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**THE LAND ANNUITIES AGITATION
IN IRELAND 1926-32**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Agricultural Credit Corporation
AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	Communist Party of Ireland
DCLA	Dublin City Library and Archive
EPC	European Peasants' Committee
FSR	Friends of Soviet Russia
GHQ	General Head Quarters
ILDL	Irish Labour Defence League
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
INUM	Irish National Unemployed Movement
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ITGWU	Irish Transport and General Workers' Union
IWFC	Irish Working Farmers' Committee
IWL	Irish Workers' League
KC	King's Counsel
LAI	League Against Imperialism
MP	Member of Parliament
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
O/C	Officer Commanding
PCRWP	Preparatory Committee for the formation of a Revolutionary Workers' Party
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RWG	Revolutionary Workers' Group
RWP	Revolutionary Workers' Party
TD	Teachta Dála (Member of Dáil Éireann)
UCDA	University College Dublin Archive
WPI	Workers' Party of Ireland
WRP	Workers' Revolutionary Party
WUI	Workers' Union of Ireland

INTRODUCTION

‘The political and agrarian questions have always been so intertwined that no settlement of the former could make a prosperous and contented country while any real grievance remained owing to the unsettlement of the latter’.¹

One of the most prominent issues in the post-revolutionary era in Ireland was the land annuities agitation 1926-32. The annuities were payments from Irish farmers to the British Treasury for money loaned to facilitate the purchase of land by tenant farmers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the mid-1920s a considerable number of farmers were in arrears and either could not pay or were refusing to pay. From this a campaign of non-payment developed which had a major effect on the electoral prospects of Fianna Fáil, leading to victory in the 1932 General Election and the party subsequently forming its first government.

An examination of any survey history of twentieth-century Ireland demonstrates that the land question in post-Independent Ireland has received relatively little scholarly attention. The exception is Terence Dooley’s *‘The land for the people’: the land question in independent Ireland* (2004). However, as Dooley sets out in the introduction, his is essentially a study of land acquisition and redistribution under the aegis of the Land Commission, with an evaluation of the extent of political interference in these processes. However, Dooley emphasises that the land question or land agitation did not end with independence. He looks at the importance of the role of the Land Commission in the new Free State and concludes that ‘land division, after all, came as close to a form of rural social policy as Cumann na nGaedheal managed in its term of office’.² However, Dooley’s work makes little reference to the land annuities controversy of 1926-32, a highly significant social and political issue of its time, which has of yet only been touched on by historians. The aim of this thesis is to address this lacuna in the historiography of the land question in the early decades of post-independent Ireland, and to examine the land annuities agitation during this period.

The thesis begins in 1926 when a first attempt was made to organise a campaign for non-payment of annuities, and ends in 1932 with the election of the Fianna Fáil government and the end of the agitation. The most prominent figure in the agitation was

¹ Horace Plunkett quoted in Joseph Thomas Sheehan: ‘Land purchase policy in Ireland 1917-23: from the Irish Convention to the 1923 land act’ (M.A. thesis, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, 1993), p. 23. This was in Plunkett’s capacity as chairman of the Irish Convention, speaking in the autumn of 1917 about the relationship between the political and agrarian questions in Ireland.

² Terence Dooley, *‘The land for the people’: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 79.

Peadar O'Donnell, a socialist and leading member of the IRA from the mid-1920s until the early 1930s, and Sinn Féin TD for Donegal. For O'Donnell, the annuities were part of a wider campaign for radical social change in Ireland in which he hoped the IRA would play a leading role. He was appointed editor of the IRA weekly paper *An Phoblacht* (established 1925) in April 1926³ and by the summer of that year; annuities were featuring prominently in the papers coverage.⁴ It was during that summer in 1926, that O'Donnell first became aware of the widespread issuing of decrees for annuity arrears to farmers in west Donegal.⁵ The arrears could not be paid and O'Donnell believed that, if organised properly, the farmers could resist these decrees and in doing so also resist the whole idea of annuity payments. O'Donnell's twin roles as leading figure in the annuities campaign and editing *An Phoblacht* were pivotal for the agitation as he ensured that the campaign secured a national profile through the coverage in the paper. As he reasoned, it was his position as the son of a farmer who owed nine years rent that gave him a greater standing among the community in Donegal rather than the fact that he was an elected representative.⁶ He saw the potential effect of the annuities situation not only in Donegal but also throughout the country and it was largely through his vision and efforts that that the annuities were catapulted onto the national stage. Uinsean MacEoin writes that 'in the case of the oppressed small holders of west Donegal he (O'Donnell) had taken hold of a weapon that would cause ripples to run through all parts of rural Ireland; that would eventually contribute to unseating the Cosgrave government'.⁷ Maurice Moore (who will be discussed in more detail later) was another significant figure in the anti-annuities campaign who allied himself with O'Donnell in 1928. Fianna Fáil's contribution to the campaign was also important. O'Donnell, through Moore helped engineer more Fianna Fáil involvement in the annuities issue. Timothy M. O'Neill outlines the importance of the non-payment campaign begun by O'Donnell as a factor in the election of the Fianna Fáil government in 1932.⁸ However, over time Fianna Fáil would put its own stamp on the issue, concentrating on legal aspects of annuity payments to Britain. This would eventually lead to a divergence between Fianna Fáil and O'Donnell, resulting in him helping to found the Irish Working Farmers' Committee (IWFC) and to seek alliances with European communists in the form of the Krestintern. The Krestintern (Peasants International) was the section of the Comintern (Communist International) which dealt with agricultural issues, with

³ Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), p. 44.

⁴ See *An Phoblacht*, July, Aug., Sept. 1926.

⁵ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 23.

⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 14 Jan. 1927.

⁷ Uinseann MacEoin, *The IRA in the twilight years, 1923-1948* (Dublin, 1997), p. 132.

⁸ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 38 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

particular interest in small farmers and agricultural labourers, the idea being to unite these groupings throughout Europe under a communist banner. Throughout the annuities agitation O'Donnell remained a central figure through his various writings, speeches at meetings, and organising at local, national and international level.

O' Donnell was born in Meenmore, near Dungloe, County Donegal in 1893. He was brought up on a five-acre farm. His father, James, undertook the traditional annual summer work in Scotland of potato picking ('tatie hoking') with his sons following when they came of age (the exception being Peadar). James also had winter work in a local corn mill, which helped ensure that only one of the family had to endure being sent to the hiring fairs, to be hired by the larger farmers from the east of the county. Many of the farm tasks at home, involving, for example, the sowing and harvesting of potatoes, and saving hay and turf were performed by 'gatherings' or communal work groups. This social pattern remained a dominant theme in O'Donnell's writing and thinking in which, as Donal Ó Drisceoil writes: 'he identified the raw materials of a future socialist society'.⁹ Encouraged by his mother whom he described as 'an advanced thinker', O'Donnell remained at school, and in 1911 secured a place at St. Patrick's College, Dublin to train as a primary school teacher. His mother, who was a supporter of Jim Larkin, had a sister and brother active in union politics in Ireland and America and this influenced O'Donnell, imbuing him with a class consciousness.¹⁰ As a teacher he was active in the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and subsequently in the ITGWU where he campaigned for better conditions for the migrant potato pickers in Scotland. During a short stay in Glasgow in 1918, he was introduced to the radical socialist unions there and was encouraged to become further involved in the Irish Trade Union movement, assuming the role of full time ITGWU organiser in 1918.

In October 1918 O'Donnell became an ITGWU organiser in Ulster, and in January 1919 he successfully led a strike of attendants and nurses at Monaghan County Asylum. During that dispute, O'Donnell encouraged the workers to occupy the asylum and run it as a 'soviet'.¹¹ He joined the IRA in Monaghan in August 1919, and in February 1920 took part in the capture of Ballytrain RIC barracks under the command of Eoin O'Duffy. By November

⁹ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, pp 4-5. This biography covers O'Donnell's political and writing career. Fearghal McGarry, 'O'Donnell, Peadar', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2012) (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do;jsessionid=2F9E074910AAF5C1D6ADDD7017565265#>) (accessed 22 Aug. 2016).

¹⁰ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 7.

¹¹ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, pp 12-14; McGarry, *DIB*. A soviet was a revolutionary council of workers and peasants, based on the term used commonly in Russia during the 1905 and 1917 revolutions and after.

was forced to go on the run as a full-time IRA activist.¹² In December 1920 he set up a flying column and in March 1921 was made O/C of the Second Brigade, covering east Donegal and Derry City. In May he was wounded in the arm. O'Donnell was becoming wary of the Sinn Féin administration that was gradually supplanting the British administration in the countryside. In particular, he was disillusioned by what he perceived to be Sinn Féin's attempts to suppress class antagonism in the name of the 'nation'; he believed they were mostly ruling in favour of landlords and property owners and using the IRA to enforce these decisions. He stopped men in his brigade engaging in such actions, effectively preventing the functioning of the Dáil courts in north-east Donegal.¹³ O'Donnell opposed the Treaty of December 1921 and was elected onto the anti-treaty IRA executive in March 1922. He was in the Four Courts at the outbreak of the Civil War and imprisoned in Mountjoy Jail after its surrender. There he immersed himself in discussions with Liam Mellows and others on future political directions, including land issues. In August 1923 he was elected to the Dáil for Donegal as a Sinn Féin TD. In Mountjoy, he was part of a mass hunger-strike begun in October 1923, remaining on strike for forty-one days. He escaped from prison in March 1924 and remained on the run until the general amnesty of republican prisoners later that year.¹⁴ In the years that followed he would throw himself into the land annuities question.

This brief summary of O'Donnell's early political activism is by way of context for the present study, which offers a more detailed insight into his role in the annuities agitation. Others have written biographical studies of O'Donnell. Ó Drisceoil's biography of O'Donnell contends that he was reluctant to drag the IRA into politics, but that the annuities campaign needed the IRA's support. It examines attempts to broaden support to form a Communist Party, and attempts by some of the more leftist members of the IRA to create a political movement, Saor Éire. Ó Drisceoil's work also touches on agrarian issues on an international level by looking at O'Donnell's involvement with the League Against Imperialism (LAI) and the Krestintern. Peter Hegarty's biography of O'Donnell also covers his involvement in the annuities agitation. Grattan Freyer's *Peadar O'Donnell* (1973) primarily deals with O'Donnell's writing, while Michael McInerney's *Peadar O'Donnell: Irish social rebel* (1974) is based on interviews with O'Donnell. He also features in a *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB) entry by Feargal McGarry. In these studies, O'Donnell's role in the annuities agitation

¹² Peter Hegarty, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 1999), pp 64-77. This biography also gives valuable insights into O'Donnell's early years and background.

¹³ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 19-20; Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, pp 19-20.

¹⁴ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, pp 34-6; McGarry, *DIB*.

is touched upon but there is no systematic attempt to describe or, indeed, to elucidate on an issue of national importance that merits further exploration.

The role of the IRA in the annuities campaign is alluded to in Brian Hanley's *The IRA 1926-1936*. This work provides a detailed account of the IRA between 1926 and 1936 and deals with the IRA reaction to the annuities, stating that while individual members and units were involved in the agitation and support for the campaign, the IRA did not officially back it. Hanley details some IRA activity in the agitation but states that this was sometimes driven by personal motivations. He further claims that IRA members wanted to assist those small farmers who had made sacrifices for them in the past.¹⁵ Hanley points out that although 'elements within the IRA were suspicious of O'Donnell's plans, he gained official army council backing for them in January 1928'.¹⁶ Furthermore, he contends that in some districts the campaign was not that effective and was struggling by the beginning of the 1930s.¹⁷ This thesis examines these issues in some depth.

Some historians, including Michael Laffan and Donnacha Ó Beacháin, have alluded to the role of the annuities in Fianna Fáil's election victory in 1932.¹⁸ In the survey histories of twentieth-century Ireland, including J.J. Lee's *Ireland, 1912-1985, politics and society*, Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* and F.S.L. Lyons *Ireland since the famine*, there are just passing references to the annuities agitation, and these mostly in relation to the 1932 election or the cause of the 'economic war' that followed. One of the best attempts to address the significance of the annuities agitation in dictating the result of the 1932 election is O'Neill's 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil, and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32'.¹⁹ However, the dynamic of the relationship between O'Donnell, the agitation and Fianna Fáil requires closer attention.

Discussion of the land annuities question is typically framed in the context of the radical politics of the era and the accession of Fianna Fáil to power. However, early agitation and resistance to payments prior to 1932 has not been fully explored. After 1932 the land annuities question is largely related to the policies of the new Fianna Fáil government and its political, constitutional and economic standoff with the British government. Most notably this

¹⁵ Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Michael Laffan, *Judging W.T. Cosgrave: the foundation of the Irish Free State* (Dublin, 2014), p. 274; Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-73* (Dublin, 2010), pp 108-109.

¹⁹ O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card?', p. 22.

is done in Deirdre McMahon's *Republicans and Imperialists, Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s*, which looks at the relationship between the Fianna Fáil government and Britain concerning the dismantling of the 1921 Treaty. This work also examines the refusal of the Fianna Fáil government to hand over the annuities, leading to retaliatory financial tariffs being imposed on the Free State by Britain and further retaliation by the Irish government in what became known as the 'economic war'. It clearly exposes the significance of the annuities in the evolution of relations between the two states.²⁰ Joseph Thomas Sheehan's MA thesis 'Land purchase policy in Ireland, 1917-23' examines land purchase in this area and the workings and findings of the Irish Convention (1917) and some of the land policies of the Dáil, 1919-1923. He also looks at some of the ambiguity on the position of annuities in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920.²¹ This thesis expands on the issue by focusing on the early agitation and looking at the demands and implications in the wider political context, and illustrating how the original ideas and demands of O'Donnell were diluted and eventually subsumed into Fianna Fáil policy.

Richard English in *Radicals and the Republic. Socialist Republicanism in the Irish Free State 1925-1937* argues that O'Donnell 'blended socialist theory with personal, localised and distinctly individual observations'. He contends that O'Donnell's campaign helped Fianna Fáil but simultaneously eclipsed his own socialist republicanism.²² Emmet O'Connor's *Reds and the Green. Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943* deals with the role of the Comintern in Ireland and the efforts to build a Socialist Party from the republican and labour movements. It covers the Comintern's links particularly through its agent in Ireland, Bob Stewart, with O'Donnell in the Anti-Tribute League and the Krestintern from 1930 as they worked to transform the League into a section of the European Peasants' Congress, and the establishment of the Irish Working Farmers' Committee (IWFC).²³ Kieran Allen's *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour* (1997) looks at the relationship between Fianna Fáil and the labour movement from 1926 to 1990. He seeks to explain the success of Fianna Fáil in attracting broad-based support, and particularly from socio-economic groupings such as small farmers and labourers, who would have been more inclined to support a more

²⁰ Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s* (New Haven and London, 1984), pp 1-135.

²¹ Sheehan: 'Land purchase policy in Ireland 1917-23', pp 7-163. The Government of Ireland Act was passed in 1920 and facilitated the setting up of two parliaments in Ireland, one for the south and one for the six north-eastern counties, both these jurisdictions were to collect and retain the annuities.

²² Richard English, *Radicals and the Republic: socialist republicanism in the Irish Free State 1925-1937* (New York, 1994), pp 73-95.

²³ Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943* (Dublin, 2004), p. 151.

left wing party or ideal, as was the case in some other European countries.²⁴ Again, while all of these works touch on the annuities campaign and O'Donnell's role, none has examined its historical significance in the detail it deserves.

O'Donnell's own book *There will be another day* is his account of the annuities agitation; most of those who have written subsequently on the issue have referenced this work and quoted extensively from it. This was published over thirty years after the end of the agitation in 1932. O'Donnell claimed it was a request from Maurice Moore shortly before his death in 1939 that persuaded him to write an account of the annuities campaign. He intended to research and gather information but had no great sense of urgency until the sudden death of Phil MacCauley, who had also been active in the campaign. O'Donnell claimed the agitation developed in 'the shelter of the unrest created by the growing strength of the IRA'. He allowed himself credit for it becoming a national issue, claiming the role of *An Phoblacht* as central to this.²⁵ O'Donnell's *Plan of campaign for Irish working farmers* (1931) is an important primary source providing an insight into his views from the time he became disillusioned with the alliance with Fianna Fáil and sought to position the IWFC in a broad socialist front in alliance with small farmers' organisations in Europe.²⁶

Although none of O'Donnell's personal papers seem to have survived, a rich vein of alternative primary sources is available. *An Phoblacht* was the weekly paper of the IRA and O'Donnell's editorship proved pivotal to the campaign; therefore, it provides a very good insight into his political thinking on annuities, containing many of his writings on the issue. *An Phoblacht*, had a wide circulation during this period. Other radical papers, including the *Workers' Voice* also gave plenty of coverage to the annuities question. Local and national newspapers are equally important to this study providing historical context at all levels.

Because land questions were so alive in post-independence Irish politics, the archives of the main political parties are an excellent source. The Ernest Blythe papers at University College Dublin Archives (UCDA) offer an important government perspective on the annuities. The Cumann na nGaedheal archive at the same repository does not contain as much detail, some of the records pre-dating 1949 seem to be lost due to a fire at the party headquarters at Hume Street sometime in the late 1950s. The Fianna Fáil archive, also at UCDA, provides valuable detail on the party's growing involvement in the campaign. The collection contains

²⁴ Kieran Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour* (London, 1997), p. 18.

²⁵ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 5-6.

²⁶ Peadar O'Donnell, *Plan of campaign for Irish working farmers* (Dublin, 1931), pp 2-11.

revealing election material on annuities and counter arguments to Cumann na nGaedheal memos, while the Eamon de Valera papers at UCDA also hold some material on the issue. The political papers of certain other leading political activists of the period are also revealing. These include Maurice Moore whose papers are at the National Library of Ireland (NLI) and who is important because he was a leading opponent of the annuities and allied with O'Donnell in 1928. Moore's correspondence traces his continued opposition to the annuities from the signing of the Ultimate Financial Settlement in 1926 to his involvement with O'Donnell prior to the Rotunda meeting in 1928. The collection contains notes for speeches and for his pamphlet *British plunder and Irish blunder*, as well as summaries of Moore's legal arguments for the retention of annuities and their growing influence on Fianna Fáil's socio-political thinking.

Moore seemed an unlikely ally for O'Donnell. He was born at Moore Hall, Ballyglass, Co. Mayo, in 1854 and was a member of the British military with the rank of colonel. He was the second son of George Henry Moore, nationalist MP for Mayo and a leader of the tenant right movement in the 1860s, and brother of the writer, George Moore. Moore retired from the British Army in 1906. He became a supporter of the Gaelic League and in 1913 was appointed to the provisional committee of the Irish National Volunteers helping in their organisation throughout 1914. Although he backed John Redmond in the Volunteer split in 1914, he was supporting Sinn Féin by 1917. He was a member of the Seanad from 1922 until his death in 1939 (excepting when that institution was abolished between 1936 and 1938). Moore became an early Cumann na nGaedheal supporter in the Seanad; however, he withdrew support for Cumann na nGaedheal in 1926 over the terms of the Boundary Agreement of December 1925 and the Ultimate Financial Settlement of March and joined the newly-formed Clann Éireann.²⁷ He presented his pamphlet *British plunder and Irish blunder* to O'Donnell as the basis for an alliance in late 1927/ early 1928. Subsequently, a public meeting was held in February 1928 at the Rotunda Round Room, Dublin to formally launch a campaign for the retention of the annuities in Ireland pending a national settlement of what farmers should pay to the national revenue.²⁸ This led to the formation of the Anti-Tribute League in the summer of 1928. O'Donnell readily admitted that the campaign was stalling in late 1927 and was glad of the support offered by Moore once certain conditions were agreed. The presence of Moore also afforded him the opportunity to push the issue within Fianna Fáil²⁹; Moore had been part of a

²⁷ Daithí Ó Corráin, 'A most public spirited and unselfish man': the career and contribution of Col. Maurice Moore 1854-1939, in *Studia Hibernica* 40 (2014), pp 71-3; Marie Coleman, 'Moore, Maurice George', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed.), *DIB* (Cambridge, 2009) (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do#>) (accessed 28 Apr. 2015).

²⁸ Moore's speech at the Rotunda meeting, 14 Feb. 1928 (NLI, Maurice Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

²⁹ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, pp 48-9.

sub-committee on annuities initiated by the party in February 1927³⁰, and became a member of its national executive in 1928.³¹ Fianna Fáil had been vocal on the issue including during the General Elections of 1927, and its Ard Fheis in November had set up a committee to examine the position of annuities.³²

Land Commission material in the NLI contains figures for payments and arrears from the years 1923-33. The Department of Justice files at the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) features information on efforts to enact decrees and details of the seizures of property that often led to violent resistance. These papers also carry reports on meetings of the Anti-Tribute League and the IWFC as well as groups associated with them. Likewise, files from the Department of An Taoiseach give an insight into the government thinking on radical groups from reports compiled by the Gardaí. These sources have been augmented by a thorough examination of Dáil and Seanad debates and banking inquiries.

This thesis adopts a chronological and thematic approach and is divided into ten chapters. Chapter one explores the extent of annuity arrears in the country in 1926, particularly in west Donegal and the establishment of an anti-annuities committee by O'Donnell. Chapter two examines O'Donnell's attempts to bring others on board, namely the IRA and Sinn Féin, and the political fallout from the publication of the Ultimate Financial Settlement in November 1926. Chapter three deals with O'Donnell's trial and the issue of annuities in the prelude to and during the General Election in June 1927. Chapter four looks at attempts by O'Donnell to increase republican activism including around the annuities, the September 1927 General Election, and the growing realisation by Fianna Fáil of the potential of the issue. Chapter five examines the forming of a broad front to oppose annuities involving O'Donnell, Moore and Fianna Fáil. Chapter six explores the efforts of the 'No Tribute' campaign to spread the agitation and it evolved into the Anti-Tribute League in July 1928. Chapter seven explores the role and the attitude of various county councils to the Anti-Tribute League resolution of retaining the annuities in Ireland and Fianna Fáil's continued honing of the issue to suit its particular agenda. Chapter eight looks at Fianna Fáil's Dáil motion for the retention of annuities in May 1929, O'Donnell's efforts to seek terms with the Minister for Agriculture, Patrick Hogan (1891-1936), on behalf of those resisting payment of annuities in west Donegal and his growing disillusionment with Fianna Fáil, and the formation of the

³⁰ *The Nation*, 9 Apr. 1927.

³¹ Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, 25-6 Oct. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/742 & P176/351 (32)).

³² *Ibid.*, 24-5 Nov. 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/351 (32)).

IWFC. Hogan was important and merits a brief introduction here. He was born in Galway, son of an extensive farmer, was a solicitor, Sinn Féin member and politician. He was interned in 1920 for helping to organise a sitting of the Sinn Féin land settlement commission in Loughrea and in May 1921 became a TD for Galway. He supported the treaty and was made Minister for Agriculture in February 1922 and a full cabinet member in 1927. He had a major influence on Cumann na nGaedheal's economic policy, arguing that farmers should produce for export and not just self-sufficiency. He helped found Fine Gael in 1933. He was killed in a car crash in July 1936.³³

Chapter nine examines O'Donnell's increasing links with communists in Ireland and Europe through the Krestintern and Fianna Fáil's continued pursuance of legal avenues to maintain the annuities in Ireland. Chapter ten looks at the impact of annuities during the lead into the 1932 General Election and the Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal arguments for and against retention. Because the annuities agitation was predominately rural-based there are many references to minor place-names and townlands and these instances the name of the county will also be provided for clarity.

As the whole issue of annuities started before 1926, it is necessary to provide an introduction to their historical context here. The land annuities were the repayment of loans at a set rate of interest from money advanced for land purchase during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This money was raised by the British Government through the issue of bonds. The background to the annuities question lies in the land agitation of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the wake of the Famine (1845-51), the land question and attempts to settle it achieved priority on the political agenda. Although Issac Butt had promoted the land question, he failed to really grasp its significance. However, the Land Act of 1870 marked a major change in the British Government's attitude to property law and rights and included a purchase scheme, which, although limited, set a precedent for further legislation.³⁴ The next phase of land agitation resulted in the formation of the Irish National Land League in 1879, with Charles Stewart Parnell as president. It was supported by the Fenians, and John Devoy's Clan na Gael in America. The 'new Departure' recognised the potential of the tenant agitation in the wider political context of the removal of British control

³³ William Murphy, 'Hogan, Patrick J. (Paddy)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *DIB* (Cambridge, 2009) (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a4057>) (accessed 4 Sept. 2016).

³⁴ T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish revolution 1846-82* (Oxford, 1981), pp 118-9; see also Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), pp 234-5.

in Ireland.³⁵ As Donal McCartney states: ‘essentially the New Departure meant the bringing together for the first time in Irish history of three powerful forces: constitutionalism, physical force nationalism and agrarianism’.³⁶ This combination of forces and the agitation during the Land War brought pressure to bear on a British government anxious to find some form of settlement on the issue. The 1881 Land Act that followed addressed some of the tenants’ grievances and introduced a further state-aided land purchase scheme, but again this was limited and did not provide an incentive for landlords to sell or tenants to purchase. The Land Commission which was to remain instrumental in Irish life for most of the next hundred years was also established under the 1881 Land Act with the aim of fixing rents and facilitating the transfer of ownership.³⁷ In the Ashbourne Land Act of 1885, £5 million was advanced initially and a further £5 million in 1888 and 25,000 tenants bought their holdings, the annuity was 4% over forty-nine years.³⁸ The Balfour Land Act of 1891 advanced £33 million for land purchase; it was amended in 1896 to make land purchase more attractive and between 1891-6, 47,000 holdings were purchased.³⁹ It was part of the Conservative government’s tactic of ‘killing Home Rule with kindness’. The Wyndham Land Act (1903) and the Birrell Act (1909) provided £83 million for land purchase with the annuity set at 3.25% to be paid back over sixty-eight and a half years. Over nine million acres were transferred into new ownership under these acts.⁴⁰ In total, these land acts resulted in more than 316,000 holdings amounting to over 11 million acres being purchased for £100 million.⁴¹ All these land acts had similar basic principles in that money was advanced to tenants by the Land Commission for purchase, to be paid back over a fixed number of years at a set percentage rate for the annuity. By the early 1920s, the annuities were costing Irish farmers £3 million annually.⁴²

Dooley makes the point that peasant proprietorship should not be accepted as the final solution to all agrarian ills and that many of the new proprietors had neither ‘the capital nor the requisite amount of land to make their holdings viable’. Moreover, he argues that the Land Commission was less tolerant of failure to pay annuities because of the impact of bad harvests, for example, than some benevolent landlords had been in the past.⁴³ As agrarian

³⁵ Moody, *Davitt and Irish revolution*, pp 290-99.

³⁶ Donal McCartney ‘Parnell and Parnellism’ in Donal McCartney (ed.), *Parnell: the politics of power* (Dublin, 1991), p. 13.

³⁷ Bew, *Land and national question*, pp 235-6; Moody, *Davitt and Irish revolution*, pp 483-9.

³⁸ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine* (revised ed., Glasgow, 1973), p. 181.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 204-05.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁴¹ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 237.

⁴² McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists*, p. 38.

⁴³ Dooley, ‘*Land for the people*’, pp 29-30; for more on land agitation during this period 1917-23 see chapter two in ‘*Land for the people*’, pp 26-56.

agitation spread during the War of Independence, it became a worry for Sinn Féin that these disturbances could undermine their primary objective of political independence. As this agitation was not organised nationally there was a danger that local considerations would overrule national considerations and further undermine Sinn Féin's aims.⁴⁴ In 1921 Erskine Childers feared that people's thoughts were being diverted from national struggle by a class war.⁴⁵ In the midst of this agrarian conflict, there was significant disruption to the payment of annuities during the War of Independence and later the Civil War. Lack of effective policing in the first six months of 1922 contributed to land seizures and disturbances. There was widespread withholding of annuities.⁴⁶ This might be interpreted as farmers assuming a patriotic stance; non-payment would hurt the British exchequer and add to the general breakdown of British law and institutions in Ireland. For others, there was an obvious personal economic incentive and benefit to withholding annuities. Political uncertainty combined with uncertainty about the eventual outcome of the conflict provided some with the incentive not to pay their annuities. Certain farmers undoubtedly believed a change of administration in Ireland would entail a change in the policy on annuities or, at very least, the waiving of the arrears accumulated during this period. Prior to this, when tenants defaulted on their annuities, the Land Commission could seek redress in the courts and if this was not forthcoming, the British Government could withhold grants to local county councils, who then had to take up the shortfall through the local rate. There was no concerted campaign against payment and as individual tenants defaulted, 'Britain recouped itself, silently; sparks without heat enough to make a blaze'.⁴⁷

In May 1920, as land agitation escalated, the Dáil took a dual approach of establishing Sinn Féin courts and ordered the IRA to protect citizens against unlawful methods by some persons engaged in agrarianism.⁴⁸ Land Courts established by the Dáil were regarded as having 'prevented the land question being used to divert the energies of the people from the national issue'.⁴⁹ O'Donnell claimed that urban Sinn Féin had disdain for the 'wild men of the land', and wrote: 'Many an IRA man in jail in '22 and '23, cursed his use as a defender of pure ideals to patrol estate walls, enforce decrees for rent, arrest and even order out of the country leaders of local land agitations'.⁵⁰ The question of land and its ownership was still a

⁴⁴ Dooley, *'Land for the people'*, pp 38-40.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴⁶ Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish civil war* (Dublin, 2004), pp 90-1.

⁴⁷ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Dooley, *'Land for the people'*, p. 47.

⁴⁹ C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish revolution* (Belfast, 2004), p. 191.

⁵⁰ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 19.

live social issue and would need to be addressed when the conflict was over by whatever new political entity emerged.

The annuities issue had an impact on Irish society at a time when wounds were still raw from the Civil War, and in some areas set farmer against farmer, farmer against bailiff, and often resulted in a substantial Garda presence to enforce decrees and seizures. In rural society, this caused increased strife. Likewise, the threat of eviction or the auctioning of farms and cattle belonging to those who did not honour their annuity payments led to tensions. There were always those prepared to take over a farm or buy livestock regardless of the circumstances.

Moreover, the annuities crisis took place within the context of a wider debate on agriculture and the sustainability of small holdings. It coincided with demands for the expediting of land acquisition and redistribution for the relief of congestion at local level that has been described by Dooley.⁵¹ All political parties were forced to engage with the annuities question, and assume a position on the issue even if some did so reluctantly or with a degree of ambivalence. Annuities, and the very public campaign for their non-payment and retention, was one of the most important factors in the electoral defeat of Cumann na nGaedheal in the General Election of 1932, and the subsequent election of Fianna Fáil which would govern for sixteen years after.

Land annuities were often referred to as ‘rents’ by contemporaries, harking back to payments made to landlords in a previous era. O’Donnell was keen to make this comparison and regularly invoked history, particularly harking back to the Land League period. He viewed annuities as akin to the payment of tribute and therefore a remnant of British colonialism in Ireland. O’Donnell saw in the campaign the potential for a national movement of small farmers and workers, which could affect wider political change.⁵² One of the main questions this thesis, therefore, addresses is how a campaign engineered by a socialist-republican activist with little or no faith in constitutional politics was adopted by Fianna Fáil and helped it win the 1932 election. This thesis will further examine the economic and social impacts of the agitation, directly or indirectly, on rural Ireland. It will explore the effect on the non-payment campaign on local government: for example, as the entire annuity debt was paid to the British Exchequer, county councils bore the brunt for any shortfall that came from

⁵¹ Dooley, *Land for the people*, chapter 3, pp 57-98.

⁵² *An Phoblacht*, 23 July, 13 Aug. 1926.

non-payment in various counties. As this thesis will show, that caused councils to increase rates to recoup their losses, which placed a heavier burden on those who were meeting their annuity payments. This caused friction between those who were paying annuities and those who were not and frequently played itself out on the floor of the county council chambers.

The annuities agitation also needs to be assessed in the context of the national and international political and socio-economic conditions of the 1920s and early 1930s. At a national level, Ireland had just emerged from a particularly volatile period of political change and a divisive Civil War. As the Cumann na nGaedheal government sought to consolidate the new state and afford it a degree of stability, others, mostly the defeated of the Civil War and the militant labour unions, sought to undermine what stability existed and in many cases did not even recognise the state's legitimacy. Resulting from this was the refusal of Sinn Féin TDs to take their seats in the Dáil, which meant, as Diarmaid Ferriter writes: 'Cumann na nGaedheal were in an unusual electoral position, not needing or receiving a majority of the popular vote to govern'.⁵³ At no election did they receive even forty per cent of first preference votes.⁵⁴ This added to the uncertainty and the questioning of the government's political legitimacy. Indeed, many in the IRA spoke of a 'second round'. There was a belief among radical republicans and socialists that revolutionary change was imminent and that this would happen outside of parliamentary institutions. It was within this maelstrom of political uncertainty that the question of paying land annuities was transformed into a national issue. There was not the aversion to communism in Ireland in the early to mid-1920s that would emerge by the end of the decade; as Ó Drisceoil contends: 'Ireland in the mid-1920s was ripe for a political alternative to Cumann na nGaedheal, but, it was not the left that would ultimately provide it'.⁵⁵ Within this ever changing political and social environment, there was the one constant of Irish life - the land question - with its varied issues concerning the transfer of ownership, redistribution of lands and the agitation against annuities, an agitation with the potential for revolutionary change. While it certainly made a dramatic impact, the most notable change achieved was not quite what was expected.

⁵³ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p. 302.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 39.

CHAPTER 1

BEGINNING OF LAND ANNUITIES AGITATION 1926

Payments of annuities had been disrupted during the War of Independence and Civil War and by the mid-1920s arrears had accumulated throughout large parts of Ireland.¹ Efforts at collection had increased in 1925 but it was only after the signing of the Ultimate Financial Settlement in March 1926 that a more concentrated attempt at recovering arrears began.² Part of the terms of this agreement, which were not made public until November 1926, provided for the collection of annuities by the Free State and their payment to Britain.³ However, no real concerted opposition emerged until O'Donnell began to highlight the issue in *An Phoblacht* and held public meetings in Donegal to organise a non-payment campaign.⁴ He believed the annuities agitation could provide the spark for further political change and that the IRA could be at the heart of that campaign. But this would prove difficult as he strove to turn individual cases of non-payment into a national movement that fully reflected his aims.

In February 1923, the under-sheriff in Donegal reported that there was opposition to the payment of annuities and intimidation was being used against persons likely to pay. There were over 400 applications for decrees for non-payment of annuities listed for the Donegal area and nearly 600 for the Lifford area.⁵ Henry Gallagher, solicitor of Strabane and Ballybofey, had to deal with about 700 Land Commission decrees for the possession of property in lieu of annuities presenting them to the County Court Judge for signature to lodge with the sheriff for execution.⁶ Some bailiffs had resigned in the Donegal area rather than have to serve decrees and there were difficulties finding new bailiffs.⁷ In June 1923 Kevin O'Higgins, Minister for Home Affairs, also considered the position in Monaghan as most unsatisfactory as no good reason could be found why decrees for possession of property of those who had not paid had not been executed. The under-sheriff of Monaghan replied that

¹ Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), p. 44.

² *Ibid.*

³ Debate on the Ultimate Financial Settlement between British and Saorstát governments, *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 17, No. 8, cols 637-52, 8 Dec. 1926.

⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 10 Sept. 1926.

⁵ Letter to Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture, from the secretary to the Minister for Home Affairs, detailing reply of the under-sheriff for Donegal to question of number of decrees in the county awaiting execution, 17 Feb. 1923 (NAI, Department of Justice, JUS/H 223/133).

⁶ Letter from Henry Gallagher, solicitor, to Ministry of Home Affairs, 24 Feb. 1923 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 223/133).

⁷ Letters from Hugh C. Cochrane, solicitor, Under-Sheriff, Lifford, County Donegal to the Secretary, Department of Justice, Dublin, 3 Mar., 22 May, 24 Oct. 1923, 31 Oct. 1924 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 223/133).

fifty-nine decrees had been recovered and the remainder were against poor men who could not pay and had asked for more time.⁸

In January 1925 Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture recommended that the assistant sheriff should receive confidential instructions to make independent inquiries as to the financial circumstances of those against whom decrees had been lodged and that proceedings should be taken against one or two who were best able to pay. This, he argued, should be done independently of the existing sheriff who had failed to execute decrees against those to whom he was related or afraid of:

The assistant should then execute the decrees and if this course is adopted it is my opinion it will have a good effect and make the others pay as soon as they possibly can. If on the contrary seizures are made indiscriminately against the poorer people it will create a lot of sympathy for them and animosity against the Government as it will be the popular cry that the Land Commission and the Government are harassing the poor man and leaving the comfortable man alone.⁹

Hogan also advised that tenants who were in arrears should be allowed settle by instalments. It was his opinion that this was the only way the large amount of arrears could be collected. He had been informed that between 2,000 and 3,000 Civil Bills had been issued for hearing at the next Circuit Court.¹⁰

What was in evidence here was the disruption to payments that had affected various areas during 1919-23. Hogan had identified some of the problems with collection: for example, the bailiff's closeness and family ties to some of the people and his fear of others. It is likely similar circumstances were replicated across the country. Hogan was also trying to formulate a strategy for collection that would cause least trouble in the countryside. This involved targeting one or two of the better-off defaulters and dealing with them in isolation, in the belief that if they were forced to pay, others would follow. He was practical in the recommendation of paying by instalment, but it remained to be seen whether the Land Commission would embrace his pragmatism. He was certainly cognizant of the need not to antagonise great swathes of small farmers by indiscriminate and wholesale seizures. In fact, he was somewhat prophetic, as sympathy would arise around the issue of the government and the Land Commission persecuting the poor man, a cry and a theme that would be utilized later by O'Donnell.

⁸ Letters between Minister for Home Affairs and under-sheriff in Monaghan, 1-4 June 1923. Execution of decrees in Monaghan, 1922-25 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 31/219).

⁹ Patrick Hogan outlining concerns with collection of annuity arrears in Clare, 17 Jan. 1925 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 31/205).

¹⁰ Ibid.

In July 1925, the Department of Justice was concerned with the amount of decrees not lodged with the under-sheriff in Kerry and urged the Land Commission to lodge as soon as possible decrees which it intended to be executed.¹¹ Redmond Roche, under-sheriff for the county, related the difficulties his bailiffs faced when enforcing decrees even with the support of guards. On 4 November 1925, they seized six cattle from the farm of Michael and John Cronin, Kilcummin, but one cow was subsequently rescued by defaulters, owing to the insufficient protection party. Roche returned to the same farm on 27 November with bailiffs and eight guards and succeeded in seizing four cows, two yearlings and two horses despite the attempts of some to rescue them.¹² Michael, Ellen and Norah Cronin were arrested on 12 December and charged with the attempted rescue of cattle from the sheriff.¹³

In July 1924 Maurice Moore raised the issue of annuities in the Seanad arguing that under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 both jurisdictions in Ireland were entitled to retain the annuities. He contended that not only was the Free State paying this money to Britain, it was actually collecting it for them. He believed that the money should stay in the country and asked the president of the Executive Council, W.T. Cosgrave to give it careful consideration.¹⁴ In December 1925 Moore went further and argued that the payments were not legal.¹⁵ The signing of the Boundary Agreement in December 1925 afforded Moore more ammunition in the case for retention of annuities; he viewed this and the 1920 act as two legal cases for non-payment ‘these two overlap and reinforce each other’. It could be claimed, he said, that the annuities formed part of the national debt of the United Kingdom, and that the Free State liability for Article v of the Treaty was cancelled by the December 1925 Agreement. The proof that annuities were part of the national debt rested on schedule vi of the 1920 act that ‘the British Government considered them part of the national debt and registered them as such in an Act of Parliament difficult to contradict now’.¹⁶

¹¹ Letter from the secretary of the Minister for Justice to the Land Commission, 20 July 1925, 1925-33 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 223/90).

¹² Letter from Redmond Roche, under-sheriff to chief superintendent, Tralee, 30 Nov. 1925 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 223/90).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21 Dec. 1925.

¹⁴ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 3, No. 14, cols 852-3, 16 July 1924.

¹⁵ Letter from Moore to the Public Accounts Committee, 12 Dec. 1925 (NLI, Maurice Moore papers, MS 10,560 (1)). In handwriting on top, he notes that this was written before the Boundary Agreement. These arguments would be used later by Fianna Fáil.

¹⁶ Handwritten notes by Moore on annuities and Boundary Agreement, c. 1925 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (1)).

A more concerted effort to collect the annuities and arrears began after the signing of the Ultimate Financial Settlement on 19 March 1926 between Ernest Blythe, Minister for Finance and Winston Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was a confirmation of the Anglo-Irish financial agreement signed on 12 February 1923 between Cosgrave and Major John W. Hills, financial secretary to the British Treasury, but kept secret during the Civil War. In this agreement, the British Government was to provide the finance and stock for the completion of land purchase in Ireland and the Free State government took on the responsibility for the continuation of the collection of the annuities on behalf of the British government.¹⁷ The Free State government was determined to keep this agreement secret for fear that it would be construed by others that the ‘terms of the Land Bill were to be virtually settled in England’.¹⁸ Efforts to maintain this secrecy continued as demonstrated in a letter dated 7 February 1925, revealing how Blythe considered it ‘undesirable to publish the text of the Agreement reached with the British Government in February 1923 on the subject of Land Purchase’.¹⁹ In August J.J. McElligott of the Free State Department of Finance conveyed Blythe’s and the government’s concerns to the British Treasury: ‘our minister sees considerable objection to the publication in full of the document marked secret embodying the Financial Agreement arrived at on 12 February 1923. Mr Blythe has no objection however to the disclosure of part II of the Financial Agreement relating to compensation’.²⁰ Controversy over this agreement would continue, especially after the change of government in 1932. This agreement was followed by the Land Act of August 1923, which included as its main aims the completion of land purchase and the relief of congestion. Money arising from the February 1923 Agreement helped finance this land purchase act.

Although the Ultimate Financial Agreement was never submitted to the Dáil²¹, its terms were published in November 1926 and these included an undertaking by the Irish Free State Government to pay the British Government:

¹⁷ Terence Dooley, *‘The land for the people’: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 58. This along with Hogan’s statements in the Dáil in Mar. and May 1922 confirmed the Land Commission’s responsibility for the collection of the annuities.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁹ Reply to Minister for Agriculture from Department of Finance, 7 Feb. 1925 (NAI, Department of Taoiseach, S1995 (A)).

²⁰ Letter from J.J. McElligott to A.P. Waterfield, British Treasury, 27 Aug. 1925 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S1995 (A)). This was one of a series of letters between the finance departments of both countries in relation to a possible court case concerning ‘Robert Newell and the Petition of Right’. The British government was concerned that they would need to produce part of the agreement in court, and was further concerned that if produced, they would have to reveal that it formed only part of a larger document and that this would likely be followed by questions in parliament.

²¹ Deirdre McMahan, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s* (New Haven and London, 1984), p. 39.

At agreed intervals the full amount of the annuities accruing due from time to time under the Irish Land Acts, 1891-1909, without any deduction whatsoever, whether on account of income tax or otherwise ... prior to March 31st 1926 the sum of approximately £550,000, being the amount hitherto withheld by them in respect of income tax on annuities payable under the above mentioned Acts.²²

However, Blythe certainly anticipated an early debate on the agreement and requested that full notes be prepared on each heading by officers in the Finance Department who were to put aside other work and give this their whole attention. What is interesting is the terminology used in reference to the annuities: ‘a special memorandum should be prepared on the question of the surrender of the Land Purchase Annuities to the British Government’.²³ Under notes headed ‘Free State concessions’ was reference to an agreement ‘to pay over Land Annuities in full in future’.²⁴ The Free State Government was obviously fearful of an unfavourable reaction from the public and from political rivals. Only Labour provided any sort of opposition to the government. Sinn Féin, the second largest party, remained outside the Dáil and seemed incapable of providing any coherent opposition. But this would change with the formation of Fianna Fáil. There was criticism from some like Moore, but the government could dismiss him as an isolated figure on the political margins. However, this was also about to change as Moore’s pronouncements gradually began to resonate even in some unlikely circles.

The new Irish Free State was heavily dependent on agriculture, with most of the population living in rural areas. According to Dermot Keogh:

Of a population of 2.97 million, the work force came to 1.3 million, and of this, 670,000 were engaged in agriculture. The estimated net output of agriculture was £49 m – more than twice that of industry. The distribution of the population reflected this economic structure; 2.01 million people lived in rural areas and 0.96 in towns. The population also had a high dependency ratio (the ratio of those above and below working age to those of working age), 38:62, reflecting patterns of continuing heavy emigration.²⁵

When the country returned to a degree of normality after the Civil War, the collection of annuities was set to be a major issue but the collection also of arrears compounded the problem, placing an added financial burden on those who had refused to pay during the revolutionary period. As Ó Drisceoil remarks: ‘it was this that made the annuities such a widespread and punitive financial burden on Irish smallholders in the mid-1920s’.²⁶

²² *Irish Times*, 20 Nov. 1926.

²³ Letter from Dept. of Finance concerning Ultimate Financial Settlement, 22 Mar. 1926 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/290 (1)).

²⁴ Notes outlining Free State and British concessions (not dated) (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/290 (5)).

²⁵ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1994), p. 38.

²⁶ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 44.

As early as May 1926 there were articles in *An Phoblacht* on the issue of annuities and rents. On its front page under the title of ‘New Land War?’ and ‘Confiscations Upheld’, there were reports of attempts on Owey Island off the west coast of Donegal ‘to recover compounded arrears payable to the Land Commission’. Dungloe District Court reported difficulties in serving documents to the islanders owing to the refusal of boatmen on the mainland to take court officers to the island.²⁷ This was obviously not an isolated incident: *An Phoblacht* mentioned that ‘over 100 other cases were raised, and in most instances decrees were granted’.²⁸ O’Donnell’s use of the headline ‘New Land War’ was invoking history through a comparison with the land wars of the 1880s based on his awareness that memories of this were still vibrant in people’s minds. What was being witnessed in west Donegal was the practical implementation of the financial agreements of 1923 and 1926. While there was no centrally organised resistance to the annuities in May 1926, people in the areas most affected by arrears and the resumption of collections, such as Donegal, were organising themselves in an ad hoc way. This of course could be done with reasonable success on the islands where it was more difficult for the civil authorities to enforce the decrees, but it would be harder to sustain through the rest of the country.

In the 4 June edition of *An Phoblacht*, there was a letter from G. O’Ceinneide also citing a ‘land war’ situation in Westmeath, reporting how the sales of farms belonging to defaulters by the Land Commission proved abortive in Simonstown. However, it was also the case that three small farms had been sold recently in a four-mile radius. O’Ceinneide claimed people were seeking his advice and asked where Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil stood on this matter.²⁹ The annuities issue was beginning to spread as making payments was proving difficult and people’s ability to retain their own homes and farms was undermined.

An Phoblacht touched on the wider political significance and implications of the renewed efforts to collect annuities in Donegal, referencing rent strikes on the Conyngham estate:

The district affected is the Rosses area of Tirconaill [Donegal]. The people refused to pay rent for over eight years. The local Sinn Féin movement backed the no-rent campaign, declaring that to admit the landlords claim was to admit the conquest. ... The Marquis of Conyngham was one of the landlords ... Now the right of conquest is

²⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 28 May 1926.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1926. In the Dublin case, he reported the bidder as being ex-National Army and that he had to be persuaded and bribed not to buy the farm. He also claimed the Land Commission would accept private bids for farms.

enforced against the peasantry by the very individuals who previously backed the national repudiation of the confiscation. Is the republican movement again behind the peasantry?³⁰

Sinn Féin had supported the people against the landlord. The charge was now made that the landlord had been replaced by the very people who had fought to overthrow the English conquest, in other words that the new government was no better than that of the colonisers. The piece ended with a plea for the republican movement to support the small farmers in the annuities campaign.

The article reflected the views and politics of O'Donnell, but while he was undoubtedly a socialist and applied his theory and his vision to most political issues, he was also a man deeply immersed in the ways of rural Ireland who had an understanding of the importance of the land question. He knew the ways and thinking of the country people, particularly the small farmer, and this was important as he attempted to navigate around an issue that required knowledge of the nuances of the Irish rural situation.

By the time the annuity issue began to spread in the summer of 1926, both the IRA and Sinn Féin had undergone significant change. De Valera and his followers had left Sinn Féin in March to form Fianna Fáil one month later. De Valera voiced his frustration at the political direction or lack of it within Sinn Féin. He resigned, claiming: 'the Free State junta was solidifying itself as an institution and that the people would fall in behind it unless a republican party entered the political fray'.³¹ De Valera's supporters left primarily over the issue of taking seats in the Dáil, arguing that by remaining outside parliament, they would have no influence on the political direction of the state. Another reason for de Valera's decision was his growing discomfort with the IRA, particularly after the latter's army convention in November 1925 when it withdrew allegiance to Sinn Féin and the second Dáil and seemed to be placing itself on a more military footing. De Valera feared a return to the pre-Civil War position of 1922. Ó Beacháin argues that de Valera and his supporters were anxious to jettison the 'more doctrinaire and less election focus elements' within Sinn Féin.³²

³⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 28 May 1926. *An Phoblacht* mostly refers to Donegal as Tirconaill, which was the old name for County Donegal, O'Donnell also uses the name Tirconaill, as do memos and letters from the IRA, as in reference to its Tirconaill Brigade. Where it is a direct quote from any of these, Tirconaill will be used; otherwise the county will be referred to as Donegal.

³¹ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers, Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-73* (Dublin, 2010), p. 32.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

It was a motion from the Tirconail Brigade, written by O'Donnell, claiming that the government (second Dáil) had become a mere political party and lost sight of its objectives that brought about this change in the position of the IRA: 'that the Army sever its connection with the Dáil and act under an independent executive, such executive be given the power to declare war'.³³ But O'Donnell's motives were not aimed at the creation of a more military-style IRA, but rather he wished to see it become more politically active. He reflected that the motion had received large support, but not for the reasons intended.³⁴ O'Neill claims this decision of the IRA to separate from Sinn Féin effectively 'purged negotiable republicans from the IRA leadership and gave O'Donnell greater influence'.³⁵ An early consequence of the convention decision and subsequent Sinn Féin split was that the IRA army council took over *An Phoblacht* and appointed O'Donnell editor in April 1926. This move heralded a change in the political outlook of the paper. Previously, as Ó Drisceoil writes, *An Phoblacht* was 'characterized by pan-class nationalism, devotional Catholicism and Irish-Irelandism ... the cross-class approach was replaced, with an emphasis on class struggle in Ireland and internationally ... and became the most significant radical paper in post-independence Ireland'.³⁶ This had an immediate impact at the beginning of the annuities campaign as O'Donnell used the paper to highlight the plight of the small farmers. Hanley argues that 'O'Donnell had a very ambitious and optimistic view of how to win the rural masses to the republican cause and it was to be centred on a campaign against land annuities'.³⁷ However, this would not be straightforward, as he knew he needed to be mindful of alienating republicans. This was further complicated by the army convention decision which seemed to convey the need for a withdrawal from politics in favour of increased military organisation. O'Donnell also drew the displeasure of Sinn Féin by his motion, but *An Phoblacht* still carried Sinn Féin notes and coverage of meetings and provided similar coverage for Fianna Fáil.³⁸ Thus, this was the basic political make-up of the main opposition outside of parliament in the summer of 1926.

³³ Tirconail motion to IRA convention, 14-15 Nov. 1925 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/47 (234)). The 'government' mentioned here is a reference to the second Dáil to whom the IRA gave allegiance prior to its 1925 convention. The second Dáil was elected in May 1921, after the Dáil vote on the treaty in Jan. 1922 and the election of the third Dáil in June 1922, those anti-treaty members of the second Dáil refused to recognise the legitimacy of the third Dáil, citing the second Dáil as the legitimate government of the Irish republic.

³⁴ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 36; for further analysis of this convention see J. Bowyer Bell, *The secret army: a history of the IRA 1916-1970* (London, 1970), pp 70-1; Richard English, *Radicals and the republic, socialist republicanism in the Irish Free State 1925-1937* (New York, 1994), pp 68-70.

³⁵ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 22 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

³⁶ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 44.

³⁷ Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 56.

³⁸ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 34.

The annuities issue came up for debate in the Dáil on 24 June 1926 when Patrick Hogan outlined extra powers he proposed should be granted to the Land Commission for the collection of arrears. These new powers would provide the Land Commission with the same powers for the collection of arrears that the county councils had for the collection of rates.

... The tenant purchaser is sued now for arrears, and a decree is given with costs. ... The sheriff goes out and gets a return of no goods. Somebody else is grazing the land. This is quite common and is happening all over the country. It has defeated the Land Commission in its work of collecting arrears. Under this section the Land Commission may seize any goods on the land, no matter to whom they belong.³⁹

Captain William Redmond (Independent, Waterford) voiced concerns about the minister's proposed new powers: 'of course they may be necessary. At the same time it is distinctly drastic'.⁴⁰

Around the same time, further drastic measures were taken by Galway County Council when it published a list of annuity defaulters which led to differing opinions in the county. The list, six and a half pages long, was published in the *Connacht Tribune* on 17 July 1926. It was a copy of the solicitor's schedule of annuity defaulters from the Land Commission as revised to 29 May 1926. Most of the list, nearly five pages, dealt with defaulters who had purchased under the 1903 Land Act; a page covered the 1909 act; and a half page covered the 1891-96 acts, with a small number who had purchased under the 1923 Act.⁴¹ The amounts of individual arrears owed varied from under £1 to £485.⁴² At a meeting of the Co. Galway Technical Instruction Committee, there was some criticism of the decision to publish the list. However, a Land Commission official claimed they had been working overtime taking payments ever since the council had made known its intention to publish the list; he argued people did not like public exposure and that the publication would lead to more prompt payments in the future.⁴³

Meath County Council were also dealing with the issue of annuity arrears and at the council meeting in May, attention was drawn to a £5,446 deduction that was to be made from the annual agricultural grant because of land purchase annuities arrears. If the arrears were not paid before the next quarterly meeting, the council would have to consider the advisability of

³⁹ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 16, No. 16, cols 1734-5, 24 June 1926.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 1750.

⁴¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 17 July 1926.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Irish Times*, 12 Aug. 1926.

publishing the list of defaulters.⁴⁴ The issue of arrears was not just confined to poorer farming areas such as Donegal or Galway of the Congested Districts. On 5 July 1926, the Land Commission obtained 150 decrees against defaulting farmers at Limerick Civil Bill Court⁴⁵, showing the spread of areas involved and the recourse to legal action being taken. The full amount of the annuities had to be paid to the British Treasury regardless of what was collected locally; any shortfalls were recouped from the individual county councils in the form of deductions from grants and services. These deductions became the crux of the issue for many county councils. Rates had to be increased to meet the shortfall, so the non-payment of annuities had affect across the community. Those who were compliant obviously felt strongly that they should not have to contribute through their rates to cover those who defaulted and this was expressed vigorously at council meetings, as was the view that publishing lists was shameful and it was not the responsibility of local councils to collect annuities as will be demonstrated later. The Land Commission obviously endorsed the publication of lists and saw the increase in revenue as its justification, while those opposed to payment viewed the publication as an opportunity to bind people together into an organised campaign.

The issue certainly caused a stir in Galway and was even transcending party lines as evidenced by a letter in the *Connacht Tribune*.⁴⁶ James Haverty of Moylough Cumann na nGaedheal claimed that the reason for the delay in publishing the defaulters list and then revising it up until 29 May 1926 was to ‘enable a few prominent members of the county council to have their names removed by paying up ... whilst others who had also paid but had no influence with the powers that be, had to allow their names to appear in print’. Haverty claimed that over two thousand farmers were unable to meet their annuities.⁴⁷ The number of prominent county councillors on the defaulters list before revision suggested a mood, and a belief, that perhaps arrears and future annuities might not have to be paid in full. Of course, at this stage, the terms of the Ultimate Financial Settlement of March were not known to the general public.

Haverty went on to suggest that certain chronic cases needed special treatment and compared two contrasting cases:

In the list appears the name of John J. Cheevers, Killian, for the sum of £290. Another person who was formally a tenant of his, and owed half a year’s annuity, was processed,

⁴⁴ *Meath Chronicle, Weekly Irish Times*, 5 June 1926.

⁴⁵ *Irish Times*, 6 July 1926.

⁴⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 31 July 1926.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

decreed, and his only cow seized by the sheriffs bailiff last Christmas, thus leaving himself and his family without milk during Christmas week. If the government had the power to do this on a man ... when he only owed a few pounds, why did they not enforce the same law against the man who owed £290 and who had scores of bullocks grazing within one hundred yards of where the sheriffs bailiff visited? There seems to be one law for the rich and another one for the poor.⁴⁸

Haverty also questioned the right of the Free State Government to hand over annuities to England and suggested that annuities should not be paid but instead should be 'held and utilised for the benefit of Ireland, cleaning rivers, planting waste lands and various other public works'.⁴⁹ This was interesting because it demonstrated that not only was there a grievance with paying the annuities to the British Exchequer, but there was also some thought of how these payments could be held for the benefit of Ireland. Much of the discussion prior to this had been about defaulters and non-payment on economic and moral grounds, and on the idea that the land had belonged to the Irish people and not the landlords. This was interesting in light of what would develop later when Fianna Fáil withheld payments to Britain, but still collected the annuities for use in Ireland. O'Donnell also advocated that the annuities should be used to establish an agricultural credit bank, run by small farmers where low interest rate loans would aid farmers and co-operative initiatives.⁵⁰

In July 1926, an editorial in *An Phoblacht* referred to Galway's list of defaulting annuitants. It contended that with the present rates of high unemployment the people were not morally obliged to pay these 'taxes' at the expense of hungry children. It criticised the fact that:

Grants ordinarily due to the county will be held up to meet the British demand, and this act is aimed at influencing the people to urge payment of the British tax. There is a new energy in the National Movement again ... Republican organisations are interfering directly and energetically in support of the people against injustice. Wholesale evictions are inevitable, for the annuities cannot be paid. Where eviction is avoided by the seizure or sale of the crops, untold suffering will result. What district will rush into the van of Ireland's new war? ... Somewhere, somehow that beginning will be made ... Such a happening may be delayed; but it is inevitable.⁵¹

In the light of what transpired, it seems that this article had caught the mood of the people. J. Bowyer Bell wrote that 'the ultimate intention was to rally the people around resistance to the bailiff ... and thus unite the everyday people and the IRA in an irresistible movement to topple

⁴⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 31 July 1926.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 47.

⁵¹ *An Phoblacht*, 23 July 1926.

the Leinster House regime and replace the West Briton social and economic system with one modelled on the ideals of Connolly and Mellows.⁵²

In September 1926 O'Donnell held public meetings in Donegal on the annuities issue, and while he could not promise official backing from the IRA he did pledge support from the pages of *An Phoblacht*.⁵³ English describes the paper in this period as 'a regular and compelling mouthpiece' and asserts that 'from the mid 1920s for a decade, the paper put the IRA's argument with energy and clarity'.⁵⁴ But the very fact that the paper was already giving coverage to the issue – and this increased considerably from September onwards - indicates that O'Donnell envisaged an escalation of the situation and the potential for a national movement. In the midst of all this was of course O'Donnell's relationship with the IRA and his wariness to be seen to be leading them directly into political agitation. This was just prior to the annuities situation coming to a head with the issuing of wholesale decrees in Donegal.

As collection efforts were stepped up, O'Donnell continued to attack the gathering of annuities by the Land Commission and was keen to place the process in the historical context of landlordism and confiscation and the imposition of oppressive rents:

It follows rationally that the Land Commission is the successor to landlordism and that their annuities are the rack rents under a new name! These lands were confiscated by force of arms. The confiscators had no legal right to the lands, or to the produce thereof. Hence they had no legal right to collect rents; and the tenants of those lands were never morally bound to pay those rents! The question of refusal to pay is a question of principle only. If Land Annuities be considered legal, the British conquest must be considered legal also. An admission of the legality of the Land Commission is there for an admission of the conquest.⁵⁵

Having stated the principle, O'Donnell and anti-annuity activists proposed to discuss other aspects of annuities and a 'plan of campaign' for their abolition in future articles.⁵⁶ The very use of the term 'plan of campaign' had a resonance with the National League of the 1880s, its opposition to landlordism and the payment of rents and was a reinforcement of O'Donnell's attempts to link annuities agitation to popular agrarian struggles of the past.

On 6 July 1926 Maurice Moore, who had recently joined the new party Clann Éireann, again argued in the Seanad for retention of the annuities. He quoted a judgement from Justice Merideth to support his contention that: 'Sections of the Act of 1920, where they contravened

⁵² Bowyer Bell, *The secret army*, p. 77.

⁵³ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 28-30.

⁵⁴ Richard English, *Armed struggle: the history of the IRA* (revised ed., London, 2012), p. 44.

⁵⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 13 Aug. 1926.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the constitution, were inoperative. England imposed clauses in the 1920 Act – for instance the partition clauses which were favourable to herself – but she did not carry out the financial clauses, which were favourable to this country’. John McLoughlin replied that they could not have it both ways. They could not approbate and reprobate, especially when these annuities went to the repayment of a loan, to which every tenant purchaser pledged his personal credit. Thomas Linehan sought an explanation as to why the money was being transferred to England.⁵⁷

Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council, maintained that the money was due to and collectable by the British Government and that it was necessary to collect the annuities and pay them over in order to retain an international credit standing. They might not, he argued, be able to collect as much as was due, ‘but it is not to be assumed that if the annuities are not paid that that is to the benefit of the community. Somebody will have to pay’.⁵⁸ Important concerns for the government were to promote the new state’s credibility, to ensure its reputation to creditors on the world markets and to renounce all talk of repudiation.

Under the heading of ‘Desperate situation in West Tirconaill – Epidemic of civil bills’ *An Phoblacht* reported that many of these civil bills had been issued on the instructions of McMenamin, state solicitor for County Donegal, acting on behalf of the landlords and Land Commission, against farmers in the Dungloe district.⁵⁹ O’Donnell later recounted being in the Rosses at the time and being shown a letter by a farmer that threatened him with court proceedings unless his land annuity arrears were paid, which he could not afford unless he sold his cattle. When O’Donnell made inquiries, he found there were others in similar situations.⁶⁰ The following Sunday he spoke outside the local church and appealed to the people’s sense of neighbourliness, urging them to stand by one another, and he hinted at ways to resist the bailiff. He drew on his experience of organising trade unions, and initially sought out individuals whom he believed to be firm, including a man named Philip McCauley. It was then proposed to establish a committee and a defence fund to help those whose cattle had been seized.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 7, No. 12, cols 713-23, 6 July 1926. This was during a discussion on the second stage of the Appropriation Bill. Clann Éireann was a new political party formed in opposition to the Boundary Commission findings, under the leadership of Professor William Magennis, TD for the National University of Ireland.

⁵⁸ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 7, No. 12, col. 726, 6 July 1926.

⁵⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 3 Sept. 1926.

⁶⁰ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 23. He had inquired after the local postman if any more of these distinctive letters were delivered and to whom.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp 25-9. O’Donnell was wary of mistakes from his days as a union organiser in small towns, when after a successful meeting, he would have enrolled many members, but returned some time later to find the branch

O'Donnell recognised that this local issue had the potential for wider ramifications. He was a Sinn Féin TD for Donegal at this time and some of those who had supported him during the War of Independence and Civil War were now withholding payments. These he could rely on, but there was also a sizeable group who had supported the Free State during the Civil War and in their opinion O'Donnell was a dangerous trouble maker. It was relayed to O'Donnell that some Cumann na nGaedheal supporters in the village were talking about this being: 'O'Donnell's way of tricking the people back into the fight against the treaty which the IRA had not the resolution to make with any firmness'.⁶² O'Donnell himself was aware that his presence would be used by the government to attack the campaign if it seemed to be gaining traction at national level. He knew he was under close scrutiny by the police; a police report some years later stated that O'Donnell 'has been closely associated with revolutionary organisations for a number of years and is considered a very dangerous individual'.⁶³ Some farmers were of course paying the annuities, but O'Donnell was anxious not to make any quarrel with those who were paying; as he put it 'we would keep them with us by using their safe byres and safe fields to shelter cattle in danger'.⁶⁴

The promised support of *An Phoblacht* was forthcoming. It brought the recent events in Donegal to a national audience:

The serving of the civil bills on the defaulting annuitants and the preparation on the Marquis of Conyngham's estate to press for arrears claimed there, have spread panic among the people, who are being very hard pressed to meet the ordinary food bills! I can pay the Land Commission a man said by driving that young heifer to the market, but that means my children will do without milk when my cow goes dry. A public meeting is arranged for next Sunday. ... It is felt that common counsel should be taken to meet a situation created by an agreed common policy.⁶⁵

In the summer of 1926 O'Donnell had met with Seán McCool, a senior IRA officer for east Donegal to seek help in tracing seized cattle. O'Donnell asked that no violence be used in this activity; he would rather see the people blocking roads to trap and harass the bailiff, 'than see him scared out of it by a few rifle shots.' O'Donnell also 'warned him ... that it would bring thunder and lightning down on my head if I could be accused of trying to drag the IRA into this agitation by the back door.'⁶⁶ Later, on his way back to Dublin O'Donnell contemplated the implications of this agitation and where it might lead. He concluded that the annuities

had fallen apart. Philip McCauley would remain with the anti-annuities committee and later form part of the committee for the Irish Working Farmer's Committee.

⁶² O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 27.

⁶³ Report on anti state activities 1929-31 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (A)).

⁶⁴ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 3 Sept. 1926.

⁶⁶ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 33.

could be portrayed as: ‘a tax directly payable to Britain: A tax devoid of any vestige of moral sanction. Refuse this tax, have the people take their stand on that refusal. ... Republicans could roast the treaty in the fire from this kindling’.⁶⁷

O’Donnell attended a public meeting in the parochial hall at Dungloe on 5 September 1926, presided over by James Duirnin of Croveigh. Eugene Doherty, a Cumann na nGaedheal TD for Donegal, was invited but did not attend. A committee of eleven was selected and its plan involved the distribution of hand-bills and further meetings. The effects of youth emigration were also discussed: ‘In many cases, if it wasn’t for the assistance that was given by the young folk abroad, there would be no keeping of the roof over people’s heads’.⁶⁸ The meeting decided that landlords who still held tenanted lands had no moral claim on rents. Working along the lines of the Plan of Campaign of the 1880s, it was agreed that farmers should pay their rents to a committee, ‘for the purpose of organising industrial enterprise which would keep their people at home and in reasonable comfort’.⁶⁹ The refusal to pay rents was therefore tied to attempts to stem emigration. This showed the intention of O’Donnell to seek a broad-based campaign from the outset by linking it to the issues of youth emigration and rural development. Moreover, while it can be argued that the idea of home grown industrial enterprise was as much aspiration as reality, its significance lies in the issue being addressed in an area of high unemployment and emigration. It also revealed the significant reliance on remittances to keep some farms viable. The returns from the recent census showed a decrease in Donegal’s population from 168,573 in 1911 to 152,511 in 1926, and that the sharpest decline was in rural areas.⁷⁰ It was a similar scenario throughout the Free State, with Connaught (-9.5%) and Ulster (three counties) (-9.4%) showing the biggest decrease in overall population.⁷¹ O’Donnell had written of this decline in the congested districts from 1911 to 1926, referring to the census returns, and attacked the government’s ‘utmost indifference to this deplorable condition’.⁷²

The fact that a formal meeting was so quickly arranged and a committee set up demonstrated the organiser’s sense of the seriousness of the issue. The worry for the committee was that if decrees were served and possessions seized, people may have been forced to sell their farms and leave, and from early, gaps would have emerged in the

⁶⁷ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 34.

⁶⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 10 Sept. 1926. It was headlined ‘Public meeting adopts basis for National Movement in the North’. Eugene Doherty, Cumann na nGaedheal was a TD for Donegal, first elected in 1923.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 28 Aug. 1926.

⁷¹ *Irish Independent*, 23 Aug. 1926.

⁷² *An Phoblacht*, 10 Sept. 1926.

resistance movement. This may have frightened others to sell stock in order to pay the arrears and hold onto their lands at all costs. O'Donnell realised this, and he knew the rural mindset, the importance of land security, but also the individual pride of people who would not want neighbours to know if they had fallen behind with payments. For those whose non-payment was motivated by political as well as economic causes, there was no shame in their names being known in public. However, for those with less forthright political views who were now in difficulty with arrears, it was different. The Land Commission and the authorities recognised this - hence the publication of the defaulters list in Galway and the threat in Meath. As was relayed to O'Donnell 'there would be people who would defy the courts but who would not plead the poor mouth'.⁷³

Although, as has been discussed earlier, arrears had accumulated because of the political and military conflict between 1919 and 1923, there was no doubt that the motives for non-payment were diverse. Moreover, while during this period, the war situation cloaked some non-payment, this was now removed. O'Donnell understood that if any form of sustained organised resistance was to take place, they needed to act quickly before a combination of evictions, seizures and a drift towards payment would create a sense of panic in local communities resulting in a loss of momentum before it had even truly begun.⁷⁴

In September 1926 O'Donnell wrote in *An Phoblacht*: 'military will have to be used as part of the trappings of the bailiffs or the Free State will have to cease its bosses' work of collecting the British taxes'.⁷⁵ That same month the Free State Army was used to enforce decrees on the islands off the north-west Donegal coast. A Free State vessel arrived in the vicinity of Arranmore with a party of soldiers.⁷⁶ Both sides stepped up their activities and O'Donnell's warning about the use of the army proved correct. It was obvious that the government wanted to bring the arrears and annuity situation under control before any organised opposition took hold.

The committee established at Dungloe organised further meetings for the area and at Meanacross. Handbills, most probably written by O'Donnell, were distributed in the west Donegal area:

The Marquis of Conyngham has no moral claim to rents from us. We owe no landlord rent, and we owe no annuities to buy out 'rights' that were never morally established.

⁷³ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 10 Sept. 1926.

⁷⁶ *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 11 Sept. 1926; *Irish Times*, 13 Sept. 1926.

We repudiate rents and annuities as a matter of principle. Our young people are being driven abroad - who is trying to create industry to keep them at home? If we pay an agreed rent it will only be to a committee of ourselves to apply it to create industry and save our children from the emigrant ship.⁷⁷

The Land Commission obtained decrees against defaulting tenants at Killybegs District Court. However, as elsewhere, there were questions over the reliability of the Land Commission records. In September 1926, a Dungloe District Court sitting before District Justice O'Hanrahan heard cases of over 120 alleged defaulters' annuitants. In many of the cases, it was proved that the amount owed had already been paid and they were struck out. In several other instances, it was shown that the liability rested upon tenants who had been dead, some for almost forty years.⁷⁸

The government, meanwhile, was anxious to quash any rumours; including what it claimed was printed in certain provincial papers, of a moratorium on payments: 'Such a course never was, and never could be contemplated. It would be ruinous to public credit and ruinous to the agricultural industry itself'. It admitted the number of defaulters was more than normal for the year and that the depressed state of the farming industry was contributing to non-payment, but claimed 'that mischief makers are taking advantage of the position to urge farmers not to pay'.⁷⁹ While the government could pass off some of the increase in the number of defaulters on the poor state of the agricultural sector, it was concerned about the influence 'mischief makers' were having on the farmers. A report in the *Irish Independent* mentioned rumours of new powers being given to the Land Commission, including proposals that county councils take up the land of defaulters.⁸⁰ There was opposition in the Dáil to this measure; John White (Farmers' Party, Donegal) and Conor Hogan (Farmers' Party, Clare) saw it as giving county councils an impossible task as bailiffs when they already had enough work and predicted that the farcical idea would fail disastrously.⁸¹

The Farmers' Party was formed as the political wing of the Irish Farmers' Union, and represented the interests of larger farmers. The party membership was mostly pro-treaty and supported the Cumann na nGaedheal government. It won fifteen seats at the 1923 General Election.⁸² The Farmers' Party represented farmers who in most cases could afford and were

⁷⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 17 Sept. 1926.

⁷⁸ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 4, 18 Sept. 1926.

⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 21 Sept. 1926.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 Sept. 1926.

⁸¹ Land Bill (No. 2) Second stage, *Dáil Debates*, vol. 16, No. 16, cols 1756-62, 24 June 1926.

⁸² D.J. Hickey & J.E. Doherty (eds), *A new dictionary of Irish history from 1800* (Dublin, 2003), p. 145.

paying annuities, although the Farmers' Union was not happy with some of the Land Commission collection methods, alluding to 'many instances of persons whom they are fully convinced could pay, but are neglecting to do so'.⁸³ Thus, the politically organised farmers groups opposed paying increased rates for the shortfall in annuities in their areas. This was going to dampen O'Donnell's hope that some government supporters would help in some small way, but of course this could change from one area to another.

The non-payment campaign needed to reassure the people that they could successfully resist the Land Commission. The non-payment committee, formed in Donegal, hoped plans to counteract the seizure and sale of cattle could provide this. The committee believed the real tussle would develop when seizures were attempted, and bailiffs would be opposed by the collective if they attempted to seize a neighbour's cattle. It was considered unlikely that buyers would be found for seized cattle in the locality so efforts would have to be made to prevent cattle being sent for sale to distant markets.⁸⁴ For this, O'Donnell and the campaign were going to need the support and goodwill of a wide range of people.

Thus, through O'Donnell's efforts and the campaign played out in the pages of *An Phoblacht*, the first organised committees advocating non-payment of annuities were set up in Donegal. This was central to O'Donnell's thinking, to move from a local movement to a nationally-organised resistance, which he believed could ultimately influence radical political change in Ireland. He had certainly identified the economic hardships annuity arrears were imposing and the explosive political potential of this issue which, if harnessed properly, could seriously undermine the Cumann na nGaedheal government. To achieve this end, he needed the support not only of the small farmers but of political groupings and parties such as the IRA, Sinn Féin, Labour and perhaps most significantly, the new emerging Fianna Fáil party.

⁸³ *Irish Independent*, 21 Sept. 1926.

⁸⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 17 Sept. 1926.

CHAPTER 2

THE AGITATION CONTINUES, O'DONNELL WORKS TO BROADEN SUPPORT BASE SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 1926

(i) O'Donnell seeks support for non-payment campaign

The establishment of the anti-annuity committee in Donegal in September 1926 gave a degree of organisation to the campaign of non-payment of annuities, and while its activities were localised, *An Phoblacht* sought to give the agitation a national platform. The committee busied itself with organising defences against bailiffs and seizures. At times O'Donnell would involve himself personally in local disputes trying to negotiate on issues concerning annuities. At a national level, he continued to appeal to the IRA, Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and Labour for support. The government met the challenge head-on by introducing legislation increasing the powers of the courts, sheriffs and bailiffs to take possession of property in lieu of annuities. There was more opposition to the government's financial relationship with Britain including the issue of annuities from O'Donnell and Fianna Fáil following the publication of the Ultimate Financial Settlement in November 1926. The revolutionary zeal of 1916-21 was gone for Cumann na nGaedheal; John M. Regan writes that 'the revolutionaries, Irish-Irelanders and most especially the militarist-republicans, where they did not voluntarily resign, were being moved sideways or purged from the places and power and influence within the regime'.¹ Erhard Rumpf likened the Cumann na nGaedheal attitude to that of the Conservative Party in 1895-1905 arguing that Cumann na nGaedheal believed 'a well-governed Ireland would receive positive economic benefits from its association with Britain, and [they] quickly forgot old passions and hatreds'.² This was against the background of poor economic conditions, which influenced calls for extended payment time and other relief measures from groups and individuals not associated with the non-payment campaign as the impact of the annuities issue continued to spread

Once the government began to tackle the issue of arrears, the bailiff once more came to prominence as it was his job to recover money owed. The bailiff had a bad reputation in Irish history and social lore, a reputation grounded in stories of seizures and evictions during the

¹ John M. Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution 1923-1936: treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1999), p. 259.

² Erhard Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977), p. 73.

Famine and memories of similar events during the Land War of the 1880s. O'Donnell believed that for the campaign to be successful, they would have to counter the action of the bailiffs. He reasoned that:

The bailiffs are in most cases, local to those against whom their activities are directed. They are connected by family ties with many of those who are being hard pressed. These are avenues of approach to their fellow feelings, and these can be used to induce them to throw in their lot with the people. It would be a big mistake not to use the justice behind the people's stand as the chief weapon with whom to affect the intentions of those on the British side.³

What was evident was the amount of trust O'Donnell was placing in the community and their ability to win over the bailiff. Perhaps it was too much to envisage them having such influence and allowing for the fact that bailiffs from outside the immediate area could also be used. However, he knew the reaction and feelings towards seizures and the work of bailiffs and believed it would be a mistake not to promote the justice of the farmers' position.

In *There will be another day* O'Donnell recalls an event in which he asked a local bailiff to supply him with the names of those who bought seized cattle through the local school teacher. He expected the bailiff to go straight to the police, but he did not and instead did as O'Donnell requested, an arrangement that continued to work very well into the future.⁴ Seizures had begun to take place, and at such hours that none of those affected could raise the alarm.⁵ This tested O'Donnell's confidence in the spirit of neighbourliness about which he had spoken at the initial church gate meeting at Dungloe in September. When O'Donnell returned to Donegal from Dublin his mother had a hand-delivered letter from the local teacher, with information from the bailiff naming the man who had bought the seized cattle. At the local committee meeting, it was agreed that O'Donnell would visit the buyer and advise him to return the cattle.⁶ The farmer had been a soldier at Finner Camp when O'Donnell was imprisoned there during the Civil War and was initially abrasive, however he admitted to having purchased the cattle but claimed he had been talked into it while drunk. O'Donnell claimed there was 'no further quarrel between us'.⁷ The fact that this had been resolved without the use of threat was a boost for O'Donnell and the campaign.

³ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Sept. 1926.

⁴ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), pp 31-2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 45-7.

While selling seized cattle in local areas would prove difficult, there were some who were willing to buy, taking advantage of the reduced price. As alluded to earlier, if the cattle were sent to distant markets, efforts were made to disclose the location of these markets at which the cattle had been seized, in the hope that buyers would show solidarity. Dockers were also made aware of the circumstances of seizures in the event of the proposed shipping abroad of the cattle. To counter the imminent threat of the bailiffs, *An Phoblacht* published the arrangements made by the Donegal committee to have localities called out:

The committee is arranging to have labour bodies approached to secure cooperation in certain eventualities. A chain of mounted couriers will carry the news of the bailiffs arrival to the various districts. Violence will not be offered by the people; the forms of the people's opposition are being drafted by the committee to be issued later as a handbill.⁸

The committee needed to reassure people that their resistance would not result in their having to endure undue financial hardship - hence, the emphasis on measures to stop and disrupt the sale of seized cattle, and efforts to stop bailiffs before they could seize goods. The obvious objective was the disruption of the bailiff's work, but the article also referenced underlying issues. The aim of the committee was to move the issue from one of individuals defaulting, as the government portrayed it, to a more broadly-based community one, which united all defaulters. The reference to labour bodies showed how O'Donnell viewed the issue in the wider political context as he continued to try and broaden its support base. By September 1926 there had been very little comment on annuities from the Labour Party and, perhaps what is more surprising, little comment in the paper of the newly-formed Workers' Party of Ireland (WPI) despite its sub-heading on the mast of the *Irish Hammer and Plough*: 'workers and working farmers' party'. The WPI had set up branches in Delvin, Co Westmeath and Killashandra, Co Cavan during the summer of 1926 and had plans for branches in Ballyconnell and Belturbet. Also in Cavan, it was involved in trying to prevent the eviction of a family in Ardlougher near Belturbet, although this was not due to annuity arrears.⁹ So the WPI were reacting to rural issues but had yet to address the matter of annuities.

⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Sept. 1926. This was under a headline: Preparing for the bailiff! Mounted couriers to spread alarm. Tirconnail war against the tribute.

⁹ *Irish Hammer and Plough*, 5, 12 June, 17 July 1926. The WPI was formed in April 1926 and its officers included Roddy Connolly and Charlotte Despard. For more on this and the party's attempts at organising in some rural areas during this period, see Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943* (Dublin, 2004), pp 117-21.

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin's support and allegiance was to the remaining anti-treaty members of the 'second Dáil', which was elected in May 1921. This allegiance was a factor in the party split of March 1926 and the subsequent founding of Fianna Fáil. The IRA had withdrawn allegiance to this body in November 1925. In September 1926 O'Donnell seemed to attack Sinn Féin and its abstentionist politics in *An Phoblacht* editorial: 'Dare we live removed from the people's needs, indifferent to their sufferings and without a programme to assist them? If we do remain passive while the British sheriff strips and starves our folk in the Gaeltacht districts ... we were creatures of make believe and words'.¹⁰ The final line can be interpreted as veiled criticism of Sinn Féin's allegiance to the second Dáil and the notion of an abstract republic. It was also an appeal to its membership to either try to shift the party to engagement with everyday political issues or for individual members to actively support the annuities campaign. While it was less of a direct rebuke to the IRA, it was again trying to influence the movement to take a less indifferent stand, from that of playing a mere role on the side-lines, to one of engaging at a more effective level.

All the while, O'Donnell was moving between national issues and local issues. He recounts one instance that encapsulates the anxieties faced by families at local level. It concerned an unmarried farmer who was in arrears. His married brother and wife also lived on the farm and they were prepared to pay the arrears, but only if ownership was transferred to the husband's name. O'Donnell met with them. He knew the unmarried farmer was unlikely to have an heir of his own so O'Donnell asked him if he had ever thought of arranging with whoever of his nephews was to take on the farm later, 'to become a joint tenant with him now, or in some way make it clear that this place would be his'. The man agreed, but wondered would the Land Commission agree in light of the arrears. O'Donnell assured them it could be arranged with a solicitor.¹¹ It seemed the most logical solution to a family problem that might have become a bitter wrangle. It illustrated the potential that land issues extending out from the annuities issue could have, as land ownership was such an emotive subject.¹² O'Donnell had some empathy with the married couple and argued that the wife 'must have worried over the uncertainty and insecurity of her position, the wife of the

¹⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Sept. 1926.

¹¹ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 40-3. O'Donnell in recalling this instance and the issue with the buyer of the seized cattle commended 'the great lessons in agitation' he got from his father and Black James Duirnin. This he believed came from their liking and trusting people and the community.

¹² See Terence Dooley, *The land for the people: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), especially introduction.

younger brother who was not the tenant of the holding'.¹³ This was O'Donnell dealing with annuities concerns at a micro level. But while he successfully negotiated this case, how many individual homes and firesides could he visit if similar problems arose? This demonstrated that, while the campaign needed to be a community effort, there were individual particulars to the agitation and O'Donnell knew these often needed to be addressed with a degree of sensitivity. Hunger for land ownership had the potential to fracture communities and families. While the national campaign for non-payment was centred on the moral right of the ownership of the land, there was no legislating for what could happen in an era of economic hardship and poverty where hunger for land would be difficult to sate. There was not enough land for those who desired it, so there was always the possibility that some would take on paying the arrears on farms of defaulters or evicted farmers in order to secure more for themselves.¹⁴

Any new legislation on the annuities issue raised concerns (see chapter 1.) In September 1926 at a Clare Farmers' Association meeting there was criticism of the Amending Bill to the Irish Land Act of 1924: 'What bank was going to make an advance on the security of the land if the Land Commission could come in and sell out to the exclusion of the first mortgager'?¹⁵ There was a clause that allowed the Land Commission to offer the farm of a defaulter to the county council if it failed to find a purchaser on account of the non-payment of annuities. Colonel George O'Callaghan-Westropp argued that this could have insidious consequences: 'by a steady application of the upper and nether millstones of national and local taxation, the county council can grind you down until you can no longer pay your purchase annuities. The county council can then acquire the land, give it to their pets and throw the loss on the rest of the ratepayers'.¹⁶ It raises intriguing questions that will only ever be answered when the Irish Land Commission archives are opened to the public. But in 1926 it was obvious that the annuities issue was impacting on those who were paying, as well as those who were not, and that non-payment was having wider economic and political consequences.

¹³ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 41.

¹⁴ On this wider issue of land acquisition and redistribution see Dooley, *The land for the people*.

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 21 Sept. 1926.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* George O' Callaghan-Westropp (1864-1944) was a landowner from Lismehane, near Tulla, Co. Clare. Initially a Unionist, he became very active in the Irish Farmers' Union and the Clare Farmers' Association. For more on O'Callaghan-Westropp and his involvement with these organisations prior to 1921, see David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life 1913-1921, provincial experience of war and revolution* (Cork, 1998), particularly pages 42-71, 222-3 and 226-8.

Meanwhile, in Donegal there was trouble on the Marquis of Conyngham's estate. Rent arrears were preventing efforts of the land agent to hand over up-to-date accounts to the Land Commission in order to further the completion of the sale of the estate. The agent 'suggested that many documents had gone up in the confusion of the last few years,' presumably meaning that they had been burned in the estate office during the revolutionary period. *An Phoblacht* contrasted the situation on this estate with neighbouring ones: 'the position on the adjoining estates is slightly different. In their cases, the arrears are due to the Land Commission, and they are pressing their claims in Free State courts'.¹⁷ John Sweeney was agent for the Conyngham estate. One of his difficulties was that the estate would lose considerably if the necessary information could not be found before the vesting of the estate prior to sale to the tenants:

I was afraid when the date of vesting would come the question of balance of compounded arrears would likely turn up and that neither the Land Commission nor I would be able to identify them on the present rental. In 1922 when I was appointed agent I was handed a copy of the Rosses rental with about 1,000 tenants returned therein. After the Land Act of 1923, I went looking for full particulars, but the tenants refused to give any, believing 'no more rent would have to be paid'. When orders were sent out for arrears, within days they were returned to the Irish Land Commission, 'saying A.B. was dead for some years'.

After months I found that there were 1,616 tenants in 1922 with about 180 sub tenants, and many were dead some from 25 to 40 years, but others' sons continued to pay the rent, each contributing a share. There would be roughly about £2,000 arrears due which would be legally recoverable provided the estate was a normal estate but to hold the sale or vesting of the estate up for two years on the chance of recovering this sum I consider it would be unwise and could not recommend it.¹⁸

Thus, in O'Donnell's sphere of influence there were two major battles ongoing: one against attempts by the trustees of the Conyngham Estate to gather in their rents and arrears and the other against the Land Commission to collect annuities.¹⁹ Some tenants on the Conyngham estate had not paid rent since 1919, coinciding with the beginning of the War of Independence.²⁰ There followed efforts by the local agent Sweeney to gather data and a centre was set up in the old RIC station in Dungloe, where tenants were invited to attend to receive details of boundary markings and acreages. O'Donnell viewed this as a threat to the annuities campaign as it might set a precedent for the payment of arrears; it was an attempt by the agent

¹⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Sept. 1926. 'Gone up in the confusion of the last few years' in this instance refers to the revolutionary period.

¹⁸ John Sweeney to Messrs. Anderson & Bland solicitors, Dublin, 20 Apr. 1929 (NLI, Conyngham Papers, MS 35,393 (19)).

¹⁹ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 49-50.

²⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 17 Sept. 1926.

to ‘cajole them into an agreement to take the compounded arrears’. There were dark hints of agreements made ‘by this person and that and of a break in the solidarity of the tenants’.²¹

Days later, on 25 September, the Marquis of Conyngham’s office in Donegal Town was raided by a group of men who demanded and took the rental books for the Rosses area for the purpose, they alleged, of having some disputed rent arrears wiped out. Sweeney commented: ‘Of what use the rental is to them is a mystery for it is stated that the tenants on the estate have their annuities paid up to May last’. The *Irish Independent* also claimed that there were practically no arrears on the estate and that the estate was about to be transferred to the Land Commission, ‘and the seizure of the books will delay the operation’.²² Two days later, there was a reply from O’Donnell in the same paper that was laced with sarcasm:

A correspondent referring to the seizure of documents from the agent of the trustees for the Marquis of Conyngham’s estate, ventures the statement that there are no outstanding arrears due from the tenants. This cannot be founded on any real knowledge of the district. It will interest the people there to know that some person has been paying rent for them; I rather fancy they will continue to tolerate such a state of things, for they seem pretty determined not to pay themselves.²³

A rental book for the Rosses Estate showed the compounded arrears on November 1926 as being £3,309 2s 5d.²⁴

The raid was initiated and led by Seán McCool, the IRA officer whom O’Donnell had engaged, to help trace seized cattle. McCool had been working with and attending meetings of the local committee in Dungloe. Soon after the raid O’Donnell received a telegram from Sweeney, which he published in *An Phoblacht*, seeking his influence to secure return of the rental books returned: ‘otherwise it would mean a claim of thousands of pounds on the already heavy-taxed Rosses people’.²⁵ O’Donnell refused, stating: ‘you will not seriously contend the trustees for the Marquis of Conyngham have any interests that are morally binding on the people of the Rosses?’²⁶ The message was clear: landlordism was dead in Ireland. McCool’s involvement in the raid was important. O’Donnell’s initial concern on receiving the telegram was that the IRA would repudiate the raid if they were implicated in the same, but Sweeney had not mentioned the IRA. Repudiation would, O’Donnell reasoned:

²¹ *An Phoblacht*, 1 Oct. 1926.

²² *Derry People and Tirconail News*, 2 Oct. 1926; *Irish Independent*, 29 Sept. 1926.

²³ *Irish Independent*, 1 Oct. 1926.

²⁴ Rental book, Rosses Estate, Trustees Marquis of Conyngham (NLI, Conyngham Papers, MS 35,400 (3)).

²⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 8 Oct. 1926; see also O’Donnell, *Another day*, pp 50-1. The telegram was addressed to ‘Padra’ O’Donnell, TD, Dungloe’, and was sent on to Dublin from there.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

‘take the heart out of the resistance, for, in however vague a way, they [the people] must have encouraged themselves to believe they were not without some support from that body’.²⁷

McCool was arrested in connection with the raid, and charged with stealing documents, and assisting and maintaining an unlawful military organisation.²⁸ He appeared before Donegal District Court in early October, but was discharged and released due to lack of evidence. However, shortly after many ‘plain-clothes policemen’ arrived in the district and several arrests followed. O’Donnell believed McCool had organised men from a local unit, in tight secrecy for the raid:

However, in his anxiety to keep to the pattern of an affair of neighbours, he gathered round him a mixed group who took it all light-heartedly, so that the country side soon knew all there was to know. The police had no trouble in getting evidence to make arrests; it was not so easy to expect people to believe I had no finger in it, when one of the arrested men was my brother, Brian.²⁹

The tenants of west Donegal resisting annuity payments were supportive of McCool’s actions, and O’Donnell hoped the raid would encourage more people to join the protest. But the area was now subjected to a heavy police presence. O’Donnell had to continue with a balancing act, to make sure the IRA was not seen as being behind the wider annuities agitation, but simultaneously assuring those refusing to pay their annuities that they were not alone in their struggle. Regarding the raid, part of an *An Phoblacht* front page article read:

The seizure of the books, etc., is put down against the assault on one of the tenants by the landlord’s reps, reported in *An Phoblacht*. There is great satisfaction expressed that the peoples blow was effective and bloodless.

By comparison the editorial was perhaps a bit more circumspect,

Care must be taken by local committees that the excitement of such raids does not sweep any enthusiastic group away from the thought out programme and acts of those whose thoughts are the guide-lines of the campaign.³⁰

This article reflected O’Donnell’s thinking on the campaign: he needed to get the best propaganda he could from the raid, but he also needed to curb wild enthusiasm that these actions alone would settle the issue in the defaulters’ favour. It also reflected his views on the wider political situation, as he grappled with the idea of moving the IRA from a purely

²⁷ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 51.

²⁸ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 9 Oct. 1926.

²⁹ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 52.

³⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 1 Oct. 1926. The assault referred to was reported in *An Phoblacht* on 10 Sept., when Neil Boyle, a tenant on the Marquis of Conyngham’s estate, was allegedly knocked down by one of the landlord’s representatives while he was collecting data with Mr. Sweeney.

military organisation to a more viable political opposition. He believed the IRA had the potential to become the leading opposition outside the Dáil if it evolved into a political coherent group, which at the time was not an unreasonable argument, as Fianna Fáil was an embryonic political organisation unsure of its future and in some instances reliant on IRA members and assistance in organising *cumann*. Sinn Féin was arguably becoming more isolated from political reality and was suffering from the formation of Fianna Fáil, and the various smaller left parties remained just that - small and fractured. One of the areas in which O'Donnell hoped to achieve this potential political growth of the IRA was through the 'thought out programme' of the annuities campaign.

For this programme of the annuities agitation to be successful, O'Donnell needed to spread the organised resistance beyond Donegal, and thus in October 1926 he again appealed for a national campaign:

It is often difficult to arouse people to a duty that calls for aggressive action. ... But the peasant farmers who are being driven to desperation today have a programme that is to their hand and acceptable to their minds. The whole basis for our national claim challenges the annuities that are being forced on them. In every corner of Ireland the campaign against annuities should be considered. ... It is a duty they owe themselves; to back them is a duty we all owe the nation.³¹

The non-payment of annuities outside of Donegal in areas such as Galway and Westmeath has been noted previously. By the summer of 1926, Wexford was also affected. A Land Commission letter to Wexford County Council in September stated that 'the amount of arrears in respect of land purchase annuities on July 31st due for gales to June 1st 1926, in the county was £22,445'. A discussion about publishing a list of defaulters followed. Richard Corish TD (Labour) suggested that the finance committee should consider the latest list of defaulters and submit the names of those who were able to pay at the next meeting of the council, and this proposition was agreed.³² In August a similar issue generated a long discussion at a meeting of Longford County Council. In parts it proved comic as it was claimed some who were not paying annuities were well able to afford driving around in motor cars; according to the chairman: 'there's a case of 14 gales [arrears] amounting to £1 15s. 8d. or half a crown a year, approximately. These are the men rolling about in motor cars that we the poor are being asked to pay for'. He also drew historical comparisons: 'some people have

³¹ *An Phoblacht*, 8 Oct. 1926.

³² *Irish Times*, 15 Sept. 1926; *Irish Independent*, 15 Sept. 1926; *An Phoblacht*, 15 Oct. 1926.

small families, in the worst days of landlordism they would get consideration, perhaps. It is not our place to be as bad or worse than bad landlords to press such poor people unduly'.³³ He went on:

I propose an amendment not to pillory these poor people. I believe there is not a man on the list but would pay if he could, and then circumstances are bad enough without publishing them to a scrutinising public. What I object to is the Land Commission didn't proceed far enough to collect the arrears, but stopped it from the county council grants. That is a point that some of our representatives in the Dáil might ask about.³⁴

A decision was taken not to publish the list, but it was requested that steps be taken to collect the arrears. There was another significant point. The Land Commission, for whatever reason, had taken the easy option of putting the onus on the county council rather than adopting a more aggressive policy of collection.

In July 1926, the monthly meeting of the Kerry Agricultural Committee of the county council proposed a motion asking the Minister for Agriculture to extend the land purchase repayment schemes under the 1903 Wyndham Land Act from 68 ½ years to 99 years. This practical step might have alleviated some pressure on those who could not afford to pay. During the debate, John Flynn said: 'the government had a precedent under the Ashbourne Act, the English Government allowed for arrears in times of stress and gave the farmers a chance'.³⁵ The amended resolution was sent to the minister and Kerry members of the Dáil.³⁶ The discussion on annuities continued at a quarterly meeting of Kerry County Council in August, where it was revealed that about £39,000 was owed in arrears. The McGillicuddy of the Reeks analysed this further:

250 owed the small sum of £500 between them so that 750 owed £38,500. Of these 36 owed £7,000 and 430 owed £25,000. One postal district owed £16,000. To state the matter in a different way, 215 owed 10-17 instalments, 359 owed 5-9, 150 owed 2-4 and 276 owed less than 2 instalments. Examination of the list shows it is not the small farmers of the Gurrane Mountain or along the Maine who are responsible but men who should be able to pay their way. As a result the remaining ratepayers are carrying a burden of nearly 3s. in the £. Limerick County have already published the names of defaulters in the press and by poster at the chapel gate, and north Tipperary have done the same with excellent results.³⁷

³³ *Longford Leader*, 21 Aug. 1926.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Kerryman*, 10 July 1926. The annuity for the Ashbourne (1885) and Balfour Acts (1891) was 4% over forty-nine years, while the Wyndham Act (1903) was at 3.25% paid back over sixty-eight and a half years (see introduction).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 Aug. 1926.

McGilycuddy then called for publication of the names of those defaulting. M. A. O'Donnell said that previously the landlords, in bad times wiped out three or four years of rent, and asked why the government could not follow suit with annuities and give people a chance of getting on. It was an interesting observation given the hostile attitudes towards landlords that had emanated from the Land War era. O'Donnell moved an amendment that a committee consider annuity arrears, and proposed 'that when they ascertained what people could pay who had failed to pay, that their names be published'.³⁸ Patrick Browne suggested they wait for a reply from the Agricultural Committee, which had asked the Minister for Agriculture 'to give a grant to farmers who lost most of their stock through the ravages of the fluke'.³⁹ The amended motion was carried, referring the matter to a committee 'with a view to differentiating between those who can and those who cannot pay and publishing such a list as may be approved after October 1'.⁴⁰

The resolution of the Kerry committee calling for an extension for annuity payments was passed by the Cork County Committee of Agriculture, and from there sent out to other counties and in October, was passed at the Meath and Clare County Committees of Agriculture meetings where the chairman of the Clare Committee commenting on its importance said it would play a big part in the coming Dáil election.⁴¹ However, the Cork resolution was rejected by the Mayo Committee of Agriculture, on 12 October.⁴² At the Westmeath Committee of Agriculture and Technical Instruction on 19 November, the resolution was moved by Seán Lyons TD, Independent Labour. John Casey moved as an amendment that it be marked 'read' responding that they were bound to attend to the business of their own county committee first and 'not be wasting time available ... considering resolutions from Cork, Kerry and elsewhere'. He further stated 'that if the suggested plan was adopted it would mean the money eventually coming from the working men of the country districts'. The amendment was carried narrowly by six votes to five.⁴³

The issue of introducing legislation extending the period of payment was raised in the Dáil by James Cosgrave (Independent, Galway) on 16 November, but rebuffed by Minister

³⁸ *Kerryman*, 21 Aug. 1926.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Irish Independent*, 16 Aug. 1926.

⁴¹ *Meath Chronicle*, 9 Oct. 1926; *Limerick Leader*, 20 Oct. 1926.

⁴² *Connaught Telegraph*, 16 Oct. 1926.

⁴³ *Irish Times*, 20 Nov. 1926; *Westmeath Examiner*, 20 Nov. 1926. Seán Lyons, Independent Labour, was first elected to the Dáil in 1922.

Patrick Hogan on the grounds that the great majority were paying their annuities regularly, and that ‘the relief is not sufficiently apparent to justify us in repudiating our financial obligations and thus making it impossible to borrow money’.⁴⁴ Cosgrave then inquired if the minister was aware that thousands of civil bills were issued throughout Ireland, and ‘if the annuitants were paying their annuities regularly how can this be possible?’ Hogan claimed that about eighty per cent of farmers and ninety per cent of small farmers were paying regularly.⁴⁵

At a meeting of the General Executive of the County Limerick Farmers’ Association on 7 August, there were inquiries as to the monetary loss to the ratepayers over the last five years due to defaulting annuitants. The chairman believed the county council should not be considered responsible for annuity arrears and ‘that they should close up rather than borrow money while grants are due to them by the government. It is most unfair that ratepayers should have to pay interest for defaulting annuitants’.⁴⁶

Disagreement and rancour continued at county council meetings particularly around the issue of ratepayers having to take up the payment for defaulting annuitants. There were also the constant references to those who could afford to pay (those driving around in motor cars) but who refused to do so. This was always going to be a group that the government would target; it was one thing to be defaulting because of economic necessity or political ideology, but quite another to be seen as adopting a position of ‘wait and see’ how the situation would unfold. The government and those willing to pay annuities pressed this argument. The manner in which the attitude of farmers who were supposedly adopting a ‘wait and see’ approach was represented in the media had the potential to harden opinion and undermine the campaign’s agenda, which centred on the aim to galvanise small farmers and labourers around the annuities question.

In October 1926, an editorial in the *Irish Independent* claimed that annuity arrears were being reduced. It was anticipated that because of legal proceedings which had been instituted against defaulters’ arrears would have further reduced by a sum of £200,000 by the end of

⁴⁴ *Dáil Debates*, Questions, payment of land annuities, Vol. 17, No. 1, cols 14-5, 16 Nov. 1926; *Connacht Tribune*, 4 Dec. 1926.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Limerick Leader*, 14 Aug. 1926.

1926.⁴⁷ The total annuity for the country was £2, 877,200 per annum. The gale due on 1 May – 1 June of the previous year was £1,438,600, and on 31 July the outstanding arrears amounted to £367,000, to which was added an accumulative arrear from all prior gales amounting to £217,600 making the total arrear on 31 July £615,500.⁴⁸

Total Land Annuities Arrears in each county on 22 September 1926:

	£		£
Carlow	05,471	Louth	007,787
Cavan	06,656	Mayo	004,692
Clare	40,206	Meath	010,089
Cork	52,436	Monaghan	004,456
Donegal	12,407	Offaly	011,827
Dublin	11,843	Roscommon	017,608
Galway	38,683	Sligo	007,682
Kerry	43,608	Tipperary N	009,172
Kildare	16,021	Tipperary S	011,562
Kilkenny	13,078	Waterford	011,913
Leitrim	06,166	Westmeath	012,978
Leix	16,493	Wexford	016,840
Limerick	37,138	Wicklow	008,899
Longford	05,595	Total	441,306⁴⁹

The Land Commission accounts showed that the arrears due on 31 March 1926 was £439,244.⁵⁰ These figures show a small increase in arrears from March to September 1926.

The total arrears for each county are interesting, although it is difficult to extrapolate trends, which perhaps adds to the many nuances and caveats that need to be looked at in relation to annuities and the agitation. For instance, both Kerry and Cork have high arrears which could partly be explained by the high level of republican activism, an anti-treaty stronghold during the Civil War. Also at the 1923 General Election Kerry had returned four Sinn Féin TDs out of a total of seven. This trend of Sinn Féin TDs in areas with higher arrears was not so striking in Cork. Nevertheless, the four Cork constituencies all returned a Sinn Féin TD and four in total from an overall total of eighteen TDs returned for Cork (interestingly

⁴⁷ *Irish Independent*, 15 Oct. 1926.

⁴⁸ *Kerryman*, 23 Oct. 1926.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* The table was compiled from a list of counties and their respective arrears.

⁵⁰ Land Commission Annual Reports, accounts 1923-31 (NLI, No. OPIE F/26). The report breaks the figures for arrears down into four blocks: £39,105 (1881 & 1885), £ 30,767 (1891 & 1896), £324,025 (1903), £45,347 (1909).

Cumann na nGaedheal only had six TDs, with five Independents elected.) In Galway, where arrears were high, Sinn Féin had three TDs and Cumann na nGaedheal four from a total of nine, again a sizeable Sinn Féin representation. Roscommon with a high rate of arrears had two Sinn Fin TDs and two Cumann na nGaedheal from a total of four. However, Mayo with a very low amount of arrears also had a high Sinn Féin representation of four, compared to Cumann na nGaedheal's five across the two constituencies. It was a similar situation in Leitrim/Sligo. This was a two-county constituency and perhaps a little harder to analyse, but of seven seats Sinn Féin had three and Cumann na nGaedheal four, but arrears in both counties were not high. Wexford, the county with the highest arrears in Leinster, had two Sinn Féin TDs to one from Cumann na nGaedheal in a five seater, while Kildare with one of the highest arrears in Leinster had no Sinn Féin TD.⁵¹ While this showed that there was not an exact corollary between the number of Sinn Féin/ Cumann na nGaedheal TDs in a county and the amount owing in arrears, evidence suggests that in some areas where Sinn Féin representation was higher, there was a higher rate of non-payment. This of course does not imply that this was the sole reason behind non-payment.

A geographical and economic analysis does also not provide clear-cut conclusions. Cork, Kerry, Clare, Limerick, Galway, and Roscommon from the west all have high arrears, but Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim have particularly low arrears. All these counties with the exception of Limerick had been part of the congested districts, 'as redefined under the Birrel Land Act of 1909 to include all of the counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, Kerry and six rural districts in Clare and four in Cork'.⁵² This area had been classed as economically disadvantaged, so it was possible to expect that if difficulties were to arise with payments, that they might be more manifest in this 'economic region', but Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim did not follow the trend. Conversely, Wexford, Laois and Kildare, all traditionally strong and prosperous agricultural areas with better land relative to the west, had high rates of non-payment, while Cavan and Monaghan with poorer lands than those in the east, had very low rates of arrears. Interestingly the list shows that in Donegal, where resistance to annuity payments was best organised, the rate was not high over all, and, indeed, particularly low relative to other areas on the western seaboard.

⁵¹ ElectionsIreland.org, <http://electionsireland.org/results/general/04dail.cfm> (25 Jan. 2014).

⁵² Dooley, *Land for the people*, p. 26.

(ii) Government response to non-payment and Ultimate Financial Settlement revealed

The government had stated in the Dáil in November 1926 that most farmers were regularly paying annuities - here it was eager to talk up the areas where there was a high compliance. In October 1926 Finian Lynch, Minister for Fisheries, was introduced by District Justice W. D. Coyne, at a meeting of the Mayo Industrial Organisation at Westport who stated that ‘during hard times Mayo stood out as one county that had practically no outstanding liability for arrears in rates or land purchase annuities, while counties that have far bigger names and far greater resources have not paid their way’.⁵³ Whilst on a ten-day tour, which the *Sunday Independent* described as a ‘western election tour’, Patrick Hogan (accompanied by Ernest Blythe) stated in Manorhamilton that: ‘Leitrim, one of the poorest counties was one of the best in paying annuities, and it was noticeable that rich counties were the greatest defaulters’.⁵⁴ Hogan also stressed the government’s determination to collect annuities to the last farthing saying they had tackled tougher jobs and had succeeded in ‘warning annuity defaulters that the government was now making arrangements to compel them to pay what they owed at once.’⁵⁵ This was a clear reference to proposed new legislation providing the government with more powers to seize assets from those in arrears. Some of this had been debated in the Dáil and more was to come in the Land Bill when the Dáil resumed in November.

The *Irish Times* was particularly praising of the perceived messages coming from Hogan’s and Blythe’s tours claiming that they had substituted the romantic melodrama of Kathleen Ní Houlihan for ‘a discussion in the astringently realism manner of Ibsen’:

Mr. Hogan’s announcement that, while he proposes to help the farmer who helps himself, his neighbour who assumes that the Department of Agriculture exists to do his work for him is doomed to bitter disappointment. ... The cheers that greeted Mr. Hogan’s statement at Sligo, that measures are being taken to deal with defaulters who have been withholding their land annuities, are a new phenomenon in our politics. ... For generations it was an article of faith that legislators had only to wave a magic wand and land difficulties would cease to trouble our peace. The Minister ... frankly admits that the division of estates promises to give rise to almost as many difficulties as sprang from the long drawn out dispute between landlord and tenant.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Connaught Telegraph*, 16 Oct. 1926.

⁵⁴ *Sunday Independent*, 24 Oct. 1926.

⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 25, 30, Oct. 1926.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 Oct. 1926. An article titled ‘From rhetoric to realism’. This was a reference to the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), who was known for his realistic plays concerning problems of personal and social morality. These included *A Doll’s House* and *Hedda Gabler* both of which were a break with some of the previous drama which had not seriously examined real social issues.

The *Anglo-Celt* also expressed satisfaction with what it saw as this realistic and frank approach and supported the minister's stance on annuities.⁵⁷ Perhaps Rev. Monsignor Soden was also speaking about the reality when he introduced Hogan and Blythe at an executive meeting of north Leitrim Cumann na nGaedheal at Manorhamilton:

The people in the locality had suffered much through loss of cattle, 15 per cent of the cattle in the area had died of fluke ... and there were some people who could not recover that loss unless the government came to their assistance. The poor farmer without cattle could not get his lands grazed. Rates and annuities being due, if another man took grazing on that farm the rate collector came along and put them in the pound. The other man was paying the rates of the man unable to do so. This must be remedied.⁵⁸

This was the reality surrounding the issue of annuities and something the ministers would need to consider if a solution was to be found.

What these reports chiefly demonstrated was the government's determination to deal with the annuity arrears by enforcing collection. But there was also an admission of the economic hardship being endured, and heightened by livestock loss in the midst of a general economic downturn. The economic historian James Meenan has stated: 'even the weather fought against agriculture. The rains of 1924 led to widespread livestock disease; the distress of 1924-25 was described as the worst that the western counties had experienced since the famine of 1879.'⁵⁹ It also brought into focus the clash between the government's new initiatives for seizing stock on land where annuities had not been paid. However, there were real problems in agriculture, which in turn affected the rest of the country. There was, for example, a surplus of rural labour owing to the contraction of employment opportunities in agriculture.⁶⁰ Raymond D. Crotty explored this further in relation to the lack of initiative to help industrial growth, which may have taken some of this surplus labour and concluded:

More than anything else, the political dominance of the farming class and the economically closely related class of country shopkeepers and tradesmen, which had assured the acceptance of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, precluded the adoption of widespread industrial protection in the 1920s. ... The government ... were absorbed at this time in the primary need to establish stable political conditions; in the existing circumstances they were understandably cautious about embarking on any radical new economic policies which would be likely to shock the existing frail political structure.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Anglo-Celt*, 30 Oct. 1926.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Also in attendance at this meeting were James Dolan TD, Martin Roddy TD and Mr. Burke chief organiser for Cumann na nGaedheal.

⁵⁹ James Meenan, *The Irish economy since 1922* (Liverpool, 1970), p. 92.

⁶⁰ Raymond D. Crotty, *Irish agricultural production, its volume and structure* (Cork, 1966), p. 108.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114. For an insight into the economic position of agriculture in this period and the government's policy on it and the wider economy see chapter 5 of Crotty's work.

Within this wider political context, the government position on arrears was formulated. But the fact that there was no concerted policy to promote industry, coupled with the dominance of beef farming, resulted in more rural unemployment which heightened the whole land and annuity crisis. Rumpf commented on this:

Medium and large farmers were good friends of both the national exchequer and the governing party; it was to be expected in such circumstances the government would put economic and political considerations above questions of broad social principle. ... Unlikely Irish government with its base among conservative and prosperous middle-class elements of society, would be in the forefront of fight for a new social and economic order.⁶²

This was part of the ongoing debate on agricultural policy based on two distinct schools of thought: either utilising farms to produce exports for money, which Hogan favoured, or concentrating on beef, bacon and eggs that would return greater profits for farmers and a healthier balance of trade. The other option was geared towards self-sufficiency, which would mean more tillage, and more employment and food produce for home consumption. Meenan summed up the dilemma: ‘Was agriculture, to put it another way, a business or a way of life?’⁶³ These debates on the future direction of agriculture demonstrated the importance of economics in relation to non-payment of annuities, particularly regarding farms that were practically unsustainable. In the *Connacht Tribune* B. F. O’Beirne claimed it was wrong to say defaulters could pay if they wished; non-payment, he argued, was simply proof of the distress and poverty in the country: ‘You would have no defaulters if the lands of the country were fully stocked. Petty loan societies and doles for drainage don’t touch the fringe of the great subjects at issue.’⁶⁴ The letter certainly challenged the government’s position in relation to some of the reasons for non-payment; there was little doubt that many farmers were having difficulty paying, owing to a variety of adverse economic factors. The opinion that there would be no defaulters if lands were fully stocked of course ran contrary to O’Donnell’s assertion that annuities were an unjust payment for lands confiscated. Of interest was O’Beirne’s opinion that if economic circumstances were more favourable, there would be less of an issue with annuity repayments which, of course, reinforced the view that economic hardship was a major determinant in non-payment.

The *Irish Independent*, which supported Cumann na nGaedheal, commented on what they called the ‘enormous’ arrears total of £441,306 as of 30 September 1926, and Ministers

⁶² Rumpf, *Nationalism and socialism*, p. 75.

⁶³ Meenan, *Irish economy*, p. 268.

⁶⁴ Letter from B.F. O’Beirne of Drumsna (Co. Leitrim) quoted in *Connacht Tribune*, 27 Nov. 1926.

Hogan and Blythe's insistence that the government would collect every penny, and claimed that the government was likely to push strongly for the retention of all the provisions of the Land Bill (No.2). The *Independent* viewed as drastic:

All arrears of annuities, rents (interest in lieu of rent, interest on purchase money, compound arrears of rent, and payment in lieu of rent,) payable to the Land Commission shall the Bill says, be recoverable from the person in actual occupation of the lands, notwithstanding that the whole or part of such arrears may have accrued due before such person went into occupation.⁶⁵

The Land Bill (no. 2) was introduced in the Dáil on 16 June 1926 for the purpose of amending the law relating to the occupation and ownership of land.⁶⁶ Its main provisions regarding annuities were the proposals to grant extra powers to the Land Commission for the collection of arrears, which were outlined in the Dáil on 24 June (see chapter 1). The *Irish Times* also viewed the Land Bill as important:

This bill will give powers for the compulsory collection of overdue land annuities. A subversive propaganda has encouraged defaulters to suppose that, if they hold out long enough the state will yield and remit their liabilities at the cost of the taxpayer in general. The banishment of this notion will bring wholesale political realism into rural life.⁶⁷

Although the bill contained many more elements, both the *Times* and *Independent* emphasised the significance of those clauses dealing with annuity arrears. A motion on the bill was debated on 16 December, after a report of the select committee set up to examine it, but was adjourned until 25 January 1927.⁶⁸ O'Donnell claimed that the enforced collections resulting from the proposed new Land Bill would drive young Irish people abroad and impoverish those at home, and that cattle would be seized and sold for a fraction of their value. He again appealed for people to resist:

Can we prevent this scattering of our people? Are we such dammed cannibals that we feed off each other; that a man will buy the cattle England's agents seize on an Irish farm and put up for auction? No; the whole strength of the position is on our side. ... 'Sheriffs sales to become the craze'. The gate of the 'pound' to become the commercial mart. It is a question of holding a grip of our homes or being dumped abroad. Let us then swear to put the good of the people above the fear of the jail. ... We can win so easily; and the loss would be so irreparable. Each in his district to his task.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Irish Independent*, 6 Nov. 1926.

⁶⁶ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 16, No. 11, cols 1130-31, 16 June 1926.

⁶⁷ *Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 1926.

⁶⁸ Land Bill (No. 2) Report of the select committee, *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 17, No. 10, col. 875, 16 Dec. 1926.

⁶⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 12 Nov. 1926. This article was entitled, 'England's purpose, working through Land Annuities'.

Again, O'Donnell based his appeal on the spirit of neighbourliness. His view of the seriousness of the situation was marked by his reference to imprisonment. The potential fallout from a defeat emphasised the importance he placed on the annuities not just as a standalone issue, but also within his broader political agenda. He went on to state:

The only means required to achieve the British purpose is to play off the commercial instinct of the cattle dealers on the hardships of the working farmers. ... (speaking of the bailiff) Leave the seized goods on his hands, leave them untouched at the sheriff's sales, refuse to handle them on the docks. ... at fair, at market, at church gates, at dance or funeral we can leave them (bailiffs) to shiver in the draught of their own mean thoughts.⁷⁰

While O'Donnell hoped for general support among farmers and the wider rural community, he was not so naive to believe that differing class interests among farmers and the agricultural sector would not surface. Again, he invoked the memory and actions of the Land League. The reference in the first article of 12 November to 'holding a grip on our homes' recalled the advice of Parnell to 'keep a firm grip on your homesteads',⁷¹ and in the second article he advocated the use of the Land League's most potent weapon, the boycott. Some remembered these actions; those who were younger were told about the agitation which eventually led to the transfer of land and the importance of now being owners rather than tenants.

Moreover, it was not only O'Donnell who was invoking the memory of the Land League. In November, R.W. Coates in a letter to the *Irish Times* outlined some of the pressure farmers were facing and stressed his disappointment with the Farmers' Party. He emphasised the plight of those farmers who did not have the capital to increase and finish the fattening of their cattle stock: 'It is well known that it is the last months feeding that pays a farmer. We have no last month; for we hear the sheriff's knock at our door at the beginning of it'.⁷² He continued:

A couple of half years' hanging gale on our annuity would help those of us who need it incalculably, and I feel sure that England would meet us more than half way in this matter. Have our deputies ever suggested this in the Dáil? Any thinking man must

⁷⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 12 Nov. 1926. O'Donnell would return to this issue of the cattle dealers and ranchers and differing class interests among farmers later, in broadly similar terms, in a pamphlet *Plan of Campaign for Irish Working Farmers* (in early 1931) and *For or against the Ranchers? Irish Working Farmers in the Economic War* (1932).

⁷¹ T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish revolution 1846-82* (Oxford, 1981), p. 305; Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), p. 58. Parnell said this at Westport in June 1879.

⁷² Letter from R.W. Coates, Co. Wicklow, expressing frustration with the efforts of the Farmers' Party in the Dáil; quoted in *Irish Times*, 9 Nov. 1926.

notice the contrast between our present Farmers' deputies and the members of the old Land League Party in Westminster. The latter wrung reforms that we may call the Magna Carta of agriculture from a hostile House of Commons, well supported by an even more hostile House of Lords; yet our men in a friendly Dáil seem to show no fight. The only hope of getting anything worthwhile for agriculture is by adopting an uncompromising attitude of isolation. Support the government by all means, but get a *quid pro quo* – that was the policy of the Land League Party, and it succeeded well.⁷³

While Coates was hardly a supporter of non-payment, his letter showed the effect annuities were having on some supporters of the Farmers' Party. The fact that he suggested some concessions on payment undermined the government belief that most were capable of paying their annuities. While it broadly reinforced the arguments of the non-payment committee, his proposal of a policy of isolationism ran contrary to O'Donnell's view of the annuities being part of a campaign for more significant social and political change.

In October, it was finally resolved to publish the list of defaulters in Kerry. At a special meeting of Kerry County Council, the acting secretary Florence Harty explained that annuity arrears were being deducted from the grants coming to the county council: 'if these sums were subsequently paid they would be credited to the Land Purchase Guarantee Fund, and of course there would be less deductions made from grants the following year'.⁷⁴ It was argued that the published defaulters list had a favourable effect on collection of arrears in Limerick. J.M. O'Sullivan wanted to ask the sheriff if he had visited the 2,617 people who had been issued with decrees, for he had visited places where there was not a goat left, but he had also passed Land Commission defaulters with money in the bank.⁷⁵ M.A. O'Donnell opposed publication of defaulters lists and insisted that collection rested with the Land Commission: why should the county council, he asked, 'act as the sheriff's bailiffs of bye gone days? They had got enough to do to collect the rates'. A vote in favour of publication of a list of defaulters was carried by ten votes to six.⁷⁶ *An Phoblacht* commented on the decision stating that every republican councillor who acquiesced in pressing people to pay the tax or failed to do his utmost to oppose it 'must be promptly disowned by all those who sincerely wish to undo the conquest.'⁷⁷

⁷³ Letter from R.W. Coates, Co. Wicklow, expressing frustration with the efforts of the Farmers' Party in the Dáil; quoted in *Irish Times*, 9 Nov. 1926.

⁷⁴ *Kerryman*, 16 Oct. 1926. The Guarantee Fund provided security for the bondholders and took up any shortfall in annuity payments, this was replenished by the withholding of grants from local councils and the eventual payment of some arrears.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 26 Nov. 1926.

In November 1926, the publication of the White paper containing the heads of the Ultimate Financial Settlement (March 1926) caused a contentious debate in the Dáil and media. Blythe said the difference of opinion with Britain was over income tax on the interest portion of the annuities, which the Free State had been withholding wrongly and had now paid £550,000 to the British Exchequer.⁷⁸ Professor Magennis wanted to know why this document was only coming before the Dáil at that time, when it had been signed back in March and asked why annuities should be paid without any deduction whatsoever, not even a deduction for the cost of collection: ‘Did not the national equity require, when once it became a question of settlement of financial relations between Britain and Ireland that the land charges should be one of the first considerations’.⁷⁹ He further stated:

Any Irishman ... knows that next to the national claim, the claim with regard to the land was predominant. Yet it was forgotten in this settlement. Petty questions of law were allowed to put it aside, and now, under what is supposed to be an ultimate financial settlement, the Free State finds itself charged with the perpetuation of this annual tribute. ... ‘We regard ourselves as entitled to income tax,’ he (Minister for Finance) said, but he did not get it. ... Why did not he regard himself as entitled to a complete cancellation of land purchase annuities?⁸⁰

Thomas Johnson (Labour) sought clarification on what constituted the public debt of Britain and whether this included the interest on land stock. He reasoned that under article 2 of the December 1925 settlement, which stated that ‘the Irish Free State is hereby released from the obligations under Article 5 of the said Articles of Agreement’, the Free State government was not obliged to pay the annuities. He argued that this entitled Ireland to retain the annuities.⁸¹ Blythe responded in conclusion that ‘the whole question of the payment of annuities had been decided by the Oireachtas in the Land Act of 1923’.⁸² He said that the recent December and March agreements were not drawn up with the same detail that would apply to an act, they were not months in preparation, and that it was specifically understood

⁷⁸ *Dáil Debates*, Debate on the Ultimate Financial Settlement between British and Saorstát governments. Vol. 17, No. 8, col. 637, 8 Dec 1926.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, cols 649-51.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 52.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, cols 658-62. This was to be an ongoing debate as to whether the annuities came under the public debt of Britain. The issue was covered, argued and debated in *British Plunder and Irish Blunder* (1927) by Col. Maurice Moore and in *The strange case of the Irish land purchase annuities* (1932) by Henry Harrison.

⁸² *Ibid.*, col. 662.

between the two parties to the December agreement that public debt did not include liability in respect of land stock interest.⁸³

Joseph Thomas Sheehan has commented that the Government of Ireland Act (1920) passed into law, but never enforced in the South, left the legal position on annuities very unclear and that ‘inexplicably this powerful bargaining position was to be ignored by all Free State governments, until the accession to power by de Valera’.⁸⁴ Undoubtedly much of the confusion around the legality of annuities was engendered because of the scant knowledge surrounding the 12 February 1923 Agreement although by November 1926 there had begun to be vague references to some such agreement. This confusion around the legal position of annuities was further explored by Deirdre McMahon. She quotes Cosgrave from the Dáil on 26 June 1923 on making payments to the British Government in respect of annuities under the Land Purchase Acts and later in the same speech stating that the Land Bill ‘provides that these annuities are to be collected henceforth by Saorstát Éireann’.⁸⁵ McMahon further argues that ‘the position was thus open to confusing interpretation, and in view of the studied vagueness both of the Land Act and of subsequent statements by government ministers, it is not unreasonable to suppose that TDs regarded the Purchase Annuities Fund as a Free State fund’.⁸⁶

In Maurice Moore’s opinion, the Free State ministers, who had so little political experience, had gone to Britain and without advice or knowledge signed agreements binding the country to millions of pounds annually.⁸⁷ On 15 December 1926 he moved a resolution in the Seanad that the recent financial agreements were ‘prejudicial to the financial stability of the Irish Free State, and will, if ratified prove to be an excessive burden on Irish taxpayers’.⁸⁸ Senator Thomas Linehan thought annuities should not be paid if there was no other legal authority for it except the 1923 Land Act, and asked Blythe to make public the secret agreement of 12 February 1923, which had been referred to in the House of Lords.⁸⁹ Thomas

⁸³ *Dáil Debates*, Debate on the Ultimate Financial Settlement between British and Saorstát governments. Vol. 17, No. 8, col. 664-5, 8 Dec 1926.

⁸⁴ Joseph Thomas Sheehan: ‘Land purchase policy in Ireland 1917-23: from the Irish Convention to the 1923 land act’ (M.A. thesis, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, 1993), p. 94.

⁸⁵ Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s* (New Haven and London, 1984), p. 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Notes from Maurice Moore on Ultimate Financial Settlement (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (1)).

⁸⁸ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 8, No. 1, col. 12, 15 Dec. 1926.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, cols 36-7.

Westropp Bennett proposed an amendment that a committee be set up to report on the articles of the agreement and to examine ‘whether they would prove a burden on the taxpayer’; this was defeated by the casting vote of the chairman.⁹⁰ Fianna Fáil viewed the government’s actions in relation to the proposed committee as betraying a sense of guilt and an admission that they had made an arrangement which the electors, had they known about it, would have repudiated. They viewed the terms as amounting to a surrender of the Free State’s financial independence. Blythe stated that he would not appear before such a committee or furnish it with any documents or information.⁹¹

The revelation of the Ultimate Financial Settlement opened up much more debate and focus on the annuities issue. Most of the debate in the Dáil and Seanad concentrated on the legal aspects of issue with Magennis, Johnson and Moore referring back to past agreements and acts to substantiate their case. Johnson argued these legal points, but was not prepared to back the campaign of non-payment. This would continue to be Labour’s stance as they struggled to find a definitive position on annuities. The government was adamant that the question had been resolved and decided by the 1923 Land Act. The debate over the legality of annuities would form the basis of the opposition to annuities on legal grounds that would eventually supersede O’Donnell’s campaign.

Revelation of the agreement was attacked in *An Phoblacht*, arguing that it ran contrary to the December 1925 agreement when the financial slate between Britain and Ireland had supposedly been wiped clean: ‘there are twelve clauses, practically each one of them loads Ireland with a new debt’. *An Phoblacht* claimed the government had withheld publication until public attention had been diverted elsewhere, meaning a series of barracks raids that had taken place in November when the IRA had raided eleven Garda barracks, stole documents, and killed one Garda.⁹² The public outcry had temporarily diverted attention from other issues.

At the same time as the legal ramifications of the financial agreement and annuities were being debated in the Oireachtas, O’Donnell was endeavouring to convince those outside

⁹⁰ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 8, No. 1, col. 40, 15 Dec. 1926.

⁹¹ Fianna Fáil leaflet on government’s financial agreement with Britain (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/827 (16)).

⁹² *An Phoblacht*, 10 Dec. 1926; Hanley, *IRA*, p. 79. The raids caused some dissension within the IRA, as a Public Safety Bill was introduced in the wake of these and many republicans arrested.

the Dáil of the merits of supporting the annuities campaign. A Comhairle na dTeachtaí (Council of Deputies) had been established at the instigation of de Valera at a meeting in August 1924 of the second Dáil and Sinn Féin TDs elected in 1923. It comprised deputies elected at Dáil elections in May 1921 and August 1923. De Valera hoped it would be more functional than the second Dáil, which would remain as the republican government of Ireland while Comhairle na dTeachtaí would be the administrative arm of that government.⁹³ On 18-19 December, at a meeting of Comhairle na dTeachtaí, O'Donnell voiced his frustration at the inaction of this group and the second Dáil. He proposed that the second Dáil take one particular law and oppose it, issuing a decree that this law should be disobeyed, for example that all forms of payments to Britain should be refused.⁹⁴

Thus, the latter half of 1926 witnessed the growing significance of the annuities issue. It was not only those involved in non-payment that were affected; it spread wider as local rate payers had to make up the shortfall. The issue was now being debated in council chambers across the country. The campaign had organised some areas in Donegal, but was struggling to secure a grip countywide. O'Donnell continued to tread a fine line with the IRA on the issue, but promoted it nationally through *An Phoblacht*. There was uncertainty within the IRA that was opposed to direct political involvement, but prepared to countenance the role of individual activists and its organ, *An Phoblacht*, in the campaign. O'Donnell continued to try and force Sinn Féin engagement and sought aid from Fianna Fáil. The government and Patrick Hogan in particular, were determined to enforce collection through increased measures and legislation. The fallout from recent financial agreements with Britain and the continuing poor state of agriculture were also impacting on the issue. The financial agreements were contested from a legal perspective and these legal aspects to the annuities were beginning to take more precedence and this would develop along with O'Donnell's agitation-centred approach. While not all parties or political groupings had a clear position on annuities, this would be further tested in the election year of 1927.

⁹³ Donnacha Ó'Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers, Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-73* (Dublin, 2010), p. 26; T. Ryle Dwyer, *Eamon de Valera, the man & the myths* (Dublin, 1991), p. 145.

⁹⁴ Report from meeting of Comhairle na dTeachtaí 18/19 Dec. 1926 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5880) (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/165 (36)). This report was compiled from documents found at Sinn Féin offices, 1928; see also Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: long fellow, long shadow* (London, 1993), pp 372-3.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANNUITIES BECOME A NATIONAL ISSUE

(i) Legal arguments, arrest and trial of O'Donnell

By 1927 the issue of annuities and non-payment was having an effect throughout the country. However, as yet the non-payment committee that O'Donnell had helped organise in September 1926 was having little impact in spreading an organised agitation outside of Donegal. While the agitation continued to receive prominent coverage in *An Phoblacht*, it remained as yet more sporadic than the nationally co-ordinated movement that O'Donnell had envisaged. The committee continued to outline ways of dealing with the bailiffs, by non-cooperation in the seizing and selling of cattle. The government was determined to close off loopholes in legislation, which in its view was preventing bailiffs from fully enforcing decrees. These included providing a sub-sheriff with protection against legal proceedings when goods were seized which did not belong to the defaulter.¹ Many county councils were debating the matter as non-payment of annuities effected the payment of their agricultural grants, the shortfall having to be secured through increased local rates. The courts were regularly dealing with arrears cases and decrees were frequently issued, which increased the role of the sheriff and bailiff.

In March 1927 the campaign received a publicity boost when O'Donnell was arrested and tried on a charge of encouraging people not to pay annuities.² This publicity afforded him the opportunity to state his position on annuities through the national media. This was a major development, the annuities were now centre stage nationally and O'Donnell's skill as a propagandist and orator ensured maximum publicity from the trial and arrest. The impending general election provided another national platform for debating the matter, and while O'Donnell was not campaigning at the hustings, he was trying to cement an alliance of republicans to defeat Cumann na nGaedheal. Fianna Fáil had begun to realise the potential of the issue and were determined to maximise it during the election campaign. At the close of 1926 O'Donnell reflected on the agitation and wrote of his attempts to focus attention on the question of annuities:

I have done so with persistence because the view of these payments remains constant. I can see no other commotion on the surface of the soil to-day that is so essential to the

¹ *Weekly Irish Times*, 2 Apr. 1927.

² *Irish Times*, 24 Mar. 1927.

waging of the national struggle. The things that stir a nation creep into the fireside. They are in the mind and in the heart. To resist land annuities payments is such a thing. Comfortable farmers will pay. Poor farmers will strive to pay. Poorer farmers will starve to pay. And there are those who can't pay. ... It is where the natural law urges non-payment that resistance will collect.³

He still maintained the belief that the issue could become the focus of a national movement, seeing it as the most important cause affecting small farmers. Once more he was using rhetoric similar to the Land League and was eager to place the campaign in the setting of historical continuity, with the annuities replacing the old rents.

O'Donnell wrote about efforts to curtail the sale of seized cattle. In one amusing piece he wrote:

Picture the return of the cow! In her leisurely waddle she carries a threat to the order of British control in Ireland. If seized cattle can't be sold, how are the arrears to be collected? But she is only one cow after all. ... March her down the village – somebody is bound to appear with a tin whistle; maybe even a couple – sought out fifes and a big drum would appear. ... British order of capitalist life is in greater danger than it was when a mine put a lorry into the air. The man, who yesterday was prepared to loot his home to scrape the amount of the land annuities for England, will hesitate to-day. And if that second cow comes back! ... England has the power to create a military machine that can beat any we create. ... It would break against the horns of a returning cow! ... And all because one cow can't be sold, because a fair can't be held, because annuities won't be paid, because British rule in Ireland is toppling.⁴

Although writing in the absurd of the mayhem that would ensue in villages with the 'returning cow', he hoped that by organisation and through people's sense of fairness, the sale of seized cattle would prove difficult. This form of resistance could be more effective than placing a mine under a lorry. Again, there is evidence of his continued reference to Irish history, in this instance to the Famine and the shipping of corn from Ireland and comparing it to the annuities: 'how often have we all felt that had we been alive in '47 we should have resisted the shipping of corn? And those who refuse to starve themselves to pay land annuities to England are doing what should have been done in '47. And the crawling slaves that would starve like gentlemen to pay like serfs – well, Ireland would be the better for their going'.⁵ He wished to see the resistance supported politically and at the end of December he appealed to republican TDs, Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil for more active support and spoke of their duty in this regard: 'Of the friendliness of their minds to the refusing of tribute I am well aware. Of their power to organise the courage of the people to end this shameful tribute I am confident.

³ 'Resisting the tax gatherer', *An Phoblacht*, 31 Dec. 1926.

⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 31 Dec. 1926.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1927.

... Let not the charge be laid to us, that seeing the right thing, we gave our blessing to a right policy, but did not back it with the full urge of our feelings'.⁶

Around the same time events in Westmeath prevented three forced sales at the insistence of the banks, and combined efforts amongst neighbours to combat the serving of a dozen or so decrees by the sheriff.⁷ In that county, S. Ó Cinnéide appealed for greater active support: 'but my point is that those good results were brought about not by the IRA, Fianna Fáil or Sinn Féin but by a few individuals acting on their own', adding: 'is it not time we buried these 'fine' feelings and came to the relief 'en masse' of the common people of Ireland'.⁸

Similarly, O'Donnell reasoned that his influence on the agitation in Donegal did not derive from his position as an elected representative, 'but as the son of a man who owes nine years' rent, I can talk to my neighbours'. 'Let these "affairs of neighbours" be duplicated as far as possible, and we will soon have a national movement adequate to the task of dealing with the tribute England is forcing from the working farmers of Ireland.'⁹ This was early 1927, by which time O'Donnell was still the campaign's chief publicist through *An Phoblacht*, and main strategist, but his role as a member of the IRA army council and editor of *An Phoblacht* undoubtedly curtailed the time he could devote to the campaign, especially as it had not yet been officially sanctioned by the IRA. His vision of the 'affairs of neighbours' dovetailing into a national movement had some credence, especially if local committees could be co-ordinated. That indeed, was close to the organisational ethos of Fianna Fáil of forming *cumainn* (plural of *cumann*, local branches of Irish political organisations) in as many parishes as possible.

Maurice Moore also remained vocal on annuities and his writings and activities were causing concern to some, as evidenced by a letter from Canon Cummins in Roscommon to Ernest Blythe complaining of Moore's activities and suggesting there should be an effective response because his campaign was 'calculated to do harm'.¹⁰ In the pamphlet *Britain's White*

⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Dec. 1926. These Republican TDs now comprised members of both Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1927. Letter from S. Ó Cinnéide outlining efforts to resist decrees in Westmeath.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1927.

¹⁰ Letter from Canon Cummins, Roscommon to Blythe, 27 Jan. 1927 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/461 (3)).

Paper and Ireland's debts (c late 1926/early 1927) Moore claimed that 'sheriffs writs are following them into their cabins, and driving them out just as the landlords drove them out fifty years ago'.¹¹ In reply to Cummins, Blythe said he had already dealt with Moore in two speeches and advised that there was no necessity to take further notice of him as he was 'sufficiently well known in the country as a humbug who is now posing as a super patriot after serving a life time in the British army'.¹² These exchanges were interesting. Firstly, prior to this there had been very little reaction from the clergy to the annuities issue; secondly Moore's rhetoric and his use of history bore a striking similarity to O'Donnell; thirdly, Blythe dismissed Moore with the disparaging reference to his time in the British army, rejecting him as outside the New Ireland and thus irrelevant to political debate.

However, other dignitaries were now coming on board. On 8 January George Gavan Duffy proposed a motion at the Blackrock Debating Society that it was unjustifiable for the Minister for Finance to hand the annuities over to the British Government. His argument was that no money was due to Britain: 'first because England admitted at the time of the Home Rule Act of 1920 that this particular liability was hers and not ours, and secondly, that financial liability of this country to England under Article v of the Treaty was wiped out by the London Pact of twelve months ago' (Boundary Commission Agreement).¹³ George Gavan Duffy (1882-1951) was a political representative, solicitor and judge. He had defended Roger Casement at his trial in 1916. He was elected Sinn Féin MP for South County Dublin in 1918 and represented the newly-declared Irish Republic as an envoy in Europe. He was a signatory to the 6 December 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and was Minister for External Affairs in the Provisional Government, but resigned in July 1922. He stood as an Independent in the 1923 election, but lost his seat. After this, he moved closer to de Valera's position and advised him on legal issues concerning the land annuities.¹⁴ Thomas Johnson, Labour Party leader said at the Blackrock Debating Society that if it seemed 'there was a legal agreement entered upon,

¹¹ Letter from Canon Cummins, Roscommon to Blythe, 27 Jan. 1927 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/461 (4)).

¹² Letter from Blythe to Canon Cummins, 11 Feb. 1927 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/461 (1)).

¹³ *Sunday Independent*, 9 Jan.1927; *Irish Times*, 10 Jan. 1927. The Boundary Commission Agreement was the agreement signed between Britain and the Free State in December 1925 dealing with the findings of the Boundary Commission. It was agreed that the border should remain as outlined by the Anglo-Irish Treaty (December 1921) ie. that the six north eastern counties of Ireland should remain in the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland. The Free State was relieved of its financial liabilities to Britain under the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which Moore and others contended included the annuity payments to Britain.

¹⁴ Gerard Hogan, 'Duffy, George Gavan', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *DIB* (Cambridge, 2014) (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do?jsessionid=58DAA25460276156710C8699506C2B0F#>) (accessed 2 Dec. 2014).

and if Duffy's interpretation was correct, then there was no dishonour in maintaining the position which was embodied in that agreement'.¹⁵

Blythe made the point that there was much dishonest propaganda concerning the Ultimate Financial Settlement and disingenuous attempts to link it to the Agreement of December 1925. He pointedly remarked: 'there was no connection between the matters dealt with in these two agreements'.¹⁶ In relation to the part of the agreement concerning annuities, Blythe maintained that annuities had been paid under the terms of the 1923 Land Act and 'in respect of annuities collected by them (Free State) before that act was passed, the Dáil on 26 June 1923, passed £3,133,557 for the purpose of repaying these annuities to the British government'.¹⁷ Clann Éireann continued to question the Ultimate Financial Settlement; a pamphlet written by Moore argued that no claim was made about over taxation since the Union, there was no division of assets, only debts, and that annuities were part of the national debt, as some of the reasons why it should be rejected.¹⁸

At a lecture in March in Blackrock, Alfred Dickie, KC gave his legal interpretation on the March 1926 agreement, and contended that the Anglo-Irish Treaty repealed any previous law inconsistent with its provisions, which meant any provisions inconsistent with the new treaty from the 1920 Act were repealed. He argued that annuities were unaffected when section five of the treaty was repealed in December 1925, as they were not part of the public debt of the United Kingdom, and the Free State Government; by agreeing to pay the annuities the government 'was only agreeing to what they were legally liable to do'.¹⁹

From the beginning of 1927, annuities were discussed at county council meetings across the country. In January, at South Tipperary County Council, Patrick Morris proposed that the payment time for annuities be extended from 68 to 110 years, Conn O'Neill seconded, describing how conditions had changed since he purchased land under the Wyndham Land Act 1903, and if he had known Britain would break the agreement by allowing Canadian beef

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 10 Jan. 1927.

¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 15 Jan. 1927.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Some reasons why Mr. Blythe's Ultimate Financial Agreement with Britain should be rejected. Clann Éireann document (NLI, Maurice Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 21 Mar. 1927.

to be sold there within ten years, which depreciated the value of Irish cattle, he would not have paid the same price for the land. Further consideration of the resolution was adjourned.²⁰

At the annual meeting of the General Council of County Councils on 4 February 1927, a resolution was passed requesting the Land Commission to stay all proceedings for a period of twelve months against defaulting land annuitants.²¹ This and a similar Dublin County Council resolution forwarded to North Tipperary County Council was rejected, but the council did adopt a resolution from Dublin County Council that the clause in the Land Purchase Act holding the council responsible for defaulting annuitants should be repealed.²² In March, Limerick, Westmeath and Wexford, county councils adopted a resolution forwarded from Kildare County Council which endorsed the resolution of the General Council of County Councils calling on the government to introduce legislation to relieve county councils from the responsibility for non-payment of land annuities, suggesting that the Land Commission deal directly with defaulters.²³ This continued to be a contentious issue for the county councils, and between them and the Land Commission, as they felt they were being put in the front line of recouping payments from defaulters, which they believed was the duty of the Land Commission.

On 27 February O'Donnell spoke at public meeting at Meenmore, County Donegal, organised in support of the four men awaiting trial for stealing the rental books of the Conyngham estate in September 1926. Perhaps wary that the authorities would try to find a legal avenue against him for inciting people not to pay rent, he chose his words carefully: 'there are keen-eared little foxy creatures listening to hear me say straight out to you – Don't pay land annuities, don't pay rent. It annoys them that speakers always say – Don't starve yourself to pay land annuities'. He made reference to those who were working abroad sending home money to pay 'the tribute'.²⁴ This was a significant change in rhetoric as O'Donnell was now often using the term 'tribute' to describe the annuities, obviously to emphasise the point that through these payments the country and farmers remained subjects of Britain.

²⁰ *Irish Times*, 8 Jan. 1927.

²¹ *Kerryman*, 12 Feb. 1927.

²² *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1927; *Nenagh Guardian*, 19 Feb. 1927.

²³ *Limerick Leader*, 9 Mar. 1927; *Westmeath Examiner*, 19 Mar. 1927; *Irish Times*, 29 Mar. 1927.

²⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 4 Mar. 1927. The arrests had taken place on 19 Feb., as reported in *An Phoblacht* on 25 Feb., and they were due to come to trial in the circuit court on 29 Mar. 1927.

In Donegal, in March 1927 the four men were charged at Donegal district court in connection with the raid for rental books at the estate offices of the Marquess Conyngham. The accused were Seán McCool, John O'Brien, Bernard O'Donnell and Alex Mailey. Three of the men - McCool, O'Donnell and Mailey – admitted their part in the raid and stated they were 'in sympathy with the land campaign in west Donegal against the land annuities'. O'Brien was granted bail, while McCool, O'Donnell and Mailey were returned to Sligo Jail to await trial.²⁵

O'Donnell now claimed that he was being watched closely by the government, that he had received letters and memoranda over time from someone connected to Patrick Hogan, and some of these had suggested that the minister took a serious view of the impact of the agitation. Hogan believed the IRA was in the background, and this unsettled O'Donnell who feared Hogan might use his influence to have the government come down hard and fast before the campaign got a foothold. However O'Donnell then reasoned that this would not be the point of attack, for to accuse the IRA of involvement would perhaps have the opposite effect of encouraging support. He believed the campaign would be attacked as a communist plot, under foreign influence, with him at its head.²⁶ By this, the government might hope to contain the campaign 'by denying it any right of succession from the land wars of the past, and isolating it from current republican struggles by relating it to foreign influences'.²⁷ Hogan's brother, James, later wrote a short book on what he perceived to be the communist threat. He identified O'Donnell as the main instigator of efforts to spread communist doctrine within the IRA and likewise the country. Hogan wrote that O'Donnell 'conceived the campaign for non-payment of land annuities, and in each case for the same purpose, to bring about a state of chaos in which anything might happen even communism'.²⁸ It is reasonable to assume that some of these views also resonated with Patrick Hogan and played some role in his position on the annuities agitation. It certainly made sense for the government to attack the campaign as communist-inspired, rather than as IRA-led, and although communism did not stir up the sense of fear in the mid-1920s as it would by the end of the decade and the beginning of the 1930s, it was still viewed very much as an outside threat. O'Donnell later claimed that the

²⁵ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 12 Mar. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 5 Mar. 1927. Bernard O'Donnell was a brother of Peadar.

²⁶ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 48. Seemingly not all of these letters, memoranda or parts of them were connected to the land annuities; the first one he recalls was sent at the height of the crisis on the findings on the Boundary Commission in 1925.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ James Hogan, *Could Ireland become communist?: the facts of the case* (Dublin, 1935), p. 55.

level of surveillance he was subjected to during this period was unusual for someone relatively unknown to the public: 'it is rarely that anybody with so little public support comes under so much hostile notice as I experienced during the campaign against land annuities'.²⁹ However, it was the case that he and the campaign were certainly being taken seriously by the government as was borne out by his subsequent arrest.

O'Donnell 'got a whisper' that his arrest was imminent, and he tried to prepare the areas of west Donegal where the annuities agitation was prevalent for this eventuality. He briefed those individuals whom he believed would best hold the agitation together. At a committee meeting, he gave what he considered the clearest statement of his views yet: 'This skirmish we were conducting could lead into a land war which could restore the independence movement that the Treaty had wrecked.'³⁰ On 23 March 1927, he was arrested and charged with having solicited and incited people on various dates between September and October 1926, to refuse to pay annuities to the Land Commission. He was remanded in custody for a week.³¹ He was brought to court on 31 March. In evidence, Garda James McKenna, Dungloe, said he heard O'Donnell tell people at a meeting to pay no rent. Four copies of *An Phoblacht* were produced in which there were various headings and articles which, it was claimed, were an 'incitement to registered owners of land to refuse to pay their annuities.'³² In his defence, O'Donnell replied that 'he would feel justified at making such a protest at any time, even in a prosperous Ireland, but under conditions existing today he felt definitely that it was his duty to protest. I have said to the peasantry that they have the first right to live on the produce of their labour.'³³ He was sent for trial the following week.

On 6 April 1927, before Justice Hanna at the Central Criminal Court, William Carrigan KC, Senior State Counsel, argued that the Irish farming community had received much financial aid from Britain, in the transfer of land ownership. The new state, he claimed, had only to put the 'coping stone' of the 1923 Land Act: 'the object of which was to secure that every tenant of an individual farm should become the owner of his land'.³⁴ The prosecution outlined that O'Donnell, by invoking people not to pay annuities, was 'involving the whole

²⁹ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 49.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³¹ *Irish Times*, 24 Mar. 1927.

³² *Ibid.*, 31 Mar. 1927.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 Apr. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 7 Apr. 1927.

credit of the country just as if he had started a campaign against banking institutions. Nothing could be more prejudicial to the common wealth and prosperity of the nation ... if we want to preserve our national credit such a thing as this cannot be tolerated'.³⁵ Carrigan quoted from *An Phoblacht* and suggested that O'Donnell was 'the leader of the conspiracy to invite persons not to pay their lawful obligations to the Land Commission, with intent to obstruct one of the most important public services of the government and do public harm'.³⁶ This was just the type of attack that O'Donnell had envisaged. By outlining the recent changes in Irish agriculture brought about by public money, and claiming that the 1923 Land Act had all but settled the land question, it cast O'Donnell at the head of a conspiracy trying to destabilise society.

Justice Hanna was adamant that conspiracy had to be proved and that apart from O'Donnell's editorial position, it had to be shown that he was connected with the committee that had passed resolutions against paying annuities. O'Donnell's statement to the court outlined the background to recent efforts to collect rents in Donegal:

It was resolved that the mothers and children should receive sustenance from the land and the stock upon it before paying rents for land of which they had the sovereignty. In that way they would escape what happened in Adrigole, County Cork. If cattle were seized, it was agreed that all people would assist those whose cattle were taken. ... In what he had done he had acted in the best intentions for the good of the people and the prosperity of the country.³⁷

O'Donnell was referring to the four people who had died recently in Adrigole, west Cork from conditions brought on by starvation (for more on this see below).

An Phoblacht covered some more of O'Donnell's statement:

Now I know the life among the rocks in congested districts. I know there are many warm snug cottages, made so by money from America, or where the family is grown up and earning by going to Scotland. But I know too the terrible hard grim struggle it is among these rocks where a family is being reared on the produce of a little farm. The arrears could only be paid in many cases by selling the cow. Already the little holdings were heavily burdened with debt for food. When we met I felt certain of this; that to pay rent where it meant stripping a family was wrong and that I would urge, organise and work against it. But you will say that I have pushed out from this case where the natural law justifies me and launched into a general incitement to withhold land annuities. I have thought the principle that the ownership of the soil rests in the people, and I hope

³⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 Apr. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 7 Apr. 1927.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Irish Times*, 7 Apr. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 7 Apr. 1927; *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 9 Apr. 1927. Between O'Donnell's arrest and trial, the *Irish Times* had reported on the deaths of four people from the one family from disease brought on by starvation in Adrigole, west Cork.

that the teaching of that may spread ... I told the people then that I knew some had paid, that I was anxious there should be no quarrel between them and the others. Let us agree on this: that those who can't pay without downright hardship will refuse to pay; that the others will refuse to buy the seized cattle. ... I have now given you truthfully what influenced and influences me.³⁸

Thus, O'Donnell drew together most of the arguments he had been making for the previous eight months and certainly took the opportunity provided to state his case against annuities. The news of the horrific deaths at Adrigole provided him with a powerful and shocking fact to back up his argument. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Maud Gonne MacBride and Charlotte Despard attended the trial to support him. Sheehy-Skeffington wrote in the *Irish World*, the Irish-American paper, that the trial reminded her of the Land War when her Uncle Eugene, Parnell and Davitt were in court defending the no rent agitation, and she praised O'Donnell's passion: 'as he told of the sufferings of his people in Tirconnail. His speech, after the dreary platitudes of the state prosecutor and the hair splitting quibbles of the judge, made a strong impression.'³⁹ His speech must indeed have made a strong impression for a number of reasons, for after the jury found him not guilty, Justice Hanna remarked, O'Donnell was acquitted despite his speech, in which he had openly outlined his involvement in an agitation to resist annuity payments, which had helped the State case considerably.⁴⁰

The *Worker's Republic* wanted O'Donnell's statement to be widely circulated, 'for it was clear, brave and in its common sense convincing'. It hoped that his acquittal would give satisfaction to workers throughout the country and that through his steadfastness and courage in not being 'afraid to call such hateful things as poverty, famine and starvation by their own hateful names in a metropolitan court of law, the conditions of small land holders in the country are becoming widely known'. It advised that this should be borne in mind when people gave their verdict on the retiring government.⁴¹

³⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 15 Apr. 1927.

³⁹ *Irish World*, 23 Apr., 7 May 1927, quoted in Margaret Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: A life* (Cork, 1997), p. 286. Despard was a member of the WPI and helped them out financially and with the use of her house. Sheehy Skeffington was at the time a member of Fianna Fáil, but had also lectured at education meetings of the WPI. MacBride had been married to John MacBride, executed in 1916. She was involved in prisoners' welfare organisations and was the mother of Seán MacBride a leading member of the IRA during this period.

⁴⁰ *Irish Times*, 7 Apr. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 7 Apr. 1927. Justice Hanna had warned O'Donnell on a number of occasions that what he was saying might work against him.

⁴¹ *Worker's Republic*, 9, 16 Apr. 1927. The *Worker's Republic* began publication in Oct. 1926 (but very little of the paper remains prior to Mar. 1927), replacing the *Irish Hammer and Plough* which had run from May to Oct. 1926.

An Phoblacht saw other hands at work in the arrest of its editor, and claimed that the reason behind it was the publicity the paper had given to the alleged torture of republicans by what it called ‘Mr. O’Higgins police force’ and threats against a Clare republican T.J. Ryan. *An Phoblacht* claimed the state would not charge O’Donnell for this as it was irrefutable, ‘so they charged him with advocating to the people the principles laid down by Lalor, and successfully carried out in 1919-20-21’.⁴² O’Donnell makes no reference in *There will be another day* to publicity given by *An Phoblacht* concerning the torture of republicans as a reason for his arrest. It seemed curious that *An Phoblacht* should emphasise the torture and threats to republicans for the reason for O’Donnell’s arrest. While the paper was obviously highlighting the torture and mistreatment of republicans anyway, it seemed reasonable that with O’Donnell’s arrest they should seek to maximise publicity around the annuities campaign. It was perhaps the failure of the IRA to fully understand the importance of the annuities campaign which led them to put this spin on O’Donnell’s arrest.

There was the possibility that O’Donnell would have to serve a prison sentence. It was not that prison worried him unduly, as he maintained that he could always make good use of time in gaol, but he did feel that without him ‘*An Phoblacht* might lose sight of the townlands. Therein lay my worry’.⁴³ While *An Phoblacht* continued to give much coverage to the annuities and the trial, there was evidence of a subtle shift to a more religious agenda in the annuities debate while O’Donnell was imprisoned. Mary MacSwiney, vice-president of Sinn Féin and leading member of Cumann na mBan, writing on the trial, stated that O’Donnell was ‘alleged to have imparted to his constituents the eminently Christian and Catholic doctrine that a man is not bound to starve in order to pay rent’.⁴⁴ MacSwiney was expressing views that were probably closer to the Sinn Féin position. As Charlotte Fallon wrote: ‘she did not have well defined economic solutions to Ireland’s problems of poverty and unemployment. Rather, she had a vague notion of Christian Socialism: an Irish version of the Sermon on the Mount where all would be adequately cared for including the poor’.⁴⁵ Brian Hanley writes

⁴² *An Phoblacht*, 1 Apr. 1927. For more on Ryan and IRA and Garda activity in Clare, during this period see Hanley, *IRA*, pp 80-2.

⁴³ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 55. O’Donnell’s use of the term ‘townlands’ in this case refers to those rural areas resisting annuity payments, particularly those areas in west Donegal.

⁴⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 8 Apr. 1927. Mary MacSwiney (1872-1942) was a sister of Terence MacSwiney, the lord mayor of Cork who died on hunger-strike in Brixton Prison in 1920. She was elected to the Dail in June 1921 and Aug. 1923, but lost her seat at the June 1927 election. She opposed the Treaty and had opposed de Valera’s position when he broke from Sinn Féin, and remained in a leadership role within the party. For more on Mary MacSwiney see Charlotte Fallon, *Mary MacSwiney*, (Cork, Dublin, 1986).

⁴⁵ Fallon, *Mary MacSwiney*, p. 115.

that MacSwiney's persistent campaigning kept Sinn Féin's name and message in the pages of *An Phoblacht* at this time, but neither she nor the party had much direct influence with the IRA.⁴⁶ While the overall message of her article was supportive of the non-payment campaign, the more pronounced religious tone clearly differed from O'Donnell's writings on the issue. Hanley claims that in ideological terms, 'the association of Catholicism and Irish Republicanism was the most notable aspect of Sinn Féin's politics.'⁴⁷ Perhaps this change of emphasis on the annuities agitation is what O'Donnell feared might happen and, indeed, become more manifest if he was to be imprisoned and had to relinquish editorial control of *An Phoblacht*.

As O'Donnell had stated during his trial, the report of the four deaths from starvation and disease in Adrigole, west Cork, brought into the open the impoverished conditions in which some were living. Daniel O'Sullivan had died on 30 March in Castletownbere Hospital, where two of his children, Timothy (17) and Rita (4), had died the previous day, while his wife had been found dead in their farmhouse on 25 March.⁴⁸ An *Irish Times* correspondent wrote:

From Glengarrif to Adrigole, in the wild and barren west Cork country, and far beyond it to Berehaven, people are existing in conditions that are a discredit to any civilised community. This is no exaggerated statement inspired by any propagandist motive; it is the result of two days investigation which I have made on the spot. The wonder, indeed, is that the fate which befell the unfortunate Sullivan family, four of whom died of starvation unknown to their neighbours, has not overtaken many others.⁴⁹

Timothy Joseph Murphy (Labour, Cork West) described in the Dáil the acute distress bordering on destitution prevalent in Adrigole and appealed for distressed families in the area to get some home assistance, but because they held very small holdings this could not be obtained.⁵⁰ Timothy Joseph O'Donovan (Farmers' Party, Cork West) raised the issue in the Dáil on 31 March, and stated that there were as many as twenty families in similar circumstances but because they held small plots of land they were being deprived of home assistance.⁵¹ While the deaths of the O'Sullivan family and other cases of distress in west Cork and across the country cannot be blamed specifically on having to pay annuities, they were certainly contributing to the grave economic conditions that small farmers were facing.

⁴⁶ Brian Hanley, *The IRA 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 1 Apr. 1927; *Southern Star*, 2 Apr. 1927.

⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, 4 Apr. 1927.

⁵⁰ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 17, No. 5, cols 327-8, 30 Nov. 1926.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, No. 17, col. 757, 31 Mar. 1927.

These economic concerns for the smallholders and the argument that the payment of annuities was not morally justifiable were the two prongs of O'Donnell's resistance.

Between the arrest of the four men for the Conygham rent office raid and the arrest of O'Donnell, the anti-annuity committee in Donegal drew up a short constitution. As Ó Drisceoil has written, they were taking advantage of the publicity to formalise the committee.⁵² The constitution contained similar pronouncements that had appeared in print over the previous eight months, asserting that the ownership of the soil of Ireland should be vested in the Irish people.⁵³ Obviously, the arrest and subsequent trial of O'Donnell gave greater publicity to their proclamation.

(ii) Prelude to General Election June 1927

In a debate on the Land Bill, in the Dáil on 24-5 March 1927, there was much discussion on section twenty-eight. This section stipulated that no legal action could be taken against any under-sheriff who, under the instruction of the Land Commission, seized any goods or animals on the lands of a debtor, even if the debtor claimed the stock were not his. Conor Hogan moved that this section be deleted because the sheriff could now take anything off a farmer's land regardless of who owned the livestock. He maintained it would inflict great hardship and create an element of distrust in the country. 'How can anyone lend even a farm implement to another man if, without his knowledge, the under-sheriff can come along and seize it in respect of a land purchase annuity?'⁵⁴ Richard Heffernan (Farmers' Party, Tipperary) supported Hogan citing an incident where a sheriff, not realising that he had crossed the boundary of the debtor's farm onto that of his brother, seized forty sheep.⁵⁵ Thomas O'Connell (Labour, Galway) spoke of the danger for a man who took grazing on a farm where he was unaware that the annuity was unpaid, who then might have his cattle seized. His only recourse then would be to proceed against the debtor, who might have very little means.⁵⁶

⁵² Donal Ó Drisceoil, Peadar *O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001) p. 46.

⁵³ *An Phoblacht*, 18 Mar. 1927.

⁵⁴ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 19, No. 3, cols 298-9, 24 Mar. 1927.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 301.

⁵⁶ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 19, No. 3, cols 302-3, 24 Mar. 1927.

Minister Hogan wanted clarity on opposition deputies attitudes towards collection of annuities: ‘when you say in one breath of course I am anxious to collect annuities, and in another, people are not able to pay, what do you mean? Do you mean that the Collection Department should stop operating and that annuities should not be collected’? He claimed the mere threat of section twenty-eight which had been before the Dáil for some time had resulted in an increase in annuities being paid.⁵⁷ Hogan was clearly trying to paint the opposition as opposed to annuities per se, which was obviously not the policy of the Farmers’ Party; they had consistently opposed non-payment, not least because of the effect non-payment was having on increasing rates. Conor Hogan in particular was targeted, as he had consistently raised issues around the annuities, including the recent financial agreement. Kevin O’Higgins pointed out:

A man owes land annuities and will not pay. He has, perhaps, read Deputy Connor Hogan's speech in the Official Report, and he will not pay his land annuities to England, as the Deputy said. The under-sheriff in due course ... goes out to that farm to seize. He makes for the speckled heifer. He is told: Do not touch that, that is not mine; it belongs to my brother-in-law. ... And the under-sheriff is up against the problem of rebutting that statement of the man that that heifer or that the bullock is not his. The thing is absurd.⁵⁸

John Lyons (Independent Labour, Longford-Westmeath) pointed out that since some councils had produced lists of defaulting annuitants, including Westmeath, more annuities were being paid. In 1924, there was £13,000 outstanding in Westmeath, but in 1927, this figure had reduced to between £5,000 and £6,000.⁵⁹ Lyons argued that some who had advised non-payment of rent during the revolutionary period were now saying that ‘the sheriff should be given sufficient power to put people who do not pay into the workhouse’.⁶⁰ This argument was not unlike what O’Donnell had been previously expounding.

This debate showed the continued significance surrounding annuities. Figures from the Land Commission shows that a total of £3,047,702 was received for the year ended 31 March 1926 and £3,145,296 received for 31 March 1927, which was an increase of £97,594. The arrears outstanding had decreased in the same period from £439,244 to £377,610, a difference

⁵⁷ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 19, No. 3, cols 305-7, 24 Mar. 1927.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, cols 312-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, cols 348-50. On 19 Nov. 1926, Lyons had moved a resolution calling for an extension on the payment of annuities at the Westmeath County Committee of Agriculture, which was defeated.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 350.

of £61,634.⁶¹ This growth in annuity payments was perhaps partly down to the fact that the collection of arrears had only resumed in 1925 and had only intensified after the March 1926 Financial Agreement. The greater annuity payments seemed to fly in the face of the non-payment campaign.

During the second reading of the Land Bill in the Seanad, John Keane criticised the deduction of arrears of annuities from the grants to the councils, arguing that it was not fair to penalise local authorities for arrears which they had no means of recovering: ‘The effect is to make the Land Commission more dilatory in the collection of arrears if they know that the land purchase fund does not suffer’. It was up to the Land Commission to act more promptly with defaulters.⁶²

During 1927 arrears cases continued to be heard across the country; in January decrees ranging from £20 to £230 were given against about forty Co. Dublin farmers at the Dublin Circuit Court for non-payment of annuities.⁶³ In May, decrees at Manorhamilton Court ranged from 9s. to £12 7s. 6d. There were about forty civil bills at Trim District Sessions; at Ballinasloe Court there were several decrees and R. J. Kelly, State Solicitor, Galway, said many of the cases were outstanding from 1923.⁶⁴ In February at Dungloe District Court a large number of cases were brought by the Land Commission against alleged defaulters but, as in earlier instances at this court, some of those processed against were dead. Most of these names were provided by the agents of the different estates.⁶⁵

In May the effect of the publication of the defaulters’ list in Galway was discussed at the county council meeting. It was revealed that there was £27,103 in arrears outstanding compared to £31,977 the previous year. The secretary thought that publication at least showed the council’s concern on the issue, although, in his view, it did not have the required effect. The Land Commission was criticised for its inaction, and Thomas Kenny claimed if they were as ‘active before the last publication as they were after there would be no need for publication’. A vote to publish the names on the latest list of annuity arrears was tied at ten

⁶¹ Land Commission Annual Reports, accounts 1923-31 (1926-7) (NLI, No. OPIE F/26). These were figures for the 1885, 1891, 1903 and 1909 Land Acts.

⁶² *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 8, No. 19, col. 860, 21 Apr. 1927.

⁶³ *Irish Times*, 13 Jan. 1927.

⁶⁴ *Fermanagh Herald*, 21 May 1927; *Meath Chronicle, Connacht Tribune*, 28 May 1927.

⁶⁵ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 19 Feb. 1927.

each, reflected the way the issue of annuities was dividing the county, and in order that the chairman did not have to give a casting vote, the matter was adjourned till a meeting in July.⁶⁶

Fianna Fáil organised a conference on agriculture open to all, which was held on 3 February in Jury's Hotel Dublin. A letter was sent from head office to the secretaries of each Fianna Fáil cumann stating that the conference would consider and make recommendations to reinvigorate the agricultural industry.⁶⁷ Delegates from North Kildare discussed the proposed conference at a Comhairle Ceantair meeting in Prosperous on 9 January, and decided to forward a resolution calling on farmers to combine in resisting the payment of annuities, arguing that if the annuities were retained in Ireland farmers could develop their resources, give much needed employment and enable them in time to meet their obligations.⁶⁸

At the opening of the conference, De Valera made reference to annuities: 'the seriousness of the position is not realised by the public at large ... and when the public hear of decrees for rates to the no. of from 1,200 – 1,500 being in the hands of the sheriff as in the Killmallock area of Limerick County, they attribute it to the farmers unwillingness to take his share of the public burdens instead of his inability to pay'.⁶⁹ A resolution from Maurice Moore, Clann Éireann calling for land annuities to be used for the improvement of the agricultural industry in Ireland was passed. A proposal for a moratorium of two years on annuity payments was referred to the credit committee for consideration. The conference also appointed a sub-committee which included Samuel Holt TD, Patrick Belton, Constance Markievicz and Moore to consider and report upon the question of the annuities.⁷⁰ An editorial in the Fianna Fáil weekly *The Nation* commented on the tragic deaths of members of the O'Sullivan family at Adrigole, outlining that appeals for help had been made in the Dáil and therefore what happened was no accident. In a pitch to the small farmers, the editorial referred to comments from the Minister of Agriculture in October 1926 that help would only

⁶⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 28 May 1927. A list of those in arrears had been first published in the paper in July 1926.

⁶⁷ Letter from Fianna Fáil head office to all Fianna Fáil Cumainn on proposed Agricultural Conference. The letter is actually dated 6 Jan. 1926, which was obviously a mistake and was intended to be 1927. Reports of Honorary Secretaries (UCDA, Fianna Fáil Archive, P176/351 (1)).

⁶⁸ *Kildare Observer*, 15 Jan. 1927. Comhairle Ceantair was the term given to the Dáil constituency organisation of political parties in Ireland, particularly Fianna Fáil. The cumann was a local branch, based on a village or parish, while the Comhairle Ceantair was made up of cumann delegates to oversee the bigger area of a Dáil constituency.

⁶⁹ Speech by de Valera at opening of Agricultural Conference, 3 Feb. 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil Archive, P176/827 (5)).

⁷⁰ *The Nation*, 9 Apr. 1927. This Fianna Fáil weekly review was first published on 26 Mar. 1927. It was only now covering the February conference as well as the follow up conference which took place on 10 March.

be given to those farmers who can help themselves (see chapter 2).⁷¹ *The Nation* editorial also alluded to recent emigration trends: ‘last year, 30,000 people mainly from the Celtic fringe, left Ireland to escape the fate that awaits the landowner along the coast. Yet the grass is growing lustily on the empty plains of Meath, and the new ascendancy draw their salaries undisturbed’.⁷²

On 27 May W.T. Cosgrave dissolved the fourth Dáil and called a general election for 9 June. However, even prior to the calling of the election, public meetings and campaigning were taking place at which the issue of annuities were often raised. A Fianna Fáil election pamphlet rejected the idea of the annuities being a just debt on the two grounds: firstly that the annuities were part of the public debt of the United Kingdom and that the abolition of Article v of the Anglo-Irish Treaty ‘abolished Britain’s claim to burden us with any share of the public debt of the U.K.’.⁷³ The pamphlet further claimed that Ireland had been overtaxed from 1870-1909 by £90 million and that therefore any money Britain had expended in land purchase had long since been retrieved in tax.⁷⁴

Richard Dunphy has argued that at this stage ‘the pledge to withhold land annuities was a policy which commanded widespread support far and beyond the small-farmer community, linked as it was to matters of national pride’.⁷⁵ Opposition to the handing over of annuities to Britain was advocated at Fianna Fáil hustings throughout the country. The common theme was that there would be significant improvement not only in agriculture but also in the economy as a whole if the annuities were retained in Ireland. Fianna Fáil continuously accused the government of weakness regarding the annuities issue and in negotiating recent financial agreements with Britain. Fianna Fáil’s platform message was that annuities ‘should not be alienated to any foreign country’.⁷⁶ At Mullagh and Cavan, Seán Lemass attacked the recent financial agreement and Blythe’s defence of that agreement.⁷⁷ Fianna Fáil’s objection to annuities being sent to England dovetailed with its brand of social radicalism. Bryce Evans wrote: ‘Cumann na nGaedheal followed a conservative social and economic strategy –

⁷¹ *The Nation*, 9 Apr. 1927.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Fianna Fáil election pamphlet on secret financial agreement with Britain (UCDA, Fianna Fáil Archives, P176/827 (16)).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Richard Dunphy, *The making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland 1923-1948* (New York, 1995), p. 97.

⁷⁶ Some points on the agricultural policy of Fianna Fáil, 1927 election campaign (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/827 (17)).

⁷⁷ *Meath Chronicle*, 30 Apr. 1927; *Anglo-Celt*, 7 May, 4 June 1927.

produce and capital were overwhelmingly directed towards export ... and the rural and urban poor were neglected'. Many republicans were forced to emigrate because of difficulties securing employment and these issues aroused a keen sense of social justice in Lemass.⁷⁸

A Fianna Fáil election leaflet appealed to small farmers maintaining that holding the annuities for the benefit of people 'would put the farmers on their feet again instead of into the workhouse'.⁷⁹ At Mountcharles in Donegal, de Valera reiterated the benefits of keeping the annuities in Ireland claiming if £3million 'was kept in the Irish treasury [the government] would be able to diminish taxation by an equivalent amount'.⁸⁰ Although annuities were not the only issue in the election, Fianna Fáil was anxious to pursue the issue in the belief it was not only a vote winner but also possibly even an election winner. Fianna Fáil's support base was likely to be drawn from small farmers and labourers, often those most effected by annuities, particularly in the west of the country.

Government ministers were highly critical of Fianna Fáil's stance. Ernest Blythe speaking at Glaslough and Ballyocean in Monaghan in April, and at Wexford in May, contended that since the Treaty the British Government had treated the Free State fairly, particularly in relation to the annuities: 'The British Government makes nothing out of the land annuities. They go to pay the interest on land stock and sinking fund'.⁸¹ On the same day Patrick Hogan made a similar point in Milltown, Galway, arguing that those advising non-payment were in reality asking people not to pay interest on money lent to them: 'in other words to embezzle and declare the country bankrupt'.⁸² He went on:

This is one of the most cowardly and disreputable campaigns I know. They know the times are bad and the temptation not to pay debts and they are using the bad times and consequent temptations not to pay debts in order to injure the reputation of your country, ... and brand this country as dishonest. ... and that is the reason it is necessary to collect the land annuities because we cannot borrow a penny for drainage, housing or any other purpose if we do not pay the interest on the money we have borrowed already.⁸³

⁷⁸ Bryce Evans, *Seán Lemass, democratic dictator* (Cork, 2011), p. 52.

⁷⁹ Fianna Fáil provides the remedy, election leaflet, 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/829 (4)).

⁸⁰ *Irish Independent*, 24 May 1927; *Irish Times*, 24 May 1927; *Derry People and Tirconail News*, 28 May 1927.

⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 25 Apr. 1927; *Irish Times*, 25 Apr., 9 May 1927; *Anglo-Celt*, 30 Apr. 1927.

⁸² *Irish Independent*, 25 Apr. 1927.

⁸³ *Connacht Tribune*, 30 Apr. 1927.

On 8 May Hogan increased the pressure on defaulting annuitants by stating that in future the ratepayers would not be burdened by the debts of defaulters; instead ‘if a man did not pay his annuity, another man would be let in who would pay’.⁸⁴ The suggestion was that the Land Commission would replace a defaulter with another prepared to pay his dues. This had the potential to greatly increase tensions in rural Ireland.

Although at the June 1927 General Election the Labour Party put forward many candidates in rural constituencies they did not seem to have a clear position on annuities. In Sligo-Leitrim the party produced a weekly paper, the *Sligo-Leitrim Liberator* to promote its candidate, Archie Heron. Its first edition on 30 April stated it was a modest attempt to provide an advocate for the interests of small farmers and workers throughout Sligo-Leitrim.⁸⁵ Despite articles on poor agricultural conditions and the plight of farmers, which included references to actions of the Land League, there were few mentions of the annuities in the *Sligo-Leitrim Liberator*. The first reference was on 28 May.⁸⁶ On 4 June there was commentary on decrees being immediately issued if annuities were not paid and the paper enquired how long some farmers could hold on to their land in these generally poor economic conditions.⁸⁷

Denis Houston, Labour Party candidate in Donegal, stated in Carndonagh: ‘it was not so much the land annuities or the county council’s taxes that mattered to the Irish people, but rather the indirect taxation that was the real burden that was making emigration necessary’.⁸⁸ Houston was a Donegal native, fluent Irish speaker and successful ITGWU organiser and well known in the labour movement but, as Adrian Grant points out, Labour had failed to build any clientelist base, focussing instead on bigger legislative issues.⁸⁹ Thomas Johnson (Labour leader) could at times be seen to be favouring retention of the annuities, but wanted assurance all the legal arguments were correct. In general, he and the party had failed to command a firm position on the annuities issue. Although individual Labour Party members supported the retention of annuities in Ireland and would later appear on platforms supporting this stance, it remained a divisive issue for the party. Perhaps the issue of annuities seemed too localised or sectional for the leadership of the party to fully embrace.

⁸⁴ *Irish Times*, 9 May 1927.

⁸⁵ *Sligo-Leitrim Liberator*, 30 Apr. 1927. The paper ran for seven issues until 11 June 1927. Archie Heron was unsuccessful in the General Elections of June and Sept. 1927, polling 4.36% and 4.17% respectively.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1927.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1927.

⁸⁸ *Irish Times*, 1 June 1927; *Derry People and Tirconail News*, 4 June 1927. Houston did not get elected.

⁸⁹ Adrian Grant, *Irish Socialist Republicanism, 1909-36* (Dublin, 2012), pp 118-9.

Clann Éireann continued to campaign on the legality of annuities.⁹⁰ The party's intention was to re-open negotiations 'mismanaged by Blythe' and to refuse to transfer the annuities to Britain. With this money from annuities, it promised to be able to give the necessary reductions in expenditure and taxation. About £1 million was to be used to reduce land annuities and local loans by 5s. in the pound.⁹¹ They attacked the government for agreeing to pay the annuities, which according to the best legal authority formed part of the public debt, from which the Free State's liability had been terminated.⁹² Pádraig O'Maille, Clann Éireann TD (Galway) thought that the least the government 'ought to do was get the highest legal information in the land to see if these annuities were legally due to England'.⁹³ Clann Éireann's pursuit of this legal formula for retention of annuities was overshadowed in the election as Fianna Fáil's message on annuities also concentrated on legal questions surrounding the issue. Following the demise of Clann Éireann after the June election, many of its legal objections would continue to be used by Moore, Fianna Fáil and the wider anti-annuity campaign.

Meanwhile, the IRA believed there was a real possibility that the government could be defeated in the general election, and so its army council advised that steps be taken to secure co-ordination between republican groups.⁹⁴ The IRA met with Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin separately and then a meeting took place later in April between Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin and representatives of the IRA army council.⁹⁵ However, the meeting failed to agree on proposals for co-operation during the election.⁹⁶ It is likely O'Donnell was involved in these meetings with Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin; there was a letter addressed to him from Sinn Féin prior to

⁹⁰ Clann Éireann programme (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (4)).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² The need for Clann Éireann (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (9)).

⁹³ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 Mar. 1927. Pádraig O'Maille was elected a MP in 1918 for Sinn Féin and was involved in the War of Independence. He supported the Treaty. He was shot and wounded with Seán Hales, who died, in December 1922 by anti-treaty forces. He was elected a TD for Cumann na nGaedheal in 1923, but differed from them initially over the Army Mutiny (1924) and later the Boundary Commission (1925) and formed Clann Éireann with Prof. Magennis in 1926. He lost his seat in the June 1927 election and failed to regain it in the Sept. election.

⁹⁴ Minutes from IRA army council meeting 9 Apr. 1927 (UCDA, Moss Twomey papers, P69/48 (108)).

⁹⁵ Meeting of IRA, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin to discuss IRA army council proposals on co-ordination for general election, 26 Apr. 1927. (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/48 (107)). Fianna Fáil were represented by P.J. Rutledge, Dr. James Ryan, Michael Kilroy, Tom Derrig, Lemass and Sinn Féin by Seán Buckley, Dr. Madden, Tom Maguire, Eamonn Donnelly, Ernie O'Malley, J.J. Sheehy. The representatives of the IRA army council who were not named but listed A, B, C, D and acting Adjutant General.

⁹⁶ Meeting of IRA, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin to discuss general election, 26 Apr. 1927. (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/48 (107)).

one of the meetings.⁹⁷ Tom Mahon and James J. Gillogly certainly believed that O'Donnell was at the meeting, and commented that O'Donnell was known to 'play a leading part in the army council's political initiatives'.⁹⁸ From late April the IRA sent further letters to Fianna Fáil and de Valera seeking a unified approach to the election. The Fianna Fáil executive rejected the proposals. On 13 May, de Valera replied to the army council that he concurred completely with the views expressed by the Fianna Fáil party executive in rejecting the IRA proposals for co-operation during the election.⁹⁹ Hanley comments that Fianna Fáil's lack of interest was due to the fact that they had 'begun the process of freeing themselves from ideological straitjackets and were not keen on returning to them'.¹⁰⁰ The IRA army council issued a statement on 3 June criticising both Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, and decided that nothing further could be done in securing co-operation in the election.¹⁰¹

In editorials on 6 to 20 May *An Phoblacht* called for co-operation between the republican parties, but by 27 May its editorial was warning IRA volunteers not to 'overestimate the possibilities of the election'.¹⁰² The editorial line represented O'Donnell's view that too much time had been spent on fruitless efforts at seeking co-operation between Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin and that his focus needed to be redirected to the annuities agitation:

This is my apology to my crowd of 'Tribute Resisters' who are restless because I have not been as active in their campaign during the last few weeks as I have been previously. I have been waiting for the band to pass and for the crowds to get back home. The result of the election will have a bearing on the payment of land annuities. ... The Free State government is tied up to England, so that if they are returned we may expect war on the defaulters. If the enforcing of the British order is well met it will fail and the failure will not be the only result. If the treaty parties come back very much weakened, so much the better, but one thing is very clear, it is, that compact organisation between the peasant farmers would put them in a position where no British effort could enforce immoral payments. When the bands have passed, let us get busy on that.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Letter from Sinn Féin addressed to P. O'Donnell on sending delegates 'to meeting with Fianna Fáil and your Council if guarantees are adhered to' (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/48 (62)).

⁹⁸ Tom Mahon and James J. Gillogly, *Decoding the IRA* (Cork, 2008), p. 82; J. Bowyer-Bell, *The secret army: a history of the IRA, 1916-1970* (London, 1970), p. 79. Bowyer-Bell also places O'Donnell at the heart of these proposals, stating that he urged them on the IRA during meetings at his house, but does not reference this. He does cover the various meetings between the IRA, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, quoting from *An Phoblacht*.

⁹⁹ Letters from Fianna Fáil including de Valera to IRA army council, May 1927 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/48 (28-33)).

¹⁰⁰ Hanley, *IRA*, p. 116.

¹⁰¹ *An Phoblacht*, 3 June 1927.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 6, 13, 20, 27 May 1927.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27 May 1927. This article was titled 'wait till the band passes'.

O'Donnell obviously believed the election would have an effect on the annuities campaign but he was also of the opinion that it was ultimately the work and efforts of the committee and the small-farmers themselves that would have the greatest impact. The election did not bring a change of government, but did see Fianna Fáil supplant Sinn Féin as the second largest party. Cumann na nGaedheal won forty-seven seats, Fianna Fáil forty-four, Labour twenty-two, Farmers' Party eleven, National League eight, Sinn Féin five, and Independents sixteen.

The first half of 1927 had witnessed a growth in publicity for the annuities campaign culminating in its role in the general election campaign. The anti-annuity committee in Donegal continued to resist payments and the bailiffs' efforts at seizures; and O'Donnell continued to promote the wider cause of annuities in *An Phoblacht*. O'Donnell's arrest and trial brought attention to the issue; this afforded him the national platform to articulate the reasons for opposition to annuities. O'Donnell's emphasis in his speech in court of the poverty and suffering of farmers who could not pay was made even starker by the news during the trial of the deaths from starvation of the O'Sullivan family in Adrigole. O'Donnell's arrest and the charges laid against him in court of inciting farmers not to pay annuities demonstrated the seriousness with which the government now viewed the annuities campaign. It also revealed that the government clearly identified O'Donnell as the head of and main instigator of the agitation. Meanwhile, the annuities issue was increasingly being debated at the county councils. Articles of the Land Bill connected with annuities and their collection caused contentious debate in the Dáil, particularly over the right of sheriffs to seize stock from farms of defaulters regardless of proof of ownership. Fianna Fáil's recognition of the significance of annuities was evidenced by the formation of a committee at their agricultural conference to discuss the issue. This continued into the election campaign. With the likelihood that Fianna Fáil would take their seats in the Dáil, it remained to be seen whether their TDs would be as vocal on the subject of annuities as they had been during the election, and what gains, if any, O'Donnell and the campaign could make from this.

CHAPTER 4

FIANNA FÁIL, ELECTIONS AND THE ANNUITIES

JULY – NOVEMBER 1927

The 1927 June general election witnessed the emergence of Fianna Fáil as the second largest party and while O'Donnell wanted more from the election than just the emergence of Fianna Fáil as the main opposition to Cumann na nGaedheal, the election had heightened national awareness of the annuities campaign. The question was how Fianna Fáil would pursue the annuity question either within or outside the Dáil. When they entered the Dáil in August and returned with thirteen more TDs after the September General Election, this took on even greater significance. Maurice Moore continued to be a vocal critic of annuity payments being sent to Britain and with the demise of Clann Éireann he became increasingly associated with Fianna Fáil. O'Donnell knew he needed to broaden the campaign and advocated setting up study groups country-wide to attract republicans who had drifted from the IRA. This he hoped would encourage political engagement including in the annuities agitation. The government was determined to play down the political impact of annuities, citing them as purely a business contract, concerning mainly landlords, tenants and individuals and that the British government had acted merely as intermediaries.¹ Through this and legislation aimed at securing the collection of arrears, the government hoped to undermine the agitation and silence some of Fianna Fáil's rhetoric on the issue. This chapter analyses further attempts by O'Donnell to engage republicans in the annuities agitation, the impact of annuities on the September 1927 general election and Fianna Fáil's increasing realisation of the potential of the annuities issue.

In late June O'Donnell wrote on the many pronouncements on non-payment of annuities during the election campaign. 'Nearly every national organisation ... has proclaimed the people's inviolable ownership of the soil in all its resources. And yet this sting of proclamations has been left floating in the air; the peasant still sees the process server and the sheriff's bailiff come in the trail of the annuities'.² The article further stated:

It is heartening to see the electioneering parties declaring themselves on the question of land annuities, for it shows there is an interest in it among the people. Electioneering folk are sensitive to popular feeling, but the strength of their movement will of course, be the determination of the people, rather than the scope of the proclamations.³

¹ *Irish Independent*, 13 Sept. 1927.

² *An Phoblacht*, 24 June 1927.

³ *Ibid.*

This view of the election was obviously influenced by the failure of the IRA to secure a united republican front between Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin during that election. The election had heightened the awareness of annuities but O'Donnell knew something more substantial than proclamations were needed as the crises continued, and it was his belief that it was those farmers in the front line against the threat of sheriffs, bailiffs and seizures that would determine the outcome.

Throughout the summer of 1927 there were decrees granted in respect of non-payment of land annuities reported from Meath, Ballinmore, Glenties and Killaloe district courts.⁴ The under sheriffs' returns from each county to the Department of Justice for September 1927 showed 1,795 decrees concerned payments to the Land Commission. In Donegal, the figure was 230, Limerick 126, Galway 303, Cork 153 and Kerry 152.⁵ In October Land Commission cases nationally counted for 1,425 out of 3,016.⁶ That month the under sheriff for Galway commented that it was pointless to try and execute these decrees while stock were still out at night: 'They will be in at night next month, when a general round up will be made in the Connemara area'.⁷

In June 1927 de Valera gave an interview to the *Manchester Guardian* in which he said:

Our farmers certainly ought to pay something for the privilege of using the land, but what, perhaps, they pay should not be annuities calculated to compensate the landlord for his legal claim to rent, but rather a land tax which could be graduated more justly and scaled down in accordance with the farmer's ability to pay. Still, I don't assert that those who advanced the money ... should not be re-paid. But the question by whom the money should be re-paid has still to be settled. I am not for a repudiation of debts. A future Republican government could not ignore all the acts of its predecessor, but the financial settlement Cosgrave has made with England is too absurd and will have to be re-opened.⁸

This reaffirmed de Valera's opposition to the payment of annuities to Britain, but left a degree of ambiguity as to what the farmers would pay. Moreover, what would a land tax entail? How much would have to be paid, and would the proceeds of this land tax then be used for investment in the agricultural sector or would it simply be swallowed up by the Irish treasury? De Valera's assertion that he was not for the repudiation of debts and his belief that bondholders who had advanced money should be paid, could be construed as an appeal to a

⁴ *Meath Chronicle*, 18 June, 30 July 1927; *Leitrim Observer*, 6 Aug. 1927; *Donegal News*, 3 Sept. 1927; *Nenagh Guardian*, 10 Sept. 1927.

⁵ Dept. of Justice, under-sheriff's returns, Sept. 1927. There was a one page return for each county listing all the decrees that came before the sheriff; this was then collated into a one page fact sheet for the whole country with the decrees broken into headings (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 223/199).

⁶ *Ibid.*, Oct. 1927.

⁷ Under-sheriff's returns, Galway, Oct. 1927 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/H 223/202).

⁸ Article in *Manchester Guardian* quoted in *Irish Independent*, 29 June 1927; *Weekly Irish Times*, 2 July 1927.

less radical voter and to investors, some of whose support he would need if Fianna Fáil were to attain political power.

After the poor showing of Clann Éireann in the June general election, Maurice Moore became more closely associated with Fianna Fáil; his arguments had more appeal to Fianna Fáil than the more radical ideas of O'Donnell. According to James Hogan, the IRA needed to remain relevant and the course chosen was the gradual adoption of socialism, and he placed O'Donnell at the centre of this shift.⁹ This more radical position of O'Donnell influenced Fianna Fáil to define their own policy on annuities. The trial on 24 June of Seán McCool, Bernard O'Donnell and Alex Mailey demonstrated some of the volatility that perhaps Fianna Fáil were keen to distance themselves from. The men were each sentenced to six month's imprisonment for their part in the raid on the offices of the Conyngham estate in September 1926 (see chapter 2). The prosecuting counsel concluded that despite the favourable distribution of land by the Land Commission 'it was astonishing to find an agitation in the country like that promoted by misguided and mischievous agitators like the accused and their confederates'.¹⁰

Fianna Fáil's deliberations over whether they would enter the Dáil took on an added urgency after the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, Minister for Justice, on 10 July in Booterstown, Dublin. O'Higgins was one the most prominent members of Cumann na nGaedheal and vice-president of the executive council. He had acquired a reputation as a leading opponent of the IRA. The killing of O'Higgins was most likely not sanctioned by the IRA, but carried out by members of that organisation acting independently.¹¹ The subsequent Electoral Amendment Bill introduced by the government that prohibited candidates who refused to swear to take the oath of allegiance if elected, from appearing on the ballot paper¹², scuppered Fianna Fáil's plan for a referendum on the oath. Ó Beacháin writes: 'by removing all possible avenues whereby the oath could be peacefully removed, Cumann na nGaedheal had pushed Fianna Fáil into a corner, forcing it to choose between ideological purity and organisational survival'.¹³ On 11 August de Valera and Fianna Fáil entered the Dáil.¹⁴ One of

⁹ James Hogan, *Could Ireland become communist? The facts of the case* (Dublin, 1935), pp 41-2.

¹⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 25 June 1927.

¹¹ Brian Hanley, *The IRA 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 49; J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army, a history of the IRA, 1916-1970* (London, 1970), p. 81.

¹² John M. Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1999), p. 274.

¹³ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-73* (Dublin, 2010), p. 62.

¹⁴ Michael Laffan, *Judging W.T. Cosgrave, the foundation of the Irish state* (Dublin, 2014), p. 248.

their first engagements was to support a no-confidence motion in Cosgrave put down by Thomas Johnson, Labour leader. They believed they had the numbers along with Labour and the National League to oust Cosgrave and back a minority coalition government of these two parties. However, the unexpected non-appearance of John Jinks (National League) allowed Cosgrave, who was supported by the Farmers' Party and some Independents, to win on the casting vote of the Ceann Comhairle.¹⁵ As Niamh Purséil writes, Labour had to shoulder some of the blame for allowing their deputy leader, T.J. O'Connell, to attend a conference in Canada during the time of the debate and vote.¹⁶ Although the government survived, the outlook for the future was uncertain and on 25 August Cosgrave called another election for 15 September. While Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil nominated a similar number of candidates as in the June election, the smaller parties, mainly due to lack of resources, put forward fewer candidates. The question of the annuities was again an issue in the election.

De Valera's idea of a land tax which he had broached in the *Manchester Guardian* received mention from candidates of both Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal on the election platforms. At Carrick-on-Shannon, Samuel Holt TD advocated the wiping out of the payment of all land annuities and its substitution by a land tax payable to the Irish government.¹⁷ At Longford, James Victory TD said Fianna Fáil were prepared to open up the financial relations question with England and would look at clause five of the Treaty. He proposed to hold the annuities in the Irish Exchequer until an arrangement with England could be reached, and if no such agreement took place they would put the issue to a referendum to determine whether the money should be paid to Britain or held in Ireland.¹⁸ Obviously many of the arguments on annuities were similar to those put forward in the June campaign, but it did seem as if Fianna Fáil were trying to sharpen their policy with talk of initiatives such as a land tax. The idea of the referendum was something new. It could be argued that some of the ambiguity around Fianna Fáil's policy on annuities was by design; its members were still deliberating on the issue, and awaiting the recommendations of its policy committee. Richard Dunphy has written that 'the party's agricultural programme was emphasised by Fianna Fáil, not merely because of considerations to do with electoral arithmetic, but also because of the

¹⁵ Laffan, *Judging Cosgrave*, p. 249.

¹⁶ Niamh Purséil, *The Irish Labour Party 1922-73* (Dublin, 2007), p. 24. The National League party was formed by William Redmond in Sept. 1926, was pro-treaty and included members of the old Irish Parliamentary Party, the party won eight seats at the June 1927 Election but was reduced to two at the Sept. Election, with Redmond later joining Cumann na nGaedheal.

¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 3 Sept. 1927.

¹⁸ *Irish Times*, 7 Sept. 1927; *Longford Leader*, 10 Sept. 1927.

ideological function of the small homestead which became an important part of the party's evocation of petty-bourgeois sentiments in general'.¹⁹

Edmund Duggan, Cumann na nGaedheal TD, claimed de Valera's statements were dishonest at a meeting at Athboy, in suggesting to the electorate that if Fianna Fáil were returned to power farmers would no longer have to pay annuities: 'he (de Valera) thought this good enough to catch a vote by appealing to the natural desires of peoples who owed money that they would not have to pay it back'.²⁰ At Arklow, Prof. Michael Tierney attacked de Valera's plans for abolition of annuities and their replacement with a land tax; it was akin to doing away with tweedledum and putting in its place tweedledee.²¹ Blythe defended the government's policies by again arguing that it was not a sign of imperialism to pay your just debts at Ballybay in Monaghan.²²

The government was keen to reinforce the idea of the annuities as a just debt, and was anxious to downplay the role of the British Exchequer in the whole area of the annuities and land purchase. C. Lehane (BL) argued similarly, that land purchase was a purely business affair, concerning mainly landlords, tenants and individuals who lent money on what he termed a state guarantee to finance land purchase. The annuities represented debts tenant purchasers have 'contracted to pay to other individuals for value received' and were not a tribute or a contribution to any government. According to Lehane, the government acted merely as intermediaries and that these loans were never considered part of the United Kingdom public debt.²³ This was a rebuttal of some of the arguments of Fianna Fáil and Moore that the annuities were part of the public debt of the United Kingdom. Lehane's charge that the government were acting merely as intermediaries was questionable, the British government had set up the land purchase scheme and had guaranteed those who provided the capital that they would be repaid with interest, and that the government had safeguards in place to secure payment in the case of tenants defaulting. The Free State government likewise was centrally involved since the inception of the state in 1922 and the fact that it facilitated and aided the Land Commission in the collection of annuities through legislation demonstrated this. They had held negotiations with the British government on the annuities issue and had signed two agreements, one of which (February 1923) was perhaps unknown to Lehane.

¹⁹ Richard Dunphy, *The making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland, 1923-1948* (Oxford, 1995), p. 95.

²⁰ *Irish Times*, 13 Sept. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 13 Sept. 1927.

²¹ *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. 1927.

²² *Ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1927.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1927.

The election results witnessed a hardening of support for the two bigger parties and conversely a squeezing of the smaller parties: Cumann na nGaedheal won 62 seats (+15), Fianna Fáil 57 (+13), Labour 13 (-9), Farmers' Party 6 (-5), National League 2 (-6), Independents 12 (-4). This provided the numbers for Cosgrave to form a government with the support of the Farmers' Party and some Independents when the Dáil met on 11 October.

Commenting on Fianna Fáil's success in the south and west, *The Times* (London) claimed:

The specious promises held out by Mr de Valera to the small farmer have probably had a far greater influence on the voting in the rural districts of the west and south. The republican leader realised at the beginning of this campaign that the mere repetition of anti-British and anti-Treaty catchwords would win him no large number of fresh adherents. A great number of the small farmers who compose the majority of the Free State electorate are paying land annuities under the Wyndham Act to their former landlords. ... de Valera appealed to their anxieties and to their cupidity by announcing that if his party came into power, these annuities would be neither collected nor paid to the British government. ... This precious scheme in which republican piety was combined with political profit seems to have commended itself to a large number of the small farmers. Of its morality the less said the better.²⁴

The article highlighted the significance of the annuities issue in the election. It showed how Fianna Fáil had slightly changed emphasis from constitutional issues to economic concerns such as the annuities in order to increase support. The author correctly identified that the campaign against annuities and wider agrarian issues had provided Fianna Fáil with a platform to appeal to a broader voter base. The *Times* was obviously sceptical of de Valera and Fianna Fáil and most likely opposed politically to them, but conceded the fact that 'republican piety', whatever its morality, had garnered a political dividend from its pursuance of this policy.

While the article identified Fianna Fáil's increased support in the south and west, it neglected to mention the fact that the absence of Sinn Féin candidates was also obviously a factor here. Sinn Féin had won five seats in the June election, four of them in the south and west, Mayo North, Kerry, Cork East and Waterford. Fianna Fáil won all four of these in the September election.²⁵ Fianna Fáil did not win the other Sinn Féin seat in Dublin North, which strengthened the argument that their policies appealed more to the small farmers in the rural

²⁴ Article from *The Times* entitled 'stalemate in Ireland' quoted in the *Irish Times*, 21 Sept. 1927.

²⁵ ElectionsIreland.org, <http://electionsireland.org/results/general/04dail.cfm> (20 Oct. 2016).

areas of the south and west. Fianna Fáil also gained seats in other constituencies where there had been a significant Sinn Féin vote in June such as Sligo-Leitrim and Cork Borough.²⁶

After the June election, O'Donnell had suggested the setting up of study groups and clubs throughout the country, centring on education and issues which affected people's everyday lives which he believed could attract republicans who had drifted away from the IRA. He believed Sinn Féin would never reorganise effectively, and on Fianna Fáil wrote 'today it is backed by national sentiment to smash the oath. Once it eases up on the attack, it passes'.²⁷ O'Neill refers to O'Donnell and this branch of republicanism as 'social republicanism' and contends that he and others 'sought to create a tangible republic that would offer a clear socio-economic alternative to the Free State'.²⁸

Once again, O'Donnell's central theme was the engagement of political activists in everyday social and economic concerns of which he viewed the annuities as being one of the most important. O'Donnell was perhaps a little disingenuous in his attack of Fianna Fáil; true, they were backed by a national sentiment to get rid of the oath, but, as alluded to earlier, the party had a range of other issues, including its stance on the annuities. In fact, in less than a year O'Donnell would be playing second fiddle to Fianna Fáil on the annuities question as they cemented their own particular stance on the issue with the electorate.

From October 1927, there was a series of debates over the next three months in *An Phoblacht* on the future direction of republicanism. O'Donnell wrote about his idea of a 'league of Republican workers' as alluded to earlier in his suggestion of forming study groups. Mary MacSwiney rejoined that *An Phoblacht* had begun to straddle too many 'isms' of various sorts and attacked the decision of the IRA to withdraw support from the second Dáil in November 1925. While O'Donnell naturally defended that action of the IRA stating 'there is no feeling so far as I know among republicans that the surviving faithful members of the second Dáil have any plan of campaign around which it is sought to collect republicans.'²⁹ The issue of annuities was central to much of O'Donnell's analysis and criticism of Sinn Féin's ideology and he was scathing of what he perceived to be their inaction on the issue.

²⁶ ElectionsIreland.org (20 Oct. 2016).

²⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 8 July 1927.

²⁸ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 21 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

²⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 8, 29 Oct. 1927. At an IRA Convention in Nov. 1925, the IRA had withdrawn support from the second Dáil, which was made up of anti-treaty Sinn Féin TDs elected in 1921. The motion had been initiated by O'Donnell (see chapter 1).

O'Donnell believed Sinn Féin should help him 'waken up the nation to repudiate tribute to England' and that if they could wake the country 'Fianna Fáil would either have to rearrange itself to stand for the peoples demand or it would be swept as wreckage around the steps of the Visregal Lodge. ... Sinn Féin has not played its part in the question of tribute to England. A prominent member of Sinn Féin told me that to help to raise issues which might be the means of raising Fianna Fáil to power would be the worst thing Sinn Féin could do'.³⁰

These were some of the problems that confronted O'Donnell; he felt Sinn Féin's adherence to the second Dáil hindered its involvement in meaningful politics, which meant no clear position on annuities. Thus, O'Donnell could not avail of an active Sinn Féin to put pressure on Fianna Fáil to take a more radical position on annuities. The scepticism of some within Sinn Féin, to pursue the annuities issue for fear of aiding Fianna Fáil electoral prospects, demonstrated that some Sinn Féin members had identified the political importance of annuities. This seemed to make a mockery of Sinn Féin's policy; they knew the political significance of annuities, but were totally incapable of addressing the issue, either to alleviate the plight of the small farmers or to gain some political capital.

MacSwiney defended Sinn Féin's stance on annuities by stating that no Irish money should be paid to the English Government.³¹ However, the Sinn Féin position was unclear and this was further demonstrated at the party's Ard Fheis in December when the president J.J. O'Kelly advised farmers not to pay annuities. There followed a discussion about the circulation of the statement in which Austin Stack said he did not agree with the statement totally and 'it should not go out that the Ard Fheis expressed approval of the entire document'. O'Kelly said that Stack differed from 'his conclusions on land annuities'.³² The *Ulster Herald* commented that among the Sinn Féin leadership it was apparent there were major differences of opinion, mentioning Stack's opposition to O'Kelly's position on annuities. It remarked of Stack, who was studying for the Bar, that his 'legal mind sees in the repudiation of bargains of this description very dangerous possibilities that might have serious

³⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 12 Nov. 1927.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1927.

³² *Irish Independent*, 12 Dec. 1927. Austin Stack (1879-1929) was born in Kerry and was a leading member of Sinn Féin. He was imprisoned in 1916 just prior to the Easter Rising. After his release he was active in Sinn Féin and was elected MP for Kerry west in the 1918 General Election. He was Minister for Home Affairs from November 1919 until January 1922, in the cabinet established by Dáil Éireann. He opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and was imprisoned towards the end of the Civil War. In March 1925, Stack had intervened and prevented Sinn Féin from becoming involved in land agitation in South-East Leinster. He was one of only five Sinn Féin TDs to retain their seats in the June 1927 General Election, subsequently losing it in September 1927 when Sinn Féin did not contest the election. For more on Stack, see J. Anthony Gaughan, *Austin Stack: portrait of a separatist* (Dublin, 1977).

reactions in the credit of any state, Republican or otherwise'.³³ O'Donnell later recounted how some months previously he had discussed the issue of annuities with Stack and he felt they were poles apart.³⁴ In 1925, Sinn Féin had actually passed a resolution condemning government payment of annuities, only for it to be quickly retracted when the executive realised its error: 'We cannot recognise Free State legislation'.³⁵ At a meeting of the second Dáil on 10 December 1927, its first since December 1926, president (of the Irish Republic) Art O'Connor in his address admitted that the amount of functioning of the second Dáil since that last meeting was practically nil.³⁶ All these instances highlighted the confusion within Sinn Féin over annuities.

The new Dáil met in October and Thomas Derrig (Fianna Fáil, Carlow-Kilkenny) raised the question of annuities. Derrig referred to a statement from Daniel Vaughan (Farmers' Party, Cork North) in the *Irish Independent*, which stated that if assistance were not forthcoming for the farmer and unemployment relieved, Vaughan believed that the majority of farmers would not be in a position to pay their annuities or rates.³⁷ Derrig had been through every county in the Saorstát during the past few years, and in his opinion, the farmers were clamouring for assistance: 'They have been complaining that the sheriffs and bailiffs have been driving them out of their homes'.³⁸ Seán MacEntee (Fianna Fáil, Dublin County) inquired as to the justification of annuity payments to England, arguing that if annuities were part of the public debt, this was extinguished by the December 1925 Agreement, if annuities were not part of the public debt, then what compelled Cosgrave to collect and hand them over to the English Exchequer.³⁹

Cosgrave agreed that an agreement was entered into and 'in March 1922 or March 1923 the Dáil passed an Act giving permission for the collection and payment of Land Commission annuities'.⁴⁰ It is unclear whether Cosgrave was unsure about the date, or he was being deliberately vague, or it was just a slip of the tongue.

³³ *Ulster Herald*, 17 Dec. 1927.

³⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 24. Dec 1927.

³⁵ O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card?', p. 26.

³⁶ Report on meeting of second Dáil 10 Dec. 1927 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5880). Sinn Féin recognised the second Dáil as the legitimate government of the Irish Republic and hence the president of the second Dáil as the president of that republic.

³⁷ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 21, No. 2, col. 100, 12 Oct. 1927.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, cols 117-119.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, cols 138-139.

In October 1927, during the Carlow/Kilkenny by election, Hogan and Blythe referred to the land annuities as purely a banking transaction, with Hogan accusing Fianna Fáil of impressing on small farmers that if in power they would not have to pay annuities.⁴¹ Moore attacked Blythe and Hogan's recent pronouncements attempting to explain the payment of annuities as purely a banking transaction, commenting that Blythe and Hogan had obviously forgotten about the Land League that forced the British government to intervene and change the whole system of land tenure in Ireland.⁴² Moore argued the Land Acts were political, and were acclaimed so at the time as a great act of generosity by which British money benefited Irish people and that the government was centrally involved in lending, collecting, appointing officials and evicting those who could not pay. He questioned why the Free State paid the annuities to the British Treasury instead of straight to the bondholders if it was a 'purely banking question'.⁴³ At the time Moore was in the process of writing *British plunder and Irish blunder* containing these core arguments, critiquing recent financial arrangements and annuity payments to Britain which was now due to run to forty-eight pages.⁴⁴

O'Donnell also commented on the notion that land purchase and annuities were simply banking transactions but from a slightly different angle than Moore. O'Donnell argued the Irish people were owners of the soil and certainly did not agree to sell it, what had happened was an investment to buy out landlord interests in Ireland, and the squabble was now between the investors and the guarantor, the British government.⁴⁵ These replies to the statements of Blythe and Hogan demonstrate the different emphases of Moore and O'Donnell in relation to the annuities question. Moore focussed on the legal and political dimension of the annuities, and though O'Donnell also used legal and political arguments, his main focus was on the moral issue that the land only belonged to landlords as a result of conquest. And regardless of the legal complexities of the case, in O'Donnell's view the payment of annuities were unjust and the money should be utilised by Irish farmers.

In the Dáil, in November 1927, Michael Kennedy (Fianna Fáil, Longford-Westmeath) raised what he said was a major issue from the June and September General Elections. The issue concerned the amount of decrees for annuities in Westmeath, 1,845 in the period 1924 to

⁴¹ *Cork Examiner*, 17 Oct. 1927; *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1927.

⁴² *Irish Independent*, 19 Oct. 1927. These were the core arguments that would be contained in Moore's pamphlet *British Plunder and Irish Blunder or the story of the land purchase annuities*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Letter from Gaelic Press to Moore, stating that Moore's pamphlet will now run to forty-eight pages and incur extra costs. 13 Jan. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (1)).

⁴⁵ *Irish Independent*, 19 Oct. 1927.

1927, of which 969 were returned as *nulla bona*. In Longford, there were 1,059 decrees.⁴⁶ Kennedy claimed the amount of decrees was a national emergency, which required immediate attention from the Executive Council: ‘The peasantry in this portion of Ireland deserve better from the ministers who in other days found shelter and succour in these homes which are now being sold’.⁴⁷ Kennedy was referring to Cumann na nGaedheal ministers who had been active in the War of Independence such as Mulcahy. In doing so, he was shedding light on the changing nature of the Sinn Féin movement of 1919-21. The pro-treaty element of Sinn Féin had formed Cumann na nGaedheal in 1923 which gradually retreated from revolutionary politics and eventually witnessed the consolidation of the remnants of the old Irish Party within its ranks. Regan makes the point that of fifty-seven pro-treaty TDs elected at the ‘pact’ general election in June 1922, only twenty-three remained in the Dáil by the end of 1925 and that the thirty-four deputies that were gone represented a revolutionary elite, they had been elected in 1918. They were replaced by candidates associated with revolutionary Sinn Féin to a lesser extent or not at all. This he argued demonstrated that the general movement in the Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party was inexorably toward the right.⁴⁸

The latter half of 1927 witnessed renewed efforts by O’Donnell to implement a broad republican grouping, of which abolition of annuities would be one of the core objectives. Sinn Féin remained reluctant to become actively involved in the campaign. In contrast Fianna Fáil, as Blythe suggested, realised the potential of the annuities issue. The issuing of decrees and cases concerning annuities were a recurring feature in the courts. The two general elections of 1927 had heightened awareness of annuities; this continued when Fianna Fáil took their seats and raised the issue in the Dáil. This was further evidence of the growing links between Fianna Fáil and the annuities. Annuities had been a major issue for Fianna Fáil in the elections and they had benefited in votes won; the obvious follow-up was to pursue the matter in the Dáil while at the same time seeking to find a position and formula which would best suit the party and their increasing electorate. Fianna Fáil could not be seen to be too close to O’Donnell on the annuities issue but it was difficult to see how they could work without him.

⁴⁶ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 21, No. 18, col. 1974, 24 Nov. 1927. Nulla bona is a term used in Latin meaning no goods, and was the description used by the sheriff when no goods could be seized to pay off a decree imposed by a court.

⁴⁷ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 21, No. 18, cols 1975-6, 24 Nov. 1927.

⁴⁸ Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution*, p. 258.

CHAPTER 5

FIANNA FÁIL, MOORE, AND ALLIANCE WITH O'DONNELL

(i) Fianna Fáil pursue position and policy on annuities

Government legislation, court decrees and seizures at the behest of the Land Commission were having an effect on those areas in west Donegal resisting annuity payments, and there still remained no organised national campaign. O'Donnell realised the perilous position of the agitation in Donegal, and when Moore offered him a lifeline to boost the annuities campaign in late 1927, he accepted. De Valera's rejection of the recent financial settlement of March 1926 became an even more significant part of Fianna Fáil's opposition to the government as they took on board Moore's critique of these financial arrangements. In November 1927, Fianna Fáil appointed a committee to formulate a policy position on annuities.¹ Opposition to annuities had a resonance with Fianna Fáil and its membership, a large part of its support came from the small farming community and its leadership wanted to appeal to that base while also portraying Fianna Fáil as a responsible party capable of government. Towards this end they were anxious to keep just enough distance between themselves and O'Donnell on the annuities issue and Moore's legal arguments would go some way to providing this.

The Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis held on 24-5 November 1927 passed a resolution appointing a committee of seven 'to consider immediately and advise the national executive within one month' on what their policy should be on the land annuities question. The national executive was then to formulate and announce the policy by 24 January 1928.² Among the resolutions referred to the committee for consideration was one urging Fianna Fáil TDs to do all in their power to suspend or reduce for a period of five years the payment of annuities in order to provide immediate relief to farmers. Another called for the outright abolition of land annuities.³ Resolution twenty-six contained echoes of O'Donnell: 'we suggest that all land annuities be paid into a credit bank from which loans be given to farmers who have no capital, at a nominal rate of interest. Special terms to be given to those of our people who have suffered for their loyalty to the cause of independence'.⁴

¹ Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis 24-5 November 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351 (37)).

² Report of proceedings of Ard Fheis (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351 (37)).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

At the Ard Fheis a resolution was passed that where writs had been issued and seizures or sales were imminent, Fianna Fáil asks that the Land Commission be instructed not to take legal action against farmers who can pay the running gale and are prepared to pay their arrears by instalments. Secondly, that farmers be allowed to set land for grazing with an indemnity from seizure guaranteed to the owner of the stock. A further resolution called for the repudiation of the Boundary Agreement and the Ultimate Financial Settlement.⁵ A booklet from the Ard Fheis, *Ireland's right to the land annuities* claimed there was no embezzlement in retaining what was 'legally and morally our own'.⁶ Also of interest was the emphasis on how the issue should be pursued: 'Fianna Fáil's appeal therefore, is not to the courts, but to the electorate'.⁷ Thus this booklet showed some of Moore's influence and clearly demonstrated the realization within Fianna Fáil of the potential effect of annuities on the populace in electoral terms.

Throughout November, there were numerous cases of land annuity arrears before the courts where decrees were obtained: Claremorris (Mayo), Delvin (Westmeath), over one hundred at Ballinasloe, Gort (Galway), Granard (Longford), Abbeyleix (Laois), over one hundred and thirty, mostly for annuities at Kilrush (Clare).⁸ Indeed the *Meath Chronicle* in a piece titled 'Christmas, 1927' alluded to the brisk business of the law courts during the year which 'mainly consisted of civil bills for the recovery of petty debts, while Land Commission suits against farmers for the recovery of annuities were many.' The paper argued for a moratorium on loans early in the New Year and that an extension of payment time would at least give breathing space and relieve the congestion in local courts.⁹ Responding to the increased decrees and seizures, the non-payment committee in Donegal sought to collect five shillings per house to be pooled together, and where decrees were granted farmers were branding their cattle with the word 'RENT' on each side of the cattle. It was hoped that the first cattle seized could be replaced with other cattle with money from this local fund. O'Donnell wrote that the branded cattle would challenge the conscience of the public at every fair.¹⁰

⁵ Report of proceedings of Ard Fheis (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351 (37)).

⁶ Fianna Fáil – *Ireland's right to the land annuities*. Booklet from 1927 Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis. (UCDA, Eamon de Valera papers, P150/2048)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 5, 26 Nov. 1927; *Meath Chronicle*, 19 Nov. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 23 Nov. 1927; *Longford Leader*, 26 Nov. 1927; *Irish Times*, 30 Nov. 1927; *Limerick Leader*, 21 Nov. 1927.

⁹ *Meath Chronicle*, 24 Dec. 1927.

¹⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 17 Dec. 1927.

In many areas, the situation was becoming critical as was evidenced by the above newspaper reports. This was particularly so in Donegal where government legislation on collection of arrears was putting increased pressure on the anti-payment committee. This was captured in *An Phoblacht*:

We are on the eve of a great struggle ... The claims of the British Exchequer are about to be enforced by evictions. The working farmers are being attacked. In many cases those who could will cease paying tribute and put the annuities at the disposal of a committee to back their neighbours. Ireland disgraced herself in '47 by putting 'honourable obligations to British landlordism' above the lives of the Irish people. That will not happen again. Payments from farmers will be made a means of support rather than of impoverisation. But while the hosts of Ireland are assembling, districts may be crucified. National support of those first attacked – and support from workers organisations everywhere should be organised.¹¹

While the article spoke of the Donegal committee's strengths - payments from farmers into a central pool - there was undoubted apprehension that some districts might be crushed before a meaningful national organisation opposing annuities emerged. There was the usual defiant reference to history, that there would be no repeat of 1847. Ó Drisceoil writes that by December 1927 the campaign was stalling, it had not spread outside certain pockets despite O'Donnell's efforts and that even in west Donegal 'it was in danger of collapse in the face of raids, arrests, seizures and a continuing lack of support from the republican and labour movements.'¹² A meeting in west Kerry in December was one such attempt by O'Donnell to spread the campaign, where he compared annuity payments to the earlier landlord rents. Some farmers present showed letters threatening proceedings against them for non-payment issued by the Land Commission.¹³ At the same time, it was claimed that Offaly, Roscommon, Leitrim and Galway had many interested groups that were opposed to annuity payments, and that they should be organised quickly so that a provisional national organising committee could be formed, and it was hoped to have pivotal people from the industrial labour movement on that committee.¹⁴

Court cases involving arrears continued into 1928 and constantly caused confusion, prompting District Justice Gleeson to comment after a series of annuity cases at Ennistymon: 'the Land Commission system of book-keeping in connection with those arrears is perfectly

¹¹ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Dec. 1927; this was under the headline of 'Cattle being stolen, houses tossed and families being made homeless'.

¹² Donal Ó Drisceoil, Peadar O'Donnell (Cork, 2001), p. 48.

¹³ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Dec. 1927.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31 Dec. 1927.

idiotic, and has upset the whole country. It is causing endless confusion and should cease'.¹⁵ Some weeks later state solicitor James Lynch was granted permission by Justice Gleeson at Ennis District Court to respond to these remarks. Lynch said that owing to prevailing conditions decrees were hard to execute and that 'there were anything from 600 to 800 decrees not collected by the sheriff'.¹⁶ Gleeson said he intended to draft a memorandum for the Land Commission outlining the major difficulties that arose in the Clare courts in proceedings for the recovery of annuities.¹⁷ In the same month, the *Irish Times* reported on what they termed was a 'most unusual event in Clare'. The successful sale of a farm by the Land Commission, where there were £105 of arrears of annuity due, and the paper saw this as a 'remarkable tribute to the growing respect for order'.¹⁸ The sale of the farm suggested growing pressure on those resisting payment.

In January 1928 a Fianna Fáil national executive meeting considered the recommendations of the committee on land annuities set up at the 1927 Ard Fheis. A letter sent to each member of the executive urged as many as possible to attend, particularly from constituencies where the annuities question was urgent.¹⁹ The first recommendation stated that the Ultimate Financial Settlement of March 1926 was contrary to the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 as was the Treaty Act of December 1925 and both were therefore unconstitutional. The second recommendation argued that payments under the March settlement were 'prejudicial to the financial stability of the Free State and were proving an excessive burden on Irish taxpayers'.²⁰ Both of these were very similar to the arguments of Moore on the legalities of paying the annuities to Britain. The third read:

Fianna Fáil considers that when a satisfactory settlement has been accomplished, the Land Purchase Fund should be used for the tenant farmers by reducing permanently the annuities now being paid under these acts, and to facilitate the purchase and distribution of land under the 1923 Act, with special reference to the Gaeltacht and Congested Districts.²¹

The fourth: 'Considering the serious difficulties of the Agricultural population at the present moment, Fianna Fáil considers that an extra and special all-round reduction should be made on annuities now due, and will move to that effect in the Dáil'.²²

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 Jan. 1928.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 Jan. 1928.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 Jan. 1928.

¹⁹ Letter to each member of the Fianna Fáil national executive on report of special committee on land annuities, 2 Jan. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/351 (41)).

²⁰ Recommendations of special committee on land annuities for national executive (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/351 (41)).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

Dr James Ryan, who could not attend the national executive meeting, put his views on the report of the special committee on annuities in writing and suggested that there be some leeway for TDs bringing the annuities issue before the Dáil. ‘On consideration, I believe it would be well if sections three and four of the recommendations of the special committee on annuities were amended and left somewhat more open. ... There is nothing in the amendment that I suggest to prevent three and four being our ultimate policy, but it does give us an opportunity of changing our tactics; if we thought same advisable’.²³ His suggested amendment to section three of the recommendations was:

Fianna Fáil considers that when a satisfactory settlement has been accomplished, that a substantial part of the Land Purchase Fund should be used to help tenant farmers and to facilitate the purchase and distribution of land under the 1923 Act, with special reference to the Gaeltacht and Congested Districts.²⁴

And to section four:

Considering the serious difficulties of the Agricultural population at the present moment, and that farmers are in many cases unable to pay their annuities Fianna Fáil will introduce a motion dealing with the subject on the re-assembly of the Free State Parliament.²⁵

Ryan thought that other national executive members would agree that it would be inadvisable to confine the party within narrower limits and he believed that this amendment bound them to introduce a motion in the Dáil on annuities which was as much as could be done at present.²⁶ The addition of the word ‘substantial’ to the third recommendation now meant that it was left open to interpretation how much of the Land Purchase Fund was to be used to help the farmers. Even more revealing, was that the idea about reducing permanently the annuities now been paid, was now missing from the original third recommendation. Clearly, Fianna Fáil had other designs on the annuities money than just its redistribution among the farming community or investment in agricultural projects. While the amendment to the fourth recommendation recognised the difficulties farmers had in trying to pay annuities, gone was the call for an all-round reduction in annuities. This was replaced by a proposed motion dealing with the general issue of annuities, as with the changes to recommendation three, this was much broader and more open to interpretation than the original recommendation and clearly afforded Fianna Fáil room to manoeuvre on the issue. Moore

²³ Letter from Dr James Ryan to Fianna Fáil national executive on subject of recommendations of committee on annuities (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351 (41)).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Letter from Ryan on subject of recommendations of committee on annuities (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351 (41)).

received confirmation of these Fianna Fáil decisions. The Fianna Fáil decision on annuities was to be published in the national press as an official statement of its policy on land annuities.²⁷ Much of the argument on the financial settlement borrowed heavily from Moore's analysis.

The issue continued to attract attention from different quarters. At the annual general meeting of the County Cork Farmers' Union Executive on 28 January, one member spoke of a difficult year for farmers, citing among other things, the numerous auctioneers' advertisements in the papers 'under instructions from the Land Commission to sell out those unable to pay their annuities'. The meeting also heard that deposits in Irish banks had decreased from £131 million to £123 million between 1925 and 1927 and that while a portion had gone into the National Loan, a 'great deal had been used in the payment of annuities and to provide food and clothes for the people'.²⁸ Publishing the names of defaulters also continued to be an issue. In Monaghan Patrick Conlon claimed that he wanted to propose that Monaghan County Council publish such a list, but that he was denied the right to speak at the meeting. In a letter to the *Anglo-Celt* outlining his case, Conlon argued his proposal would allow 'people judge for themselves and see that they got proper safeguards before taking lands on the con-acre system'.²⁹

In January Hogan, when speaking of the benefits the proposed Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) would confer on farmers, attacked those advocating non-payment of annuities, especially now when it was necessary to borrow money on international credit to finance this bank.³⁰ The Banking Commission (1926) considered that the ACC should be concerned primarily with the development of co-operative agricultural credit.³¹ Hogan's pronouncements on who would be entitled to loans allowed for the implementation of a carrot and stick approach towards farmers. For farmers who were compliant or made efforts to clear debts, the carrot of available funds; for those who were not loans would be denied to them. This had the potential to place more strain on O'Donnell's campaign.

²⁷ Letter to Moore from Gerard Boland, Fianna Fáil, 17 Jan. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (10)); *Irish Independent*, 19 Jan. 1928.

²⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 30 Jan. 1928.

²⁹ *Anglo-Celt*, 4 Feb. 1928.

³⁰ *Irish Independent*, 23 Jan. 1928; *Irish Times*, 23 Jan. 1928.

³¹ Commission of inquiry into Banking, currency and credit (Dublin, 1938), p. 256. In fact, the Commission concluded that the ACC was unable to achieve what was intended as its main task, and that the co-operative credit movement had declined in the Free State.

(ii) Alliance of O'Donnell and Moore

Moore called to O'Donnell's home in Donnybrook in late 1927/early 1928 with the manuscript of his pamphlet *British plunder and Irish blunder*, which had been written at the request of Clann Éireann, hoping that it might be serialised in *An Phoblacht*. In the foreword, Moore laid out the reason for publication: the Minister of Finance's secrecy surrounding all matters concerning the financial relations of the Free State and Britain, and the agreements which led to vast sums of money being transferred to the British Treasury without the knowledge of the people.³² The pamphlet claimed the 'tribute' was unconstitutional, and that the large amounts paid each year, about £5 million, would bring the Free State close to bankruptcy. It criticised Blythe for refusing to appoint a committee to examine the Ultimate Financial Settlement. Moore had told Blythe that if he continued to deny information on the financial settlement, he would lay the matter before the people. This pamphlet was the result.³³

Until then O'Donnell had not sought to involve Moore in the campaign as O'Donnell opposed those who were nominated to the Senate. Moreover, he was pushing the boundaries of IRA policy in political involvement by his use of *An Phoblacht* to promote the annuities campaign, and he did not want to alienate the IRA by aligning with a Free State Senator. O'Donnell's attitude to Moore was summed up in his opinion that 'long distance sniping on legal issues offered little shelter for the townlands'.³⁴ Moore was 'an energetic evangelist in relation to the annuities issue' but was far more moderate than the socialist-republican O'Donnell.³⁵ 'But with state pressure mounting against the local non-payment of annuities committees, he finally agreed to a meeting'.³⁶ At this juncture in the campaign O'Donnell needed allies and Moore had come to him.

I was desperately in need of some help to widen the area of struggle and to bring new voices on to the land annuity platform. Moore handed me the resolution on which, he thought, an agitation could be promoted. It declared the payment of land annuities to Britain to be illegal and immoral and a burden on the economy of the country.³⁷

³² Maurice Moore, *British plunder and Irish blunder or the story of the land purchase annuities* (Dublin, 1928), p. 3. Blythe had refused to appoint a committee to examine the Ultimate Financial Settlement in the Seanad in December 1926 (see chapter 2).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be a another day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 79.

³⁵ Daithí Ó Corráin, 'A most public spirited and unselfish man': the career and contribution of Col. Maurice Moore 1854-1939, in *Studia Hibernica* 40 (2014), p. 129.

³⁶ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 28 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

³⁷ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 85-6.

O'Donnell read over Moore's pamphlet checking it against the needs of those who were resisting payment and concluded that since the pamphlet judged that payments were illegal, all decrees enforcing them should be suspended. Decrees should be suspended until there was a national agreement on what contributions Irish farmers would make towards what O'Donnell termed 'national housekeeping expenses'. He asked Moore to accept the slogan 'call off the bailiffs' as this was one of the major demands of the anti-annuity committee, and if so they could work together. O'Donnell was surprised to find that Moore believed he was fronting the campaign for the IRA. He set him straight that at present it 'was an affair of neighbours in a few townlands'.³⁸

Moore's pamphlet critiqued the payment of annuities from a legal, economic and moral position:

it has been necessary to make this statement because President Cosgrave, Blythe and Hogan's continued assertions that land purchase annuities were merely transactions between tenant farmers and the banks, whereas officials of the British Government settled the prices, divided the lands, collected the annuities, evicted those who did not pay, and transmitted the funds to a government commission under the control of the British Treasury. The very fact that the British Government puts in a claim shows that it is a question of national finance and national indebtedness, and not a question of banks and stockholders.³⁹

Moore reiterated the point that Britain's legal claim to the annuities rested upon statute and could be proved baseless by reference to those particular Acts of Parliament. He reasoned that under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 that the British Government would have assumed it was inconceivable that any Irish Government could or would collect annuities to hand over to the British Treasury.⁴⁰ Realising their moral claim was thin, the government as Moore put it, 'determined to make a virtue of necessity and correlated the legal with the moral position' by allowing the two Irish Governments to retain the annuities and the British would pay the interest due to the stockholders. There could not be a 'more definite repudiation of the notion that Ireland was bound in honour or in law to pay, or help to pay, this particular British debt'.⁴¹ Moore outlined the change to this imposed by the Treaty:

The British Government seems to have been alive to this state of affairs and accordingly it attempted to put its own liability, or rather a share of it, on to the Free State by Article 5 of the Treaty, which provided that the Free State was to assume liability for its fair proportion of the 'Public Debt' of the United Kingdom as then existing; but due regard

³⁸ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 86.

³⁹ Moore, *British Plunder*, p. 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 30-31.

⁴¹ Maurice Moore, *British plunder and Irish blunder* (Dublin, 1928), p. 31.

was to be had to the other side of the account which would set out Ireland's claims for cash and damages against the British.⁴²

By the agreement of December 1925, Moore argued that all of Ireland's liability under Article 5 for a share of this public debt was completely wiped out. He claimed that after this agreement, the Free State was forever free from this particular share of the public debt, but now the people are being asked to pay under the secret Ultimate Financial Agreement an obligation from which Britain had twice released this State.⁴³ He outlined the sequence of events:

Under the Act of 1920 we were free from all liability for Land Stock; under the Treaty (on the least favourable interpretation) we might be liable for our proportion of this part of the Public Debt, if anything remained after all our counter-demands had been taken into account. By the Pact of 1925 all liability of that kind is finally wiped out. That was in December. In March the tables are turned, and under the new finance of Merrion Street we suddenly become liable, not for a fair share, but for the whole of the British liability to the holders of Land Stock, and we are to make England a present of the tenants' annuities to indemnify her against this obligation of hers.⁴⁴

Moore was frustrated with what he perceived to be Blythe's and the government's ineptitude and lack of will to stand up to the demands of the British Treasury in the negotiations over the financial settlement. In his opinion, there were clear legal arguments framed in the British parliament with which the Free State government could argue the case that Ireland should be exempt from sending annuity payments to Britain. However, all this was in the context of Moore not knowing the complete facts of the financial arrangements with Britain, from the agreement of February 1923, by which the Free State government had agreed to collect and hand over the annuities to Britain.

Moore did not blame Blythe for not being an able financier or for being less astute than Churchill who had treasury officials behind him, but he did blame him 'for acting in secret and signing away the financial resources of the country', and for refusing to listen to warnings, consider or reply to criticism in the Oireachtas. He considered Blythe responsible for not keeping the Dáil informed on the financial agreements and 'plunging the State into financial difficulties which have impoverished the people, and which will require years of care and retrenchment to amend'.⁴⁵ Moore believed the case of the Free State was so strong

⁴² Moore, *British plunder*, p. 31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp 32-3.

⁴⁴ Moore, *British plunder*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

that wise and courageous action could overcome the damage caused by Blythe without causing a quarrel.⁴⁶

In conclusion, Moore argued that the debt contributed to the inability of the Free State to balance the budget and that the present ministers had compromised their position so much that he believed it might not be possible for them to reopen the agreement. Though the position was difficult, a ministry of a different party would not be hampered to the same extent. He claimed a new ministry could ‘re-open the financial relations with Britain, and with the law on the side of the Free State and possession of the money in addition, it could overcome any opposition British Ministers might make’.⁴⁷

While Moore was still a member of Clann Éireann he had been part of a sub-committee on annuities set up in February 1927 by Fianna Fáil (see chapter 3). O’Donnell saw in Moore and his pamphlet the opportunity to reinvigorate and broaden the campaign. He obviously hoped Moore’s recent alignment with Fianna Fáil would aid this effort, and commented on how Moore had very effectively explained Blythe’s surrender over the Financial Settlement and the part that interested him most was the complete case he made against the payments of annuities to the British treasury. O’Donnell advised every anti-tribute group to try and get a copy of Moore’s pamphlet into every house in their district.⁴⁸ As Ó Corráin writes, the alliance with Moore offered O’Donnell a conduit to Fianna Fáil on the annuities issue.⁴⁹ There was also a slight change in O’Donnell’s message as he strove to pitch the campaign to a wider base: ‘the fact that the opposition to tribute to England is not an organising act of the political Republican Movement, but of groups of people of various political affiliations in the past is a good omen. This points to the fact that it is a new movement, not a mere rearguard action’.⁵⁰ O’Donnell argued the hesitation in working towards national repudiation of the tribute demonstrated the strength of the reactionary elements within the different political parties. ‘In discussions with well-known figures in the political parties one discovers a strong fear of how far the people might go and what trouble the leaders might have afterwards in governing the people’.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Moore, *British plunder*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 45-6.

⁴⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 14 Jan. 1928.

⁴⁹ Ó Corráin, ‘A most public spirited and unselfish man’, p. 130.

⁵⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 14 Jan. 1928.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

O'Donnell also examined what he believed to be the wider attitude concerning annuities within Cumann na nGaedheal. He again invoked history to strengthen his case. 'It would be interesting to see the secretary of the Straid branch of Cumann na nGaedheal attempting to make a case for the sacred rights of alien landlordism to the peasant farmers around there'.⁵² In an editorial, he argued that the campaign was not the preserve of any one political organisation but involved groups from all parties.⁵³ It was noticeable the extra coverage now afforded to the annuities in *An Phoblacht* since O'Donnell's meeting with Moore. Although there had been increased coverage towards the end of 1927, this was surpassed in the New Year and particularly the 14 January edition, which contained numerous long articles on annuities. This suggested a growing confidence in O'Donnell that the issue could now become a national movement.

About this time, O'Donnell's confidence was undoubtedly further boosted by an IRA decision to back the campaign. The IRA decision stemmed from a question from the Tirconaill Battalion to IRA GHQ as to whether they would accept full responsibility for the anti-annuities campaign and sought clarification and instruction on the issue.⁵⁴ GHQ accepted full responsibility for any 'acts volunteers may take in raising the resisting power of the people' and stated that the campaign had the approval of the army council. It urged volunteers to co-operate.⁵⁵ In a letter sent to 'Mr Holmes', with a copy of the GHQ reply, 'J. Brady' felt, hoping he was wrong, that the Tirconaill Battalion query may have been sent in the hope of getting a negative reply. 'Brady' believed some members of the Tirconaill Battalion were seeking to back away from the annuities campaign and shift the onus onto the IRA leadership for this course of action.⁵⁶

Although this support from the IRA was hardly a ringing endorsement of the campaign or a statement that the IRA would take a lead role, the anti-annuities agitation did now officially have the backing of the army council. It raised the question of the commitment of some IRA members to the campaign as can be gleaned from 'Brady's observations in the letter to 'Mr Holmes'. The IRA would take full responsibility for the actions of their

⁵² *An Phoblacht*, 14 Jan. 1928. Straid in County Mayo was the birth place of Michael Davitt founder of the Land League.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Letter from Tirconaill Battalion IRA to adjutant general GHQ, 5 Jan. 1928 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/149 (71)). The IRA were using the name Tirconaill for Donegal in their records and correspondence.

⁵⁵ Letter to O/C Tirconail Battalion from adjutant general, re. land annuities campaign, 12 Jan. 1928 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/149 (71)).

⁵⁶ Letter to Mr Holmes from J. Brady, 12 Jan. 1928 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/149 (71)). The IRA at the time were using fictitious names and while this is nearly certainly the case with 'Mr Holmes' it is most likely a similar situation concerning 'J. Brady'.

volunteers in support of the campaign but veered on the side of caution of being in the forefront of the agitation. This perhaps demonstrated a degree of uncertainty within the IRA of its politics and future direction that it could not completely grasp the significance of the annuities issue and take ownership of it. However, this was still a significant boost to O'Donnell, with the official confirmation of the broad support of the IRA leadership.

Moore had relayed to O'Donnell his efforts to involve the Labour party and the difficulty in getting Johnson or William O'Brien to commit their support. O'Donnell had his own difficulties in even getting the IRA to help bring some unions behind the annuities campaign, but both he and Moore met with and worked with P.T. Daly secretary to the Dublin Trades Council.⁵⁷ Within weeks of O'Donnell and Moore meeting, plans were being put in place for a national meeting with *An Phoblacht* commenting in late January: 'at long last steps are been taken to hold a big meeting in Dublin to focus national attention on the looting of this country by England through the Ultimate Financial Settlement of Mr. Blythe'.⁵⁸ *An Phoblacht* deemed the land annuities a substantial factor in that loot and proclaimed that the demand for tribute must be resisted generally with no more party tactics.⁵⁹ Peter Hegarty wrote that Moore would prove to be O'Donnell's most influential ally; he brought influence and respectability to the campaign and busied himself putting it on a national footing. Moore searched the press for favourable correspondence and replied to such correspondence, urging the organisation of local committees.⁶⁰

What was already interesting were the slight shifts in the portrayal of the annuities issue, the Ultimate Financial Settlement was been emphasised for the looting of the country and the annuities seen as a substantial factor in that loot. This was more representative of Moore's analysis than O'Donnell's. This demonstrated the influence of Moore's pamphlet; obviously, for O'Donnell its strength lay in the exposing of the financial relations with Britain and the centrality of the annuities within this. Moore and O'Donnell shared much common ground, centrally that annuities should not be handed over to the British Exchequer, there were some differences of emphasis, but in early 1928 there was enough common cause and, perhaps more important, the realisation that each needed the other to move the issue forward. O'Donnell, as was discussed, needed to widen the campaign and Moore would need

⁵⁷ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 86-8.

⁵⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 28 Jan. 1928.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Peter Hegarty, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, Dublin, 1999), pp 175-6.

O'Donnell to distribute his material and ideas among farmers who were already and those who might in the future resist payment.

An article in *An Phoblacht* in February called for provisional 'no rent committees' to be formed in each county and instructed these to communicate with O'Donnell, arrange meetings and invite him to attend. The next step would be to form such committees in each parish.⁶¹ A national meeting was planned for Dublin on 14 February 1928. Moore publicised it in the provincial press, saying it was supported by members of different and even opposing parties and that it would be addressed by Dáil and Seanad members.⁶² *An Phoblacht* stressed the need for a common effort, and that the anticipated broad attendance was in response to invitations from Moore.⁶³ The emphasis on the invitations coming from Moore is interesting; if it was known that O'Donnell had too much influence in arranging the meeting it might be construed as a left wing republican event and scare off some of the more moderate opponents of annuities. P.T. Daly influenced the executive of the Trades Council to adjourn its own meeting and attend the national meeting on annuities. O'Donnell noted that the country delegates were encouraged by this, but added that 'nothing further came of it and I soon lost hope of city reinforcements'.⁶⁴ The meeting to launch an anti-tribute campaign took place in the Round room of the Rotunda on 14 February 1928 with Moore presiding. He outlined the background to annuities and recent financial agreements and copies of his pamphlet examining these issues were sold at the meeting for 3d.⁶⁵ A resolution was passed which called on the Irish people to repudiate the agreement:⁶⁶

This meeting declares the land annuities to be neither morally nor legally due to the British Treasury; that the exportation of such large sums of Irish money is prejudicial to the financial stability of the Irish Free State; that we believe all decrees for annuities already issued or about to be issued against farmers should be suspended pending a national settlement of what payments farmers are to make to the national revenue.⁶⁷

O'Donnell and TDs, James Ryan, P.J. Rutledge, Hugo Flinn, and Gerry Boland also spoke. Ryan said the poor were making themselves poorer in order to pay an unjust tax to a foreign power, that it should be repudiated and that ultimately the Irish people would join together in such force to prevent the payment of annuities to England. O'Donnell referred to the suffering in the western areas because of the decrees, which he asserted should not be

⁶¹ *An Phoblacht*, 4 Feb. 1928.

⁶² *Anglo-Celt*, 11 Feb. 1928; *Mayo News*, 11 Feb. 1928.

⁶³ *An Phoblacht*, 11 Feb. 1928.

⁶⁴ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 88-9.

⁶⁵ Moore's speech at the Rotunda meeting, 14 Feb. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Resolutions from Rotunda meeting, 14 Feb. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (6)).

enforced. The meeting was termed the ‘opening of a campaign’ and O’Donnell demanded the bailiffs be called off.⁶⁸

The *Irish Independent* asked on what principle of law or morality the resolution urging repudiation could be supported? It reiterated the government’s view that the annuities were ‘similar to any ordinary contractual debt payable by one individual to another.’ The paper used the example of Russia as a state that had repudiated its debts and was now discredited: ‘Surely the people of the Free State will not follow a policy of repudiation, and blindly bring upon the nation a discredit from which it might not easily recover’.⁶⁹ O’Donnell responded, claiming the importance of the meeting was ‘best seen in the hostility and alarm of the imperial organs’. He expressed his satisfaction with the representation on the platform and new hope for those areas resisting payment: ‘We confess to a sense of relief. The burden that was falling heavy on a few is now to be distributed over many’.⁷⁰

While the campaign against annuities had been ongoing since mid-1926, O’Donnell seemed to be prepared to allow this latest initiative be seen as the ‘opening of a campaign’. The number of Fianna Fáil TDs who spoke from the platform at the national meeting was significant. Although O’Donnell talked up the involvement from the Labour Movement, this was certainly overshadowed by Fianna Fáil’s presence.

The implementation of decrees was putting extra pressure on those resisting payment. This was arguably a contributing factor in O’Donnell agreeing to ally with Moore in opposition to annuities. Moore had outlined his opposition in legal, economic and moral terms in his pamphlet, of which O’Donnell was in broad agreement and identified as an opportunity to involve more in the campaign, particularly Fianna Fáil. There was optimism that this coalition of forces could become a truly national movement that had failed to materialise thus far. However, for O’Donnell that optimism was perhaps somewhat tempered by the realisation that with greater numbers involved, there was also the risk that core aims might become diluted. Nevertheless, in the prevailing circumstances in the spring of 1928, he obviously viewed this as a risk worth taking.

⁶⁸ *Irish Times*, 15 Feb. 1928; *Irish Independent* 15 Feb. 1928; *An Phoblacht*, 18 Feb. 1928; Moore’s speech, 14 Feb. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

⁶⁹ *Irish Independent*, 15 Feb. 1928.

⁷⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 18 Feb. 1928.

CHAPTER 6

THE 'NO TRIBUTE' CAMPAIGN AND EFFORTS TO BUILD A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Advances were made in the annuities agitation in early 1928; a committee appointed to review annuities at the 1927 Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis had duly reported that the transfer of annuities to Britain was unconstitutional. Fianna Fáil pledged to reopen the recent financial settlement and that a substantial amount of the money retained should be directed to help farmers. O'Donnell had broadly agreed with Moore's thesis expressed in *British plunder and Irish blunder* and had worked with him on the launch of an Anti-Tribute campaign. The meeting at the Rotunda on 14 February had certainly given new impetus to the campaign; all those involved, principally O'Donnell, Moore and the Fianna Fáil TDs realised the need for a broad-based coalition. After the meeting in Dublin, the strategy of the group was to organise meetings throughout the country where O'Donnell was anxious to further involve Fianna Fáil.

Fianna Fáil TDs continued to speak in opposition to annuities across the country. One of the objectives of the Anti-Tribute committee was to seek repudiation in the county councils. But while support from the party, and individual TDs and members were helpful, O'Donnell and Moore wanted to harness this Fianna Fáil opposition within a structured and cohesive grouping, hence the Rotunda meeting and subsequent resolutions. As O'Donnell wrote, both agreed 'that it would greatly help us in the countryside if we could bring Fianna Fáil TDs onto our platform there'.¹ The major prize in this venture was to manoeuvre de Valera onto such a platform and when this was achieved in June 1928, it further boosted the campaign. Adrian Grant argues that after that the 'radical class element of the campaign was soon diluted and the issue interpreted as one of national pride'.² The government attitude remained that annuities were not solely a debt to the British Treasury but to individuals who had helped finance land purchase and to renege on this debt would damage Ireland's international credit reputation.

The area chosen for the first of a series of countrywide meetings on annuities was Loughrea, east Galway, on 4 March 1928. Galway was one of the counties that had witnessed much strife on the issue, with a high level of non-payment. This had resulted in the *Connacht Tribune* publishing lists of defaulters' names in July 1926 (see chapter 1). O'Donnell later

¹ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 89.

² Adrian Grant, *Irish socialist republicanism, 1909-36* (Dublin, 2012), p. 155.

wrote: ‘I was eager to light a fire on Paddy Hogan’s doorstep’.³ A local priest Father John Fahy was particularly active in the non-payment campaign in the Loughrea area and as, Jim Madden writes, had been aided by a tightly-knit group including the O/C of the local IRA.⁴ O’Donnell was aware of this and commented: ‘there has been a steady group of workers in Galway teaching persistently that tribute to Britain must end’.⁵ Broadly speaking, two strands of extra parliamentary republicanism remained after the formation of Fianna Fáil, those with a socially conservative outlook and those who wanted to radically address social and economic problems. It was to this socially radical group, ‘largely through the influence of O’Donnell, that Fr. Fahy was inexorably drawn’.⁶ Fahy helped arrange the meeting and soon informed O’Donnell that Frank Fahy, no relation of the priest, and Hugo Flinn, TDs for Galway and Cork City, would speak if it could be cleared by the Fianna Fáil leadership.⁷ However, a problem arose over the issue of the strategies encapsulated in the slogans ‘No Rent’ and ‘Call off the Bailiffs’. O’Donnell endorsed these strategies, but Fianna Fáil seemed reticent to launch a campaign under these banners. Fianna Fáil TDs were unclear in their intent. For example, P.J. Rutledge TD had challenged Michael Davis TD Cumann na nGaedheal in Moygownagh, Mayo on 26 February, ‘to show where any responsible Fianna Fáil member had advised farmers not to pay land annuities’ and pointed out that what they stated was that annuities if collected must be used for the improvement of land the farmers were working.⁸ This was the dilemma for O’Donnell: he needed help to spread the campaign but in doing so, he was joining with some whose views, while similar on certain issues, were in most cases not as radical. O’Donnell probably dared not believe he could control Fianna Fáil on the annuities issue, but hoped he could at least direct it in some way: ‘If Fianna Fáil were allowed off on their own they would drift into soft talk on the burden of those payments on the national economy, and of the good use they would make of this money when they got into office’.⁹ The fundamental difference between O’Donnell and Fianna Fáil was that he saw no reason for the payment of annuities to any government. O’Donnell agreed to farmers paying some money for their land that would help finance a farmers’ bank (see chapter 2). However, as

³ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 94.

⁴ Jim Madden, *Fr. John Fahy: radical republican and agrarian activist, 1893-1969* (Dublin, 2012), p. 38.

⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 25 Feb. 1928.

⁶ Madden, *Fr. John Fahy*, p. 35.

⁷ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 89. Father John Fahy (1893-1969), came from the Loughrea area and was ordained a priest for the diocese of Clonfert in Sept. 1919. While working as a priest in Scotland from 1919 to 1921, he served as an IRA battalion chaplain and had attended Communist meetings. After his recall to Clonfert in 1921 he served as a curate in the parish of Bullaun (1925-29). He was well known for his Republicanism and socially radical views. Frank Fahy and Hugo Flinn were Fianna Fáil TDs for Galway and Cork City respectively.

⁸ *Irish Independent*, 28 Feb. 1928.

⁹ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 90.

O'Neill has concluded: 'Fianna Fáil permitted its members to speak under the 'Call off the Bailiffs' banner, but prohibited them from speaking under the 'No Rent' banner.'¹⁰

Moore, writing in a letter to an unnamed recipient about the national meeting in Dublin, explained that the committee did not advise the farmers not to pay the annuities. Moore stated that 'it would be a very serious step to take and might lead to serious losses. We have no means at our disposal to prevent the sheriff's seizures'. It was not specified who was the recipient of the letter, but there was a reference to Galway.¹¹ Moore was outlining his position on 'no rent' but it was obvious from this letter there were others in the wider group whose position he was not sure of. Richard English has noted that while Moore provided valuable support to O'Donnell, he did not share his socialist ideals and their association was based on a 'temporary intersection of purpose rather than on a common political philosophy'.¹² While Moore and O'Donnell grappled with a formula that would allow Fianna Fáil speakers to attend at Loughrea without being seen to be too closely associated with O'Donnell's radicalism, posters appeared in Loughrea promoting the meeting as part of a 'No Rent Campaign'. Three of the speakers Fahy, Flinn and Moore published a disclaimer in a letter to the *Irish Times*:

We desire to say quite definitely that the issue of this placard has no authority from any of the three speakers above named, and that no one of us will take part in any such campaign or speak under these auspices, and that no such campaign was started in Dublin. It is desirable to make this repudiation immediate and definite, as folly of this kind is liable to obscure the merits of, and prevent the accomplishment of a cause which is practical and just—namely that of retaining in this country as we are legally and morally entitled to do, the annuities paid on Free State land.¹³

O'Donnell recounted how Moore, Fahy and Flinn travelled with him to the meeting at Loughrea and by the time they arrived, all agreed they would speak the following day. O'Donnell had argued that the resolution agreed with Moore for the Rotunda meeting in February 1928 had called for the suspension of decrees until there would be a national agreement on the payments that farmers might make to national housekeeping expenses. O'Donnell reasoned that if all agreed 'that money was not legally or morally due, why should

¹⁰ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 29 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

¹¹ Handwritten letter from Moore shortly after the Feb. meeting in Dublin. It is not specified who the letter was for (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (1)).

¹² English, *Radicals and the Republic*, p. 92.

¹³ *Irish Times*, 3 Mar. 1928.

farmers pay it and why should Fianna Fáil worry so long as the resolution contemplated the prospect that farmers might be asked to make a direct payment later on?’¹⁴

A large attendance was reported at the meeting in Loughrea, which was chaired by Eamonn Corbett, Chairman of Galway County Council, but many of the neighbouring areas failed to send representatives partly because of the repudiation from Fahy, Flinn and Moore.¹⁵ The meeting reiterated the message from the inaugural Dublin meeting; Flinn stated their object was to bring back into the Irish exchequer fund the annuities being paid to Britain, which he personified as ‘the stranger’.¹⁶

The Loughrea meeting demonstrated some of the challenges facing the campaign and for O’Donnell in particular. The anti-tribute group had managed to provide a united front on the platform, but the general uncertainty and confusion about which banner the meeting was to take place under was reflected in the poor overall turnout. This was in an area where there was already strong opposition to annuity payments; if the campaign hoped to grow it could not afford too many similar setbacks. The newspaper coverage was interesting, giving much coverage to Moore, Fahy, Flinn and James Cosgrave (ex Independent TD, he had lost his seat at election of June 1927 and failed to regain it in September of that year)¹⁷ and just mentioning at the end of the article that O’Donnell had also spoken. It was unlikely that O’Donnell wanted to be placed on the periphery of these events. However, he expressed his positivity with the meeting in an editorial:

The apathy of the general public to the widespread hardships will be shaken up by these meetings ... To have the repudiation successful the greatest attention must be paid to the organising of local meetings. This must be a coming together of neighbours and the platform should show that a coming together of people who have differed in the past and who do not agree in the present on other issues is actually in motion. ... Given that the mind of the country is definitely set against the tribute the British Exchequer may write off the claim.¹⁸

From this, and clearly evident in other articles by O’Donnell, was his belief that enough common cause could be found on this issue to sustain the campaign and to force the British to abandon their claim on annuities.¹⁹ O’Donnell began to ask why were people in general nervous about the ‘No Rent’ phrase? O’Donnell speculated that it was partly due to the

¹⁴ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 92.

¹⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 Mar. 1928.

¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 6 Mar. 1928.

¹⁷ Dáil Éireann members’ directory.

¹⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 10 Mar. 1928.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 Mar. 1928.

perception that farmers were self-centred, and that the slogan could be interpreted as: ‘That if we got into the bad habit of paying nothing for a while we will never pay anything, not even into a fund ... for national development including agricultural credits’.²⁰ He argued that to end the tribute it must first be nationally repudiated and then resisted and that he would work towards national repudiation. He referred to this as possibly being a retreat. He returned to the issue of a defence fund, arguing that ‘if it can be created no other way let it be sliced off rents’.²¹ The question of a retreat in the above article indicated that O’Donnell probably believed he was shifting his position a little and wanted to clarify that this was required in the short term to secure national repudiation.

O’Donnell sought to make the case that non-payment of annuities was not tantamount to farmers totally absenting themselves from any financial obligations to the state; that could be arranged after they ceased paying annuities to Britain. The establishment of a defence fund being secured from unpaid annuities was an original ideal of the campaign, and harked back to the Plan of Campaign strategy of the Irish National League in the late 1880s; O’Donnell’s position had not altered that radically.

On 1 April another meeting took place at Dungloe in Donegal which attracted a much larger crowd than Loughrea. It was chaired by Phil MacCauley, who roused the audience by stating that the farmers’ own families should have the first claim on their income. O’Donnell used the imagery of modern warfare and compared the farmers in west Donegal to soldiers in the front line trenches and warned that they might have to bear more than people did in other areas. O’Donnell promised that if he thought those resisting annuities were going to be beaten, he would come and tell them, he would not carry them to the point where he thought disaster would overtake them.²² On the same day a meeting in Falcarragh of west Donegal Cumann na nGaedheal was addressed by Hugh Law TD who warned of the dangerous propaganda emanating from a ‘pay no rent’ meeting in Dungloe earlier that day. He claimed that in the Dáil, Fianna Fáil advocated the collection of rents, but instead of paying the bondholders, they wanted the government to keep this money. Then, outside the Dáil, they advocated a ‘pay no rent’ policy. ‘Where was the honesty in this?’ he asked. He concluded all of this was simply to cover Fianna Fáil’s true policy, which was simply to dismantle the Treaty.²³

²⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 24 Mar. 1928.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 7 Apr. 1928.

²³ *Ibid.*

Not all in Donegal were opposed to the payment of annuities; this was evidenced by a motion at the county council meeting on 20 March that drew attention to the high level of rates caused by the deduction in grants because of defaulting annuitants. The motion urged the Land Commission to establish a rent office in the county, convinced that bringing annuitants into closer touch with the Land Commission would result in the collection of a considerable amount of arrears that in turn would lead to a corresponding increase in grants and a reduction in rates.²⁴ However, at the county council meeting on 24 April there was a more conciliatory tone expressed for those farmers in arrears of annuity payments. A motion proposed by Patrick Mulreany was passed; that owing to the prevailing conditions the payment of annuities and rates were impossible and that the council request that local TDs confer with the relevant ministers to seek the best means of relieving the present deadlock. Mulreany claimed there were more than thirty holdings that had no stock on them for the last thirty years and nearly all were in arrears and were it not for this people would pay to graze cattle on them.²⁵

Throughout 1928 local councils continued to explore the possibility of extending payment times for annuities. A resolution from Middleton Urban Council in Cork called for a reduction and extension of repayment period of annuities by twenty years and this was later adopted throughout the country, for example at Clones in Monaghan, Trim in Meath, New Ross in Wexford, Tralee in Kerry and Nenagh in Tipperary. The resolution was marked read at Castlebar Urban Council.²⁶ At the AGM of the General Council of County Councils in Dublin on 25 April, the executive committee expressed the opinion that it was ‘unjust that the finances of local authorities should be dislocated in respect of the non-payment of these annuities, over the collection of which the local councils had no control’.²⁷ Dublin County Council passed a motion similar to this the following day after it was revealed that £2,457 had been deducted from its agricultural grant owing to non-payment of annuities.²⁸ Louth had £3,600 and Offaly £9,900 deducted from their agricultural grant owing to defaulting annuitants.²⁹

²⁴ *Strabane Chronicle*, 24 Mar. 1928.

²⁵ *Derry People and Tirconail News*, 28 Apr. 1928.

²⁶ *Irish Independent*, 10, 17 Mar. 1928; *Fermanagh Herald*, 10 Mar. 1928; *Meath Chronicle*, 10 Mar. 1928; *Kerryman*, 24 Mar. 1928; *Connaught Telegraph* 24 Mar. 1928; *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 Apr. 1928.

²⁷ *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1928; *Irish Independent*, 26 Apr. 1928.

²⁸ *Irish Times*, 27 Apr. 1928.

²⁹ *Irish Independent*, 17, 25 Apr. 1928.

Limerick County Council agreed to the publication of a list of defaulters on 26 May by a vote of twenty-two to six. The council heard that four hundred letters had been sent to defaulters and that there were only sixty-seven replies. It was also stated that the Land Commission and the state solicitor were prepared to take arrears in instalments.³⁰ In the Dáil Martin Roddy, parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Fisheries, replied to a question from Patrick Clancy (Labour, Limerick), that the arrears outstanding in Limerick on 31 January 1928 were £42,216.³¹ In May Kilkenny County Council also decided to publish a list of annuity defaulters. The secretary revealed that the list contained five hundred and sixty-two persons and that the amount outstanding in respect of the November and December instalments was £10,032. It was agreed to publish the names of those who owed more than two instalments.³²

In March 1928 O'Donnell stated that the Land Commission had intensified the offensive against the farmers and that many seizures had taken place throughout the country and he once again stressed the urgency for the demand to call off the bailiffs. He attacked the role of the print media: 'a system of legalised blackmail goes on; even the local press being hired to shame those who were slow to pay by threats of having their names put in the paper'.³³ He contrasted the printing of defaulters lists with the media's alleged reluctance to report on evictions and seizures: 'These seizures quietly effected, kept out of the press, and uniformly successful, leave public opinion cold ... Evictions are being carried out; in Kerry a family has been thrown on the wayside'.³⁴ O'Donnell argued that if there were no protest, the British Exchequer would boldly seek to root out those who fail to pay tribute. He urged the media to provide balanced reportage: 'The country only requires to be informed to be aroused. There are groups in revolt in every county'. If, he went on, a national demand to call off the bailiff is made: 'rule by the bailiffs will go to pieces before the passive hostility of the people'.³⁵

O'Donnell's article above was putting into context the whole argument of publishing defaulters names. From the position of those local councils who were broadly supportive of the government stance on annuities, the publication of names was seen as a justified way of forcing and or shaming people into payment. Local councils knew the mindset of rural Ireland

³⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 28 May 1928.

³¹ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 23, No. 19, col. 2174, 30 May 1928.

³² *Munster Express*, 1 June 1928.

³³ *An Phoblacht*, 3 Mar. 1928.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

and banked on the effect of publishing the defaulters' lists and argued that their actions were vindicated when in some areas and in the country overall the arrears decreased. Land Commission figures had shown an increase in payments of £97,000 and a decrease in arrears of £61,634 for the year ended March 1927.³⁶ However, Land Commission accounts for the year ended 31 March 1928 showed that £3,067,921 had been received in annuity payments, which were down £77,375 on the previous year. It also showed the arrears until March 1928 at £399,295, which was an increase of £21,685 from March 1927.³⁷ These Land Commission figures obviously reflect the extent of non-payment, which was evident in the numerous arrears cases before the courts during 1927 and 1928. The arrears figures may also perhaps indicate that O'Donnell's message on annuities was gaining traction with farmers, even though much of the non-payment was not on a structured organisational basis. In the opinion of the anti-tribute campaign, the press were not taking an impartial stance and the role of the councils in publishing defaulters' lists was seen as shameful, believing they should not resort to pricking the sensitivities of people who were already struggling with depressed agricultural conditions. The reluctance of the press to cover widely the seizures and evictions reinforced the anti-tribute campaign's view on the press's bias.

The campaign delivered on its promise to hold meetings throughout the country including one at Kinsale on 16 May 1928 presided over by Tom Mullins.³⁸ However, according to the Garda report, there was a small attendance and little enthusiasm despite the fact that it was a fair day in Kinsale.³⁹ O'Donnell spoke of wanting to organise resistance to the collection of annuities for which he advocated the use of constitutional methods. He appealed to members of all political parties to assist in the campaign and advocated the formation of branches of previously unheard of 'Irish Peasant Farmers Protective Association'.⁴⁰ The idea was that farmers, dockers, auctioneers, shopkeepers, railway employees and all labourers should join this association in order to band together to resist the collection of annuities. Branches of the association had been formed in Donegal and as a

³⁶ Land Commission Annual Reports, accounts 1923-31 (1926-7), (NLI, No. OPIE F/26). These figures covered collection statements for Land Acts, 1885, 1891, 1903 & 1909; see also chapter 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, (1927-8).

³⁸ Marie Coleman, 'Mullins, Thomas Lincoln Joseph', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009). (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do#>) (accessed 17 April 2017). Tom Mullins (1903-1978) was born in New York in 1903 to Irish parents. He moved to Ireland in 1914. He joined the IRA and was arrested in 1920 and held until the end of 1921. He opposed the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and was imprisoned in Mountjoy. He was a close friend of de Valera and helped found Fianna Fáil in 1926. He was elected a TD for Cork West in the June and September elections of 1927 and represented the Bandon area on Cork County Council between 1928-34. He was general-secretary of Fianna Fáil from 1945 to 73 and a member of the Seanad between 1958-69. He died in 1978.

³⁹ Report on meeting in Kinsale of anti-annuities campaign, 16 May 1928 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

result it was claimed only one cow had been seized in respect of land annuities since 1926.⁴¹ After the meeting O'Donnell and some others, mainly farmers, attended a conference in the Seaview hotel, but it was reported that no branch of the 'Farmers Protective Association' had yet been formed in Kinsale.⁴²

O'Donnell and Moore had achieved one of their objectives with the increased involvement of Fianna Fáil and although differences remained, the newly-moulded broad-based grouping had breathed new life into the campaign. However, de Valera had not yet spoken at any of the meetings and both O'Donnell and Moore knew of the significance of his presence. They consulted on how to bring this about and agreed that Clare, where he had really begun his rise to national political prominence, was the best option for a meeting involving de Valera.⁴³ There had also been considerable opposition to annuities in Clare with regular cases in the district courts dealing with annuity defaulters. Rev. Fogarty, Bishop of Kilaloe, speaking at Scariff in May blamed the non-payment of annuities as the most serious cause of high rates, which he said were crippling the farmers. 'It is a shame ... for men ... who encourage the people not to pay annuities, and thus have them cut their own throats with the knife of dishonesty'.⁴⁴ A return from the Land Commission discussed at the Clare County Council Finance Committee on 3 May showed there were 1,609 in annuity arrears in Clare amounting to £37,275 and although the numbers in arrears was down on the previous year (2,052), the amount owed was practically the same. The Land Commission had forwarded the list to the state solicitor to begin legal proceedings.⁴⁵ The chairman of the Finance Committee, Frank Barrett, outlined that about £36,000 was withheld from the council in grants, which was near to the amount owed to the Land Commission.⁴⁶

O'Donnell and Moore were aware of the situation in Clare. O'Donnell knew Barrett from when both were members of the IRA Executive in 1922 and later when they were in prison. He sought Barrett's help in persuading Clare County Council to adopt the campaign's resolution.⁴⁷ In May, Clare passed the resolution proposed by Barrett, which declared the payment of annuities to England to be illegal and immoral and demanded a suspension of decrees granted to enforce such payments. It was also decided to hold a county demonstration

⁴¹ Report on meeting in Kinsale of anti-annuities campaign, 16 May 1928 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 104.

⁴⁴ *Irish Independent*, 5 May 1928.

⁴⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 12 May 1928.

⁴⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 26 May 1928.

⁴⁷ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 105-6.

in support of the resolution.⁴⁸ O'Donnell was delighted, reporting that Clare had given a lead on the annuities issue by their action.⁴⁹ This was an undoubted success for the campaign, the first council to adopt the resolution.

A second resolution from Clare County Council, to call a county meeting for Ennis asking all Clare TDs to attend⁵⁰, was significant in terms of de Valera's position and efforts to get him to stand on a platform supporting the anti-annuities campaign. While de Valera supported the retention of the annuities, he was reticent about being seen to be too closely allied with O'Donnell and the 'call off the bailiffs' banner. De Valera was accompanied to the Ennis meeting organised for 17 June by other Fianna Fáil TDs Martin Sexton and Patrick Houlihan, while Patrick Hogan, Labour TD (Clare), was also present. Barrett chaired the meeting. De Valera said in his view that it was the duty of a county council to take up all matters which affected the people's daily lives and hoped the meeting would give a lead to other councils irrespective of the policies of the party that might have a majority there. He further stated that when Ireland got her share of the assets of the United Kingdom she might take her share of the liabilities in the way of land stock, but not until then. O'Donnell, Hogan and Hayes also spoke.⁵¹ It was a major coup for the anti-tribute campaign to get de Valera on its platform even if de Valera was watery in his support and his speech was as much on general national issues as it was on the specifics of annuities. O'Donnell recalled, 'in his speech that day he [de Valera] wandered, even rambled, over the whole national scene, but he never once mentioned the word bailiff. I addressed myself to that part of the resolution, and Clare farmers were a good audience for it'.⁵² O'Neill wrote, that 'O'Donnell's small community would have been crucified without Fianna Fáil support, and he felt compelled to assist those he had encouraged to revolt'. O'Neill states that Fianna Fáil support was even more significant because the IRA were refusing to back the campaign⁵³ (but by this stage the IRA were backing the anti-annuities campaign, see chapter 5). For O'Donnell and the campaign, the main reason for the meeting was to force de Valera's hand; he could not turn down an invitation from his constituency county council on an issue that Fianna Fáil broadly supported. Therefore, although he was tentative and careful in what he said, his presence on the platform at least identified him more closely with the campaign.

⁴⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 26 May 1928.

⁴⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 26 May 1928.

⁵⁰ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 107.

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 18 June 1928; *Irish Times*, 18 June 1928.

⁵² O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 108.

⁵³ O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card?', p. 29. The IRA had issued directives to its Tirconail Battalion to support the campaign in Jan. 1928 (see chapter 5).

As these public meetings on annuities increased the profile of the campaign, O'Donnell was also attracting more attention and he was arrested on numerous occasions during this period, usually detained for about four hours and then released. The reason given for these frequent arrests was O'Donnell's close association with certain criminal organisations and the suspicion that he was in possession of documents relating to these organisations.⁵⁴ This prompted Gerry Boland and de Valera to raise the issue in the Dáil in June. Boland asked why O'Donnell had been arrested fourteen times since 24 April and both seen it as an attempt to break him. It was stated O'Donnell only avoided arrest on the day of the Ennis meeting because he was in the company of Patrick Hogan, Labour TD, which Hogan confirmed.⁵⁵

In July, shortly after the success of the Ennis meeting, members of the anti-annuities campaign formed an Anti-Tribute League provisional national executive to direct teaching and activity in connection with the 'No Tribute' organisation. The League expressed confidence that the activities round the annuities issue had begun to yield national results. A handbill soon to be issued countrywide would explain among other things:

The Irish Land Commission is acting as a National Bailiff Association to collect tribute ... and we pay the expenses of that association.

That there is no law to compel anybody to assist the Land Commission pitch Irish folk on the roadside, nor to make raiding pay by buying seized cattle.

The executive will call on individuals not to pay ... to secure a national repudiation of the tribute to England.⁵⁶

The league had a secretary's office at 39 Blessington Street and its objective was set out on its headed notepaper: 'to collect national opinion to repudiate the British claim to £3 million annually as tribute from the Irish nation for the use of Irish soil'.⁵⁷ The members of the executive were Frank Barrett, Chairman, Eamonn Corbett, Neill Houston, Vice-Chairmen, Michael Hallissey, Secretary, Gilbert Lynch (Labour), Martin Fahy, Seán Hayes, Robert Beechinor, Kinsale; Stephen Flynn, Leitrim Co. Council; Charles Ridgeway, Dublin and O'Donnell.⁵⁸ Many of these men had been central to O'Donnell's campaign, Houston was with him from the start of the campaign in Donegal, and Corbett was prominent in Galway, while Barrett and Hayes were active opposing annuities in Clare. Some including O'Donnell and Barrett were also members of the IRA. While this newly formed executive contained

⁵⁴ Adjournment debate on the arrest of a Dublin man. *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 24, No. 12, cols 1756-7, 28 June 1928. O'Donnell also wrote of his sense of danger before the Ennis meeting and of attending it with Hogan, in *There will be another day*, p. 107.

⁵⁵ Adjournment debate on the arrest of a Dublin man. *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 24, No. 12, cols 1756-7, 28 June 1928.

⁵⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 21 July 1928.

⁵⁷ Headed paper of Anti Tribute League (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (5)).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

many county councillors and some in key positions in areas where the agitation was strongest; it was not national in a geographic context. What was probably predictable was its heavy reliance on those from the western seaboard, from Donegal to Cork; in fact, there was only one member from outside this area, Charles Ridgeway. The representation from Galway, Clare and Donegal reflected the resistance to annuities in these areas. The number of county councillors reflected the growth of Fianna Fáil and its increasing influence on the anti-annuities campaign. Nevertheless, it was notable that there were no TDs on the executive. However, for O'Donnell this was certainly incremental progress from the Rotunda meeting in February and indeed from the beginnings of the agitation in Donegal in the summer of 1926. By August 8,000 copies of *British plunder and Irish blunder* had been printed with nearly 3,000 distributed to Fianna Fáil, 1,500 to Sinn Féin with the others on general sale and just over 2,000 still in stock.⁵⁹ There was a call for a national convention on annuities and the pooling of money in a common fund to assist farmers at an anti-tribute meeting in Carrick-on-Shannon in July. O'Donnell, Ben Maguire TD (Fianna Fáil) and Seán O'Farrell ex TD spoke.⁶⁰

Even with the successes of the campaign, O'Donnell was not immune from criticism even from within the pages of *An Phoblacht*, mostly from the pen of his old adversary, Mary MacSwiney. O'Donnell wrote in April how some were sizzling with anger over his use of *An Phoblacht* to pursue his own agenda and how this agenda would 'split the compactness of real republicans'. O'Donnell remained adamant that if the tribute could be associated with workers' grievances, it would ferment real change and the republican movement needed to give leadership.⁶¹ MacSwiney asked for whom did the editor speak? Moreover, was he not trying to preach Fianna Fáil policy? She claimed O'Donnell's main attacks were against the second Dáil and the claim that Sinn Féin were not throwing themselves heart and soul into the 'No Tribute' campaign. MacSwiney admitted: 'Sinn Féin is not agreed as to the best method of dealing with that thorny subject, but that is not because any member believes the tribute should be paid to England'.⁶² MacSwiney further claimed the second Dáil had already repudiated every claim England made on the country: 'That non-payment of one particular tax to England was only a side issue, though an important one'. O'Donnell wanted her to explain Austin Stack's position (he was reluctant to back a call for non-payment, see chapter 4), if all

⁵⁹ Note from Gaelic Press on distribution of Moore's pamphlet, 18 Aug. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (4)).

⁶⁰ *Irish Independent*, 26 July 1928; *Irish Times*, 27 July, 1928; *Kerryman* 18 Aug. 1928.

⁶¹ *An Phoblacht*, 14 Apr. 1928.

⁶² *Ibid.*

in Sinn Féin were against the tribute.⁶³ Continuing her criticisms MacSwiney questioned Moore's intent and whether he would be satisfied if the annuities were paid to the Free State: 'I would think it as wrong to pay anything to England's Free State as to England herself'. She argued that those on low annuities on poor land should not have to pay anything even to an Irish Government until such time as they could live decently. Moreover, that it was an appalling crime that 'people should accept such a drain on their resources without murmur'.⁶⁴ It was perhaps ironic that MacSwiney should finish with so strong an attack on those paying annuities while Sinn Féin was not engaging in the agitation against payments. Her position was probably best summed up by her attitude to Moore. Although at times MacSwiney seemed to be looking for some form of co-operation with the IRA and other republicans by outlining Sinn Féin's position, she still seemed unconvinced of the significance of the annuities issue.

Arrears continued to be an issue along the western seaboard in particular, amounting to £5,228 in Mayo up to 31 March 1928. It was remarked that though Mayo had the lowest arrears it was still an indication of the precarious financial position of tenant farmers in the country. The threat of publication would not compel people to pay what they could not; it would simply advertise their poverty, which in most cases was not the fault of the debtor.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the Land Commission was granted decrees against annuitants at Longford, Kildare, Manorhamilton (Leitrim), Dingle (Kerry), Claremorris (Mayo), Sligo, Abbeyleix (Laois) and Galway in May and June.⁶⁶

In July a debate in the Dáil was a reflection of the unease the annuities situation was having throughout the agricultural community. While discussing the Agricultural Credit Bill Denis Gorey (Cumann na nGaedheal, Carlow-Kilkenny) stated that it was a 'peculiar anomaly that a person applying for a loan who owes a half year's or a year's annuity and who has his land fully stocked cannot get a loan, but if he sells a cow to pay the annuities which he owes he can borrow money to repurchase cattle. He is open to the risk of selling good cows and buying bad ones'.⁶⁷ Martin Corry (Fianna Fáil, Cork east) found it astonishing that the farmer

⁶³ *An Phoblacht*, 5 May 1928. Austin Stack had differed with others in the party on the issue at the Ard Fheis in Dec. 1927. O'Donnell had recounted talking to him on the issue and felt he and Stack were poles apart (see chapter 4).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 May, 16 June 1928.

⁶⁵ *Ballina Herald*, 2 June 1928.

⁶⁶ *Westmeath Examiner*, 12 May 1928; *Kildare Observer*, 12 May, 9 June 1928; *Fermanagh Herald*, 26 May 1928; *Kerryman*, 2 June 1928; *Connacht Tribune*, 2, 30 June 1928; *Ballina Herald*, 2 June 1928; *Leinster Express*, 9 June 1928.

⁶⁷ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 24, No.15, col. 2232, 6 July 1928.

who owed £1,000 to the bank could get a loan from the Corporation, while the farmer who only owed £20 land annuities could not.⁶⁸ John Daly (Cumann na nGaedheal, Cork east) wanted the barriers to receiving a loan removed if a farmer owed half a year's annuity.⁶⁹ John Nolan (Cumann na nGaedheal, Limerick) outlined the position of a man he knew who was refused a loan because he was one month in arrears with one annuity instalment amounting to £1, 1s.⁷⁰

The number of Cumann na nGaedheal TDs who raised concerns with areas of the bill in relation to annuities was indicative of how the issue was fundamentally linked to the wider crises in agriculture. The three Cumann na nGaedheal TDs mentioned, came from rural constituencies and while they were in no way supportive of the anti-tribute campaign, it reflected their concerns on areas surrounding annuities and government policy on the issue. Clearly, there were some Cumann na nGaedheal TDs who recognised the difficulties annuities were causing and that some initiative was needed to address the issue. Whether it was an extended payment period, a moratorium, or as had been suggested in the Dáil access to loans from the ACC, there was growing concern that the status quo could not continue indefinitely. Within Cumann na nGaedheal, there was an element of disquiet with government attempts to ostracise all those in arrears, as was reflected in their contribution to this Dáil debate.

In August 1928 Leitrim became the second county council to endorse the Anti-Tribute League resolution. A motion proposed by Michael McGrath disapproved of the collection methods of the payments to England and handing over of revenue that should be kept at home. Nevertheless, there was some resistance to repudiation provided by Patrick Briody who stated that there had been agreement that no political discussion would be allowed in the council chamber and that this motion was introducing the thin end of the wedge of politics, and the resolution would have little effect.⁷¹ Although Briody was not the first councillor to complain about political issues encroaching into the councils workings, it was evident that annuities were been discussed at council meetings throughout the country. Moreover, regardless of those who wanted to place annuities totally in a financial context of grants received or held back, the issue was political as well as economic and social. Indeed, it was naive to believe that council chambers would remain free from politics and with the emergence of Fianna Fáil, political debate became an increasingly significant aspect of

⁶⁸ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 24, No.15, col. 2238, 6 July 1928.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 2246.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 2260.

⁷¹ *Irish Times*, 30 Aug. 1928; *Anglo-Celt*, 1 Sept. 1928.

meetings and within this, the annuities issue was prominent. The Anti-Tribute League had targeted county councils as a means of heightening awareness of their campaign in the full knowledge of the political nature of the councils.

On 8 August 1928 farming representatives from fifteen counties met in Dublin to form an Agricultural League. The meeting was presided over by Christopher Byrne, Chairman of Wicklow Committee on Agriculture; former Fianna Fáil TD Patrick Belton supplied a report on the conference. The league was to be non-party with membership open to all who were interested in the safeguarding and development of agriculture. A standing committee was instructed to prepare a memorandum on the land purchase annuities, with special reference to financial manipulations connected with the Land Acts 1885-1909, which they felt 'in certain circumstances the annuities from the 1885 Act should be terminated and in the case of the other acts considerably reduced'.⁷²

Annuities were also a regular topic of discussion at Board of Health meetings. The boards contained many political representatives including TDs and county councillors, providing a further platform for representatives to raise political issues including the annuities. In September, the County Wicklow Board passed a motion from James Everett TD (Labour) which called on the government to extend the payment time by fifty years and failing that they should arrange that no annuities be paid in the next two years. Later in September, the Leitrim Board passed a similar resolution proposed by Michael McGrath.⁷³ In October, the motion was adopted by Cavan County Council and a similar resolution by Longford County Council, and in November by the Galway Board of Health. The resolution was rejected and marked read by Meath and Mayo Health Boards respectively.⁷⁴ Dublin County Council discussed the Wicklow motion but passed a different resolution proposed by Patrick Belton, calling for a revision of the Ultimate Financial Settlement of March 1926 and a moratorium on annuities.⁷⁵ Committees of Agriculture in Sligo and Cavan marked the resolution read in November and December, while it was passed in Donegal and Galway in

⁷² *Irish Independent*, 13, 18 Aug. 1928; *Irish Times*, 11 Aug. 1928. Patrick Belton had been the first Fianna Fáil TD to take his seat in Dáil, doing so in July 1927. He lost his seat at the Sept. 1927 Election. Byrne had been a Cumann na nGaedheal TD for Wicklow, but resigned from the party in 1926 over the Government's position on the Boundary Commission. He helped form Clann Éireann, but lost his seat in June 1927 and was also unsuccessful in the Sept. election. He regained his seat in 1943 as a Fianna Fáil TD.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 26, 28 Sept. 1928.

⁷⁴ *Anglo-Celt*, 13 Oct. 1928; *Connacht Tribune*, 20 Oct. 1928; *Longford Leader*, 27 Oct. 1928; *Meath Chronicle*, 27 Oct. 1928; *Connacht Tribune*, 10 Nov. 1928.

⁷⁵ *Irish Independent*, 26 Oct. 1928.

this period.⁷⁶ This was furthering the argument that politics and the annuities were present in many areas of public life.

In August the Labour Party offered its detailed examination of the annuities question in three weekly articles by Thomas Johnson in its weekly paper *The Irishman*. Johnson laid out the legal and moral claims and arguments and counter-arguments both for and against retention.⁷⁷ He explained that Labour could follow a ‘no rent’ populist course but argued for a more responsible approach; he said there was justification for a plea for postponement of payments until an improvement in market conditions.⁷⁸ Johnson believed there was definite evidence that by the 1891 Act, annuities were part of the national debt, but the 1920 Government of Ireland Act seemed to place them outside this debt.⁷⁹ The conclusions he drew were that (1) the tenants had no justification in law or morality in repudiating annuities on the grounds that they are paid into British funds. (2) There appeared to be some grounds in the December 1925 Agreement for the Free State to be released from the annuities. (3) The Free State could not hope to avoid payment except by repudiation or an *ex gratia* concession from the British. (4) There were grounds for re-opening the financial settlement in the hope of a payment from Britain regarding over taxation, assets, or a share of war reparations, although he admitted this might involve a fair amount of risk.⁸⁰

Moore critiqued Johnson’s articles arguing that he was wrong concerning the 1920 Act and that annuities were deemed to be part of the national debt. He outlined that the Free State claims were based on statutes passed by both parliaments not on some private agreement whose terms might be referred to an arbitrator.⁸¹ He was astonished that Johnson should claim that some of these financial arrangements were not fully debated in the Dáil; Johnson was leader of the opposition and chairman of the Accounts Committee and should have been foremost in raising the issue. Moore claimed these matters were fully debated in the Seanad.⁸² Regarding Johnson’s idea to reopen negotiations on the Free State counter claims on taxation, assets and war reparations, he pointed out that the difference in what he hoped to gain and what the Free State possessed is that the later (the annuities) ‘are in our hands’. Johnson’s

⁷⁶ *Western People*, 1 Dec. 1928; *Anglo-Celt*, 8 Dec. 1928; *Connacht Tribune*, 8 Dec. 1928; *Strabane Chronicle*, 22 Dec. 1928.

⁷⁷ *The Irishman*, 4, 18, 25 Aug. 1928.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 Aug. 1928.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1928.

⁸⁰ *Irishman*, 25 Aug. 1928.

⁸¹ Moore’s reply to Johnson’s articles on annuities, Sept. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (10)).

⁸² *Ibid.*

proposal to ‘surrender the only assets on which we can safely rely in exchange for others which are beyond our reach’ left Moore doubtful of him as an adviser or negotiator.⁸³

Although the *Irishman* articles demonstrated the interest of Johnson and Labour on annuities, it again revealed the party’s reluctance to take a firm stand on the issue. Granted conclusions had been put forward, but the main bargaining position seemed to represent a proposed trading of annuities for concessions on taxation, assets and war reparations. Moreover, Johnson’s stance had exposed divisions within the party, as just two months previously Patrick Hogan from Clare had helped O’Donnell attend the Ennis meeting and had spoken there on a ‘no rent’ platform.

Seizures and the granting of decrees continued, some of these resulting in arrest and imprisonment as in the case of Seamus Duirnin from Croveigh, Donegal. Duirnin, who had been one of the first to join O’Donnell in the campaign, was sentenced at Dungloe District Court to three months in Sligo prison for failing to comply with a decree for unpaid annuities.⁸⁴ In an editorial, O’Donnell wrote of Duirnin’s imprisonment and his involvement in the repudiation of tribute since 1918 and railed against some attitudes to the annuities campaign, and how Duirnin’s imprisonment might have happened:

That the writ of the British Exchequer can reach out and drag an old man from his growing crops to jail is nothing new. But that such a thing should happen and the nation remains indifferent would be something alarmingly new. The nation’s sovereignty extends to the soil. That sovereignty is Seamus Duirnin’s protection. Republicans who think that the call to back such cases as Duirnin’s with all the energy ... is an undue emphasis on this phase of the struggle are just tired and prefer to talk abstractions that cannot mean any work. Tired folk should be left to rest; they will be alright by and by, but peasant Ireland must be put in contact with Duirnin’s case and it is up to republicans to do it. And they must do it now.⁸⁵

There was undoubtedly a sense of anger resonating from O’Donnell over the imprisonment of Duirnin, particularly in light of his age, he was seventy-two, but more pertinently with what he perceived to be the callous attitude of the Irish public. Again most of his anger was directed at Sinn Féin in a thinly-disguised rebuke of their notions of an abstract republic and unwillingness to engage in the anti-annuities campaign. O’Donnell seemed particularly frustrated that not alone would Sinn Féin not help, but would instead criticise the

⁸³ Moore’s reply to Johnson’s articles on annuities, Sept. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (10)).

⁸⁴ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 22 Sept. 1928.

⁸⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 15 Sept. 1928.

emphasis he was placing on the annuities issue, an obvious reference to ongoing debates with MacSwiney.

Sinn Féin made occasional pronouncements on annuities; one of the more interesting was at a rally in Clashgenny, Carlow in September addressed by J.J. Kelly (Scelig), who suggested that £3 million of the £4 million annuities sent to England each year should be given to people about to emigrate, at £100 each to help them stay in Ireland. The money would keep 30,000 people at home every year and by achieving this Ireland would soon have a robust population, without which economic progress is impossible. MacSwiney also spoke on this idea.⁸⁶ The idea while arguably well intentioned was anything but practical; how, for example, were prospective emigrants to be identified? It seemed naive and offered no explanation of how the payment of annuities to the British Exchequer was to be stopped.

By the end of 1928, the 'No Tribute' campaign had certainly advanced the annuities issue, even if differences remained within the organisation. O'Donnell had to contend with differing opinions from some within Sinn Féin. However, Moore had proved a valuable ally in trying to soothe some of the issues with Fianna Fáil, as witnessed at the Loughrea meeting in March. Further public meetings had been held across the country, the highlight for the campaign being de Valera's appearance at Ennis in June. Clare and Leitrim County Council's had repudiated the tribute. The impact of government legislation and Land Commission decrees and seizures were taking effect. The Rotunda meeting and the formation of the Anti-Tribute League in July had tied Fianna Fáil more into the campaign and they were eager to promote their policies and assert their influence which in some areas ran contrary to O'Donnell's views and this was to provide another significant nuance to the agitation.

⁸⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 29 Sept. 1928; *Irish Independent*, 18 Sept. 1928.

CHAPTER 7

THE ANTI-TRIBUTE LEAGUE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REACTION

The formation of the Anti-Tribute League in July 1928 had created a structure to pursue the programme of the national meeting on annuities at the Rotunda in February. County councils had passed the campaign's resolution and de Valera had stood on their platform and the strategy was to force the issue further onto the county councils. It was decided that Moore's new pamphlet *Catechism of Land Annuities* would be distributed to all councillors in order to help in this objective. O'Donnell continued to promote the annuities campaign through public meetings. The government's response continued to warn against the dangers to Ireland's credit rating and international standing if annuities were repudiated. However, slight shifts could be detected in government circles, with suggestions from Henry J. Moloney that the best approach would be to seek a moratorium on annuities from the British government for a period of five years.¹ The government rejected this idea, on the grounds of the likely difficulty of getting people to recommence payment after a moratorium.² The debate continued to play itself out against the background of depression and continued seizures and decrees as contesting sides sought to force the annuities issue.

At the third annual Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis in Dublin on 25-26 October, the honorary secretaries reported on the national executive decision to appoint a special committee to report on the question of annuities.³ It outlined the results of the committee's deliberations, which included the suggestion that the Ultimate Financial Settlement be classed as unconstitutional and prejudicial to the financial stability of the Free State. It proposed that when a satisfactory agreement had been achieved a substantial part of the annuities should be used to help struggling farmers, especially those in the Gaeltacht and Congested Districts. This was circulated to the press and all Fianna Fáil cumainn, and flagged as the party's position on the annuities question.⁴

At the Ard-Fheis, there were resolutions from the Leixlip (Kildare), Castleplunket (Roscommon) and Rathmines cumainn requesting that Fianna Fáil press for a revision of the

¹ Letter from Henry J. Moloney to Diarmuid O'Hegarty secretary Executive Council, 14 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/291 (15)).

² Letter to Blythe from Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Department of the President, 19 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/291 (15)).

³ Report of Honorary Secretaries to the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, 25 Oct. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35). For more on the report of the special committee set up to look at annuities see chapter 5.

⁴ Ibid.

financial settlement of March 1926. Another motion from the Fintan Lalor Cumann, Rathmines declaring land annuities to be neither morally nor legally due to the British Treasury was adopted.⁵ The resolution on the financial settlement was partly addressed in the report from the special committee on annuities. De Valera spoke on some matters arising from the resolutions, outlining his view that Fianna Fáil did not stand for a policy of non-payment of the annuities, and advocated payment into a central fund. It would then be the government's decision as to the manner in which the annuity money should be spent on the development of Irish agriculture.⁶

The Fintan Lalor Cumann had a further motion adopted: that all decrees for annuities issued or about to be issued should be suspended pending a national settlement.⁷ This motion was certainly close to O'Donnell's position of 'Call off the bailiffs' and its adoption demonstrated support within the grassroots of Fianna Fáil, even if the leadership remained slightly more reticent on this issue, preferring to concentrate on the legality of payments to the British Treasury. Similarly, across the country, Fianna Fáil TDs and councillors were prepared to condemn the actions of the bailiffs, but party leaders were more reluctant to demonstrate public support for fear of being too closely identified with O'Donnell. What was more revealing of the position of the Fianna Fáil hierarchy on annuities was the decision to circulate Moore's pamphlet on the Ultimate Financial Settlement.⁸ Moore was elected onto the national executive of the party at this 1928 Ard Fheis.⁹

However, as Fianna Fáil formulated its position on annuities, some of their motives and tactics were questioned. Former party TD Patrick Belton claimed that prior to the June 1927 General Election he had discussed the issue of annuities with de Valera and although de Valera seemed to have no fixed opinions he did commit himself to non-payment of the annuities to England and this persuaded Belton to become a candidate for Fianna Fáil in that election.¹⁰ A Dáil vote was to take place in mid July 1927 to authorise payments to England. Belton requested that a party meeting be called to decide their policy on the vote but received no reply and no meeting took place until after the Dáil had authorised payment to England.

⁵ Resolutions dealing with the work of the Fianna Fáil Party in the Dáil (Finance), (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35).

⁶ *Irish Independent*, 26 Oct. 1928.

⁷ Resolutions dealing with the work of the Fianna Fáil Party in the Dáil (Agriculture), (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35).

⁸ Report of Honorary Secretaries to the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, 25 Oct. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35). The pamphlet referred to was *British Plunder and Irish Blunder*. For more on this see chapter 5.

⁹ National Executive elections, Ard Fheis, 25 Oct. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/742).

¹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 29 Dec. 1928.

Because of the introduction of the Public Safety Bill in July 1927 and in particular the clause ‘making any association for the non-payment of annuities an offence’, Belton sought advice from de Valera on whether to take his seat in the Dáil or resign. Once again, he received no reply until he was informed that he was to be expelled from the party for which no reason was forthcoming. However, he had no doubt it was because he had pressed for action on the annuities issue.¹¹ Belton claimed he received a torrent of abuse for taking his seat from Fianna Fáil, his Fianna Fáil accusers followed just three weeks later and took their seats in the Dáil, when it was too late. Belton argued that if they had entered the Dáil earlier Fianna Fáil could have ousted the government and reopened the financial settlement before it was approved by the Dáil.¹² Belton’s comments pointed to Fianna Fáil’s uncertainty during what could be termed a period of flux in the wake of the June 1927 election. Fianna Fáil could of course argue that there had been much turmoil for them in the summer of 1927, but Belton believed he had exposed a hesitancy within the party to seize the initiative on annuities and the broader financial arrangements with Britain. This he viewed as a lost opportunity.

Fianna Fáil were still discussing their position on annuities and one of the matters due for consideration at a national executive meeting on 19 November was the suitability for adoption and publication by the party of a leaflet prepared by Moore, entitled *Catechism of land annuities*.¹³ In this leaflet, Moore provided an historical analysis of land confiscations in Ireland and the efforts of the Land League of the 1880s, which forced the British Government to introduce a land purchase scheme. He made the point that the farmers had no individual dealings with the banks or landlords, but with the Land Commission and with the British Government itself. This was an admission that Land Purchase Annuities were regarded as public funds and essentially part of the British national debt.¹⁴ Under the heading ‘What could be done’ he suggested £1 million could be set aside for the reduction of the annuities, a second million used to relieve rates, which were collected for the funding of local

¹¹ *Irish Independent*, 29 Dec. 1928.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Letter to each member of the national executive outlining matters for discussion for 19 Nov. meeting. 14 Nov. 1928. (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/352 (8)).

¹⁴ *Catechism of land annuities* (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/352 (8)). Within the leaflet, Moore said the people were paying rent for confiscated land until the government unwillingly and under pressure when the country could no longer be governed bought out the landlords, reduced the rent and called them annuities. The National Debt Commissioners had advanced the money and it was described as part of the National Debt in the Government of Ireland Act 1920. He went on to outline issues concerning this in the Treaty (Dec. 1921), Boundary Agreement (Dec. 1925), and the Ultimate Financial Settlement (Mar. 1926), and then explained how the money could be used if retained in the Free State. Much of what appeared in this leaflet was also contained in *British plunder and Irish blunder*.

government, and a third million to relieve the taxpayer.¹⁵ It was essentially making similar arguments to his earlier pamphlet *British plunder and Irish blunder*.

In November, Dr James Ryan criticised an address by Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture, to the Dublin Chamber of Commerce. Ryan outlined some of the difficulties facing agriculture in the context of prevailing economic circumstances: ‘the farmer receives 31.9 % more for his produce than in 1911-13, but taxation per head has increased from £2 9s, 5d, in 1911-13 to £6 19s, 5d, in 1928-9 (estimates 1928-9). The farmer’s income has increased by 31.9%, his taxation by 225.1 %’.¹⁶ Ryan said Fianna Fáil were advised not to mention the £3 million a year annuities that were leaving the country lest they should be accused of inducing farmers to repudiate their liabilities, which he said no party had done or was doing.¹⁷ In the Dáil on 2 November Gerry Boland, Fianna Fáil, raised the case of a man in his Roscommon constituency who was in arrears to the Land Commission, whose cow was seized and sold for £6 but only 12s 6d went to pay part of the man’s debt with the remainder being used to pay the Garda expenses.¹⁸

At an Anti-Tribute League meeting in Nenagh in November local farmers outlined how annuity payments could be utilized to help farmers and fund industrial projects such as the Shannon scheme and hence help stem the tide of emigration. O’Donnell, who at this stage was continuing to promote the programme of the Anti-Tribute League across the country, encouraged the people of north Tipperary to insist that their county council pass a resolution opposing tribute. O’Donnell claimed that if one-third of the money from annuities could be used for a new credit bank, money could be made available at less than two per cent interest.¹⁹

The Agricultural League, which had been formed in August 1928 (see chapter 6), held a convention on 9 October. A motion proposed by Thomas Mullins and seconded by Patrick Brett a county councillor from Mullingar (who had contested the June 1927 General Election

¹⁵ *Catechism of land annuities* (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/352 (8)).

¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 3 Nov. 1928. This was in reply to a speech Hogan had made at the Dublin Chamber of Commerce at the end of Oct. in which he outlined his and the governments ideas for the development and improvement of agriculture. In this he was critical of aspects of Fianna Fáil’s plans for agriculture, particularly in this instance their plan for increased wheat production, arguing that they should not try to compete with the special resources of Canada, but rather to increase production in existing areas from which imported wheat could be paid for. It was part of the general discussion on the issue of tillage versus grazing as the best model for Irish agriculture.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ In Committee of Finance-vote on Garda Síochána, *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 26, No. 12, cols 1439-40, 2 Nov. 1928.

¹⁹ *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 Nov. 1928.

as an Independent)²⁰, called on the convention to declare the annuities to be neither morally or legally due to the British Treasury and it was referred to the League's standing committee for consideration. The standing committee's opinion was that as a result of financial adjustments made under a clause in the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the legality of the payment to England was unquestionable.²¹ The committee suggested the settlement may have been a bad one for Ireland but that did not alter its status. The committee decided to disassociate from the 'Land Annuities' campaign, viewing that campaign as misdirected. The committee's decision was to seek an immediate revision of the Ultimate Financial Settlement and pending this that there should be a moratorium on annuities.²² On 21 November Galway County Council backed the Anti-Tribute League resolution by twenty-three votes to three.²³ The decision was criticised by William O'Malley former Irish Party MP for Galway Connemara, stating repudiation was not an issue 'until the exigencies of de Valera or the Republican party made it a plank on their platform. He predicted that the repudiation cry in some form would certainly be raised at the next general election.²⁴ This was an example of the implementation of the strategy of the Anti-Tribute League, 'to base the forthcoming agitation on the county councils'. To further aid this project Moore's *Catechism* was to be sent to every county councillor in Ireland.²⁵

However, despite the Galway decision and other councils backing the resolution, the campaign was taking its toll on those resisting payment, especially where O'Donnell had initiated the agitation in Donegal. In the Dáil Archie Cassidy (Labour, Donegal) complained that many farmers in his constituency could not pay their annuities because of their economic circumstances.²⁶ A plea from the west Donegal Anti-Tribute League asked people to wake up to the facts of the situation: 'Ease the burden on us; back us financially while organising your own districts. Money sent us will be available for national purposes when there is a national rally. ... Build a defence fund here so we may not be crushed in before the rest of Ireland awakes'.²⁷ This had concerned O'Donnell that before the rest of Ireland was properly organised; the campaign in Donegal would falter. He was aware that resistance in isolated areas could not be sustained.

²⁰ ElectionsIreland.org, <http://electionsireland.org/results/general/04dail.cfm> (17 Apr. 2017).

²¹ *Westmeath Examiner*, 3 Nov. 1928.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Cork Examiner*, 23 Nov. 1928.

²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 28 Nov. 1928.

²⁵ Lecture by Moore to Rathmines Fianna Fáil cumann, Dec. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (4)).

²⁶ Debate on Supplementary Agricultural Grant, *Dáil Debates*, Vol 26, No. 17, col. 1741, 8 Nov. 1928.

²⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 17 Nov. 1928.

However, the strategy of getting resolutions passed repudiating the annuities at county councils and public bodies was making an impact, and opponents of the campaign were taking notice. A *Cork Examiner* editorial (the paper was opposed to the anti-annuities campaign) felt it necessary to advise farmers to turn a deaf ear to what it called mischief-making resolutions being supported at county council and Committee of Agriculture meetings. It reasoned that these political issues should not be discussed at council meetings. The article argued that the farmers had got a good deal with the various land acts and prophesied that there could be serious consequences if the British Government and traders made it difficult to sell Irish produce in retaliation for a repudiation of annuities.²⁸ An *Irish Independent* editorial opposing the agitation also commented on the prevalence of the issue at council meetings: ‘this question has been discussed at meetings of local bodies throughout the country and on many platforms with an irresponsibility that betrays a lamentable lack of honesty and honour’.²⁹ An annuities debate led to the adjournment of a Mayo County Council meeting on 24 November because of disorder. After the main business of the agenda, Fianna Fáil councillors sought to propose the motion repudiating payment to Britain, but the chairman Michael Davis TD (Cumann na nGaedheal) citing the motion as political would not accept it. Many Cumann na nGaedheal councillors had left at this stage, and as Fianna Fáil were now in the majority they demanded that Davis vacate the chair and the motion be put to the floor. He refused to do so and adjourned the meeting.³⁰

On 28 November 1928 Dr James Ryan moved a Dáil motion that ‘the Executive Council is deserving of censure for its failure to take effective steps to deal with the depression in agriculture and the serious economic situation arising there from’.³¹ Ryan contended that farmers were being compelled to get rid of their stock to ward off the sheriff with his decrees.³² The motion was defeated by seventy-three votes to sixty-four.³³ While this debate did not deal with annuities, but with the general conditions and government policy pertaining to agriculture, it was all part of a Fianna Fáil strategy designed to target the government on a wide range of agricultural issues including annuities. During the debate Ryan mentioned several times that he did not want to discuss annuities now but rather in a future debate.³⁴

²⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 24 Nov. 1928.

²⁹ *Irish Independent*, 20 Dec. 1928.

³⁰ *Irish Independent*, 27 Nov. 1928; *Connaught Telegraph*, 1 Dec. 1928.

³¹ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 27, No. 7, col. 839, 28 Nov. 1928.

³² *Ibid.*, cols 843-4.

³³ *Ibid.*, cols 964-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, cols 839-963.

Efforts by Tom Mullins to have the Anti-Tribute League resolution passed at Cork County Council on 15 November witnessed contentious debate and opposition to what was perceived as the political agenda of the motion. It was argued that Mullins should move this in the Dáil rather than the council chambers. The chairman William J. Broderick adjourned the debate until the next council meeting.³⁵ This meeting on 13 December involved another lengthy debate and the resolution being rejected when a direct negative to Mullins motion moved by David O’Gorman was carried. The *Cork Examiner* hoped the issue would not be raised again at the council and that it would be good if other bodies took the same course regarding what they termed ‘the stunt resolution being sent out from the County Dublin and is being boomed where ever possible by people of Fianna Fáil leanings’.³⁶ Fianna Fáil were anxious to maintain forward momentum on annuities. A motion proposed by James Ryan that the annuities be retained in Ireland and be devoted to the relief of rates on agricultural holdings, thus giving farmers in the Free State equal benefits with those in the North and Britain, was to be on the agenda for the party’s national executive meeting on 3 January.³⁷ The proposal to use the money for the relief of rates was new and would no doubt be a popular decision across the farming community.

At the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis on 18 November 1928, delegates discussed at length a resolution from Cork City Comhairle Ceantair that no money in the form of annuities or pensions should be paid to England, as that payment was an acceptance of the conquest. There were similar motions on the agenda from Clare and Dublin City North. Eventually an amendment proposed by Austin Stack and seconded by Dr. J. A. Madden was adopted as a substantive motion; ‘that this Ard Fheis is of the opinion that no form of tribute is payable from this country to any foreign power, and it is reaffirmed that Sinn Féin stands for the complete independence and absolute sovereignty of Ireland’.³⁸ The motion adopted was broad and while ‘from of tribute’ was obviously meant to cover annuity payments the fact that the word ‘annuities’ was not contained within the motion demonstrated a certain reluctance by Sinn Féin to clarify their position on the issue.

³⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 16 Nov. 1928.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1928.

³⁷ For all members of national executive concerning agenda for meeting in Jan., 28 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351 (54-6)).

³⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 1 Dec. 1928.

In December there was reaction from the Catholic Church to the annuities agitation as Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Kilaloe, gave a stern rebuke to those councils who voted in favour of repudiation:

It is not for enunciating Bolshevik principles of this kind that the county councils are maintained by the rates of the people. ... To say that the farmers are not legally bound to pay their annuities when it is the clear law of the country that they should do so ... is simply to play fast and loose with the elementary virtues of truth and common honesty. It is very regrettable to see men who should know better propounding subversive principles of that kind, which strike at the very basis of social life.³⁹

These denouncements from the church would become more frequent and will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

Moore replied to Bishop Fogarty privately and publicly contending that not one of the councils who passed the resolution had stated that the farmers should not pay their annuities to the proper authorities, i.e. the Free State Government.⁴⁰ Moore argued that if annuities were retained, it would not be necessary to raise new loans and people could live in comfort. It was to the county councils that the Anti-Tribute League looked to enable them to affect this reform.⁴¹ The reaction of Bishop Fogarty to the decisions of the county councils further demonstrated the impact the tactic of bringing the issue into this sphere was having. Galway County Councillor, Martin Fahy also replied to Fogarty's comments, asking would he deny the fact that the land was taken by robbery, roguery, confiscation and murder and should the farmers buy back the soil? Fahy referred to the history of land confiscation: 'we are out to undo the robber and seize back our soil from them, and unless our Holy Mother the Church ... makes it an article of faith that we are bound to buy back the soil of our forefathers from the robber invaders we will pay no heed whatsoever to the partisan pronouncements of individual bishops'.⁴² Bishop Fogarty returned to the annuities issue in his Lenten Pastoral in February: 'let us deny ourselves and pay our lawful debts; ... let us close our ears to sophistry and pay our land annuities, like honest Catholics and good Irishmen'.⁴³ The intervention of the Catholic hierarchy, albeit from individual figures, can be viewed as a ratcheting up of the campaign. Prior to this, the clergy had commented only occasionally but Fogarty's intervention seemed more pronounced. The position of the Church would be further tested in 1929, when the activities of Fr. John Fahy brought him to the attention of civic authorities and later imprisonment. This will be discussed in detail in chapter eight.

³⁹ *Nenagh Guardian*, 29 Dec. 1928.

⁴⁰ Reply to bishop's rebuke of county council's decision to support the Anti-Tribute League resolution, 19 Dec. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (10)).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *An Phoblacht*, 12 Jan. 1929.

⁴³ *Irish Independent*, 18 Feb. 1929; *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1929.

Meanwhile, Cumann na nGaedheal politicians such as Ernest Blythe believed Fianna Fáil still had some way to travel politically and their attitude on the annuities was a case in point.⁴⁴ He spoke of Fianna Fáil's cautious approach and how they generally refused to associate with those advocating that farmers should not pay. He explained that Fianna Fáil were cognisant of the facts of the land purchase acts, although their leadership left themselves open to a line of escape while advocating their policy in this regard. The whole object according to Blythe was a vote catching exercise by fooling people into believing that annuities might not have to be paid.⁴⁵ Some of what Blythe said was not strictly correct, Fianna Fáil had shared platforms with O'Donnell and others who had advocated non-payment of the annuities. However, what Blythe had identified, like Belton previously, was a certain hesitancy in Fianna Fáil on the issue.

Meanwhile, during this period, O'Donnell had continued to try to persuade the IRA to embrace a more politically active role and on 8 December 1928, the first meeting of a new grouping, Comhairle na Poblachta, formed to co-ordinate and direct political activity between the IRA, Sinn Féin and Cumann na mBan, took place in Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin. Seán McBride chaired the meeting at which O'Donnell spoke about the need to connect organised industrial workers with a similarly organised rural Ireland.⁴⁶ Boywer Bell later claimed that O'Donnell's proposal for a new political direction was too radical for the IRA and Comhairle na Poblachta was formed partly to placate O'Donnell.⁴⁷ O'Donnell had wanted a more socially radical movement, to which the IRA acquiesced later in 1931 in the form of Saor Éire, which will be discussed in chapters nine and ten. In January 1929 Brian O'Higgins, Sinn Féin, addressed a Comhairle na Poblachta meeting in Meath, and outlined that in recent months the second Dáil and the executive of the Volunteers had formed a national council to direct and link up the activities of Sinn Féin, the IRA and Cumann na mBan, but it was not an attempt to set up a new organisation. At a meeting of the group in January, delegates urged the development throughout Ireland of repudiation of tribute to England. They were strongly of the opinion that the Comhairle should develop this phase of anti-imperialist attack. Further co-ordinating meetings were held in east and west Clare and Tuam on 17 February.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 10 Dec. 1928. This was during an address made by Blythe at Mallow in Dec.

⁴⁵ *Irish Times*, 10 Dec. 1928.

⁴⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 15 Dec. 1928.

⁴⁷ J. Boywer Bell, *The secret army: a history of the IRA, 1916-1970* (London, 1970), pp 98-9. Boywer Bell lists some of those involved, many of whom were well known republicans outside of Fianna Fáil. He cites the new venture has been formed after a meeting in Apr. 1929, while it is clear from *An Phoblacht* that the group was holding public meetings from Dec. 1928.

⁴⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 19 Jan., 2 Mar. 1929.

However, Comhairle na Poblachta was not quite the radical political initiative that O'Donnell had envisaged and was really a compromise between those with similar leanings to O'Donnell and the IRA leadership. Although the new organisation contained impressive individuals, those in Comhairle na Poblachta had little in common; as Bowyer Bell concluded: 'Comhairle na Poblachta was a paper tiger, which after a promising start decayed leaving the individual organisations to go their appointed ways'.⁴⁹ It was an exercise from an IRA point of view to mark it out from Fianna Fáil and stem the movement of its members to that organisation. As Ó Drisceoil writes: 'the growing strength of de Valera's party was calling into question the *raison d'être* of the IRA, while there was an increasing leakage of volunteers especially officers, into Fianna Fáil'. O'Donnell and his associates provided the IRA with a political project that differentiated it from Fianna Fáil and fitted the radical temper of the times'.⁵⁰ O'Donnell had wanted a revolutionary political project that in his view would truly fit the radical temper of the times and would throw its weight fully behind the annuities campaign.

At this juncture, Moore was instrumental in directing Fianna Fáil policy on annuities and was also reaching out to the grass roots. In December 1928, he gave a lecture to the Rathmines cumann in which he stressed that the annuities were merely a new name for the old landlord rents. Landlords, he claimed, had been well treated; they had been paid a decent price for their lands so that 'nothing we do can injure him'.⁵¹ In January 1929, at Enniscorthy Seán Lemass who was a Honorary Secretary in Fianna Fáil made a similar argument. The purchase money for estates had been advanced by the British National Debt Commission and the farmers dealt solely with a government department, the Land Commission.⁵² The influence of Moore's recent pamphlet *Catechism of land annuities* was clearly evident in Lemass' speech.

By early 1929 the annuities issue was causing apprehension in government circles despite the robust and regular statements from Hogan and Blythe that annuities must be paid. In January 1929 a letter to the Executive Council from Henry J. Moloney KC, advising on approaches to the British Government, suggested some areas where the Free State might look for some relief on the annuities burden.⁵³ Moloney advised that an agreement could not be broken with honour but it was always permissible to agree to some modifications or

⁴⁹ Bowyer Bell, *The secret army*, p. 99.

⁵⁰ Donal Ó Drisceoil, Peadar *O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), p. 52.

⁵¹ Lecture to Rathmines Fianna Fáil cumann, Dec. 1928 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (4)).

⁵² *Weekly Irish Times*, 19 Jan. 1929.

⁵³ Letter from Henry J. Moloney to Diarmuid O'Hegarty secretary Executive Council, 14 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/291 (15)).

alterations. He suggested asking for a moratorium on annuities of five years and that the Free State should support and pursue it on the following grounds:⁵⁴

1. That they had endeavoured to develop agriculture with some success but were hampered by the financial depression.
2. England will readily appreciate the advantage of maintaining Ireland as a food producing country, clearly established during the war.
3. More than 80% of Ireland's imports came from England – a better financial position in Ireland is also better for England.
4. England forgave war debts to other countries and the business advantage of adopting such a course in Ireland would be immediately apparent. The Republican Party was getting considerable support in country districts mainly because of its adoption of a policy of repudiating annuities. Temporary relief from payments would have a great effect and would tend to re-establish the present government. It would also influence Irish votes at the coming general election in England.
5. Apart from the world depression, Ireland had been affected by the Civil War and with the result that it was almost impossible for many farmers to pay the arrears. The enforced payment of these arrears had been availed of by the opponents of the government to create considerable dissatisfaction.⁵⁵

Moloney contended that the Irish government could argue that the farmers in the Free State had tried to honour the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921; however, one of the first effects of trying to honour that treaty resulted in Civil War, which meant annuities fell further into arrears. The Irish government should outline that the burden of annuity arrears had fallen on the county councils and hence onto the rates, loading more on the shoulders of those who could pay. The granting of a moratorium on annuities would relieve rates and allow grants of loans to restock depleted farms.⁵⁶

The Free State government was reluctant to take on board Moloney's proposal; a letter from the Department of the President proffered the opinion that even if the proposal of a moratorium on annuities was ever accepted, it had two very grave objections:⁵⁷

The interest for that five years would have to be borrowed and added to capital with the result that either the period of repayment would have to be extended or the annuity increased. The more important objection is however that the difficulty of inducing a person to recommence paying his debts after five years backsliding seems to me to be almost insurmountable and I fear that the net result would be that the last condition would be worse than the first. If we had a five year moratorium all annuities would become uncollectable during that period.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Letter from Henry J. Moloney to Diarmuid O'Hegarty secretary Executive Council, 14 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/291 (15)).

⁵⁵ Letter from Moloney advising Executive Council, 14 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/291 (15)).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Letter to Blythe from Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Department of the President, in which he goes through some of Moloney's ideas and dismisses them. 19 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/291 (15)).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

This reflected the fear in government circles on the issue of a moratorium for even a small period believing it would make the recommencement of payments much more difficult than the existing collections despite the numerous problems these already ensued.

Blythe termed the propaganda on annuities as consciously and deliberately dishonest and that if the State stopped paying annuities they would be discredited in the eyes of the world, and there were many ways England could deal with non-payment without putting troops in the country. Britain could tax every pound of butter and every beast Ireland sent there.⁵⁹ In the *Fermanagh Herald*, 'Our Dublin Letter' alluded to the importance of the annuities issue in a future general election. The article pointed out that Hogan, Minister for Agriculture was shrewd enough to see how a movement for non-payment could become extremely popular due to the impoverished conditions existing in agriculture and that he was making a brave effort to explain in vivid terms the 'disastrous effects on public morality of such a campaign'.⁶⁰

The disastrous effects Hogan had alluded to were seemingly not having such a sustained impact in Mayo, where arrears had decreased by just over £1,000 from 31 March 1928 to 5 October 1928. The arrears still due were to be deducted from the county agricultural grant. The editorial line in the *Ballina Herald* was opposed to this system of making the ratepayers pay for defaulting farmers.⁶¹ Kildare County Council had £5,000 stopped from its agricultural grant. There was disquiet that this would happen again and questions were raised as to why the Land Commission had not made more of an effort to collect the annuities. James Harris proposed a motion pressing for the revision of the financial settlement of March 1926, which also stated that annuities were not legally or morally due to England which was carried by eleven votes to ten.⁶²

A meeting of the Cork branch of the Irish Farmers' Union in January 1929 reported arrears in the county to be approximately £36,000. The problem of annuity arrears on county council finances was also apparent in Wexford where grants were reduced by £12,000 as a result. A proposal by Richard Corish TD, Labour, that a list of defaulters be supplied to the council was adopted.⁶³ On 22 January, Waterford County Council rejected a proposed resolution by Michael O'Ryan declaring the payment of annuities to Britain to be illegal and

⁵⁹ *Irish Times*, 29 Jan. 1929.

⁶⁰ *Fermanagh Herald*, 2 Feb. 1929

⁶¹ *Ballina Herald*, 10 Nov. 1928.

⁶² *Kildare Observer*, 1 Dec. 1928; *Leinster Express*, 1 Dec. 1928.

⁶³ *Irish Times*, 7, 16 Jan. 1929.

immoral by ten votes to eight. A similar motion for the retention of the annuities in Ireland was defeated at Mayo County Council by the casting vote of the chairman on 23 February. The *Connaught Telegraph* noted that five of the nine TDs had remained silent during the debate and asked if there was the possibility of a financial re-arrangement: ‘why not have it strongly voiced in the Dáil?’⁶⁴ Longford County Council discussed the issue of arrears and the suggestion of a list of defaulters, where it was claimed: ‘decrees were taken out, the sheriff could not realise, the farms were offered for sale, and the people, for sentimental reasons, would not bid for them.’⁶⁵

It was regularly argued at council meetings that the issue of annuities was one of national political importance and should be dealt with at a national level. By January 1929, Fianna Fáil were preparing to raise the subject in the Dáil. In February, Dr James Ryan, claimed that Fianna Fáil was not intending to test it in the courts but rather in the Dáil in the near future.⁶⁶ On 13 March, Ryan, seemingly in preparation for the debate, enquired about the Guaranteed Fund and to what amount it had been depleted to meet arrears during 1924 to 1928.

Year ended.	Total amount drawn from Guarantee Fund.	Amount in respect of Land Acts, 1923-27.
	£	£
31st March 1925	725,634	—
31st March 1926	749,758	08,897
31st March 1927	589,176	17,074
31st March 1928	518,399	20,684
31st March 1929	501,978	29,376

This information was prepared by Land Commission officials for the minister.⁶⁷ While the figures showed a decrease in the amount taken from the Guaranteed Fund from 1926 to 1929, it was still a significant sum for those years. Total arrears outstanding on 31 January 1929 amounted to £559,251.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, O’Donnell continued with rounds of public meetings and on 10 February, spoke at an Anti-Tribute League meeting held at Dungloe attended by approximately 600

⁶⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 23 Jan. 1929; *Connaught Telegraph*, 2 Mar. 1929.

⁶⁵ *Irish Independent*, 23 Mar. 1929.

⁶⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 23 Feb. 1929.

⁶⁷ Parliamentary debates on Land Purchase Guarantee Fund, 13 Mar. 1929 (UCDA, Blythe Papers, P24/282 (1)); *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 28, No. 10, cols 1246-7, 13 Mar. 1929.

⁶⁸ Answer to question from Jim Ryan on the total amount of arrears due to Land Commission at the end of 1928, *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 28, No. 10, cols 1246-7, 13 Mar. 1929.

people. James Duirnin spoke of his experience in prison and Eamonn Corbett referred to the county councils that had passed resolutions in favour of the non-payment of annuities and his belief that it would not be long before every council in Ireland had passed similar resolutions. O'Donnell outlined that the Anti-Tribute League intended to summon an all-Ireland convention of county council representatives to consider the matter.⁶⁹ When asked by a member of the crowd whether he would advise him not to pay rent, O'Donnell replied he would not tell a man to do anything for which he was not prepared to take the consequences. He would only say that the payment of annuities was wrong, and according to some authorities illegal, but he would not say to any individual: 'Do not pay your rent'.⁷⁰ It was reported that when O'Donnell mentioned by name some individuals involved in the collection of rent, he was heckled by some in the crowd by shouts of: 'they did not rob anyone'.⁷¹ This demonstrates some unease in the crowd, perhaps reflecting some disquiet concerning the agitation and within the Donegal anti-annuities organisation. O'Donnell was by now being closely watched by the authorities; another meeting was scheduled that evening for Annagary but when O'Donnell arrived he was detained in the local barracks till 7 pm and later in Dungloe until 10.30pm.⁷²

On 2 March seven people were arrested in the Dungloe area and were charged with riot arising out of an incident that took place as the Gardaí attempted to serve processes on those who had refused to pay their annuities. Three who refused bail were remanded to Sligo Jail. They appeared in court on 8 March and were returned for trial at the circuit court at Lifford. In January, bailiffs and Guards were forced back while attempting to seize cattle for non-payment of annuities at Doogan's farm, Drimluid, Donegal. Bailiffs had emerged from the byre with a cow, but a group had gathered from neighbouring farms and forced her release. After a scuffle the bailiffs and Gardaí withdrew. The Doogan family were also returned for trial to the circuit court.⁷³ For O'Donnell this conjured up all he believed to be good about the campaign, neighbours standing with one another to defeat what he termed 'the raiding party'.

On 23 February *An Phoblacht* reported on another death in Adrigole of which the coroner at the inquest said: 'I have no doubt that this man's death was accelerated by his condition of semi-starvation'. Timothy Harrington died on 1 February. He was aged fifty-two and had a wife and seven children aged from six months to thirteen years.

⁶⁹ Report on Non-Payment of annuities meeting at Dungloe, 10 Feb. 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.; see also *Irish Independent*, 27 Feb. 1929.

⁷² Meeting at Dungloe, 10 Feb. 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336).

⁷³ *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 16 Mar. 1929. See also *An Phoblacht*, 2 Feb. 1929.

Dr. Joseph Lynn, dispensary medical officer Castletownbere, gave evidence to the effect that Harrington could not possibly have supported himself on his holding and that there were a number of similar cases along the seaboard.⁷⁴ This again underlined the condition of poverty that existed in parts of the country and the problem of uneconomic holdings. It was against this background that the annuities took on even more significance.

The Anti-Tribute League had succeeded in persuading a number of county councils to repudiate the annuities, others had rejected the notion, but the debate in council chambers was still ongoing by the end of 1929. O'Donnell's speeches, Moore's pamphlet and public meetings kept the issue in focus. During 1929, the Catholic Church came out against the agitation and the government had increased its response through the courts by issuing decrees and carrying out seizures. There had been numerous arrests particularly in Donegal. O'Donnell knew the situation of those farmers resisting annuity payments in Donegal was becoming more precarious and their resistance might not last if demands were not met soon. There was a real possibility that he might have to invoke his promise to the farmers that if the situation became serious he would negotiate with Hogan to seek the best terms for them. It remained to be seen whether Fianna Fáil's long promised Dáil motion on annuities would bring any relief or comfort to what O'Donnell referred to as the groups of neighbours bearing the brunt of the resistance.

⁷⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 23 Feb. 1929.

CHAPTER 8

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, O'DONNELL FORMS CLOSER TIES WITH THE COMINTERN

The Anti-Tribute League formed in July 1928 had seen different groups coalesce on the annuities issue; the campaign had spread and some county councils had repudiated the payment of annuities to Britain. The differences between the interested parties which had always existed in the anti-annuities campaign would come to the fore from the spring of 1929 onwards and make it difficult to hold this coalition together. The alternative strategies of taking a legal approach or one of mass non-payment and abolition conflicted during this period. It was not until May 1929 that Fianna Fáil finally got to debate its long-awaited motion on retention of the annuities in the Dáil.¹ Around the same time, the Catholic Church was drawn into the debate because of the anti-annuities activities of Fr. John Fahy in Galway, which will be examined below. In Donegal, where the resistance had begun, the campaign came under most strain, and the local committee directed O'Donnell to seek a settlement with Hogan and the Land Commission. This questioned and undermined the sustainability of the non-payment campaign. Annuities were the key issue in two Dáil by-elections in 1929 and 1930, while O'Donnell continued to provide the more radical edge to the agitation. He became centrally involved in efforts to place the anti-annuities agitation in a European context and bring it broadly into line with the agrarian politics of the Krestintern. The Krestintern (Peasants International) was the section of the Comintern (Communist International) which dealt with agricultural issues, with particular interest in small farmers and agricultural labourers, the idea being to unite these groupings throughout Europe under a communist banner. The frequently-repeated government line that the annuities issue was dead was contradicted at nearly every turn as those as diverse as a local priest, Fianna Fáil, individual farmers, local committees, O'Donnell and international communists took up the fight which also involved a struggle for the direction of the campaign. All these issues will be examined in this chapter.

(i) Fianna Fáil's Dáil motion

On 2 May 1929, Fianna Fáil's promised motion on annuities came before the Dáil. De Valera moved that 'the land annuities now being paid into The Purchase Annuities Fund' for transmission to Great Britain should henceforth be paid into the Central Fund, and that the

¹ *Irish Times*, 3 May 1929.

Executive Council should immediately take the appropriate steps to that end'.² The *Irish Independent* claimed that if the motion was passed it would lead to the fall of the government as Cosgrave and Blythe could not countenance the implementation of such a mandate.³ The significance that each party attached to the debate can be gauged from those nominated to make the major contributions: for Fianna Fáil arguably their three most prominent TDs, de Valera, Lemass and Seán MacEntee. For Cumann na nGaedheal, Hogan and Blythe, while Labour leader T.J. O'Connell also made a significant contribution.

De Valera's argument mirrored much of what had been said in the past, that under the terms of the 1921 Treaty the 'Transfer of Functions Order' of 1 April 1922 was initiated to allow the Provisional Government to function until such time as the Free State came fully into being. Under this arrangement annuities were paid into the exchequer of the Provisional Government. However, section 12 of the 1923 Land Act changed this and all sums collected after 31 March 1923 were paid into 'The Purchase Annuities Fund', and then sent to Britain. De Valera's motion sought the repeal of this section of the 1923 Land Act.⁴ De Valera then claimed that the Ultimate Financial Settlement of March 1926 was not a binding contract between the Free State and the British Government; it had not received statutory sanction. He again reiterated the opinion that annuities were part of the public debt of Britain and that while stockholders should be paid, it should be from the British Exchequer.⁵ While de Valera maintained that the Free State government should have retained the annuities from 1923, he had even more serious issues with the continuance of payments after the 1925 Agreement. He argued that if the state had acted wisely it could 'have retained them here pending a decision on this question ... why should we hand them over for one day longer after 1925?'⁶ Earlier in 1929, de Valera had been authorised by the national executive of Fianna Fáil to seek the opinion of a number of leading lawyers on the issue of annuities. Eight were forwarded questionnaires and seven of those consulted were of the opinion that the Free State government was under no obligation to continue annuity payments to Britain. De Valera relied on these opinions throughout the debate.⁷

² *Dáil Debates*, Land Purchase Annuities, Vol. 29, No. 11, cols 1301-2, 2 May 1929.

³ *Irish Independent*, 1 May 1929.

⁴ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 29, No. 11, cols 1302-7, 2 May 1929.

⁵ *Ibid.*, cols 1307-13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, cols 1320-21.

⁷ Fianna Fáil pamphlet, 1932 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35). This was a pamphlet produced in 1932 as a reply to arguments upholding the legality of the payment of annuities to Britain contained in a sixty-five page Memorandum on Land Purchase Annuities produced by the Attorney General by order of the Executive Council in Dec. 1931. The Fianna Fáil pamphlet looked back on what they considered some of the important points on the issue over the previous years, hence to reference to de Valera's actions in 1929. See also *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 29, No. 11, cols 1439-42, 2 May 1929. De Valera had named six lawyers in the debate,

Patrick Hogan countered on behalf of the government that the repeal of section 12 of the 1923 Land Act would not result in the annuities being retained in Ireland. He stated that the annuities were being collected on various land acts passed prior to 1923, and that he found it incomprehensible that deputies could believe that the 1921 Treaty could repeal all of them. In his opinion, those who invested in the land stock raised to finance land purchase had done so in the belief that their investment was secure. They had been made more confident by the Guarantee Fund which was designed to take up any shortfall in annuity payments.⁸ According to Hogan, de Valera only became interested in the annuities campaign when it was first promoted seriously by *An Phoblacht*. He attempted to expose certain ambiguities in the Fianna Fáil argument pointing out the contrasting stance of de Valera, in Dublin preaching that there would be no repudiation of debts, while simultaneously encouraging some deputies to spread the message in the rural constituencies that a vote for Fianna Fáil would lead to the end of the annuities.⁹

The Labour leader T.J. O’Connell emphasised the point that if the British Government were to pay the stockholders, then what right had the Free State to collect annuities from the farmers. He intimated he would vote against the motion because it could not be disentangled from repudiation of debt and that the process would be better served by dealing with the whole Ultimate Financial Settlement and to seek its revision.¹⁰ Seán Lemass of Fianna Fáil argued that England must prove a legal right to the annuities and considered O’Connell’s stance ambiguous, asking with regard to the Ultimate Financial Settlement, ‘what part of it is he against, if not against the land annuities’? He reasoned that it was the British government that had borrowed the money and it was they who should be responsible for the payment of the interest and the sinking fund.¹¹ Hogan rebuffed these arguments calling on Fianna Fáil to settle the issue through the courts. The Minister for Justice, James Fitzgerald-Kenny hoped that this was the last time the issue would be raised and that this ‘preposterous campaign will die to-night and die for ever’.¹²

Michael Comyn, KC; James Geoghegan, KC; George Gavan Duffy, B.L.; and Conor Maguire, BL, Martin Maguire KC and Hubert Hamilton KC.

⁸ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 29, No. 11, cols 1327-30, 2 May 1929.

⁹ *Ibid.*, cols 1343-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cols 1376-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, cols 1388-91.

¹² *Ibid.*, col. 1406.

The motion was defeated by seventy-nine votes to sixty. Five Labour TDs and one National League deputy James Coburn (Louth) voted with Fianna Fáil. The four Farmers' Party TDs who were present voted against while all the Independents who voted, opposed the motion. While predictably Fianna Fáil voted for and Cumann na nGaedheal against, what was perhaps most interesting was the division among the thirteen Labour TDs, five voted for the motion, Archie Cassidy (Donegal), Patrick Clancy (Limerick), Richard Corish (Wexford), James Everett (Wicklow) and Patrick Hogan (Clare) while seven voted against (one Hugh Colohan (Kildare) may have been absent from the Dáil).¹³ While party leader O'Connell had outlined reasons for opposing the motion, he could carry only half of his parliamentary colleagues. It could be argued that O'Connell's ambiguous position on the motion, opposing it but seeking a revision of the whole Ultimate Financial Settlement, reflected a party with no fixed position on the issue. Thomas Johnson, the previous leader, had also struggled to define a clear policy for the party on annuities (see chapter 6). Some of those who backed the motion like Patrick Hogan from Clare (not to be confused with the Minister for Agriculture) had been vocal in his opposition to annuities and had appeared on anti-annuity platforms including when de Valera spoke at Ennis.

Although the motion was soundly and predictably defeated, de Valera was not dismayed and wrote to the *Irish Times* clarifying the points he had made, which he believed were misrepresented in that paper's coverage of the debate.¹⁴ The *Ulster Herald* column 'Our Dublin Letter' stated that the annuities question had now assumed a position of first class importance and that there was little doubt that it would be the leading issue at the next general election and that de Valera had now nailed his colours on annuities.¹⁵ This was, indeed, the case and although Fianna Fáil was disappointed not to have convinced more TDs from the other parties of the merits of its arguments, it was pleased that it had further raised the national profile of annuities. The importance of the issue and the recent Dáil motion were not lost on Cumann na nGaedheal as it also sought to clarify its position in a small booklet. *The truth about the land annuities*, by Hogan, contained his address to the Dáil on 2 May during the debate and sought to expose what he termed the 'Fianna Fáil fake about land annuities'.¹⁶

¹³ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 29, No. 11, cols 1449-50, 2 May 1929.

¹⁴ Letter from de Valera to editor of the *Irish Times* clarifying his arguments in the annuities debate, sent 4 May 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8338).

¹⁵ 'Our Dublin Letter' *Ulster Herald*, 11 May 1929.

¹⁶ *The truth about the land annuities*, by the Minister for Agriculture, small booklet issued by Cumann na nGaedheal. (UCDA, Eamon de Valera papers, P150/2147). The booklet stated it was a review of the history of land purchase, with an exposure of Fianna Fáil dishonesty and the danger to the state of its campaign for the repudiation of a national obligation.

Contrary to what Fitzgerald-Kenny had hoped, the annuities issue was about to assume national prominence once again with the arrest and imprisonment of Galway priest John Fahy.

(ii) Fr Fahy and the annuities

Fr John Fahy from Galway had been active in the non-payment of annuities agitation in the Loughrea area, he was also well known for his republican sympathies (see chapter 6). O'Donnell recalled how Fr Fahy invited him to Galway and knowing that there was significant resistance to annuities in that county he accepted: 'If I had a campaign headquarters anywhere outside *An Phoblacht* offices, it was at Fr John's home at Bullaun'.¹⁷ On 25 February 1929, when a bailiff named Peter Whelan seized two cattle in execution of a decree against Bidy Nevin of Ballymurray, Loughrea, for failing to pay annuities. Fr. Fahy and a group of men intervened, took the cattle and hid them.¹⁸ Fahy was subsequently summonsed but refused to appear in court and ensuing attempts to resolve the matter, which involved the intervention of Fahy's superior, Bishop Dignan of Clonfert, all failed. Fahy was quite happy with the publicity his stance had generated, but the government was anxious to avoid any confrontation with the Catholic Church.¹⁹ Fahy was eventually arrested on 16 April and was charged at Loughrea District Court with obstructing a bailiff and unlawfully rescuing cattle. He admitted taking the cattle, expressed no regrets and that he had intended to prevent robbers from seizing stock to send over money to that 'robber Winston Churchill'.²⁰

The imprisonment of Fahy raised national awareness of the annuities campaign, causing unease outside Galway. Eoin O'Duffy, Garda Commissioner, was concerned that the extremist section attempted to make as much capital as possible from Fahy's arrest. It was also creating some discomfort between the Church and local elected representatives as evidenced in a Galway County Council resolution not to take part in the Catholic Emancipation Centenary celebrations on 2 June. O'Duffy claimed Galway County Council had made themselves look ridiculous by suggesting that Bishop Dignan had supported Fahy's actions on annuities.²¹ Moreover, Dignan was unhappy with what he viewed as a public body's interference with ecclesiastical matters of discipline and made this known, while

¹⁷ Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), pp 94-5.

¹⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 20 Apr. 1929.

¹⁹ Jim Madden, *Fr. John Fahy: Radical republican and agrarian activist (1893-1969)* (Dublin, 2012), pp 42-5.

²⁰ Report on arrest of Fr. Fahy, 16 Apr. 1929 (UCDA, Fitzgerald papers, P80/852).

²¹ Confidential report of Garda Commissioner O'Duffy on organisations inimical to the state (Galway), for Minister for Justice, 5 July 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/477 (1)).

making public that Fahy had given him a signed promise to apologise for his actions.²² O'Duffy welcomed Dignan's response but felt he had let Fahy go too far.²³ The church wanted the matter resolved and Rev. Michael Browne, Professor of Canon Law at Maynooth College, visited Fahy on 22 May to explain the consequences of his position.²⁴ A letter from Rev. Browne to Fahy some days after this visit would seem to imply that Fahy was indeed going to apologise for his actions: 'in any case you will I am sure, be most scrupulous to honour your signed word'.²⁵ A Department of Justice official confirmed this: 'this letter obviously has reference to the written promise given by Fr. Fahy to his bishop that he would make a public apology for his conduct'.²⁶ Dignan was a Fianna Fáil supporter and had some sympathy for Fahy's views and this had allowed some free rein in his political activities in the parish.²⁷

Fahy later wrote to Mary MacSwiney (leading figure in Sinn Féin who was often opposed to O'Donnell's radical socialist ideals): 'had my ecclesiastical authority punished me to the state's satisfaction, the state would not have incurred the odium of bringing me into court'.²⁸ Fahy claimed Dignan was a friend of de Valera, Frank Fahy, Fianna Fáil TD for Galway and Eamon Corbett, leading anti-annuities campaigner and member of Galway County Council.²⁹ He then dealt with the subject of Bishops and *Privilegium fori*. 'I do not know how they will deal with the matter. I have given their Lordships a splendid opportunity to broach the question anyhow. ... Were the Free State a Catholic state the *Privilegium fori* should hold'. On the subject of annuities, he said 'physical opposition to the British tax-gathering or robbery is breaking the tribute groove' and that he would love to discuss this with her.³⁰ In Fahy's view, the Free State was not a Catholic state and he obviously believed he had presented the Catholic Church with a real opportunity to assert itself and challenge the

²² *Irish Times*, 22 May 1929.

²³ Confidential report O'Duffy, 5 July 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/477 (1)).

²⁴ Letter from P. Gordon, governor, Galway Jail to secretary Department of Justice, 30 May 1929, informing him of Rev. Browne's visit to Fr. Fahy (UCDA, Blythe papers P24/164 (15)).

²⁵ Letter from Rev. Michael Browne to Fr. Fahy, 28 May 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers P24/164 (12)).

²⁶ Letter from Department of Justice to secretary to Executive Council, 1 June 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers P24/164 (11)).

²⁷ Letter from Fr. Dignan to Fianna Fáil organiser, 30 Oct. 1926 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/827 (1)), In the letter Dignan thanked Fianna Fáil for an invitation to a meeting in Loughrea which he could not attend and expressed that it would have afforded him great pleasure to meet Messrs Fahy, Rutledge and O'Kelly. He wished them every success and commented that every true Irishman must wish for a speedy end to partition and the oath and that no Irish state could be set up while these remain.

²⁸ Letter from Fr. Fahy to Mary MacSwiney, 11 May 1929, found in a search of Sinn Féin offices (UCDA, Blythe papers P24/164 (5)).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Privilegium fori* was an old church law which protected priests from being tried in a secular court unless there had been ecclesiastical approval. Dignan had broached this with O'Friel.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

government and judicial system. But not all of that body shared his political views or those of Dignan.

It was not just Galway County Council that raised Fahy's case; Wicklow County Council³¹ and Tipperary South Riding called upon the government to reconsider the question of the release of Fr. Fahy.³² *An Phoblacht* which had not been published since 9 March 1929, owing to raids on the Fodhala Printing Company, who were its printers³³, returned on 18 May 1929 under the new editorship of Frank Ryan and assistant Geoffrey Coulter³⁴; O'Donnell continued to write regularly for the paper. *An Phoblacht* gave much coverage of its single-page edition 25 May to Fahy's case. It claimed that the media had distorted the facts and that Dignan or indeed any ecclesiastical authority had not condemned the 'no tribute' campaign on moral grounds, and it was not a county council that had interfered in ecclesiastical matters but the government that had flagrantly violated canon law.³⁵ *An Phoblacht* was not correct in its assertion that no bishops had condemned the campaign; Bishop Fogarty could hardly have been any more strident as recently as February in attacking the agitation in his Lenten pastoral (see chapter 7). It was also interesting to see *An Phoblacht* defending canon law, but whether this was a new editorial position or just an expedient line to suit this particular case is unclear.

At Fahy's trial at Galway Circuit Court on 3 June, his solicitor Louis O'Dea said that Fahy admitted taking the cattle and would accept the consequences. Fahy was sentenced to six weeks imprisonment, but as he had already been in custody for that length he was released. His solicitor informed the court that Dignan had commanded Fahy to make an apology, adhering to his vow of obedience he subsequently did so and expressed his regret.³⁶ Therefore, although Fahy had frequently stated he had no regrets over his actions, a formula and compromise was worked out with his solicitor to secure his release. Jim Madden also credits O'Donnell with involvement in the case, arguing that it was inconceivable that he had not had a major input into devising the strategy for the court case.³⁷ *An Phoblacht* claimed that ecclesiastical regulations had conveniently aided the state in terminating the affair

³¹ Letter from Wicklow County Council to secretary of Executive Council, 29 May 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/164 (2)).

³² Letter from Tipperary South Riding County Council to secretary of Executive Council, 30 May 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/164 (4)).

³³ *An Phoblacht*, 9 Mar. 1929.

³⁴ Ibid., 25 May 1929; Seán Cronin, *Frank Ryan, the search for the republic* (Dublin, 1980), p. 25.

³⁵ Ibid., 25 May 1929. The paper had not been published since 9 Mar. 1929, Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Kilaloe had also attacked the campaign in Dec. 1928 (see chapter 7).

³⁶ *Irish Times*, 4 June 1929.

³⁷ Madden, *Fr. John Fahy*, pp 63-4; O'Donnell also writes of the efforts to find a formula for the court without Fr. Fahy having to plead guilty in *There will be another day*, pp 99-100.

speedily and quietly, claiming that an order from his bishop had secured Fahy's silence in court. However, the campaign had not been hindered.³⁸ The Fahy episode was uncomfortable for the government and the Catholic Church, and as the latter was taking an increasingly unfavourable stance on the anti-annuity campaign, it did not welcome one of its priests becoming so publicly involved, which in turn dragged in the local bishop.

The Bishop of Raphoe, Rev. MacNeely, on the advice of the local superintendent, delivered a strong condemnation at Dungloe in May 1929, of the local anti-annuities campaign, which Eoin O'Duffy believed had a good effect, as there had not been a single case of opposition or obstruction since. MacNeely also offered to try to find financial assistance or to make a case before the authorities if families were found to be unduly burdened by financial difficulties related to annuities.³⁹ This was obviously in the hope of wooing farmers away from the campaign, particularly in the light of recent events involving Fr. Fahy.

Concurrent with the annuities issue receiving national coverage over the Fr Fahy affair it was continuing to have an effect at other levels. Some speakers at a local Cumann na nGaedheal party meeting in Berehaven in Cork, expressed the opinion that more time should be given to those in arrears who had failed to pay their annuities before the commencement of legal proceedings.⁴⁰ There was a long list of annuity cases at Longford Circuit Court on 24 April, but as they were called it became clear many were announced as settled. This was put down to a previous decision of Longford County Council to distribute a list of defaulters among the councillors. It had not been deemed necessary by Longford County Council to publish the list in local papers, but the publicity surrounding this threat had arguably contributed to a larger than usual number of cases being settled.⁴¹ Courts remained busy with the granting of decrees for non-payment of annuities at Portlaoise (Laois), Carndonagh (Donegal), Berehaven (Cork), and Dungloe.⁴²

Arrears on 31 March 1929 were £393,382, which was just under £6,000 less than on 31 March 1928. The total received by the Land Commission by 31 March 1929 was £3,100,327,

³⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 8 June 1929.

³⁹ Confidential report of Garda Commissioner on organisations inimical to the state, for Minister for Justice, 5 July 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/477 (1)); *Irish Times*, 18 May 1929.

⁴⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 25 Apr. 1929.

⁴¹ *Longford Leader*, 27 Apr. 1929.

⁴² *Kerryman*, 4 May 1929; *Derry People and Tirconaille News*, 4, 18 May 1929; *Kilkenny People*, 4 May 1929; *Cork Examiner*, 16 May 1929.

which was over £22,000 more than the previous year.⁴³ The slight increase in payments could have been because of recent government measures and legislation to secure payment. Although the overall arrears were still significant, the increased collection rate demonstrated the difficulty for O'Donnell in trying to sustain the non-payment campaign. There were renewed complaints at Limerick County Council that the Land Commission was not making sufficient efforts to make defaulters pay; Edward J. Mitchell called for all farms belonging to defaulting annuitants be put up for sale. John McCormac, chairman, refuted this proposal saying that the Land Commission knew that no one would bid for these farms. It was decided to send a circular to all on the defaulters list, seeking an explanation for their non-payment and requesting them to pay.⁴⁴

The government had been anxious throughout the annuities agitation to portray the campaign as communist-led and the work of O'Donnell. It certainly was not keen that a jailed rural priest should be viewed as the standard-bearer for the campaign. The conflict had been presented as a clash between a fiscally-responsible government that would project Ireland favourably on international terms and those who would repudiate debts regardless of the consequences, but it was never quite as straight-forward as that. Sentiments expressed during the Dáil motion that this could be the last of the annuities issue had certainly not come to fruition as the incidents surrounding Fr Fahy had proved, and this would continue, as annuities became the central issue in the Leitrim/Sligo by-election.

Within two weeks of Fianna Fáil's Dáil motion, the annuities debate was played out again in Leitrim/Sligo. Only the two main parties put forward candidates: General Seán MacEoin for Cumann na nGaedheal and Eamonn Donnelly for Fianna Fáil. The fact that both parties had chosen prominent national figures demonstrated the emphasis they placed on this election: MacEoin was well known from his prominent role in the War of Independence, while Donnelly had been MP for Armagh, a leading organiser for Sinn Féin and a founding member of Fianna Fáil. The *Sunday Independent* thought the election decision would reflect the temperature of rural Ireland on the annuities question and its support for the government.⁴⁵

A Fianna Fáil election leaflet entitled 'Do you know how Land Annuities affect you?' stated that the government was sending over £200,000 every year in annuities from struggling

⁴³ Collection statement from Land Commission for year ended 31 Mar. 1929, Land Commission Accounts 1923-31 (NLI, No. OPIE F/26). These were figures for the 1885, 1891, 1903 and 1909 Acts.

⁴⁴ *Irish Independent*, 14 May 1929.

⁴⁵ *Sunday Independent*, 19 May 1929.

farmers in the two counties of Leitrim and Sligo to the British Treasury.⁴⁶ It outlined uses for this money if retained in the area: draining land, building houses, finding work for your sons which would keep them from America. It added that this sum was being sent without either the authority of the people or parliament to the richest treasury in the world.⁴⁷ Fitzgerald-Kenny attacked Fianna Fáil for taking up Moore's pamphlet on annuities, which he said was as 'badly a reasoned pamphlet as has ever proceeded from the hand of man' and it would not have been heard only that Fianna Fáil needed a catch-cry and ran with this.⁴⁸ On the final weekend of the campaign over 100 meetings were held and annuities were discussed on every platform. At Manorhamilton, Cosgrave brought up the old criticism of Fianna Fáil that its leaders said one thing in parliament, but their backbenchers said another in the rural constituencies and contended that an honest party ought to speak with one voice.⁴⁹

MacEoin defended his party's policy on annuities: 'the right, title and interest which the farmer had in his holding were those which he got under the land purchase agreement on which he was paying the annuity and if one party broke that contract it was null and void'. He also said Fianna Fáil had not mentioned annuities in 1927.⁵⁰ This was not true, although the Treaty and the Oath may have commanded a more prominent policy position; annuities were a major issue for Fianna Fáil in both elections that year (see chapters 3 & 4).

On polling day a *Connaught Telegraph* editorial noted that the retention of annuities in Ireland had become a live and practical issue and further that 'it was practically the only issue at the Sligo-Leitrim election'.⁵¹ It predicted that much more would be heard on the subject, 'which in all probability will be a very live issue at the next Dáil election'.⁵² The *Ulster Herald* column 'Our Dublin Letter' caught the mood of what was at stake:

There is not a better constituency in Ireland to test the question of the land annuities than Sligo-Leitrim. The farmers in the area have been badly hit by the prevailing agricultural depression of the past few years. Many of them have been dispossessed because of the non-payment of purchase annuities. Visits from the sheriff and his assistants have left a considerable number with anything but tender feelings towards the government in power. In Leitrim, particularly, the agricultural community has passed

⁴⁶ Extract from Fianna Fáil election leaflet to the voters of Leitrim/Sligo, Land Annuities, government and opposition (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8338).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Irish Independent*, 22 May 1929; this was most likely in reference to Moore's pamphlet *British plunder and Irish blunder*.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3 June 1929.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Fianna Fáil candidates including de Valera had spoke on election platforms demanding the retention of the annuities throughout both elections.

⁵¹ *Connaught Telegraph*, 8 June 1929.

⁵² Ibid.

through a period of acute depression, de Valera's policy in connection with the land annuities will undoubtedly appeal to a big percentage of the voters.⁵³

MacEoin won the election with a majority of just under 4,000, polling 28,598 to Donnelly's 24,621. MacEoin commenting on the victory said this should be the last of the annuities question: 'as there is no doubt that Fianna Fáil picked on this essentially rural constituency to make their appeal on this question, and that over thirty Fianna Fáil deputies had spent the previous two weeks canvassing farmers, but 'the farmers had realised the fallacy of their propaganda'.⁵⁴ There was no doubt this was a significant victory for Cumann na nGaedheal; not only had they taken a seat from Fianna Fáil but they had done so in an election fought over the issue of annuities in a constituency with many small and uneconomic holdings where the pressure to meet annuity demands was often severest. Both parties had thrown their most able personnel into the campaign, which at times had captured national attention. Although MacEoin had won, Donnelly had secured a substantial vote, which again demonstrated the growing importance of the annuities issue, and in contrast with what the new deputy, MacEoin said, it was unlikely to disappear any time soon.

(iii) O'Donnell seeks terms with Hogan

The annuities agitation was spreading and gaining support in areas outside of Donegal as witnessed by the incidents in Galway. The campaign had also gathered a certain political momentum with county council support, the Fianna Fáil Dáil motion, and the Leitrim/Sligo by-election. However, in the area where it began, the agitation was coming under most strain. O'Donnell had warned of this numerous times, but when news was communicated to him that the non-payment campaign had reached breaking point he struggled to comprehend that it had finally happened: 'I do not know, to this day, what took the heart out of the committee. The agitation just stalled. The jailings had a part in it; so had the death of big Niall Houston from Donegal who had been involved in the campaign from the beginning. ... Maybe I stayed too much in Dublin'.⁵⁵ In July, Garda Commissioner O'Duffy, in his report on Donegal noted that the 'No Annuities' campaign was the continuing main cause of anxiety but that the campaign had lost considerable ground during the previous three months. Many causes had contributed to this but he identified the heavy sentences imposed on those who attacked gardai and court

⁵³ *Ulster Herald*, 8 June 1929.

⁵⁴ *Sunday Independent*, 9 June 1929.

⁵⁵ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 69-70.

officials at Falcarragh in February as having the most effect.⁵⁶ On 1 April, two Gardaí accompanying a summons server were met by women and children throwing stones. At Dungloe District Court it was then authorised that all civil bills relating to annuities be served by post.⁵⁷ On 17 April 350 defaulters were served in this way, but the postman met resistance from local women and returned with all undelivered. O'Duffy commented that for some days following people had to call to the post office for letters, and soon regretted the earlier action and so ended that phase of the campaign.⁵⁸ O'Duffy referenced the effect of Bishop MacNeely's intervention in May and claimed that at the last Dungloe District Court over 95% of defaulters had appeared and promised to pay. He had reasonable belief that 'short of a strong revival movement immediately, the 'no annuities' campaign will soon be defunct in the Dungloe district'.⁵⁹ Part of the background and context to this was the worsening economic situation in west Donegal; this was reflected at Donegal County Council on 25 June where it was stated that owing to the poverty prevailing in the Rosses and Gweedore districts, 2,500 labourers had migrated to Scotland since 1 April, while seventy-five had gone to America.⁶⁰ In August, the county council reported £8,058 arrears in Donegal.⁶¹

It seemed O'Donnell was genuinely surprised at what seemed to be the end of the campaign in Donegal. Part of O'Donnell's reasoning for the collapse tallies with O'Duffy's report that imprisonment had taken its toll on the agitation, however O'Donnell did not mention MacNeely's intervention, but was obviously cognizant of its significance as it warranted a reply at the time. Moreover, when in Dublin or anywhere else O'Donnell was pursuing many other political ventures, none more so than the creation of an active political group working with and under the direction of the IRA, and he may just have taken his eyes off the annuities issue. O'Donnell had pledged the Donegal anti-annuities committee that if ever they felt they could not sustain the campaign in the light of state or economic pressure he would endeavour to negotiate the best settlement for them with the government. He had now received a short letter from Phil MacCauley, chairman of the committee in Donegal directing him to do just that. He immediately contacted Bertie Smyllie of the *Irish Times* to help arrange a meeting with Patrick Hogan. Regarding Smyllie, O'Donnell writes: 'when will somebody adequately acknowledge Smyllie's warm response to the many demands

⁵⁶ Confidential report on organisations inimical to the state (Donegal), for Minister for Justice, 5 July 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/477 (1)).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Confidential report on Donegal, 5 July 1929 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/477 (1)).

⁶⁰ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 29 June 1929.

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 29 Aug. 1929.

Republicans made on him’?⁶² Smyllie was born in Glasgow in 1893. He began work with the *Irish Times* in 1920 and was appointed editor of that paper in 1934.⁶³ Smyllie relayed O’Donnell’s request for a meeting to Hogan, and Hogan brought the matter of O’Donnell’s situation to a meeting of the Executive Council. The council expressed the view that O’Donnell should make his proposals in writing to the Land Commission. O’Donnell provided a note of his terms to Smyllie to pass on to Hogan. The terms from O’Donnell included proposals that the anti-annuity committee and members would renew their current annuity payments, but that arrears were not to arise and that no charges for legal proceedings were to be made against the tenants.⁶⁴ Hogan informed Smyllie that he found these proposals impossible, but Smyllie urged him to see O’Donnell anyway.⁶⁵

In O’Donnell’s version of events, his terms were: release the prisoners, which referred to farmers from the Dungloe area who were in prison for refusal to pay annuities and opposing seizures of stock. Forgive the court charges, which related to decrees and charges against farmers for non-payment of annuities. O’Donnell also wanted the arrears frozen. He would then seek to get all tenants to pay their current annuity.⁶⁶ Prior to the meeting with Hogan O’Donnell was alarmed to receive a telegram from the Donegal anti annuities committee similar to the letter he had received from MacCauley, he suspected a government supporter hostile to him had access to the local post office, and news would spread which would weaken the committee’s negotiating position. Interestingly regarding this, O’Donnell admitted: ‘that was one of the troubles, the robustness of the personal enmity I drew on myself’. When he met Hogan and was informed that Hogan could not negotiate, O’Donnell felt his concerns about the telegram were justified.⁶⁷ This was O’Donnell’s account of the meeting, which varied slightly from Hogan’s version.

Hogan reported that O’Donnell admitted he had been responsible for an agitation for non-payment of annuities and resistance to seizures in the Dungloe area:

⁶² O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 70.

⁶³ John Horgan, ‘Smyllie, Robert Maire’, in James McGuire and James Quinn(eds.), *DIB* (Cambridge, 2009), (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId= a8164> accessed 20 Oct. 2016)

⁶⁴ Letter from Hogan to Fitzgerald-Kenny concerning arrangements for meeting with O’Donnell and his proposals, 25 June 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336). Also enclosed in this was a letter sent to E. O’Herlihy of the Land Commission and Harry O’Friel of the Dept. of Justice.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ O’Donnell, *Another day*, p. 70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 70-1.

He considered that the agitation was unsuccessful and that he was now anxious to get these people out of jail and get them to start paying their annuities and arrears again.⁶⁸ O'Donnell made the following proposals. ...
The current annuities to be paid as they became due.
An arrangement to be made with the Land Commission under which the arrears would be paid within a certain number of years.
O'Donnell himself would see the state solicitor and settle the costs.⁶⁹

At the meeting with Hogan, O'Donnell further enquired that if an arrangement could be made on the basis of the terms he had outlined, would the prisoners be released. O'Donnell wanted to go to Donegal to relay the outcome of the meeting to the farmers and inquired from Hogan if he could ensure there were no seizures while he was there. Hogan agreed to communicate with the various departments to see if such an arrangement could be made.⁷⁰ Hogan thought it 'might be useful at this stage if O'Donnell did anything which would amount to publicly renouncing his former attitude in regard to Land Commission annuities, hence I think the matter should be considered'.⁷¹ This would suggest a slight move by O'Donnell from his earlier stance of 'arrears not to arise' to the position that some could be paid over time. This account of the meeting also suggests a less intransigent position from Hogan than his initial refusal of the terms, by contemplating possible consideration if O'Donnell renounced his position on annuities. This reflected Hogan's view of the situation after the meeting. However, all this was predicated on O'Donnell renouncing his attitude publicly, which was unlikely. O'Neill writes that, he of course refused to renounce the campaign and returned to meet the non-payment committee.⁷²

O'Donnell decided to go to Donegal, inform the farmers of Hogan's stance and to try to persuade them to reconsider their decision and continue the agitation. When he met the committee, he surmised that there were two dangers: seizure of cattle and jail. O'Donnell reasoned that none of the farmers were alarmed by the Land Commission threat to sell their farms; he knew no neighbour would buy a farm from which a farmer had been evicted and no stranger would be let live in one.⁷³ In his opinion, the anti-annuities committee were in a good position to hold their own against seizures, but jail was different, as he knew many feared it. O'Donnell proposed a formula whereby some farmers would pay one year's annuity, but was not certain this would set aside the risk of seizures. As a last resort the committee would use

⁶⁸ Letter from Hogan to E. O'Herlihy, Land Commission, 25 June 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Letter from Hogan to Fitzgerald-Kenny, 25 June 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8336).

⁷² Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 31 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

⁷³ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 72-5.

the defence fund to pay arrears, especially for those with most to lose and least equipped for jail.⁷⁴ This strategy O'Donnell believed would also provide safe byres and fields. Some would still continue to resist payment, they would be selected; 'farms hardest to get at, with least stock, men who have known jail and do not fear it'. Those who would now send in the year's annuity would make a pledge that they would stop paying if the committee ordered.⁷⁵ The threat of prison was real; six tenants imprisoned in connection with the agitation were released in August and given a public reception in the Rosses.⁷⁶

Following the meeting with the Donegal anti-annuity committee O'Donnell recalled a certain tension between him and MacCauley. MacCauley had word that Black James Duirnin (Duirnin had been a leading supporter of the campaign from the start and had been imprisoned for refusing to pay annuities) would be rearrested soon and was anxious that the committee should pay his arrears. MacCauley believed this a better option, rather than see him returned to prison, particularly now that it had been agreed at the meeting that some others would be paying for tactical reasons. But O'Donnell was reluctant to interfere, feeling it would dent Duirnin's pride whom he judged as 'the pulse of the movement, the very root of its courage'.⁷⁷ O'Donnell also thought it likely that the news of Duirnin's possible arrest influenced MacCauley to side with those who wanted a compromise, and that this resulted in the committee making the decision to negotiate. He made the pertinent point that MacCauley 'was dealing with neighbours he lived among'.⁷⁸ While areas of west Donegal would now continue to resist payment, O'Donnell was even more aware that their burden needed to be reduced, which entailed a spread of the non-payment movement countrywide. This brought an even greater focus to the differences with Fianna Fáil's approach. Would the farmers be better off paying their annuities and wait for a legal solution? Or should they accrue some benefits from the retention of annuities? O'Donnell was reluctant to see the farmer removed from the frontline of the campaign in favour of the legal approach. This was contrary to O'Donnell's position that the farmer should be at the centre of the agitation, but the impact of seizures and prison had caused friction, none more so than in his own area. The tension with MacCauley after the meeting was a palpable indication of this.

⁷⁴ O'Donnell, *Another day*, pp 75-6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 24 Aug. 1929.

⁷⁷ O'Donnell, *Another day*, p. 77.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

In June over two hundred Land Commission cases relating to annuity arrears were heard at Dungloe District Court in one day, and in nearly all, decrees were granted.⁷⁹ In May a party of court messengers who assisted sheriffs had to abandon their seized goods when reportedly fired on by rifle shot in Kerry. Later in the month 19 cattle, 2 greyhounds and a horse were seized from the farm of Michael Walsh, Waterville (Kerry) and only released on payment of arrears due of £53 15s.⁸⁰ At Ennis Circuit Court the Land Commission admitted an error in seizing a pony and trap in April 1929 from Thomas Hynes, Kilfenora (Clare) in respect of a decree from June 1926 which had already been paid but not recorded in their files. It was instructed to pay £34.⁸¹ In September, decrees were granted at Blessington (Wicklow) and Berehaven (Cork) while at Dungloe, J. Houston was sentenced to three months imprisonment for failure to pay annuities.⁸² In Kilrush court (Clare) the Land Commission sought the imprisonment of an eighty year old woman for failure to pay annuities, which was refused by the judge.⁸³

O'Donnell's third novel, *Adrigoole* was published in the summer of 1929, inspired by the deaths of four of the O'Sullivan family from Cork in 1927 (see chapter 3) but set in his native Donegal. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington praised the descriptions of efforts to eke out a living from the poor soil, the hiring fairs at Strabane and the hardship in the potato fields of Scotland.⁸⁴ But she was critical of the 'dumb resignation' of the central characters Hughie and Brigid Dalach:

In the last phase they seemed to go down to their deaths, dumb and driven, as sheep to the slaughter-house, accepting their lot with a resignation criminal in its passivity. Theirs is the story of '47 all over again, when peasants were praised by their pastors for dying with a Christian resignation while food was within reach and their rents had been duly paid. ... But from Hughie and Brigid one would have expected something more upstanding – and from their creator, also, a better moral, for his philosophy is not framed on the lie-down-and-die school of ethics.⁸⁵

Ó Drisceoil writes that the literary criticism of the work has been dominated by reference to the novel's tragic dimension; hence, most commentators underestimate the importance of the context in which it was written and misread the political points being made.

⁷⁹ *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 22 June 1929.

⁸⁰ Letter to the Chief-Superintendent, Tralee, from the sheriff's office, Tralee, 1 June 1929 (UCDA, Fitzgerald papers, P80/851 (5)).

⁸¹ *Weekly Irish Times*, 27 July 1929.

⁸² *Kildare Observer*, 14 Sept. 1929; *Cork Examiner*, 20 Sept. 1929; *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 21 Sept. 1929.

⁸³ *An Phoblacht*, 26 Oct. 1929.

⁸⁴ Review of O'Donnell's novel *Adrigoole*, by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington in *An Phoblacht*, 3 Aug. 1929.

⁸⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 3 Aug. 1929.

When O'Donnell wrote *Adrigoole* he was frustrated with the slow progress of the annuities campaign and aimed to demonstrate the precarious position of the small farmer and the fragility of their economy. They could only survive in a context of neighbourliness, and it was the breakdown in this solidarity primarily caused by the Civil War that led to the deaths of the Dalachs.⁸⁶ At the beginning of the annuities campaign O'Donnell had emphasised that he was anxious to overcome the bitterness of the Civil War and was keen to re-establish the 'patterns of neighbourliness' that had been undermined.⁸⁷ O'Donnell had often spoken about rekindling a spirit of neighbourliness which he saw as crucial to the success of the annuities agitation.

Meanwhile, issues surrounding annuities continued to regularly inflame letter writers. A series of letters appeared in the *Irish Independent* in early September, including one from Eamon Donnelly, the defeated candidate in Leitrim/Sligo that outlined legal and historical arguments for non-payment of annuities. These prompted the editor to write that he would not allow a long rambling discussion on annuities which, in his opinion, had already been fully debated in the Dáil, the press and on political platforms.⁸⁸

The Land Commission was putting increased pressure on those who continued to refuse to pay annuities and arrears. It instructed that farms be sold by public auction in Leitrim, Longford, Kilkenny, Laois, Cork and Wicklow in July; Roscommon, Kerry and Wicklow in August; Roscommon again in September; and in Limerick in November. These were all advertised with the proviso that if the public auctions proved unsuccessful the farms would be later sold by private treaty.⁸⁹ These auctions and sales would have undoubtedly caused heightened tension in communities, especially when the sales were the result of evictions for non-payment of annuities. In Leitrim, a man who had taken over a farm from which the previous tenant had been evicted for refusal to pay annuities was alleged to have been visited by armed men telling him to leave the area. *An Phoblacht* complained about the arrest of three local republicans over the matter, claiming they had no connection with the incident; and that this was just the usual response to any occurrence in south Leitrim.⁹⁰

The growing influence of Fianna Fáil on the annuities issue was obviously causing some concern within the Labour Party. In September 1929, Labour Senator J.T. O'Farrell attacked Fianna Fáil's stance on annuities, sarcastically stating that the idea had

⁸⁶ Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), pp 54-5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁸⁸ *Irish Independent*, 5, 6, 7 Sept. 1929.

⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, 5, 6, 12 July, 9, 17, 21 Aug., 20 Sept., 2 Nov. 1929.

⁹⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 5 Oct. 1929.

been invented and given to them by a British Army pensioner and ex-landlord, claiming Maurice Moore had bequeathed it to Fianna Fáil only after his party Clann Éireann had been wiped out at the 1927 Election. O'Farrell said the obvious way was to test the annuities issue was in the courts. His conclusion on Fianna Fáil's reluctance to attempt this was that they had no faith in the substance of their claims.⁹¹ O'Farrell spelt out Labour's attitude as one of two courses: reopen the financial settlement with Britain or bring an action in the courts restraining the finance minister from paying the money into the British Exchequer.⁹² The spat between Labour and Fianna Fáil continued with Labour leader, T. J. O'Connell, claiming the two main party's intractable positions on annuities meant Labour's attitude was the 'only one likely to bear any fruit'.⁹³

In August 1929 the Kildare Dáil Comhairle Ceantair, following instructions from the Fianna Fáil executive, arranged to hold a series of meetings on annuities, beginning in Athy.⁹⁴ Then meetings were organised across the country with Fianna Fáil TDs to the fore demanding the retention of annuities. Some of those who spoke made reference to Philip Snowden, British Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had negotiated a better deal for Britain over war reparations at a conference in The Hague. The sum he had negotiated was far less significant to the British Exchequer than the £5 million the Free State was paying to Britain annually.⁹⁵ Maud Gonne MacBride also alluded to this when criticising the financial agreement, claiming that the £5 million was, in the Irish context, proportionately to its population and relative wealth, higher than the war reparation indemnity that was been wrung by the Allies from Germany, and that there was no Dawes or Young plan in operation in Ireland.⁹⁶

The Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis was held at the Mansion House on 17-18 October, and annuities figured prominently in the Honorary Secretary's report. It stated the campaign for the retention of the annuities had been vigorously pursued throughout the year. No question in

⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 30 Sept. 1929; *Irish Independent*, 30 Sept. 1929. These were a series of speeches and letters between both parties on various issues, with annuities prominent. Lemass had attacked Labour's voting record in the Dáil, believing they had favoured the government in important decisions, citing the annuities motion as one such decision and the division in the Labour vote.

⁹² *Irish Independent*, 3 Oct. 1929.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Kildare Observer*, 10 Aug. 1929.

⁹⁵ *Anglo-Celt*, 12 Oct. 1929; *Irish Times*, 14 Oct. 1929; *Southern Star*, 19 Oct. 1929. Snowden had been in opposition when a commission had been appointed which allotted war reparations claims from Germany and although there was a British representative on the commission who agreed with its outcome, Snowden disagreed and said if returned to power he would reopen the case. Labour was returned to power and Snowden fought for and won a better deal for Britain at a conference in The Hague.

⁹⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 2 Nov. 1929. The Dawes (1924), and Young (1929), plans were initiated by the USA to help Germany meet its war reparations, the plans extended the period of payment and reduced the amount, while lending money to the German Government.

recent times had aroused such interest as evidenced by the attendance at public meetings and the demand for literature on the issue. It was confident the government would be defeated on this single issue.⁹⁷ The report contained a resolution adopted by the national executive on 14 February, which had been recommended by a special sub-committee, appointed to consider the matter of annuities: 'that Fianna Fáil should undertake in the event of a satisfactory revision of the so-called Ultimate Financial Settlement to use whatever proportion of the money thus secured as would be required to finance a scheme for the de-rating of agricultural land'.⁹⁸

Moore was re-elected to the national executive. An adopted resolution expressed satisfaction with the campaign for retention: 'which has been based on legal justice and moral right, it believes will be inevitably successful. That it urges the national executive to pursue this campaign with unabated vigour and calls on all cumainn to do their utmost to arouse public opinion in these areas in support of it'.⁹⁹ As with Fianna Fáil speakers throughout the country there was an increasing attempt to link the campaign to the issue of de-rating. De-rating would have been popular with farmers and the demand that the money from annuities be used to help in that regard might, Fianna Fáil hoped, placate some of those farmers unhappy with the idea of paying annuities to either government.

On 30 October Ernest Blythe announced he was proposing to set up a commission of inquiry into de-rating.¹⁰⁰ 'Our Dublin Letter' had wrote of Blythe's intention some weeks previous, claiming that his hand had been forced by an influential group within his party, who felt something had to be done to counteract the effects of Fianna Fáil's position on annuities, that farmers had suffered as a result of some of the legislation concerning annuities and the government would need to make a gesture to the farming community to hold their support.¹⁰¹ This Commission of inquiry took place in January 1930 and will be briefly discussed later in this chapter.

In December Bishop Fogarty labelled the campaign against annuities in Tipperary as a brazen dishonesty. He argued that people in Tipperary were some of the first to avail of the Land Acts and had promptly paid their annuities, and, in fact, some had completed their

⁹⁷ Honorary Secretaries Report. Ard Fheis 17-18 Oct. 1929 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/743).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ 1929 Ard Fheis (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/743).

¹⁰⁰ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 32, No. 4, col. 415, 30 Oct. 1929. The Dáil had resumed sitting on 23 Oct. after the summer recess.

¹⁰¹ *Ulster Herald*, 19 Oct. 1929.

obligations under the earlier acts.¹⁰² The reaction to Fogarty's speech was predictable; there was an endorsement from a *Cork Examiner* editorial: 'the holding out of the prospect of repudiating the annuities to a community who were finding it hard to make ends meet, showed there were no limits that some would go for political purposes'.¹⁰³ A reply from Seán T. O'Kelly Fianna Fáil TD and was perhaps less predictable; he inferred that the bishop was not attacking Fianna Fáil's position on retention of annuities but rather that Fogarty was attacking those farmers who refused to pay annuities. Refusal to pay annuities was not a position that Fianna Fáil had ever supported and thus on this issue O' Kelly agreed with Dr Fogarty.¹⁰⁴ It was interesting how O'Kelly interpreted Fogarty's speech and seemed keen to deflect any notion that the dishonesty was directed at Fianna Fáil's position; indeed he sought to put clear distance between the party and those advocating non-payment. It certainly implied an anxiety within Fianna Fáil over potential discord with the church.

This and the bishop's speech in turn provided a predictable response from O'Donnell who stated that no annuities should be paid and that Fogarty was only repeating what John O'Connell had said before. O'Donnell argued that until Fianna Fáil were in power and able to prevent the export of annuities they had no right to proclaim that they must be paid.¹⁰⁵ *An Phoblacht* was also scathing of O'Kelly and Fianna Fáil: 'apparently fearful of being considered dishonest hastens to assure the Bishop that Fianna Fáil wants to have annuities paid to Dublin and not to London. What does it matter to the poor farmer whether it is to Dublin or London he has to pay? No wonder the Fianna Fáil policy on annuities has met with no support'.¹⁰⁶ There had always been a difference between O'Donnell and Fianna Fáil, but it was evident in O'Donnell's writing that this difference was widening and the early euphoria at the coming together of these strands in February 1928 with Moore as the glue was beginning to wane. Indeed Fianna Fáil strategists probably believed they would garner even greater support if they wrestled influence on the campaign away from O'Donnell.

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 12 Dec. 1929.

¹⁰³ *Cork Examiner*, 13 Dec. 1929.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Independent*, 16 Dec. 1929.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 Dec. 1929.

¹⁰⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 21 Dec. 1929.

(iv) O'Donnell and the European Peasants' Congress

The IRA had been forging increasing links with communist groups through organisations directed by the Comintern. O'Donnell was centrally involved in many of these groups.¹⁰⁷ He and Seán MacBride represented the Irish section of the League Against Imperialism (LAI) at its second World Congress at Frankfurt am Main on 20-31 July 1929.¹⁰⁸ The Irish Labour Defence League (ILDL) was another group linking the IRA, unions and communists. Its first conference was held at Little Theatre, South William Street, on 7 July 1929. It was reported that the IRA would form the nucleus of the Workers Defence Corps.¹⁰⁹ From January 1930 Bob Stewart, a former Acting General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), had been in Ireland as a paid official of the party to organise the Irish section of the Krestintern. In addition, O'Donnell was working actively to promote relations with the communist movement in Ireland and Europe. It was mistakenly reported that O'Donnell was no longer interested in *An Phoblacht* but that the 'tone of the paper indicates some understanding of the communist movement'.¹¹⁰ While O'Donnell was no longer editor of *An Phoblacht*, he still contributed, albeit less frequently, as was evidenced from the less frequent coverage of the annuities crisis. However, since the beginning of 1930 articles from him began to appear more regularly particularly around the issue of the working farmers committee. O'Connor writes that the most important Comintern work was done with O'Donnell and from January 1930, Stewart worked with him to transform the Anti-Tribute League into the Irish section of the European Peasants Congress.¹¹¹

O'Donnell was now moving in a different direction to Fianna Fáil and in January, he outlined plans for an organising committee in Berlin for a European Congress of Working Farmers. He hoped to have Irish delegates present, selected from a national conference.¹¹² A provisional organising committee was set up in Galway on 31 January 1930. This comprised many who were already active in the anti-annuities campaign including Eamonn Corbett, Martin Fahy, Seán Hayes who were county councillors, Seán O'Carroll (Limerick), Liam

¹⁰⁷ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, pp 50-51.

¹⁰⁸ Account of proceedings at Congress of League Against Imperialism, Frankfurt am Main, 20-31 July 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/8/682).

¹⁰⁹ Memo on formation of Workers Defence Corps to the Secretary Executive Council, 16 July 1929 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5074).

¹¹⁰ Communist activities/ Peasant Farmers Organisation (Krestintern), Dept. of Justice 27 Mar. 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5074); see also Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 57. Writing that Stewart and another senior member Tom Bell had come to Ireland in Jan. 1930 as part of a Comintern initiative to prepare for the setting up of a new communist party and were assisted by O'Donnell.

¹¹¹ Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the green: Ireland, Russia and the communist internationals 1919-43* (Dublin, 2004), p. 151.

¹¹² *An Phoblacht*, 1 Feb. 1930.

O’Gorman and John Spain (Tipperary), Phil MacCauley, Michael Hallissey and O’Donnell. They adopted the platform of the European Working Farmers’ Organising Committee which included ‘the struggle against landlordism’; defined to mean the freeing of the land for usage by the working farmer without rent or annuity, working farmer in these instances would relate to smaller farmers as opposed to those bigger landowners. The committee would make no pretence at being non-political.¹¹³ Stewart accompanied O’Donnell to Galway on 23 March for the national congress of the Irish Working Farmers’ Committee (IWFC). Forty-three delegates attended the meeting, from Galway, Clare, Donegal, Roscommon, Longford, Leitrim and Tipperary. O’Donnell, Corbett and MacCauley were appointed as delegates (according to *An Phoblacht*, Fahy was also chosen) to attend the European Peasants Congress in Berlin.¹¹⁴ Hayes chaired the meeting, which found annuities to be as objectionable as the old rents and landlordism under another name. It warned the political parties that ‘the working farmers were not interested in the legal quibbles or slushy talk about moral obligations in this matter’. The meeting instructed the committee to join the farmers with urban workers to form a congress that would ‘authoritatively voice national repudiation of the bailiffs and which will decide on action to make the national repudiation effective’. It accepted the programme of the European Peasants Congress and welcomed the fact that a preparatory committee for the formation of a Revolutionary Workers’ Party (RWP) had been formed in Dublin.¹¹⁵ The IWFC had acquired an office at 6 Upper O’Connell Street and links with the preparatory committee for the formation of a RWP were evident as meetings to set up this group took place in this office. On the 2 and 3 March O’Donnell and Stewart met with members of the IRA to explain the advantages of them joining this preparatory committee.¹¹⁶ On 13 March a committee was established which included O’Donnell.¹¹⁷ The government viewed this preparatory committee as a new organisation which would embrace the IRA, all republican groups and also communists. It believed that Michael Fitzpatrick (a central figure in the IRA and a key figure in their contacts with the USSR)¹¹⁸, who was found along with twenty-two other members of the

¹¹³ *An Phoblacht*, 1, 8 Feb. 1930.

¹¹⁴ Report on meeting of Irish Working Farmers’ Committee, Galway 23 Mar. 1930. Communist activities/ Peasant Farmers Organisation (Krestintern), Dept. of Justice, 27 Mar. 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5074).

¹¹⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 5 Apr. 1930.

¹¹⁶ Report of meeting under auspices of Irish Communist Party held at offices of Irish Working Farmers’ Committee. 2 & 3 Mar. 1930, Dept. of Justice, 19 Mar. 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5074). There was not a Communist Party but a preparatory committee to assist in its formation (PCRWP).

¹¹⁷ Ó Drisceoil, *O’Donnell*, p. 59; see also O’Connor, *Reds and the green*, pp 153-4.

¹¹⁸ Brian Hanley, *The IRA 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 192.

IRA at a meeting discussing a constitution and new rules, had been entrusted by GHQ with its organisation.¹¹⁹

The establishment of the IWFC as an alternative voice in opposition to annuities allowed O'Donnell and others to pursue the campaign on their own terms. The IWFC had a broader agenda than the single issue of annuities; O'Donnell had always envisaged the campaign developing along a broader trajectory anyhow. Opposition to the Fianna Fáil approach was clearly outlined in the call for repudiation of the bailiffs and reference to farmers not being interested in 'legal quibbles or moral obligations',¹²⁰. The IWFC was also very much grounded in the Krestintern policy to promote and represent small farmers' interests as distinct to those of larger farmers, obviously reflecting O'Donnell's international political outlook and his growing association with the Comintern. This international view had been evident in the pages of *An Phoblacht* in recent years under O'Donnell's watch and had continued under the editorship of Ryan so it was no surprise that efforts were made to link agrarian agitation in Ireland to small farmers' groupings across Europe.

There was a hardening of attitudes on both sides of the annuities divide. This was evident in O'Donnell's open letter to Cardinal MacRory who had earlier reported that priests were being persecuted in Russia for practising their religion; O'Donnell pointed out this only happened for political offences in Russia and referred the cardinal to the recent imprisonment of Fr Fahy by 'Cosgrave's Catholic administration'.¹²¹ Patrick Hogan was trenchant that he 'would rather see the treaty repudiated and see war fair and square than that the campaign against land annuities should succeed'.¹²²

The government was obviously taking news of the new Farmers' Committee and the upcoming European congress seriously, as they assessed passport applications from MacCauley, Corbett, Hayes, Patrick Rooney and Martin Fahy. The police could not give clearance as all had associations with the 'irregular movement' but an arrangement was made with the Department of External Affairs for their issue. It was felt if the German

¹¹⁹ Report on Irish Workers and Farmers Republican Party (UCDA, Fitzgerald papers, P80/856 (23)). This was not the name of the party or group as the reports sometimes got it wrong, but some of the names changed frequently as the linkage between IRA, Communists and small farmers developed.

¹²⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 5 Apr. 1930.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 22 Feb. 1930. This was in the wake of increased criticism of the Soviet Union and communism from MacRory.

¹²² *Irish Independent*, 24 Feb. 1930.

Government was allowing the congress take place in Berlin, it would be difficult to refuse passports.¹²³ O'Donnell opened the congress in Berlin in March where delegates from seventeen countries attended. A permanent central committee of twenty-five members was elected with German communist leader Harry Richter as president; O'Donnell was elected to this committee.¹²⁴ O'Donnell offered his services to help out with some of what he termed 'illegal work' across Europe, he would arrange literary meetings, giving a talk on aspects of his writing to coincide with committee work in countries particularly hostile to the politics of the Krestintern.¹²⁵

While meetings continued nationally and at international conferences, the effects of non-payment and seizures continued at local level. In Wexford, bailiffs made a seizure against Patrick Kavanagh, to satisfy a decree for £150. Sixteen cattle were seized, only six of which belonged to Kavanagh, the remainder had strayed from an adjoining farm. They were brought to the pound in Wexford Town and put up for auction, the only bidder was Kavanagh the owner of the strayed cattle, but this was rejected, as it did not meet the amount of the sheriff's claim. The cattle were then sent on to be sold.¹²⁶ This was the reality of seizures: as alluded to previously the law enabled stock to be taken regardless of their ownership. In the case of cattle breaking into an adjoining field, this seemed particularly harsh but this was the actuality of the conflict between those resisting payment and a government determined to provide the legislation to deal with that resistance.

Public auctions of farms on the instruction of the Land Commission continued in 1930, with auctions in Clare and Louth in January; Clare and Donegal in February; and in Wexford, Laois and Tipperary in May.¹²⁷ On one day in January over fifty decrees were granted in Tipperary Circuit Court for non-payment of annuities.¹²⁸ Decrees were granted at Monasterevan (Kildare), Ballycastle (Mayo), Newcastle West (Limerick), Mohill (Leitrim),

¹²³ Report on Irish Working Farmers' Committee, Dept. of Justice, 27 Mar. 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5074).

¹²⁴ James Hogan, *Could Ireland become communist? The facts of the case* (Dublin, 1935), pp 89-91.

¹²⁵ *Monkeys in the superstructure. Reminiscences of Peadar O'Donnell* (Galway, 1986), p. 24. O'Donnell hoped to use his literary contacts for this venture. The idea being that he as a known writer could travel more freely to events organised around his literature and while there make contact with members of the farmers' committees.

¹²⁶ *Irish Times*, 4 Mar. 1930.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 Jan., 14, 22 Feb., 3 May 1930.

¹²⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 20 Jan. 1930.

and in Leitrim a term of one month's imprisonment was handed down to one farmer for non-payment.¹²⁹

In January 1930, at a meeting of the Commission of Inquiry into the De-rating of Agricultural Land, the General Council of County Councils put forward the view that defaulting annuities should be borne by all the country rather than just the farming community. The reply was that the Agricultural Grant was allocated entirely to relieve rates on agricultural land and was it not more equitable that defaulting annuities should be made good by those who benefit. Representatives of Donegal County Council made a similar submission that councils had no responsibility for the collection of annuities yet they were required to make good the deficits from their grants which served to show the unfairness of penalising local authorities for the Land Commission's failure to collect annuities.¹³⁰

In February Blythe replied to a Dáil question from Denis Allen (Fianna Fáil), that the total paid in annuities for each of the years 1922-29, including interest under the Land Purchase Acts 1891-1909 (including the Labourers Act) were as follows:

This was a table provided in Blythe's answer to the question.¹³¹

Financial Year.	Amount.			Financial Year.	Amount.		
	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
1922-23	2,834,502	16	0	1926-27	2,997,722	9	8
1923-24	2,900,859	17	9	1927-28	3,002,227	14	7
1924-25	2,954,482	14	5	1928-29	3,002,072	0	1
1925-26	2,986,166	17	8	1929-30	2,995,074	5	1

The impact of annuities at local authority level was evident in a response to questions from Michael Connolly (Cumann na nGaedheal, Longford/Westmeath) on 19 March. It was revealed that the total amount of the estate duty grant for Longford absorbed in the payment of annuity arrears since 1922 was £5,204, and that £1,855 had been deducted from the county's agricultural grant in 1928 for the same reason.¹³² This type of information was important given that there was a forthcoming by-election in Longford-Westmeath and that there was a likelihood the annuities question would remain centre stage. The Fianna Fáil selection to contest the election, James Geoghegan, KC a former member of Cumann na

¹²⁹ *Leinster Express*, 1 Feb.1930; *Ballina Herald*, 15 Feb.1930; *Limerick Leader*, 1 Mar.1930; *Anglo-Celt*, 19 Apr. 1930; *Leitrim Observer*, 10 May 1930.

¹³⁰ *Irish Times*, 23 Jan. 1930; *Cork Examiner*, 9 Jan. 1930. This inquiry was presided over by Judge Davitt.

¹³¹ *Dáil Debates*, Questions on Land Annuity payments, Vol. 33, No. 7, cols 847-8, 26 Feb. 1930.

¹³² *Ibid.*, Questions on grants withheld in Longford, Vol. 33, No. 16, cols 2029-30, 19 Mar. 1930. See also *Longford Leader*, 22 Mar. 1930.

nGaedheal and one of the six lawyers whose opinion was quoted in support of the retention of annuities, further increased this likelihood.

During political speeches at Mullingar and Ballinamuck, Geoghegan commented that it was impossible to avoid the question of annuities at this election, and stated that as a lawyer he declared there was no obligation to pay them to England.¹³³ Cumann na nGaedheal recognised the importance of the election and at a parliamentary meeting on 22 May, the Minister for Agriculture raised the question of releasing some TDs from Dáil attendance during the campaign.¹³⁴ The other candidates in the election were Dr. Vincent Delany, Cumann na nGaedheal and Senator Michael Duffy, Labour. M.J. Lyons, secretary of the Longford Farmers' Association, supporting Delaney, sarcastically commented that it had taken Geoghegan, a clever legal expert, five years to 'discover that the Treaty was a bad instrument' and that even then he had said nothing of annuities for some years.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, O'Connell, the Labour leader, regretted that the annuities issue had become party political. He believed there was little chance of a favourable revision of the financial settlement as a consequence of the positions of the two major parties.¹³⁶ Geoghegan won by over 5,000 votes and the *Irish Times* was quick to proffer reasons behind this victory; the unpopularity that sooner or later befalls a government of eight years, Fianna Fáil's superior organisation and:

In the second place, Fianna Fáil concentrated all its energies upon the land annuities. Longford/Westmeath is an agricultural constituency in which there are large numbers of small farmers. The suggestion that a Fianna Fáil government would withhold the annuities from Britain and devote the money to de-rating in the Free State was as plausible as it was dishonest, and we have no doubt that it influenced the less intelligent elements among the electorate to vote against the government.¹³⁷

O'Neill has concluded that the economic crises and falling agricultural prices were the main differences between this election and the Leitrim/Sligo election of June 1929.¹³⁸ *An Phoblacht* was unhappy with comments after the by-election that Geoghegan and Fianna Fáil hoped to sustain their claim to the annuities by legal methods.¹³⁹ This reinforced different attitudes now pertaining on the best way forward for the annuities agitation.

¹³³ *Irish Times*, 19 May, 2 June 1930; *Cork Examiner*, 19 May 1930; *Longford Leader*, 24 May 1930.

¹³⁴ Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party minute books (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal /Fine Gael papers P39/MIN/3). Meeting of parliamentary party at Leinster House, 22 May 1930.

¹³⁵ *Irish Times*, 26 May 1930; *Longford Leader*, 31 May 1930.

¹³⁶ *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1930; *Cork Examiner*, 27 May 1930.

¹³⁷ *Irish Times*, 16 June 1930.

¹³⁸ O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card?', p. 32.

¹³⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 28 June 1930.

This was an important victory for Fianna Fáil, but of more significance was the prominence of annuities in the campaign. The selection of Geoghegan seemed to epitomise Fianna Fáil's position on annuities, that the issue would be fought on legal grounds. He was new to the party, they could make the case that a lawyer of moderate opinion now endorsed their legal stance, and hoped this would appeal to voters outside their traditional base. One year on from another by-election dominated by annuities, Fianna Fáil's message seemed to be resonating with voters.

The previous fifteen months had witnessed Fianna Fáil pursue the annuities question with increased vigour as had been demanded at their Ard Fheis. The defeat of their Dáil motion had not deterred them, nor the Leitrim/Sligo by-election. While an increasingly assertive Church was critical of the anti-annuities campaign, Fianna Fáil had sought to deflect this criticism as it stressed the legalities of its approach. But the campaign was not homogeneous and the activities of O'Donnell, Fr Fahy and some county councils provided it with a radical edge. The newly-formed IWFC hoped to harness this radical view aided by similar organisations at home and abroad. As the effects of economic depression loomed the differences between those favouring a legal approach for retention and those proposing non-payment and a broader international view supported by the Comintern, seemed to be widening. However, there was little doubt that Fianna Fáil were fast becoming the standard-bearer for an issue that affected great swathes of the electorate and were continually moulding and harnessing that to cement their own stamp on the campaign.

CHAPTER 9

EMERGING DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE ANTI-ANNUITIES CAMPAIGN BETWEEN O'DONNELL AND FIANNA FÁIL

The political groupings opposed to annuities were increasingly moulding the campaign to fit their specific aims, as it continued to be drawn into the wider political debate. The newly-formed IWFC, which reflected O'Donnell's political outlook, though small, had a wider agenda than the larger 'No Tribute' campaign. O'Donnell would also now have to unexpectedly contend with criticism from another flank in the shape of the embryonic RWP. There was also the issue of an unflattering IRA report into the campaign in Donegal. Those opposed to annuities sought to place the issue in an international setting; Fianna Fáil linking them to war reparations and debts, while O'Donnell and the RWP viewed it as part of a European-wide small farmers' movement. O'Donnell articulated this in a pamphlet on working farmers in early 1931.¹ Fianna Fáil would continue to emphasise the annuities during elections with a view to the impending general election, while O'Donnell became increasingly involved in efforts to incorporate the IWFC and hence the annuities into a socially radical movement spearheaded by the IRA.

(i) The agitation under strain

O'Donnell had continued to argue for greater cooperation between the IRA and the new RWP in what was termed a united front approach. He was well placed to bring the two organisations closer together as he was a member of both and contributed to their respective weekly papers. O'Donnell had been listed to write for the first edition of the *Workers' Voice* under the heading 'land annuities and peasants'.² He was identified as making every effort to persuade IRA members to join the new grouping and had been reasonably successful, as a list noting IRA members in the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) revealed.³ References to annuities were included second on the party's twelve point draft; it would repudiate all payment of tribute to imperialism whether by way of land annuities, public or national debts.⁴ However, to O'Donnell's surprise his efforts at allying the two groups were to be somewhat

¹ Peadar O'Donnell, *Plan of campaign for Irish working farmers* (Dublin, 1931).

² Memo regarding Revolutionary Organisations in Saorstát Éireann, 5 Apr. 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, S5864).

³ Memo and documents relating to the Workers' Revolutionary Party from Garda Commissioner's office to Secretary, Dept. of Justice, 13 June 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/8/691). In the Garda files the group was called both Revolutionary Workers' Party and Workers' Revolutionary Party, its paper the *Workers' Voice* referred to it as Revolutionary Workers' Party.

⁴ Documents including draft of ideals of party, 13 June 1930 (NAI, Dept. of Justice, JUS/8/691).

undermined by one of the very organisations he was serving. Emmet O'Connor writes that the implementation of the Comintern's edict of class against class was now extended to include republicans. They constituted a sizeable number in the new communist group and were to the fore in many of its front organisations.⁵ An anonymous article in the *Workers' Voice* outlined this new position, stating it was inconsistent to expose the corruption and treachery of the leadership of Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil and Labour while 'failing to adequately expose the cant nonsense and up in the clouds politics of the left-wing republican leadership'.⁶ Workers, it went on, who follow these parties, including 'Sinn Féin and the IRA are all victims of the policy of deception and fraud pursued by leaders of these organisations'.⁷

Ó Drisceoil states that O'Donnell was shocked by the article and believed it was most likely unsanctioned.⁸ O'Donnell replied: 'because the IRA leadership confines itself mostly – and too much - to purely military considerations it is adversely criticised by individuals in working class parties'.⁹ For the IRA to be accused of deception and this to be allowed into a working-class journal was 'sheer treachery to the working class struggle'.¹⁰ The *Workers' Voice* claimed the article did not represent their policy and had remained unsigned due to a technical error but that they would continue to seek the opinions of workers and working farmers and from this, would formulate a clear political direction.¹¹ O'Donnell later resigned from the party.¹² In O'Donnell's denunciation of the *Workers' Voice* article there was the minor reference to the IRA's overconcentration on purely military matters, once more emphasising his desire to create a more politically active organisation. There was not a complete split as both groups continued to provide members for various radical campaigns, but it was undoubtedly a blow to O'Donnell's agenda of a broad left coalition. He had anticipated tough battles with Fianna Fáil for the direction of the annuities campaign, but not an attack from this quarter. The annuities issue was not directly affected and the IWFC was still organising committees of action and continued to link the RWP and the IRA.

The *Workers' Voice* gave much coverage to the annuities issue and in particular to the organising of the IWFC. It carried news of the building of committees of action in Clare,

⁵ Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the green: Ireland, Russia and the communist internationals 1919-43* (Dublin, 2004), pp 153-5.

⁶ *Workers' Voice*, 28 June 1930; see also O'Connor, *Reds and the green*, pp 153-5; Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), pp 60-61.

⁷ *Workers' Voice*, 28 June 1930.

⁸ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 62.

⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 5 July 1930.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Workers' Voice*, 12 July 1930.

¹² O'Connor, *Reds and the green*, p. 155.

Donegal, Galway and North Tipperary and how these committees were liaising with the national committee. The paper claimed the working farmers' organisation was gaining influence; that its Galway conference resolution on annuities was not without effect on the Longford/Westmeath by-election where the government candidate was heavily defeated.¹³ The *Workers' Voice* maintained that the condition of working farmers made a revival of the old Land League pledge necessary: 'Never to bid for, take or hold the farm from which our neighbour has been evicted for the non-payment of an unjust rent (annuity) and never to take hand, act or part in the sowing or saving of crops thereon, and hold the man who would do so as a public enemy'.¹⁴

The *Workers' Voice* continued to highlight agrarian concerns including efforts by farmers in Meath to prevent Land Commission auctions of estates for division, preventing farms being sold to large farmers. It cited a case two miles from Kells, where gates and lands were broken which prevented the auction of meadows on these lands. Signs had been erected in the area: 'Neighbours, keep the grabbers out!'¹⁵ At Lattin, in Tipperary, a meeting protested against Land Commission sales, stating that 'every small place sold was picked up by the bigger farmers, backed by the banks'.¹⁶ Although these were sales of estates and not farm sales forced from non-payment of annuities, the paper was highlighting the inequities in land redistribution. It demonstrated how the IWFC was seeking to broaden the campaign, placing particular attention on preventing bids for farms from which tenants had been evicted, and non-cooperation with any who would take over such farms.

Each committee of action was to represent at least five homes. Its role was to recruit neighbours and lead the struggle against landlordism and every attempt to 'cod working farmers with foolish reform talk'.¹⁷ The *Workers' Voice* coverage reflected the local and the national: from Glen, in Clare where only one family in twenty in the district had paid rent over the last eleven years, to peasants fighting against imperial-fascist terror in India, Poland, western Ukraine and Italy.¹⁸ The *Workers' Voice* had sought to highlight the influence of the IWFC, referencing the Longford/Westmeath by-election of 1930. Annuities were the primary concern in that election, however, it was Fianna Fáil's portrayal of the issue that arguably had

¹³ *Workers' Voice*, 21 June 1930.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, for more on the attempts at and effects of land redistribution see Dooley, 'The land for the people', chapter 3, pp 81-98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1930.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1930.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the greatest bearing on the electorate, particularly the small farmer cohort. This was to remain a conundrum for the more radical elements opposed to annuities, that while they welcomed the promotion of the issue nationally, including at elections, it was the more localised Fianna Fáil message rather than its wider agricultural agenda of linking the problems of small farmers to European situations that was gaining traction with Irish farmers.

The IWFC remained a small grouping despite the efforts of O'Donnell; James Hogan commented that if attempts to make communists of struggling Irish farmers did not meet expectations, it was through no fault of O'Donnell, Seán Hayes or their IRA colleagues as they did their best to translate Krestintern decisions into action.¹⁹ While O'Donnell may have given a slightly embellished account of the level of engagement of the farmers committees to the committee in Berlin, they were surprised with the slowness of results attained and sent a representative to Ireland in May 1930 to speed up the process. The Krestintern representative reported that although their branches were few the IWFC appeared capable of becoming the pivot for widespread class struggle in the country. It was pleased they were recruited chiefly from the IRA, as this would also place them in the forefront of the national struggle.²⁰

However, while these efforts to organise small farmers continued, the campaign in Donegal had been encountering difficulties, resulting in O'Donnell being forced to seek terms with Hogan in June 1929 (see chapter 7). This was further borne out by the findings of an IRA officer's report, submitted to the acting chief-of-staff in September 1930. He reported from areas including Letterkenny, Glendowan, Doocharry and Gweedore: 'in the following districts as I could ascertain, there is not a single individual holding out'.²¹ Some farmers were still refusing to pay in the Dungloe, Loughanure and Croveigh areas, but that there was 'nothing approaching an organised resistance' and those still holding out were doing so simply as individuals. The officer said it appeared that already farmers had had enough of the campaign and that it 'would take a considerable amount of coaxing to get them started on it again'.²² An opinion generally expressed was that people could not be relied upon to maintain an active resistance and that, 'those who would be foremost in joining the fight would be the first to go to the Land Commission and settle on the quiet'.²³ Many who had made sacrifices at the beginning of the agitation felt the rest of the country had let them down and,

¹⁹ James Hogan, *Could Ireland become communist? The facts of the case* (Dublin, 1935), p. 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 91-2.

²¹ Report for Acting chief-of staff on land annuity campaign in Donegal, 22 Sept. 1930 (UCDA, Twomey papers P69/153 (178-9)); see also Brian Hanley, *The IRA 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), pp 121-22.

²² IRA report on annuities in Donegal (UCDA, Twomey papers P69/153 (178-9)).

²³ *Ibid.*

worryingly, many others expressed utter indifference to the whole question which led the IRA officer to conclude that the campaign had no future.²⁴

The report suggested that the people lacked sufficient confidence in each other to attempt anything of an organised nature. There were those who held doubts that their neighbours had settled with the Land Commission, and that the situation was handled so indifferently in the past as to cause the people to be shy of a similar attempt in the future. Some who had held out 'were simply advised to make the best settlement they could with the Commission'.²⁵ This was most likely a reference to when O'Donnell advised some farmers to pay annuities in June 1929 after he had met with Hogan to seek terms on their behalf (see chapter 8). The IRA report should be viewed in the context of the officer wishing it understood that he was to a great extent unfamiliar with the whole question of annuities, therefore he could only report on information gleaned from people who were all strangers to him.²⁶

This was certainly a damning description of the 'No Tribute' campaign in Donegal and confirmed to some extent the reasons behind O'Donnell being requested to negotiate with Hogan in June 1929. However, those series of events may go some way to explaining some of the report's content. O'Donnell instructed some farmers to pay their annuities shortly after the meeting with Hogan, for tactical reasons to gain time. This instruction could be withdrawn if the committee decided (see chapter 8). This may partly account for the numbers paying in Donegal according to the IRA report. However, prison, court decrees and seizures also undermined the campaign, exacerbated by its failure to extend nationally, which in turn encapsulated the feeling in west Donegal of being let down by the rest of the country. The officer was unfamiliar with the situation and relied partly on information from the local IRA; the IRA Army Council, when approving the annuities campaign in January 1928, had detected a certain reluctance on behalf of the IRA in Donegal to fully embrace the agitation²⁷ (see chapter 5). This may have contributed to some of the negative aspects of the report. However, the sense of unease that was conveyed, over the belief that some were settling with the Land Commission undermined O'Donnell's idea of neighbourliness. Assertions that the issue had been handled indifferently implied criticism of his tactics and leadership.

²⁴ Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 122.

²⁵ IRA report on annuities in Donegal (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/153 (179-80)).

²⁶ Report on annuities (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/153 (179-80)).

²⁷ Letter from Tirconail Battalion IRA to adjutant general GHQ, 5 Jan. 1928 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/149 (71)).

An Phoblacht lamented the lack of co-operation between city and rural workers and laid some of the blame for this on the Trade Union movement. It identified those fomenting industrial unrest and those refusing to pay annuities as the basis for an alliance.²⁸ These were some of the early outriders for Saor Éire, which O'Donnell hoped, would bring these strands of workers together, based around the IWFC and the IRA. O'Donnell spoke of these themes at an IWFC meeting at Tralee, organised by Michael Hallissey,²⁹ declaring that the right and natural alliance of the working farmers was with workers in the towns. He urged the formation of committees of action in each district and hoped that a future delegate congress in Dublin would represent the true will of the working farmers on the question of annuities. Seán Hayes and Martin Fahy explained the situation in their respective areas, Fahy arguing that there was as much landlordism in Galway as ever before in the sense that the Land Commission forced payments in the way landlords did previously. Tom Slattery, who fought with the Free State in 1922, said the old comradeship pre-Civil War had returned in the struggle for the land, while many again linked the annuities to the Land League campaign.³⁰ *An Phoblacht* highlighted Slattery's appearance on the platform, stating that a 'new note however quietly had been struck' by his assertion that his area which had split in 1922, had healed in the common struggle against the new bailiff.³¹ This was a result O'Donnell had hoped would come from the resistance to annuities, his oft-referenced neighbourliness that he maintained had been ruptured during and after the Civil War period. But it was going to need many more like Slattery (now secretary to a local committee of action and whose home had been visited by those enforcing decrees) before his hoped for national movement on annuities would come to fruition.

These activities of the IWFC was against the background of renewed efforts by O'Donnell and other left-republicans to persuade the IRA leadership to pursue a more socially radical programme, which increased in vigour after the temporary termination of the united front agenda with the RWP. Ó Drisceoil writes that 'from late November 1930 until February 1931 *An Phoblacht* became the forum for an open debate and discussions on proposals to redefine the IRA's objectives in socially radical terms'.³² The IWFC would be part of this.

²⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 1 Nov. 1930.

²⁹ Seán Cronin, *Frank Ryan: the search for the republic* (Dublin, 1980), p. 32. Saor Éire was a political project that O'Donnell was working on which he hoped would be approved by the IRA. It was launched in September 1931.

³⁰ *Kerryman*, 8 Nov. 1930.

³¹ *An Phoblacht*, 15 Nov. 1930.

³² Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 64.

In the summer of 1930, there were a series of raids and seizures across the Rosses area of west Donegal; from Croveigh and Tubberkeen cattle were taken for non-payment of annuities. Among the farms where stock was seized were the Houstons and Seamus Duirnin, families prominent in the campaign. At Meenacross, the bailiffs were resisted as local farmers hid cattle and erected obstructions; the raiders failed to confiscate any stock. The success of the bailiffs in the Rosses where such incursions had often been repulsed, was partly attributed to the action having taken place on a wet and stormy night, which covered the noise while farmers slept. However, the raids had clearly surprised the group as a conference of the local committee of action of the IWFC was called and the organising committee of the national executive including O'Donnell, Hayes, Fahy and MacCauley had gone into the area.³³ In May John White had raised the question of Land Commission charges and issues of processes for arrears of annuities in Donegal at a Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary meeting. Martin Roddy, parliamentary secretary explained the procedures relating to collection of annuities.³⁴ It was not stated if there was unease with Land Commission activity in Donegal, but White had raised such issues before.

In August cows, horses and a pony were seized in raids in Killaloe, Clare. Bailiffs and gardaí then proceeded to the farm of Thomas Slattery, secretary of the local IWFC, but by that time neighbours had gathered and they were forced to leave.³⁵ In July 1930 decrees were issued at Ballyforan (Roscommon) and at Mohill (Leitrim) a committal order was made against a man for failing to comply with a previous decree for £4, 4s. In Kanturk (Cork) the court ordered the imprisonment of a man for two months if he failed to pay £10 and £1 costs, the defendant cited his inability to pay was due to the seizure of his farm on 28 June by the Land Commission for failure to pay annuities.³⁶ In July, twelve decrees were issued at Glenties District Court (Donegal).³⁷ The Land Commission ordered the auctions of farms at Castlepollard (Westmeath), Limerick, Letterkenny (Donegal) and Ballymote (Sligo) in July, at Moville (Donegal) and Manorhamilton (Leitrim) in August and at Ballybofey (Donegal) in

³³ *An Phoblacht*, 9 Aug. 1930.

³⁴ Land Commission administration in Co. Donegal. Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party minute books (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal /Fine Gael papers P39/MIN/3). Meeting of parliamentary party at Leinster House, 1 May 1930. While other TDs also spoke on the issue, their actual contribution is not recorded nor was there much elaboration on Roddy's answer.

³⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 23 Aug. 1930.

³⁶ *Irish Independent*, 5, 19, 21 July 1930.

³⁷ *Derry People and Tirconaill News*, 2 Aug. 1930.

September.³⁸ In September 1930, *An Phoblacht* reported that two girls were evicted from their home in Kiltimagh (Mayo) for non-payment of annuities by the Land Commission.³⁹

Eamonn Mansfield, chairman of the Land Settlement Committee, wrote that most attempted Land Commission sales proved abortive. He suggested that instead of selling a whole farm to collect a debt for three or four year's arrears, it would make more sense to sell, say, twenty-five per cent of the land to cover the annuity which would leave some money over to enable the annuitant to restock.⁴⁰ However, *Sunday Independent* columnist 'Politicus' offered the view, that only in isolated cases was the Land Commission experiencing difficulty in realising the market value of lands sold as a result of defaulting annuitants. There was still a demand for land, and people willing to purchase but defaulters were creating an atmosphere unfavourable to the free market by obstructing sales. While there were undoubted cases of misfortune, he claimed that, in the majority of cases, defaulters were neither industrious nor deserving.⁴¹ Nevertheless, there is more evidence to suggest that the lack of success of Land Commission auctions was the reluctance of farmers to buy land for whatever reason. Perhaps there was a sense of neighbourliness towards the evicted tenant or a sense of fear of being ostracised in the community. This would also apply to prospective purchasers from outside the community.

In August 1930 O'Donnell laid bare divisions now existing in the 'No Tribute' campaign.⁴² In examining the complexities within the campaign, he outlined how at the IWFC March conference in Galway, the majority of delegates who were active in Fianna Fáil had adopted a resolution declaring annuities to be nothing more than the old rents under a new name and that they must end (see chapter 8). An executive had been given the task of organising a big national congress, with mass backing to justify a national stoppage of payments.⁴³ O'Donnell claimed: 'Fianna Fáil speeches, Moore's exposures, county council resolutions –educated public opinion, created restlessness against annuities, along with the steady depression in agriculture'.⁴⁴ He stressed that a general election would not provide working farmers an opportunity to speak their minds on the issue. A congress could provide this and committees of action of the IWFC were working towards that congress.⁴⁵ In

³⁸ *Irish Times*, 4, 19 July, 1, 8, 29 Aug. 1930.

³⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 27 Sept. 1930.

⁴⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 29 Sept. 1930.

⁴¹ *Sunday Independent*, 12 Oct. 1930.

⁴² *An Phoblacht*, 23 Aug. 1930.

⁴³ *Irish Independent*, 22 Aug. 1930.

⁴⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 23 Aug. 1930.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

O'Donnell's opinion, the campaign had moved on from where de Valera thought it was and the slogan 'land annuities must be retained in Ireland' was now exhausted.⁴⁶

William Joss, writing in the *Workers' Voice*, disagreed with O'Donnell's analysis and sought to draw him 'back to a correct policy in relation to annuities and kindred questions'.⁴⁷ He opposed the view that a general election would not provide working farmers the opportunity to state their case, citing the rising militancy of the working farmers on annuities as being responsible for the increased Fianna Fáil vote in the Longford/Westmeath by-election.⁴⁸ Joss reasoned that O'Donnell could not foresee an expression of this rising militancy in an election campaign because he was thinking in terms of the old political parties 'or does not want to draw the correct political conclusion' which involves the creation of a party representing workers and working farmers. He believed O'Donnell was still placing too much hope in the idea of a united front with some Fianna Fáil, AOH and Cumann na nGaedheal elements and was missing the point of the need for a new party.⁴⁹

O'Donnell was making the point in the above articles that sections within Fianna Fáil with reasonable influence (such as county councillors) supported the more radical agenda of 'no rent'. Some Fianna Fáil members also broadly supported the ideals of the IWFC, with a number of them on the national executive, but O'Donnell believed that this aspect might not get a full airing in a general election. He recognised elements within Fianna Fáil, Cumann na nGaedheal and the AOH that he believed were supportive of a more militant position and should be galvanised around the 'no rent' slogan. What actual evidence he had for this, particularly the elements within Cumann na nGaedheal, is unknown. However, the theme of O'Donnell's analysis was obvious, that as the Fianna Fáil leadership adopted a more cautious approach on annuities, it was beholden to the IWFC to target some of the radical grassroots support for non-payment within Fianna Fáil. In his opinion, this action would be necessary to help project the IWFC to the vanguard of the annuities campaign. The thrust of Joss's evaluation was the importance of building a new party, from which he believed O'Donnell was now straying, but ironically with the idea of a 'united front' with the RWP seemingly closed off, this was just what O'Donnell was now striving to do within the IRA and incorporating the annuities support base around the IWFC.

⁴⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 23 Aug. 1930.

⁴⁷ *Workers' Voice*, 30 Aug. 1930.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Workers' Voice*, 30 Aug. 1930; Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 62.

Broadening out on O'Donnell's strategy for the IWFC, the second session of the European Peasants Committee to be held in Berlin, in December 1930, was promoted in *An Phoblacht*. The article stressed how working farmers across Europe were realising the necessity of breaking away from the leadership of the big farmers, such as the Irish Farmers' Union, who had sought to delude working farmers with promises of prosperity by way of agricultural protection.⁵⁰ This again sought to place the Irish working farmers, and in turn the annuities issue, in the broader European socialist context.

The European Peasant Committee met in Berlin in December 1930 to review work carried out by national committees since the European Congress in March. O'Donnell reported that thirty-five committees of action had been formed in Ireland and while they had not achieved all they had wanted, he maintained that Ireland was highly favourable to the development of the European Congress.⁵¹ However, while there had been progress on implementing the programme of the Congress, this was uneven across Europe: 'indeed in Ireland we could produce a miniature picture of the whole European struggle. In Ireland, East Clare struggles, West Clare is at rest, comparatively, West Donegal fights, East Donegal does not, and so on'.⁵² O'Donnell gave some practical examples of alliances with urban workers, he alluded to cases where farmers had co-operated with Irish Omnibus Company bus strikers and suggested that such co-operation would help their cause.⁵³ The national committees were issued directives from the European committee meeting at Berlin for future work that included calling meetings and public demonstrations of farmers against the forcible collection of rent and against the compulsory sale and confiscation of their property.⁵⁴

(ii) O'Donnell's attempts to radicalise the working farmers, de Valera and elections

O'Donnell made further reference to the disparity in the annuities agitation alluded to in Berlin in a new pamphlet *Plan of Campaign for Irish Working Farmers* (1931) in which he outlined the isolation of farmers in west Donegal. Those resisting annuity payments admitted they were near breaking point and had yielded ground: 'according to an agreed plan, individuals making occasional payment to gain time while other districts were organising and

⁵⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 29 Nov. 1930; *Workers' Voice*, 29 Nov. 1930.

⁵¹ *Workers' Voice*, 20 Dec. 1930.

⁵² *An Phoblacht*, 17 Jan. 1931.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Hogan, *Could Ireland become communist?*, p. 95. A strike by 600 busmen from the Irish Omnibus Company lasted from May to July 1930, during which buses driven by strike-breakers were attacked, held up, set on fire and shot at by supporters including members of the working farmers' committees and the IRA; see Milotte, *Communism in modern Ireland*, pp 102-3.

⁵⁴ *Workers' Voice*, 27 Dec. 1930.

a National Congress was being formed'.⁵⁵ O'Donnell compared bailiff gangs to cattle rustlers.⁵⁶ The pamphlet endorsed the European Peasants Congress and applied it to the Irish situation. It reinforced the rejection of the Fianna Fáil policy from the IWFC Galway meeting that rents should be paid into the Free State exchequer, and promoted a no rent campaign. O'Donnell argued that those who could not afford to pay should seek assistance from their neighbours 'against the threatened bailiff raid or forced sale' and from this local defence groups would arise: 'There must be no collections to pay rent, only for defence'.⁵⁷ O'Donnell's choice of the title '*Plan of campaign*' was obviously invoking the memory of the Plan of Campaign of 1886-90.⁵⁸

O'Donnell's analysis of Fianna Fáil's position on annuities was perhaps borne out by a proposed resolution disagreeing with party policy at its Ard Fheis on 30/31 October. This was covered by Seán Murray in the *Workers' Voice*. The Coolmeen branch in Co. Clare proposed that the policy involving the payment of annuities into the National Exchequer was wrong and believed that farmers were fully entitled to be released from these annuities.⁵⁹ No report of any debate on this resolution appeared in the press and party policy remained that farmers should pay their annuities. Murray argued this was bleeding the peasantry in the interests of the Irish manufacturers and that, as confirmed by Labour, all three parties (Fianna Fáil, Cumann na nGaedheal, Labour) stood on common ground on the issue. In his opinion, Labour needed to secure a united front with the labouring masses that supported Fianna Fáil, based on an exposure of their policy on land annuities among other issues.⁶⁰ The Honorary Secretary's report to the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis mentioned the Longford/Westmeath by-election, but there was nothing concerning annuities, and they were not listed in resolutions adopted by the Ard Fheis. Moore was re-elected to the national executive.⁶¹

Murray's reference to Labour concerned that party's new programme that was published in pamphlet form on 30 October following a reorganisation of the party. The programme reasoned that the Land Purchase Acts had been introduced to give effect to the people's demand for purchase of their farms and should not have become an imposition on

⁵⁵ O'Donnell, *Plan of campaign*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁸ Lyons, *Ireland since the famine*, pp 188-94. When landlords refused to reduce rents, the plan offered rents to landlords that tenants considered fair and if refused the rent went into a fund to support tenants with grievances against landlords. The plan was opposed by the government and landlords.

⁵⁹ *Workers' Voice*, 15 Nov. 1930. Seán Murray a comrade and friend of O'Donnell became General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland when it was reformed in 1933.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Honorary Secretaries' report to Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, Oct. 1930 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/744).

them by an alien parliament against their will. Labour stood with Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal that obligations farmers had undertaken in respect to annuities must be fully observed. It added that while lawyers differed on interpretation of the law regarding the retention of annuities, political parties were not qualified to pronounce judgement. The party favoured an expert inquiry into claims and counterclaims referred to in the treaty. It sought a revision of financial relations with the British Government and wanted to secure every advantage accruing from any international agreement involving the Free State.⁶² This was part of a revamp of the party outlined by O'Connell at Ballinrobe (Mayo) including a promotion and re-launch of its paper under the new title, *Watchword* which further cultivated this message under the heading 'The New Programme'.⁶³ Although marketed as new, there was very little on annuities that had not been stated previously and was basically a reiteration of arguments made by Johnson in 1928 (see chapter 6).

In September, at Elphin (Roscommon), de Valera claimed that the Free State was paying four per cent more relatively in annuities and pensions to Britain than Germany was paying in war reparations. For every £100 collected in tax in Germany, £20 went for reparations; in the Free State £24 in every £100 collected was sent to Britain.⁶⁴ He was now stressing this point that other Fianna Fáil activists had touched on previously.

Meanwhile, the government continued to denounce the annuities agitation. Professor John Marcus O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, stressed that the two governments were merely a channel to convey the money from borrower to lender and refusal to pay would result in taxes being put on Irish exports. He claimed the annuities campaign sprang from a secret meeting of the second Dáil in December 1926, when O'Donnell had argued for activities to undermine the Free State; the second Dáil needed a new focus to capture the people's imaginations and suggested non-payment of annuities (see chapter 2). He also claimed that O'Donnell was now the leader of the Communist Party in Ireland.⁶⁵ While O'Donnell had indeed raised the issue of annuities with the second Dáil in December 1926, the agitation had already begun in September 1926. Despite O'Sullivan's declaration, O'Donnell was not at the time a member of the Communist Party. But it was interesting that,

⁶² *Watchword*, 1 Nov. 1930; *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1930; *Irish Independent*, 30 Oct. 1930.

⁶³ *Irishman*, 18 Oct. 1930; *Watchword*, 1 Nov. 1930.

⁶⁴ *Irish Times*, 22 Sept. 1930.

⁶⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 6 Nov. 1930; *Irish Times*, 6 Nov. 1930. The Communist Party of Ireland was not reformed until 1933, what O'Sullivan was referring to were the Preparatory Committee of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PCRWP), which was the forerunner to the CPI, from which O'Donnell had resigned following criticism of the IRA in the *Workers' Voice*. O'Donnell suggested the idea of agitation on the issue of annuities to the second Dáil in Dec. 1926 (see chapter 2).

once again, a government minister was keen to place all the responsibility for the annuities agitation on O'Donnell, and to associate him with the Communist Party. It was clear that attempts to undermine the anti-annuities campaign would continue to be centred on the portrayal of O'Donnell as a radical and dangerous communist. There was good news for the Free State exchequer when an ACC bond issue was nearly three times oversubscribed and there was good demand for the National Loan Stocks.⁶⁶ This reinforced the government position as outlined by O'Sullivan, that their economic policies were working and a repudiation of debt would jeopardise this.

Fianna Fáil selected Conor Maguire to contest the Dublin County by-election in December; he was one of the six lawyers who had given their legal opinion supporting the retention of annuities. Geoghegan who won the last by-election had a similar profile. Fianna Fáil again promoted the annuities issue in what was a predominantly rural constituency but it would perhaps have less impact than in the more rural Longford/Westmeath. At meetings Maguire outlined his legal opinion stating that it was dishonest to say that it was a case of cheating the stockholders; they would be paid by the British Government.⁶⁷ De Valera spoke with Maguire at Lusk and Skerries addressing the annuities question. Richard Mulcahy appeared at Clondalkin with the Cumann na nGaedheal candidate Thomas Finlay claiming that it was only a handful of farmers who were endeavouring in several areas to disturb the hard-working industrious farming community by trying to drag them into false issues. He was heckled with shouts of 'why pay the land annuities?'⁶⁸ Finlay won the election polling 35,362 votes to Maguire's 15,024.⁶⁹

On 24 November, the Farmers' Protection Association passed a resolution demanding a moratorium on annuities and that court proceedings and seizures for agricultural rents, annuities and rates which compelled farmers to sell their livestock and crops at ruinous prices be ended.⁷⁰ A public meeting of the Association in County Dublin called for a one year moratorium, but some present believed this did not go far enough and thought the time had come to seriously consider the refusal to pay rents and annuities. In February and March, there were similar calls for a moratorium at meetings at Stepside and Swords.⁷¹ The imprisonment of Thomas Gallagher, Killtycloghter, Co. Leitrim for two weeks, for non-

⁶⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 11 Nov. 1930.

⁶⁷ *Irish Independent*, 24 Nov, 1 Dec. 1930.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1930.

⁶⁹ ElectionsIreland.org, <http://electionsireland.org/results/general/04dail.cfm> (21 Oct. 2016).

⁷⁰ *Irish Times*, 25 Nov. 1930.

⁷¹ *Irish Times*, 26 Jan., 9 Feb. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 9 Mar. 1931.

payment of annuities was raised in the Dáil by Ben Maguire (Fianna Fáil), who inquired if imprisonment was the way to punish people who through circumstances over which they had no control were unable to pay. Parliamentary secretary, Martin Roddy claimed they had ascertained that the man was able to pay his annuities before they took proceedings against him; Maguire disagreed with this citing a wide discrepancy in evidence between him and Roddy.⁷² In January, the Leitrim Board of Health passed a resolution expressing surprise and regret at Gallagher's jailing. The Board reported that the home help officer who visited Gallagher's family after his imprisonment recorded that there was no food in the house, and no stock on the twenty-seven acre farm.⁷³

Evidence before the Joint Committee of the Dáil and Seanad on the Courts of Justice Act, 1924 showed that the costs of a decree for an unpaid annuity were out of all proportion to the actual debt. In the case of a decree for 13s 4d, the costs were approximately 11s; a decree for £2, approximately £1 3s. The debt was rarely contested, only the inability or unwillingness of the annuitant to meet it and the report of the committee recommended that a new and considerably reduced scale should be fixed and applied to uncontested cases for the recovery of sums not exceeding £10.⁷⁴

In the Seanad, in December, Michael Comyn proposed a motion that included halting the issue of civil bills and decrees concerning annuities, stating that when there were bad harvests in the past, rental abatements had been granted by landlords. Referring to the first year of the Land war in 1879, he claimed rents were not collected: 'with the same cost of civil bill officers and sheriff's officers as they are to-day'.⁷⁵ Senator Kathleen Browne protested against all the talk of tariffs, annuities and the hopeless condition of the farmer and considered the motion unnecessary. Moore felt even if the Minister for Agriculture thought that annuities were due to Britain, there was no reason why the Free State which had the power should not reduce the annuities.⁷⁶ Hogan stated that many had taken the advice of Moore and his party and not paid annuities. While these farmers could have managed payments yearly, they now found themselves in three or four years arrears that they could not pay. He claimed there were now more people willing to buy the farms of those who had not paid annuities, and that year

⁷² *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 36, No. 9, col. 1070, 10 Dec. 1930.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 14 Jan. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 14 Jan. 1931; *Leitrim Observer*, 17 Jan. 1931; *Longford Leader*, 17 Jan. 1931.

⁷⁴ *Irish Independent*, 23 Dec. 1930.

⁷⁵ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 14, No. 3, cols 97-102, 3 Dec. 1930.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, cols 107-14.

after year these were easier to sell.⁷⁷ However, Comyn challenged this: ‘are they getting grabbers to buy derelict farms?’ and asked for statistics of that in Kerry, Clare, Tipperary or Limerick. His motion was defeated by twenty-one votes to nine.⁷⁸

The effects of the US depression were witnessed directly in Clare at Christmas when some bank drafts could not be cashed as the American banks which had issued them had shut down. Some relied on this money from emigrant children to pay rents and annuities.⁷⁹ This contrasted sharply to Martin Roddy’s opinion on the depression when he had claimed that it was actually small farmers in Mayo who were sending money to children in America to tide them over.⁸⁰ While it was quite feasible that money could be sent abroad, most money came in the other direction and the disappointment reported from Clare demonstrated the value of these remittances to various ends, not least the survival of the family farm.

Auctions of farms continued to be ordered by the Land Commission at Athy (Kildare), Manorhamilton (Leitrim), Wicklow, Kildare, Kinnegad (Westmeath), Carrickmacross (Monaghan) in October 1930, Boyle (Roscommon), Manorhamilton, Athy, Mountcharles, Letterkenny (Donegal), Limerick, Nenagh (Tipperary) in November and Ennis in December.⁸¹ At Ballyforan District Court (Roscommon) in October some decrees were granted, one committal order was to be enforced unless defendant paid his instalment but more cases were adjourned, as there were prospects of a settlement. A large number of decrees were obtained at Monaghan District Court.⁸² In December decrees were granted at Rathkeale (Limerick), Moville (Donegal) and Kenmare (Kerry).⁸³ About thirty decrees were issued at Kells Circuit Court (Meath) and in one farmer’s case the bank had refused his rent because he had no receivable order, which he then obtained from the Land Commission, paid them but then received a letter demanding 19s. in costs. The judge observed ‘they always do that’, adjourned the case and instructed the lawyer to inform the Land Commission that it was not the farmers’ fault.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 14, No.4, col. 173, 10 Dec. 1930.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, cols 178-86.

⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 24 Dec. 1930; *Irish Independent*, 24 Dec. 1930; *Cork Examiner*, 24 Dec. 1930; *Leitrim Observer*, 3 Jan. 1931.

⁸⁰ *Irish Independent*, 8 Dec. 1930.

⁸¹ *Irish Times*, 25 Sept., 4, 11, 17, 31 Oct., 1, 7, 29 Nov. 1930; *Irish Independent*, 18 Sept., 3, 11, 24 Oct. 1930.

⁸² *Connacht Tribune*, 1 Nov. 1930; *Anglo-Celt*, 8 Nov. 1930.

⁸³ *Limerick Leader*, 13 Dec. 1930; *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 20 Dec. 1930; *Kerryman*, 20 Dec. 1930.

⁸⁴ *Meath Chronicle*, 1 Nov. 1930.

In January 1931 Lemass implied that if the Free State got a decision of the League of Nations or some other international and impartial tribunal, as to their liability for annuities, Fianna Fáil would be prepared to accept it, but until such opinion was forthcoming, they maintained that the government should withhold the annuities. Similarly, at Claremorris, Co. Mayo de Valera suggested the onus was on Britain to prove in law that they were entitled to the annuities.⁸⁵ On 8 January 1931 a conference of Wexford County Council and TDs adopted a resolution declaring the withholding of government grants over the non-payment of annuities to be grossly unjust to those ratepayers who are meeting their liabilities. Furthermore, it was argued that it was unreasonable to expect county councils to be 'responsible for money for the collection of which they have no concern'. These resolutions were also adopted by Longford County Council in January.⁸⁶

A series of debates centred around the IRA's future development; when O'Donnell and his supporters argued for a more socially radical direction, they were given wide coverage in *An Phoblacht* from November 1930 to March 1931. However, as Richard English contends this proved difficult as the prevailing IRA culture through which the socialists worked was ill suited to their radical socialist project.⁸⁷ Those on the left were not in a majority but members including O'Donnell, Ryan (editor of *An Phoblacht*), George Gilmore and Michael Price did wield a certain influence on the organisation. Moss Twomey and the IRA were anxious to maintain its relevance and provide some form of viable political platform to counter a drift of members to Fianna Fáil. Twomey, using the pseudonym Manus O'Ruairc, proposed a programme for action which included organising the people to declare and attempt to enforce, that there was no right to the exaction of tribute and that those who would not and cannot pay will be supported and protected'.⁸⁸ Although the annuities were not at the centre of these debates, they were part of the wider programme envisaged by O'Donnell, who certainly hoped the IWFC would provide one of the support bases for this new political initiative.

An IRA Army Convention in February 1931 gave support to the establishment of a new political movement, Saor Éire, which would be constructed around IRA units and working farmers committees.⁸⁹ Seán Cronin has claimed that O'Donnell believed the annuities

⁸⁵ *Irish Independent*, 6 Jan. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 7 Jan. 1931.

⁸⁶ *Irish Independent*, 9 Jan. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 9 Jan. 1931; *Longford Leader*, 17 Jan. 1931.

⁸⁷ Richard English, *Radicals and the republic. Socialist republicanism in the Irish Free State 1925-37* (New York, 1994), p. 119.

⁸⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 14 Feb. 1931. Manus O'Ruairc was a pseudonym used by Moss Twomey when writing in *An Phoblacht*. He was a regular contributor to this debate.

⁸⁹ Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 64; see also Hanley, *The IRA*, pp 176-9; Bowyer Bell, *The secret army*, p. 103.

campaign forced the IRA into launching Saor Éire.⁹⁰ Brian Hanley contends that backing was given to a ‘Civil Revolutionary Organisation’ to ‘win wider political support and avoid its military organisation becoming isolated’.⁹¹ Mike Milotte claimed that the official (if cool) backing for this alternative based on IRA units and incorporating O’Donnell’s peasant committees ended the possibility of fully integrating the IRA left into a Communist party.⁹² Some of the early grounds for these ideas had been expressed in *Plan of campaign for Irish working farmers* (1931). O’Donnell identified the county councils as a potential forum where the struggle could be maintained:

Storm the Co. Councils; drag out the crook gangs who are formed round the bailiffs and sheriffs in the dastardly traffic over seized cattle. Get the council out into a campaign behind the men who are being looted at the bidding of British imperial interests. In short, push the Council out into the very vanguard of the people’s struggle and make it a weapon in the people’s hands rather than in their sides.⁹³

O’Donnell argued that with the backing of the county councils, attempts at forced sales would be useless and ‘the agony that harrows many minds today would be ended’. The county councils were not standing up to imperialist control while annuity arrears were being paid and then recouped by stopping money due to the councils from the central fund. This fund created by taxation must be safeguarded from being raided in the interests of the British ruling classes and should be administered under the control of the Central Council of County Councils.⁹⁴

O’Donnell was adamant that leadership must come from within the working farmers (amongst other working groups):

It is true in the first nervous days of bad times there is an illusion that well-to-do people can lead the way out. The farmers trek in and have a talk with the merchant, the publican, the post-master, the banker, the solicitor, and all the network of the ‘smart men’ of the village. Political parties have their listening posts ... among this network, and immediately each party gets busy to harness the anxiety to serve its purpose. ... At this stage the man with clay on his boots has great belief in the wisdom that goes with spats. ... And then one day some worker springs up on a wall before his neighbours, and his words ring clear ... drawing lessons that are true and stripping the ‘wisdom’ of the smart men to its rotten core.⁹⁵

O’Donnell sought to emphasise that there could be no future for working farmers in an all-encompassing farmers’ organisation, where the interests of the big farmers would dominate.

⁹⁰ Cronin, *Frank Ryan*, p. 34.

⁹¹ Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 177.

⁹² Mike Milotte, *Communism in modern Ireland: the pursuit of the workers’ republic since 1916* (Dublin, 1984), p. 100.

⁹³ O’Donnell, *Plan of campaign*, pp 5-6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 6-7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 8-9.

This was of course a rebuff to the Farmers' Association and its aspirations of forming a new farmers' block in the Dáil. Earlier, Maurice Moore had disagreed with the chairman of the Kerry Farmers' Association who had appealed to farmers to form such a block, arguing that the Farmers' Party's history in the Dáil was one of support for the government and that they had never been independent.⁹⁶ O'Donnell believed Irish small farmers would welcome the news that their European counterparts were breaking away from the large farmer/landholder leadership and moving towards a revolutionary working-class alliance. He made the point that the working farmers' committees in Ireland included officers and privates who had fought in the Free State army, who now worked together with men active in national revolutionary circles.⁹⁷ O'Donnell had stressed the involvement of an ex-Free State soldier before, and was keen to add more substance to this at every opportunity as it sat with his vision of neighbourliness and people's disillusion with the Free State.

Meanwhile, in January 1931 decrees were issued for non-payment of annuities at Stranorlar and Donegal Town, and a committal was granted against a defendant in Athy (Kildare) if he refused to pay within a month. Decrees were also issued at Newcastle West (Limerick) in March.⁹⁸ Auctions of farms at the instruction of the Land Commission were ordered for Tralee, Killarney (Kerry), New Ross (Wexford), Fermoy (Cork) in January, Ennis (Clare), Ballybay (Monaghan), Dundalk (Louth), Stradbally (Laois), Longford, Castleisland (Kerry) in February, and Templemore (Tipperary), Sixmilebridge (Clare), Mohill, Manorhamilton (Leitrim), Ballymahon (Longford) in March.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the *Nenagh Guardian* reported that only one civil process for non-payment of annuities was a record for the March court at Nenagh (Tipperary).¹⁰⁰

In April 1931 decrees were obtained against farmers at Ballinamore (Leitrim), Cork, Belturbet (Cavan), Kildare, sixty-five decrees at Longford, Newcastle West, Gort (Galway), Castlerea (Roscommon) in May, Roscrea (Tipperary), Buncrana (Donegal) and Urlingford (Kilkenny) in June.¹⁰¹ Land Commission auctions were scheduled for Listowel (Kerry),

⁹⁶ *Kerryman*, 7 Feb. 1931.

⁹⁷ O'Donnell, *Plan of campaign*, pp 9-10.

⁹⁸ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 10, 31 Jan. 1931; *Kildare Observer*, 31 Jan. 1931; *Limerick Leader*, 23 Mar. 1931.

⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, 3, 10 Jan., 6, 12, 14, 21 Feb., 13 Mar. 1931; *Leitrim Observer*, 28 Feb. 1931; *Longford Leader*, 14 Mar. 1931.

¹⁰⁰ *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 Mar. 1931.

¹⁰¹ *Anglo-Celt*, 4 Apr., 2, 9 May 1931; *Irish Times*, 7 May 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 9 May 1931; *Kildare Observer* 16 May 1931; *Limerick Leader*, 20 May 1931; *Connacht Tribune*, 23, 30 May 1931; *Nenagh Guardian*, 20 June 1931; *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 20 June 1931; *Kilkenny People*, 20 June 1931.

Rathkeale (Limerick), Belturbet, in April and Kildare, Ennistymon (Clare) in May.¹⁰² In May 1931, Richard Anthony (Labour, Cork Borough) asked the parliamentary secretary to slow the collection of annuities from those who were making an earnest endeavour on their farms. Predictably, government representative Denis Gorey (Cumann na nGaedheal, Carlow/Kilkenny) disagreed believing it would be unwise to ease up on annuity collections and have the ratepayers take up the burden later.¹⁰³

Annuities were to the fore during the Kildare by-election campaign in June 1931. Prominent Fianna Fáil TDs, Ryan, Lemass and de Valera addressed meetings across the county in support of former IRA leader, Thomas Harris, in which they mentioned the annuities crisis. De Valera rebuked Minister for Education Professor O'Sullivan's warnings of taxes of £1 or £2 on every beast from Ireland if the annuities were withheld, claiming that by handing over the annuities they were handing over a sum equivalent to £3 10s. on every beast exported from the Free State.¹⁰⁴ Eamonn Donnelly, the Fianna Fáil candidate defeated in the Leitrim/Sligo by-election in June 1929, reiterated the importance of annuities in a letter from the party's office: 'this plank of the Fianna Fáil policy will not be altered and the issue of the land annuities must of necessity be one of the foremost in the coming by-election in Kildare'.¹⁰⁵ O'Sullivan warned that a new revolutionary agrarian movement could grow from the repudiation of annuities, because of the involvement of those with communist tendencies and their association with republicans.¹⁰⁶ At Castledermot, Hogan made reference to recent Irish history, stating that if annuities were repudiated it would undermine the memories of Parnell, Redmond, Dillon and Healy who had fought to secure the land of Ireland for the farmers.¹⁰⁷ Both sides therefore used history to reinforce their position. Fianna Fáil were increasingly trying to counter the warnings of economic woe if financial sanctions were imposed from Britain in the wake of the annuities been retained.

Harris won the Kildare seat which had been held by Labour. This was the last by-election of the sixth Dáil. Ó Beacháin writes that Cumann na nGaedheal concentrated again on the constitutional *bona fides* of Fianna Fáil, alluding to their suitability for government and

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 4, 25 Apr., 2 May 1931; *Limerick Leader*, 4 Apr. 1931.

¹⁰³ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 38, No. 12, cols 1417-20, 15 May 1931.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 1, 15, 20 June 1931; *Irish Independent*, 1, 8 June 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 1 June 1931; *Kildare Observer*, 6 June 1931.

¹⁰⁵ *Kildare Observer*, 6 June 1931.

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Independent*, 15, 29 June 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 29 June 1931.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Times*, 29 June 1931; *Irish Examiner*, 29 June 1931. Here Hogan was referring to John Redmond, John Dillon and Tim Healy would had all been prominent members of the Irish Parliamentary Party and had campaigned on land issues.

the question of whether they would adhere to the constitution, while Fianna Fáil's paper *The Nation* pushed to the forefront the twin issues of annuities and political prisoners.¹⁰⁸ *The Irish Independent* lamented the defeat of the government candidate reasoning that voters had blamed the government for the general depression and the recent dispute between the beet growers and the factories, citing Kildare as a beet growing county. However, it also pointed out that a proportion of the electorate were deceived by Fianna Fáil's specious promise to abolish annuities and make the plains of Kildare flow with milk and honey.¹⁰⁹ Once again, the reaction of the political parties and the press highlighted the role of annuities in the election.

Throughout 1930-31, Fianna Fáil had continued to question the legalities of annuities and sought to link them to war debts, and pushed the issue to the front of the agenda at every available electoral opportunity, with an obvious eye on the upcoming general election. During this period of the agitation, O'Donnell had contributed his new pamphlet *Plan of campaign for Irish working farmers* and sought to radicalise the small farmer cohort by emphasising the separate issues that concerned them as opposed to the interests of the larger farmers. O'Donnell and the IWFC maintained that 'the tribute' had to be abolished and sought to broaden the campaign to incorporate wider agrarian and economic issues, which involved closer ties with efforts to develop a European small farmers' movement directed by the Krestintern. Midst worsening economic conditions more farmers' organisations questioned their members ability to pay annuities and the effect of seizures. O'Donnell's pamphlet on working farmers espoused his views and broadly those of the IWFC which he now sought to incorporate into the radical programme of Saor Éire. Whatever the outcomes for each group, it was clear the annuities were no longer a standalone issue, if indeed they ever had been.

¹⁰⁸ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-73* (Dublin, 2012), p. 107.

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Independent*, 2 July 1931.

CHAPTER 10

LAND ANNUITIES AND THE 1932 ELECTION

There was a significant increase in non-payment of annuities during 1931, which was exacerbated by an increase in the budget deficit with the government identifying land purchase finance as requiring special attention. The government published a memo on the issue, drafted by the attorney-general, stating there was no legal case for the retention of annuities which was presented to the Dáil in December.¹ This was a rebuttal of Fianna Fáil's stance, who in turn critiqued the memo as both they and the government sought to promote their position on annuities to the electorate. The IWFC held national conferences in July and in September as part of the new Saor Éire project, which O'Donnell had been championing within the IRA. This he hoped would provide a more radical edge to the annuities campaign but the idea was to be short lived as a combination of church and state asserted their authority. Fianna Fáil continued to try to link the annuities to international debts, including war reparations. With an election imminent, it was clear the annuities would play a significant role in the months leading to that election.

As the fall-out from the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the subsequent world economic recession began to be felt in Ireland, it had a notable impact on the payment of annuities. O'Donnell wrote that 'middle and even bigger farmers found the current annuity an embarrassment, and suddenly our movement became self-propelled'.² These middle and bigger farmers did not participate in the annuities agitation or campaign, but just defaulted, prepared to wait and see what would happen.³ Moore had noticed this trend as he studied long lists of defaulters, commenting 'this is becoming a runaway' and O'Donnell claimed that while decrees were being granted they were not being enforced and the 'burden of arrears was being passed on with less and less fuss to the local rates'.⁴ Peter Hegarty writes about the arrears burden being passed to the county councils: 'in doing so the government made itself a proselytiser for O'Donnell'.⁵ These deductions had an effect on social service budgets and helped swing more councils towards retention of annuities and while this was backed by Fianna Fáil, as was to be expected, the grass roots of Cumann na nGaedheal were also

¹ Memorandum on Land Purchase Annuities, presented to both houses of the Oireachtas by order of the Executive Council, 17 Dec. 1931 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

² Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 112.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Peter Hegarty, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, Dublin, 1999), p. 189.

increasingly supportive of retention.⁶ The assertion that the movement had become self-propelled and non-payment widespread can be partially substantiated in the Land Commission collection figures for the year ended 31 March 1931. This showed an increase in arrears from the previous year of £23,629. There was a corresponding decrease in payments of £53,394.⁷ The figures for the year ending 31 March 1932 showed an increase in arrears of £119,215 while payments decreased by £93,126.⁸ Ó Drisceoil has argued that this may also have been explained by the fact that emigration had slowed down and so remittances shrunk expanding the number of families unable and unwilling to pay annuities.⁹ The problems with remittances had been demonstrated in Clare at Christmas 1930 (see chapter 9).

Collection Statements for Land Commission for year ended 31 March 1930-32

	Total Received.	Arrears.
	£	£
31 March 1930	3,107,106	377,309
31 March 1931	3,053,767	400,938
31 March 1932	2,960,641	520,153

There was further evidence for the rise in the volume of arrears in a strictly confidential memorandum from the Department of Finance in September 1931, which showed that the overall budget deficit, by which the government expenditure had exceeded the revenue that the government had collected, had increased by £599,114 for the first five months of 1930-31.¹⁰ It was noted that the position of the Land Purchase finances deserved special and very serious consideration and that at 31 July 1931 annuity arrears were £634,148, an increase of £110,000 in a year. The department was of the opinion that the Guarantee Fund would prevent any call being made on the state to service the debt, but the finances of the local authorities were being seriously disrupted by the growth in arrears. It was feared that owing to the bad harvest in 1931, the arrears at the next gale would be even higher and that local authorities would be forced to further increase rates to maintain their revenue.¹¹ The gravity of the annuities crisis was revealed in the concern that ‘any movement towards non-payment of rent, which might readily arise in times like these, would deal our exchequer a staggering blow’.¹²

⁶ Hegarty, *O'Donnell*, p. 189.

⁷ Land Commission collection statements for year ended 31 Mar. 1931. Land Commission Accounts, 1923-31 (NLI, No. OPIE F/26). These are figures for the Land Acts of 1885, 1891, 1903 and 1909.

⁸ Collection statements, year ended 31 Mar. 1932 (NLI, No. OPIE F/26).

⁹ Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001) p. 50.

¹⁰ Memorandum from the Dept. of Finance, J.J. McElligott, 9 Sept. 1931 (UCDA, Blythe papers, P24/99 (4)).

¹¹ *Ibid.* (P24/99 (8)).

¹² *Ibid.*

Ireland was susceptible to economic changes outside its control, the reliance on emigration and consequently remittances being a prime example of this.

In June, 1931 South Tipperary County Council adopted a resolution calling on the government to retain the annuities for de-rating (it was not stated if they wanted the complete abolition of rates or just a reduction); this resolution was in turn adopted in July by Limerick, North Tipperary, Westmeath and Cavan County Councils. It was rejected at Waterford County Council in August.¹³ The annual meeting of the General Council of County Councils debated a similar motion but voted for Patrick Belton's amendment that the council reiterate its demand for a revision of the Ultimate Financial Agreement of March 1926. Belton objected to those who, for political purposes, proposed retention of annuities for de-rating. At the meeting, Eamonn Corbett was elected vice-chairman of the council, which was significant as he was a leading member of the IWFC.¹⁴ In August 1931, the Leitrim County Committee of Agriculture adopted a resolution calling on the Minister for Agriculture to use his influence to put a stay on the many processes now in preparation by the Land Commission against farmers for non-payment of annuities and that a moratorium should be declared. The Kerry Farmers' Association requested similar action from the government.¹⁵ A resolution calling for the extension of payment time by thirty years was passed at Longford County Council.¹⁶ Even though there had been widespread support for the annuities resolution at the county councils, Eoin O'Duffy, Garda Commissioner, was confident that the annuities campaign in Donegal had been neutralised. A report from the Donegal district claimed Garda policy had broken 'O'Donnell's No Annuities campaign' in the county and cited Superintendent Murphy as being principally responsible for this.¹⁷

James Hogan Professor of history at University College Cork, noted that the work of spreading the IWFC continued chiefly in Galway, Clare, Sligo, Carlow and Wexford attempting to ferment agitation on issues such as beet prices, bank debts, annuities and forced sales but without any noticeable success. He claimed this was because the bulk of farmers were moderately well-off and the new movement's bulletins 'full of news from Poland and

¹³ *Irish Independent*, 1 July, 20 Aug. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 1, 13, 18 July 1931; *Westmeath Examiner*, 18 July 1931; *Anglo-Celt*, 25 July 1931.

¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 6 Aug. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 6 Aug. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 6 Aug. 1931.

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 11 Aug. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 11 Aug. 1931; *Leitrim Observer*, 15 Aug. 1931; *Kerryman*, 22 Aug. 1931.

¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 21 Aug. 1931.

¹⁷ Copy of confidential report by Garda Commissioner for period 1 Jan. 1931 to 31 May 1931, signed Eoin O'Duffy. Circulated to members of Executive Council, 27 July 1931 (UCDA, Fitzgerald papers, P80/856 (10), & (27)).

other parts of Northern Europe' had little appeal to them; something more practical was required to make progress.¹⁸ Hogan's claim that the bulk of farmers were moderately well-off does not concur with the numerous concerns raised by a variety of farmers' groups in the period. While Hogan was right to a degree about news from Europe failing to appeal to Irish farmers, he does admit that the IWFC had sought to engage on issues on the ground (it had emerged from the annuities campaign), which leaves his comment about the requirement for something more practical redundant. However, Hogan had partly identified O'Donnell's grand vision that the needs of the small farmers were similar across Europe, and O'Donnell believed that if a European committee, the Krestintern, could direct this it would strengthen their position. But O'Donnell was also cognizant of specific Irish requirements within this and so he endeavoured to adapt the programme of the European Congress to the Irish situation focusing on annuities, forced sales, land redistribution etc. While the needs of other European farmers mattered to O'Donnell and he could see the significance of this in the wider context, the ideal of a European wide movement of small farmers did not have the same impact on the majority of farmers. In a Europe of growing right-wing nationalism, that had already witnessed Fascist's take power in Italy in 1922 and that would manifest itself later in Germany, Spain and Portugal, O'Donnell's ideals would prove even more difficult to implement.

The IWFC finally held their conferences in Limerick on 4 July and Galway on 5 July 1931.¹⁹ O'Donnell had outlined two main tasks the previous week: to transfer the leadership of the working farmers to the most active fighters in the campaign and to decide how the great mass of farm workers were to be mobilised on the farmers' platform.²⁰ As O'Donnell noted the conferences were taking place in the context of changed economic circumstances:

Conditions are improved since the first Galway conference. The idea of defaulting annuity payments or interest charges was then talked against by our opponents on moral grounds. ... Now, however the air is full of talk of moratorium, so it can't be wrong or the bankers wouldn't mention it. Irish working farmers were just a little bit ahead of the times last year. ... Even in the Free State parliament the question of a moratorium ... has become sharply crackling politics. But did you notice, the moratorium was not for the farmers exactly? The 'State' was to get the relief. It must be our kind of a moratorium.²¹

¹⁸ James Hogan, *Could Ireland become communist? The facts of the case* (Dublin, 1935), p. 96.

¹⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 4 July 1931.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

O'Donnell reflected on how changing economic conditions affected the farming community in general but particularly small farmers. He was now anxious to ensure that any further economic dislocation would place the IWFC at the centre of the agrarian and annuities campaign. O'Donnell felt the annuities campaign should be given credit for the calls for the moratorium and should now determine its extent and the class of farmers who would benefit most from it. O'Donnell's view was that a moratorium should be final. There had to be an end to all annuity payments and a new system formulated where farmers would contribute to a farmers' bank.

The IWFC conference had been delayed owing to a lack of organisation in most areas. Initially it was only in six counties that a viable organisation had been formed. O'Donnell believed that this had been remedied with what he termed some 'grouping of neighbours' in all the other counties, with the exception of Cavan, Monaghan, Louth and Wicklow.²² The conferences passed motions calling on farmers to oppose forced sales by the Land Commission and banks, and for the formation of more defence committees as a priority. The committees were instructed to seek to influence local councils and called on auctioneers to refuse to advertise or attend farm sales and cattle seizures. Any attempted sales were to be an occasion of mass demonstration. The conference emphasised the need for county committees to form a national congress reflecting the view of the overwhelming mass of the people, which would demand a moratorium on land debts.²³ These pronouncements and ideas reflected much of what O'Donnell had expounded in his recent pamphlet on working farmers, in which he had outlined the roles of local committees in resisting forced sales and identified the county councils as an area to popularise the farmers struggle (see chapter 9).

In August a letter to all members of the RWG alluded to the growing number of poorer farmers who were rebelling against 'exorbitant taxes and imperial tribute' and that the police, bailiffs and Land Commission were intensifying their actions against these poorer farmers.²⁴ A Defence Committee envisaged by the IWFC was formed in Wexford in July around the campaign to free Matt Kent who was imprisoned for one year at Enniscorthy Court for taking possession of his home from where he had been evicted two years previously by the Land Commission for failure to pay annuities. The farm had subsequently been sold to Patrick Fortune who was described as a motor owner and big farmer. Kent had already served six

²² *An Phoblacht*, 4 July 1931.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1931.

²⁴ Letter to all members of the RWG, 14 Aug. 1931, 25 Bachelors Walk, Dublin (DCLA, Nolan – Palmer collection, CPI papers, Box 1, item 12).

months in prison for previously taking repossession of the farm. Two neighbours were also imprisoned for refusing to give evidence against Kent. Captain Redmond had prosecuted for the state and Judge Devitt remarked that he had tried several men in the same position as Kent, and one had served four years.²⁵ The Wexford Committee of working farmers in calling for Kent's release and the restoration of his holding hoped that every working farmer committee would raise the issue. A pamphlet from the Campaign Committee of the Irish Working Farmers printed in *An Phoblacht* stated that though Kent had been evicted and had no title in the eyes of the law, in the eyes of his neighbours, he had a title and that title had to be honoured. It also made comparisons with the period of the Land War and the famine with the statement that those who support the 'Free State machinery play the role of the bailiff gangs in bloody Balfour's days' and concluded: 'The threat of forced sales must not be met by starving the household to meet rent, taxes, bank and other debts. That is the policy that disgraced this nation in Forty-Seven'.²⁶

The local Saor Éire organising committee united with the working farmers' committee for a demonstration on 9 August, demanding the release of Kent at which O'Donnell, Seán Hayes and Martin Fahy spoke.²⁷ The meeting was informed that a farm labourer and a blacksmith had refused to work on Kent's farm; O'Donnell emphasised that the meeting was not called because of a row between Kent and the present owner, but that this was one incident in a wider struggle. Hundreds of homes had been broken up by the Land Commission, auctioned and grabbed, and those people had gone quietly, broken under the strain, which made the bailiff's job easy. However, Kent had struck back, and this was a strike against all forced sales.²⁸ These again had the hallmarks of O'Donnell emphasising the sanctity of a title that should be recognised by neighbours. Moreover, the presence of Saor Éire in the midst of this was part of O'Donnell's greater plan for the merging of local IRA units and the working farmers' committees.

In July, a similar case was before the courts in Cork, which dated back to December 1929 when the Land Commission evicted Denis Donovan, Kanturk, for non-payment of annuities. Donovan returned one month later to occupy his farm. It was stated that he had

²⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 25 July, 1 Aug. 1931.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 Aug. 1931. Arthur Balfour was chief secretary for Ireland from 1887-91 during some of the most turbulent years of land agitation, noted for the introduction of coercion measures. After police fired into a crowd in Mitchelstown in 1887 he became as 'Bloody Balfour'. He served as prime minister from 1902-5. S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2007), p. 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1931.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

made no effort to pay his annuities. The court case in July 1931, after an appeal, resulted in Donovan being sentenced to six months in prison for forcibly taking repossession of the farm from which he had been evicted.²⁹ In September 1931, *An Phoblacht* reported on the formation of a Defence Committee in Kildare modelled on Wexford, Wicklow had the William Dunne Defence Committee, and in Galway, committees had forced auctioneers to take down auction notices.³⁰

Meetings were held to promote the IWFC programme including one at Sligo where O'Donnell referred to alleged cases of grabbed farms and that the grabbers were business men or big land owners. Seán MacBride also spoke, demonstrating the overlap of Saor Éire and the IWFC. O'Donnell and MacBride attended a meeting of Saor Éire that evening in Sligo. Michael Price (leading member of the IRA from Dublin who had been O/C of the Dublin Brigade and would become a member of the Saor Éire executive)³¹ spoke at another such meeting in Clare.³² A government memorandum had observed this crossover in some of the radical organisations, outlining how they were banded together in groups whose direction and personnel had much in common, but whose titles, avowed objects and methods provide sufficient variation to attract every type of element subversive of public order.³³ The memo viewed the IWFC, WRP, ILDL and others as avowedly communistic in their objectives. These organisations were working in close conjunction with the IRA, in efforts to bring the present social system into disrepute.³⁴ The constitution of Saor Éire that was explained at meetings throughout the country by prominent IRA leaders appeared to be a basis for cooperation between the divergent elements included in the general movement for political change. This included the abolition of Land Commission annuities, the argument being that these were immoral and unjust and therefore it was right to refuse to pay them.³⁵ A government memo had claimed that the benefit of this arrangement to the IRA was deemed obvious: every unemployed man, every farmer who had to pay an annuity, every discontented worker would now see the IRA as his ally. The fear was that the depression in agriculture and the world-wide economic slump would be turned into motive power for the IRA.³⁶

²⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 16 July 1931.

³⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 26 Sept. 1931.

³¹ Brian Hanley, *The IRA 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), pp 196-7.

³² *An Phoblacht*, 22, 29 Aug. 1931.

³³ Existence of a conspiracy for the destruction of stabilised government. Memo on Anti-State activities. 15 July 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (B)).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Memo on Anti-State activities, 15 July 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (B)). The first copies of these Saor Éire documents had been found on Seán MacBride, described as the principal travelling organiser of the IRA, when he was arrested in July 1931.

³⁶ Memo on Anti-State activities, 15 July 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (B)).

IWFC meetings were twinned with meetings to prepare the launch of Saor Éire, but as Ó Drisceoil writes, in reality, the IWFC had little structural input and the new departure was dependent on IRA structures: ‘which allowed its many opponents at brigade commander level to sabotage preparations’.³⁷ He quotes Dan Keating of the Kerry IRA who recalled O’Donnell making little progress in the county in explaining the Saor Éire plan to brigade officers, simply because the IRA backed Fianna Fáil at the time.³⁸ However, the IWFC continued to try to organise working farmers, while attempting to breach the sectarian divide by appealing, for example, in a pamphlet to farmers prior to an Orange Order demonstration at Cootehill in Cavan to break from those who would not champion the cause of the wage-earner against annuities, taxes and bullying by the banks.³⁹

The Saor Éire congress of 26-7 September 1931, in the Iona Ballroom, Drumcondra, Dublin was the culmination of numerous meetings throughout the country. About 150 delegates attended and Seán Hayes was elected chairman and a national executive was elected which included O’Donnell, MacBride and Price.⁴⁰ While its constitution and rules only contained a brief mention of a programme of activity and resistance to annuities, it contained many of the aims of the IWFC. It embraced the slogans: ‘No Rent’ ‘No Forced Sales’ ‘Down with the Land Commission’ and stated that the committees of working farmers had the enthusiastic support of Saor Éire. There would be immediate support for the struggle against forced sales, bailiff’s raids and stout backing for those struggling against eviction.⁴¹ Saor Éire wanted a congress of working farmers to repudiate annuities and to lead a struggle to make this repudiation effective.⁴² As part of its wider position on agriculture, census figures were used to demonstrate the decline in small farms: in 1911 there were 400,000 holdings under thirty acres, this had decreased to 292,000 by 1926, and that almost three-quarters of agricultural land was held by just over one-fifth of the occupiers. Saor Éire claimed government policy including the 1923 Land Act pressed upon the small farmer. ‘The ‘big farmer’ policy and the rationalisation of agriculture in his favour is squeezing out the small man’⁴³, leading to a ‘new widespread landlordism and an accentuation of rural poverty’.⁴⁴

³⁷ Ó Drisceoil, *O’Donnell*, p. 65

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *An Phoblacht*, 8 Aug. 1931.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 Oct. 1931; *Irish Times*, 28 Sept. 1931; *Irish Press*, 28 Sept. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 28 Sept. 1931.

⁴¹ Saor Éire, Constitution and rules, p. 4, and resolutions to be submitted to the congress, 26-7 Sept. 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (B)).

⁴² Saor Éire congress, resolutions to the congress, 26-7 Sept. 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (B)).

⁴³ *An Phoblacht*, 3 Oct. 1931.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Although this report on the decline of smaller holdings was not specific to the annuities issue, it demonstrated the influence of the IWFC on Saor Éire's agricultural position. The IWFC had a broader approach to agrarian matters as alluded to in earlier chapters. This illustration of the growing disparity in land ownership was part of the attempt to explain the differences in the economic concerns of the farming community, and certainly bears the stamp of O'Donnell, heavily influenced by the Krestintern that the small farmer had to break from the big farmer position.

In September 1931 a letter from Cosgrave to Rev. Edward J. Byrne, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland expressed the government's concern about the growth in 'subversive teachings and activities'. They believed a threat to the foundations of all authority had arisen and that it was the government's duty to inform the church hierarchy of these issues.⁴⁵ Cosgrave and the cabinet were determined to stifle this growth in radical groups, which was now centring on Saor Éire, by providing church leaders with information which he obviously hoped would be used to undermine such organisations. The government were preparing the ground for a heavy-handed approach to dealing with these activities. They hoped this hard-line stance, coupled with efforts to link Fianna Fáil to some of these radical groups would deter electors from voting for that party at the forthcoming general election. Amongst the groups under attack was the anti-annuities campaign.

There were references to O'Donnell's activities and the annuities in the Dáil debate on the Constitution (Amendment No. 17) Bill, which spanned three days in October. The Bill that was passed authorised the setting up of a military tribunal for the trial of certain offences, gave the government the power to ban any organisation thought to pose a threat to the state and provided additional powers for the Gardaí.⁴⁶ During the debate in the Seanad, James Fitzgerald-Kenny (Cumann na nGaedheal) referred to those going through the country assuring people that they need not pay annuities as dishonest blackguards.⁴⁷ The joint pastoral of the bishops was read in all churches on 18 October 1931 condemning Saor Éire by name. On 20 October twelve organisations were proscribed, including the IWFC, Saor Éire, WRP

⁴⁵ Letter from Cosgrave to Edward J. Byrne, Archbishop of Dublin, Primate of Ireland on subversive activities and groups, 17 Sept. 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864, Appendix 1).

⁴⁶ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 40, No. 1, cols 25-388, Constitution (Amendment No.17), Bill, 14-16 Oct. 1931; *Weekly Irish Times*, 24 Oct. 1931.

⁴⁷ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 14, No. 33, col. 1976, Constitution (Amendment No.17), Bill, 16 Oct. 1931.

and the IRA.⁴⁸ The *Workers' Voice* criticised the legislation for making it a criminal act to advocate the non-payment of annuities, while the government was doing nothing to find the money for one farmer to keep the prosecutor away from his farmyard.⁴⁹

There followed a series of arrests and raids. The publication of *An Phoblacht* was severely restricted with only smaller editions published during November 1931, which resulted in its appearance under a new title, *Republican File* on the 28th of that month.⁵⁰ Some editions of the *Workers' Voice* were banned and in December, it ceased publication.⁵¹ O'Donnell evaded arrest, managed to leave Ireland and spent Christmas in Berlin.⁵² The main casualty of the bill was the newly formed Saor Éire, with the arrests and restricted publicity making it difficult for the group to function. The organisation never recovered from the damning attack by the Church and was quickly and quietly jettisoned by the IRA. Matt Treacy writes that the 'alacrity which the IRA abandoned Saor Éire suggests its commitment to socialism was not profound' and that to secure any alternative to Fianna Fáil was the overriding reason for its formation.⁵³ The banning of the IWFC and its links to the now-doomed Saor Éire were a blow to O'Donnell's vision of the annuities agitation leading to a mass of small farmers campaigning on a variety of agrarian issues. Moreover, although Fianna Fáil had strongly opposed the Constitution Amendment Bill as Hanley says they 'skilfully avoided the taint of communism, while denouncing Cumann na nGaedheal's hypocrisy'.⁵⁴ Lemass stated that while 78,000 lived in rooms in Dublin unfit for habitation, the government was creating a communist bogey, while Thomas Mullins TD (Cork West) informed the Dáil that he was a member of four of the recently-banned organisations.⁵⁵ Fianna Fáil would ultimately benefit as many of the smaller parties and groups in opposition to the government were severely disrupted. This included restrictions on their political papers and consequently less coverage of the annuities campaign. The disruption of the activities of the IWFC would result in the even wider appeal of the Fianna Fáil message on annuities.

Fianna Fáil had been keen to link the annuities to the issue of international debt. When President Herbert Hoover of the USA proposed a moratorium on inter-governmental

⁴⁸ *Irish Independent*, 19, 21 Oct. 1931; *Irish Press*, 19 Oct. 1931; *Weekly Irish Times*, 24 Oct. 1931. The WRP had changed its name to the Revolutionary Workers' Groups (RWG), in late 1930.

⁴⁹ *Workers' Voice*, 31 Oct. 1931.

⁵⁰ *An Phoblacht*, 7, 21 Nov. 1931; *Republican File*, 28 Nov. 1931. *Republican File* just printed the news and events, it did not comment on matters as *An Phoblacht* had.

⁵¹ *Workers' Voice*, 28 Nov. 1931.

⁵² Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*, p. 69.

⁵³ Matt Treacy, *The communist party of Ireland 1921-2011: Vol. 1, 1921- 1969* (Dublin, 2012), p. 43.

⁵⁴ Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123

payments, de Valera again raised the question of annuities and sought to have them placed within the ‘category of debt to which the moratorium will apply’.⁵⁶ De Valera wanted assurance from the Minister for Finance that proper representation would be made to secure the inclusion of the annuities in this moratorium, without prejudice to the claim of any future Irish government that they are not justly due. But his question on action to place the annuities within the category of debt that the moratorium applied to was ruled out of order.⁵⁷ De Valera continued to seek to raise the issue during the following days, but without success. He claimed the issue was one of utmost national importance but the government had failed to give it any consideration and that if re-payments were suspended for a year, by that time Fianna Fáil would be in power and Fianna Fáil would ‘take steps to ensure that the money which was not legally due to England would not be paid’.⁵⁸ Hoover’s plan was for a one-year moratorium on war reparations and war debts and in reality did not affect Ireland, but de Valera and others were keen to try and link Hoover’s proposal to the annuities situation. The Farmers Protection Association adopted a resolution which also urged the government to seek to include the annuities in Hoover’s proposal.⁵⁹ The *Irish Independent*’s political correspondent reflected the government view that the annuities were debts concerning individuals and hence did not come under the Hoover Plan, and the plan if adopted would only affect the Free State if it stimulated a world economic recovery that would be beneficial to Ireland.⁶⁰

De Valera again compared Germany’s war reparations under the Young Plan to the £5m the Free State paid annually to Britain. Of this over £3m were land annuities, so that reparation payments represented a tax of £1 6s. 1d. per individual citizen in Germany, compared to £1 16s. 3d. from individual citizens in Ireland. Taking an average family size at 4.3, a German family paid £5 12s. 4d. in war reparations, an Irish family £7 15s. 10d. in payments to Britain of which the greatest amount were the annuities.⁶¹ In September Daniel Corkery TD and Richard Corish (Labour) made similar comparisons at a Fianna Fáil meeting in north Cork and at Wexford County Council respectively, arguing that annuities should be reviewed through negotiations between the two governments.⁶² In June decrees were obtained

⁵⁶ In Committee of Finance, President Hoover’s proposal for a moratorium, *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 39, No. 7, col. 947, 24 June 1931.

⁵⁷ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 39, No. 7, col. 947, 24 June 1931.

⁵⁸ *Irish Times*, 27 June, 6 July 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 27 June 1931.

⁵⁹ *Irish Times*, 4 July 1931; *Irish Independent*, 4 July 1931.

⁶⁰ *Irish Independent*, 7 July 1931.

⁶¹ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 39, No. 10, col. 1290, 1 July 1931; *Irish Times*, 2 July 1931.

⁶² *Southern Star*, 26 Sept. 1931; *Irish Times*, 29 Sept. 1931.

at Cardonagh Civil Bill Court, in July at Donegal, in August at Kildare and in October at Loughrea and Ballinsloe District Courts (Galway).⁶³

In October Seán Lemass claimed the case for retention was receiving increased support daily from all quarters and from all political parties and should be pursued as a non-party matter. He argued if there was any doubt concerning the legal position, the benefit of that doubt should be given to Ireland rather than Britain.⁶⁴ A leaflet entitled 'Hold the Annuities Fund' urged farmers to vote for only those who were pledged to retain the annuities. It invoked the memory of Parnell, Davitt, O'Brien and Dillon and commented that unlike them, Irish ministers in 1931 forcibly collected and sent the 'old rents', now called annuities, to the British Treasury.⁶⁵ It stated that the archbishop of San Francisco and the priests of the diocese had signed a demand for a moratorium on annuities.⁶⁶ The petition from the clergy in San Francisco was sent to President Hoover requesting the inclusion of the annuities in his plan for war debts. A reply from the assistant Secretary of State stated that Hoover had no information on the annuities debt but the immediate object of the President's proposal was to provide temporary relief from inter-governmental obligations arising from the war.⁶⁷

In May 1931 a new rural organisation, Muintir na Tíre (People of the Land), had been launched in Dublin for the purpose of uniting the rural communities of rural Ireland.⁶⁸ It was formed by Fr John Hayes⁶⁹ from Tipperary. Muintir na Tíre was to be non-political and included aims to develop and improve agriculture, but with no specific reference to annuities and proposed to hold a series of public meetings, the first being scheduled for 22 November 1931 in Thurles.⁷⁰ On 28 November 1931 the *Workers' Voice* reported on this meeting calling the new group 'People and the Land' which it stated differed from the IWFC. It was presided over by a priest, Fr. Hayes who claimed that under this new organisation the people would no longer hear of class war. There were ten priests on the platform and the archbishop of Cashel

⁶³ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 4, 18 July 1931; *Kildare Observer*, 22 Aug. 1931; *Connacht Tribune*, 24 Oct. 1931.

⁶⁴ *Leitrim Observer*, 10 Oct. 1931.

⁶⁵ 'Hold the Annuities Fund' 1931 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (7)).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Irish Press*, 30 Nov. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 16 Jan. 1932.

⁶⁸ D.J. Hickey and J.E. Donnelly (eds) *A new dictionary of Irish history from 1800* (Dublin, 2003), pp 324-5.

⁶⁹ Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Hayes, John Martin', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do#>) (accessed 14 April 2017). Fr John Hayes was born at Murroe, Co. Limerick in 1887 in a Land League hut, the son of a small farmer who had been evicted from Lord Cloncurry's estate. John studied for the priesthood at St. Patrick's Ecclesiastical College, Thurles and later at the Irish College in Paris. He was ordained in 1913. In 1927 he was appointed to the united parishes of Loughmoe and Castleleiny, Co. Tipperary. While at this parish, he founded Muintir na Tíre in 1931. He became a national figure promoting issues of rural self-help.

⁷⁰ *Southern Star*, 7 Nov. 1931; *Nenagh Guardian* 23 Jan. 1932.

sent his blessing and support.⁷¹ The *Workers' Voice* obviously believed this was an attempt by the church to wrench back control of those it believed were being led astray by proponents of communism.

On 12 November Cosgrave met a delegation from the Farmers' Protection Association but rejected their case for a moratorium, citing the falling revenue of the state.⁷² In September, Donegal County Council adopted a resolution requesting the government to reopen the Financial Settlement and suggested that annuities should in whole or in part be retained by friendly agreement.⁷³ A resolution from South Tipperary County Council called for the government to revise the annuity payments collected and reduce them in line with the ability of the farmers to pay.⁷⁴ The council also resolved that the sinking fund portion of the annuities be retained by the ministry of finance and invested, and the accumulations periodically availed of to cancel the land stock at a favourable price. Through this, they believed it would be possible to give substantial reductions of from 5s. to 6s. in the pound to farmers even without extending the period of redemption. Copies of this were to be sent to Cosgrave, Hogan, Roddy and all Tipperary and Limerick TDs.⁷⁵ A similar demand from Patrick Belton was supported by the General Council of County Councils.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, decrees continued to be issued at Lifford (Donegal), Tubbercurry (Sligo), Cavan, Cork, Mullingar (Westmeath), Dowra (Cavan) and Granard (Longford) in November and at Ballymote (Sligo), Ballyconnell (Cavan) and Ballinasloe (Galway) in December.⁷⁷

The seriousness with which the government viewed the annuities crises can be gauged by the instruction to attorney-general John A. Costello to prepare a 'comprehensive memorandum on the subject'.⁷⁸ This was presented to both houses of the Oireachtas on 17 December, the last sitting for 1931. This sixty-five page booklet outlined the legal position that there was no case for the retention of annuities.⁷⁹ This was the long promised government response, the 'blue book' that Blythe had mentioned and contained the opinion of five leading

⁷¹ *Workers' Voice*, 28 Nov. 1931.

⁷² *Irish Press*, 12, 13 Nov. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 13 Nov. 1931; *Cork Examiner*, 13 Nov. 1931; *Irish Times*, 21 Nov. 1931.

⁷³ *Irish Press*, 30 Sept. 1931.

⁷⁴ Letter to President of the Executive Council from Laurence Ryan, Secretary South Tipperary County Council, 18 Dec. 1931. Resolutions by South Tipperary County Council, 30 May 1929 - 5 July 1932 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8335).

⁷⁵ Resolutions by South Tipperary County Council, 18 Dec. 1931 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S8335).

⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 12 Dec. 1931.

⁷⁷ *Strabane Chronicle*, 14 Nov. 1931; *Western People*, 14 Nov., 5 Dec. 1931; *Anglo-Celt*, 14, 28 Nov., 19 Dec. 1931; *Irish Press*, 16 Nov. 1931; *Westmeath Examiner*, 21 Nov. 1931; *Leitrim Observer*, 28 Nov. 1931; *Connacht Tribune*, 26 Dec. 1931.

⁷⁸ David McCullagh, *The reluctant Taoiseach: a biography of John A. Costello* (Dublin, 2010), p. 69.

⁷⁹ Memo on Land Purchase Annuities, 17 Dec. 1931 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

counsel, T.S. McCann, KC; A. Alfred Dickie, KC; A.K. Overend, KC; Cecil Laverty, KC and T.C. Marman, BL. Its analysis formed the opinion that the state had no legal or moral claim on the annuities and repudiation would cause injury to the credit of the state.⁸⁰ The memo found the course taken by the government to have been legal and necessary for the maintenance of the credit of the state.⁸¹

Seán Lemass attacked the document as a Cumann na nGaedheal election pamphlet.⁸² There was much rancour from the Fianna Fáil benches to the pamphlet on a number of fronts: their obvious disagreement with its content, the timing of its presentation on the day of the Christmas adjournment, and the fact that the memorandum was paid for by public money while reflecting Cumann na nGaedheal's position. In fact, Fianna Fáil in all probability had valid concerns, as David McCullagh states: 'despite the convention that the legal advice of the Attorney-General is privileged and confidential to the Government, the memorandum was published as a Government White Paper.'⁸³ J.P. Casey has noted that although there were often other instances where the opinion of the Attorney-General was made public and even published, this was perhaps the most outstanding example.⁸⁴ Fianna Fáil argued that on certain issues the document was thoroughly unconvincing especially those concerning the operations of the financial provisions of the 1920 Act and the responsibility of the British Government to land stock holders. However, Fianna Fáil identified the statement making the case for Britain retaining the payments as the most serious aspect of the government's pamphlet, arguing that this would be quoted against the Free State, when the right to hold the annuities was asserted by a future Government.⁸⁵ Blythe asserted it was not a party document, the issue was non-party, it was national and had to be looked at from a national perspective, irrespective of party considerations.⁸⁶

The timing of the presentation of this document, on the day of the adjournment of the Dáil, left the government open to accusations that it was indeed an election ploy. The Dáil would not meet again until after the general election, which the opposition were not to know, but which must have been in the thoughts of the government. It underlined the importance the

⁸⁰ Memo on Land Purchase Annuities, 17 Dec. 1931 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*; see also *Irish Times*, 18 Dec. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 18 Dec. 1931; *Irish Press*, 18 Dec. 1931; Documents prepared by Attorney-General outlining arguments in recent White Paper on annuities, 2 Feb. 1932 (UCDA, Blythe papers P24/151 (1-6)).

⁸² *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 40, No. 21, col. 3008, 17 Dec. 1931.

⁸³ McCullagh, *Reluctant Taoiseach*, p. 69.

⁸⁴ J.P. Casey, *The office of the Attorney General in Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), p. 88.

⁸⁵ *Irish Press*, 19 Dec. 1931.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 4 Jan. 1932; *Irish Independent*, 4 Jan. 1932; *Irish Press*, 4 Jan. 1932.

government now placed on the annuity issue. It was an admission by it of the significant role annuities would play in the coming election. Indeed many ministers would champion the contents of the 'blue book' as approval of their position during the election, while Fianna Fáil argued vehemently against it.

The debate on the merits of the government paper continued: on 28 January Moore proposed a motion of censure against the Executive Council in the Seanad on two fronts: (1) for its failure to deal with the question of the legality of the payments until such question became a major political issue; (2) printing at public expense what was in effect a party statement on the issue.⁸⁷ He argued that this document should have been produced after the signing of the Ultimate Financial Agreement, and how the idea for a Seanad committee to examine that agreement was rejected on the casting vote of the chairman in 1926 (see chapter 2). In Moore's opinion, the fact there was a document bearing the signature of five lawyers and there was another contrary opinion bearing the signature of lawyers, necessitated an investigation into the matter of annuities. Like others in Fianna Fáil, he claimed the government document strengthened Britain's case.⁸⁸ The motion was lost.⁸⁹ In January, decrees were issued at Easky, Co. Sligo, Clonmel and Tipperary.⁹⁰

Cosgrave dissolved the Dáil on 29 January 1932 and called an election for 16 February. This was, apparently, as T. Ryle Dwyer suggested, to exploit the benefits of the Statute of Westminster which became law on 11 December 1931.⁹¹ But it was the issue of annuities that was to the fore during the campaign and unsurprisingly there was much focus on the Attorney General's document opposing the case for retention. Fianna Fáil produced a twenty-four page pamphlet in reply to the government document; the chief argument was that the government had made no attempt to answer the case or to justify their actions in paying the annuities to Britain until December 1931.⁹² The pamphlet dissented from the conclusion that the Free State had no right to retain the land annuities: 'The arguments and reasons advanced against their retention are fallacious and unsound' and that the case for retention was not fully or

⁸⁷ Land Purchase Annuities, *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 15, No. 8, col. 507, 28 Jan. 1932.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, cols 508-15.

⁸⁹ *Seanad Debates*, Vol. 15, No. 8, col. 568, 28 Jan. 1932.

⁹⁰ *Western People*, 9 Jan. 1932; *Cork Examiner*, 13, 21 Jan. 1932.

⁹¹ T. Ryle Dwyer, *Eamon de Valera, the man and the myths* (Dublin, 1991), p. 167. The Statute of Westminster formally recognised that the dominions of the British Empire were in no way subservient to Britain, giving the Irish Free State similar status to that of Canada and other dominions.

⁹² Reply of counsel consulted by Fianna Fáil to the arguments advanced in support of paying the annuities to Britain, 1932 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35).

accurately set out in the statement.⁹³ The Fianna Fáil pamphlet referred back to sections of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 concerning annuities, and analysed the old chestnut of what constituted ‘public debt’ and concluded, similar to Moore, that public debt included liability on the interest on the stock issued to finance land purchase and hence the cancellation of Article 5 of the December 1925 Agreement absolved the Free State of all liability in respect of Land stock.⁹⁴ At an election rally for Blythe in Monaghan, Costello refuted some of the findings of the Fianna Fáil legal team on the Government of Ireland Act and the issue of public debt.⁹⁵ These and other such arguments on annuities figured prominently throughout the campaign.

While weighty and complex legal matters could undoubtedly have had a bearing in determining the ultimate outcome of the annuities issue, it is unlikely that all of this legal detail or political debate resonated with farmers struggling in a harsh economic environment. There were farmers who were not paying any annuities, those just about keeping up with repayments, and those able to meet repayments but who were concerned about the increase in rates which had been exacerbated by the drop off in annuity payments. It was a vicious circle. The electoral message that would most likely appeal to all farmers would be one that would have the greatest immediate impact on the day to day running of their farms. Both the main parties tried to address this.

Retention of the annuities was placed second on the Fianna Fáil election manifesto to a commitment to abolish the Oath of Allegiance. The manifesto also included a denial that a land tax was imminent: ‘a land tax is not part of our programme and the farmers’ title to his holding is in no way endangered by the retention of the land annuities’.⁹⁶ Prior to the election the government had consistently been putting forward the notion that retaining the annuities would jeopardise the farmers’ title and Fianna Fáil were anxious to quell such fears. Cosgrave warned that the moment payments ceased or were diverted questions would arise over the farmers’ title, but if all the money was paid, they had undisputed possession with which no Government had the right to interfere.⁹⁷ Cumann na nGaedheal produced adverts specific to the annuities, warning of the dangers of Fianna Fáil’s policy: ‘if the money you are paying in annuities is not due to the people who lent you the money it is not due to anyone. No

⁹³ Fianna Fáil reply to government memo on annuities, 1932 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/35); extracts from this pamphlet were published in the *Irish Press*, 6-10 Feb. 1932.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Irish Independent*, 15 Feb. 1932; *Irish Press*, 15 Feb. 1932.

⁹⁶ Preparation of and Fianna Fáil election manifesto, 9 Feb. 1932 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers P176/830 (1)).

⁹⁷ *Irish Independent*, 23 Nov. 1931, 12 Feb. 1932.

Government has any right to land annuities’.⁹⁸ It also emphasised that if Fianna Fáil seized the annuities, that all of the payments paid to date were for nothing. Cumann na nGaedheal election literature proclaimed: ‘You beat the grabbers before; beat them again by voting Cumann na nGaedheal’.⁹⁹ On the other hand, De Valera sought to sooth farmers’ fears regarding annuities and the issue of title:

Their payment ... was not an obligation on behalf of the farmers to stockholders. The farmers had only one obligation and that was to the state. The position was that if Fianna Fáil got into power farmers would still pay the annuities into the treasury as before. The farmers, title to their land lay in the contract they formed with the state.¹⁰⁰

De Valera pledged that if the annuities were retained, £2 million would be returned to help farmers develop their farms, and there would be no interference with the farmers’ title.¹⁰¹ Clearly, both sides were playing on the threat to legal title from different perspectives. Both sides could play on farmers’ insecurities depending on how they presented their arguments. There was an acute awareness that some farmers had already lost their farms over failure to pay annuities. What was also interesting was the rhetoric used by Cumann na nGaedheal: terms such as ‘seizing’ the annuities and ‘grabbers’ were more associated with O’Donnell and the anti-annuities campaign and the earlier Land League agitation. The government was conjuring up historical references to depict the anti-annuities supporters as communist bogeymen who threatened land ownership and the rights of private property, and by extension the very state itself.

John M. Regan sets the scene with the political rhetoric and the apocalyptic warnings of 1932 in what was to be a tense and arguably the most important election thus far in the new state:

Fianna Fáil in the late twenties still enjoyed the prefix ‘slightly’ before their constitutional status. Cumann na nGaedheal conducted its electoral campaigns in the same language as it had a decade earlier, taking refuge in the argument that any alternative government - Fianna Fáil or a coalition – would visit anarchy on the country once more. In the lead-up to the 1932 general election this gunmen verus statesmen paradigm had taken on a more potent and exotic tinge in the form of a communist scare.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Derry People and Tirconnaill News*, 13 Feb. 1932; *Western People*, 13 Feb. 1932.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Press*, 4 Feb. 1932.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 4, 13 Feb. 1932.

¹⁰² John M. Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution 1921-1936, treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1999), p. 279.

The Labour Party continued to take the view that the purchaser was under a moral and legal obligation to pay, and accused both Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal of making a party issue out of what was essentially a national issue. It called for a non-political commission to examine the annuities question with a view to a review of the financial agreement with Britain.¹⁰³ Once again, Labour failed to define a policy on land annuities; they merely reiterated their policy position of October 1930 (see chapter 9), which in turn had differed little from the party's previous pronouncements on annuities. The Farmers' Protection Association wanted all candidates pledged to a review of the question of payment of annuities to Britain.¹⁰⁴ There was a noticeable absence of advertisements of sales of farms by the Land Commission during the previous months; with an election looming it would have been political suicide for the government. Prior to this auction advertisements had appeared consistently and regularly in the national press. The annuities were of course not the only issue in the campaign, Cumann na nGaedheal maintained the state was under threat from subversive groups and referred the Public Safety Act and the bishop's pastoral of October 1931. Cumann na nGaedheal sought to link Fianna Fáil to these subversive groups and individuals such as O'Donnell. Ó Beacháin writes that using the banner 'show me your company' drew attention to the communist sympathies of Charlotte Despard and O'Donnell and in turn connected them with Fianna Fáil.¹⁰⁵ The government obviously hoped to divert just enough voters from concerns over the economic situation including the annuities, to what it portrayed as the constitutional and security threat, to enable it to win another term. But as Ó Beacháin reasons:

Fianna Fáil's electoral strategy was less defensive and proved to be an effective synthesis of ideology and organisation. Its land annuities policy was popular, as was its promotion of industrial protection ... their demands proved a perfect blend of politics and economics, irresistible to those concerned with national pride as well as to the small farmer eager to keep a few extra shillings in the pocket.¹⁰⁶

While O'Donnell and the IWFC were not involved in the election as an organised party, individuals certainly played a role in the campaign. O'Donnell was most likely present at the meeting of the IRA Army Council, which suspended the order forbidding volunteers to work or vote in elections. It recommended that volunteers vote against Cumann na nGaedheal and others who actively supported the policies of that party.¹⁰⁷ And while it did not mention Fianna Fáil specifically they were obviously the intended beneficiaries of this IRA decision,

¹⁰³ *Kildare Observer*, 15 Feb. 1932.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Independent*, 21 Jan. 1932.

¹⁰⁵ Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ Communication from IRA to commanders of all units, 12 Jan. 1932 (NAI, Dept. of Taoiseach, S5864 (C)).

and perhaps more importantly benefited from valuable IRA organisational support. Hanley wrote they assisted in ‘canvassing, postering and organising meetings’.¹⁰⁸ According to Seán MacBride there was close collaboration between the IRA and Fianna Fáil during the election and that IRA officers practically ran the campaign in Dublin.¹⁰⁹ This was certainly a meaningful change from the positions adopted by these two groups prior to the June 1927 General Election when they could not reach agreement (see chapter 3).¹¹⁰ These actions arguably heightened the awareness and tension surrounding an already fraught election campaign. It furthered the belief prevalent in Cumann na nGaedheal, that a considerable number of those supporting Fianna Fáil, such as the IRA and the anti-annuities campaign were out to undermine the state.

In the 1932 election, Fianna Fáil won seventy-two seats, Cumann na nGaedheal fifty-seven, Labour seven, Farmers’ Party two and the remainder were Independents. The *Irish Times* in summing up the election results argued that Fianna Fáil had fought the election on three main issues, the Oath of Allegiance, the annuities and repeal of recent legislation against secret societies.¹¹¹ In areas where there had been a high level of resistance to annuity payments Fianna Fáil polled well, for example in Kerry, where it won five of the seven seats available. This was an even more significant achievement considering Cumann na nGaedheal had two sitting ministers in this constituency. Both Fionan Lynch, Minister for Lands and Fisheries, and John Marcus O’Sullivan, Minister for Education, retained their seats, with O’Sullivan taking the last seat.¹¹² Similarly, in Limerick Fianna Fáil won an extra seat, which gave it four seats out of a total of seven.¹¹³ In Leitrim-Sligo Fianna Fáil not only regained the seat lost in the 1929 bye-election but won another seat bringing its representation to four an increase of two from the outgoing Dáil in this seven-seat constituency.¹¹⁴ Leitrim had been the second county to endorse the Anti-Tribute League resolution for the retention of annuities in August 1928 (see chapter 6). In Longford-Westmeath where annuities had dominated a by-election in 1930, Fianna Fáil gained a seat. Likewise, in Donegal, Fianna Fáil went from two to three seats.¹¹⁵ In Clare the first county to back the Anti-Tribute resolution in June 1928, Fianna Fáil retained its three seats from a total of six. In Galway, one of the earliest counties

¹⁰⁸ Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁹ Seán MacBride, *That day’s struggle, a memoir 1904- 1951*. (ed. Catriona Lawlor) (Dublin, 2005), p. 120.

¹¹⁰ Bryce Evans, *Seán Lemass, democratic dictator*. (Cork, 2011), p. 78.

¹¹¹ *Irish Times*, 22 Feb., 1932.

¹¹² ElectionsIreland.org, <http://electionsireland.org/results/general/04dail.cfm> (20 Oct. 2016).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to support the resolution, Fianna Fáil retained its five seats from a total of nine.¹¹⁶ While this does not suggest that the annuities issue was wholly responsible for the results, there was significant support for Fianna Fáil in areas where the annuities agitation was strongest and most contentious.

Fianna Fáil were just short of a majority in 1932, but with the support of Labour it formed a government on 9 March. One of the major election promises and now the new government's expressed objectives was the retention of the annuities. After much deliberation and discussion since March, de Valera informed a British government delegation at a meeting in London in June 1932 that the next instalment of the annuities would not be paid; he had rejected their idea of arbitration, wanting instead international arbitration on the issue.¹¹⁷ The British government warned that if the annuities were not paid by 16 July, it would collect the debt using other methods, namely the imposition of tariffs on Irish goods. On 16 July, the day after another unproductive meeting in London the Fianna Fáil government withheld the annuity payments, which led the British to impose a twenty per cent tax on Irish imports that was followed by retaliation from the Free State on British imports.¹¹⁸ Fianna Fáil won an overall majority in a snap General Election in January 1933 and on 14 March, Minister for Finance, Seán MacEntee announced in the Dáil a further moratorium on arrears for the November – December gales of 1932 and the May- June gales of 1933 and a reduction of fifty per cent on all annuities.¹¹⁹

The economic war had disastrous consequences for cattle farmers and this affected middling and large farmers most.¹²⁰ Many of these larger farmers now refused to pay their annuities and the decision by the government to seize and impound the cattle of those larger farmers who were not paying annuities caused much contention and resistance to these seizures. This resistance was often similar to the Land League campaign of the 1880s.¹²¹ It was also similar to the annuities agitation inspired by O'Donnell, but this agitation had a different political direction, the crucial difference was that it was now the larger farmers resisting payment of annuities to the Fianna Fáil government.

¹¹⁶ ElectionsIreland.org (20 Oct. 2016).

¹¹⁷ Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s* (New Haven & London, 1984), pp 56-8. The first three chapters (pp 4-71) of this book give comprehensive coverage to the initiatives and correspondence surrounding the annuities from March until the decision to withhold them in July, as well as other matters in British- Irish relations.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 65-9.

¹¹⁹ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 46, No. 6 col. 677, 14 Mar. 1933. McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists*, pp 109-110.

¹²⁰ Feargal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy, a self made hero* (Oxford, 2005), pp 202, 224.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

A new organisation, the Blueshirts, became involved in the agitation. ‘Blueshirts’ was the more common name for the Army Comrades Association, a political grouping formed in February 1932, by ex-members of the Free State army, in reaction to the victory of Fianna Fáil in that month’s general election. Eoin O’Duffy, former Garda Commissioner became Blueshirt leader in July 1933. In September 1933, the Blueshirts merged with Cumann na nGaedheal and the National Centre party to form Fine Gael, with O’Duffy as leader.¹²² There were violent confrontations between those including the Blueshirts, who were opposed to cattle seizures and sales and gardaí enforcing the sales. In August 1934, in Cork, a Blueshirt, Michael Lynch was shot dead as Blueshirts attempted to disrupt the sale of seized cattle. Lynch was shot by members of the Special Police Auxiliary, which was recruited from Fianna Fáil supporters and members of the IRA.¹²³ In August 1934, at the first congress of the Blueshirts, members backed a decision to support ‘the illegal agitation against the economic war if the government did not cease collecting annuities’.¹²⁴ On 30 August, this decision to support the anti-annuities agitation was discussed at a Fine Gael national executive meeting, and after some debate it was agreed the following day to urge the government to cease collecting annuities, however support for the annuities agitation would be limited to ‘practical help and assistance consistent with the Moral Law’.¹²⁵ O’Duffy endeavoured to spread the non-payment campaign throughout rural Ireland and sought but failed to involve the small farmers, who were less directly affected by the economic war.¹²⁶ By 1935, the government’s determined response to the annuities situation was taking effect. This response had resulted in the imprisonment of Blueshirts involved in anti-annuity activities, the building of more secure sale yards and the employment of more sheriffs, court officials and guards to help enforce the collection of annuities. Also in December 1934, the beginnings of a return to economic normality had been signalled, by the signing of the Anglo-Irish coal-cattle pact. By mid-1935 the anti-annuities agitation was showing signs of disintegration.¹²⁷ In April 1938 an agreement ending the economic war eventually resolved the standoff with the British over the

¹²² S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 51; for more on the Blueshirts, see Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 1987); Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997).

¹²³ Regan, *Irish counter-revolution*, p. 362.

¹²⁴ McGarry, *Eoin O’Duffy*, pp 261-2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

issue of annuities; Britain waived her claim to the annuities and in return for this the Free State paid a lump sum of £10million.¹²⁸

Meanwhile, O'Donnell continued his political activism. He and others split from the IRA in 1934 to form the Republican Congress, although this movement, like Saor Éire, was short-lived. O'Donnell supported the Spanish socialist government elected in February 1936, and helped in organising men from Ireland to go to Spain to fight in the Civil War (1936-39) with the International Brigades in defence of the Spanish Republic. (He did not go to Spain himself, although he had been there at the outbreak of the war). He continued his literary career and in 1940 established a literary and political magazine *The Bell*, with Seán O'Faolain. He continued to support political campaigns both at home and abroad throughout his life with particular interest in the plight of Irish emigrants and economic problems in the west of Ireland. He died in 1986.¹²⁹

Annuities continued to play a significant role politically and economically during the second half of 1931 which was heightened by the economic downturn in Ireland and the USA. The government realization of the seriousness of the issue had resulted in it publishing a memo outlining the legal reasons why the state had no claim on the annuities and refuted Fianna Fáil's claims for retention. It also sought to divert attention from harsh economic conditions by warnings of threats to the state from communism, which in their view was principally responsible for the annuities agitation. O'Donnell had helped merge the IWFC into Saor Éire, but ambitions for a new socially radical agenda were thwarted by a combination of church and state. Ironically, it was this successful government initiative against O'Donnell and radical groups and the less successful attempt to link them in the electorate's eyes to Fianna Fáil, which cleared the way for that party to become the standard-bearer on the annuities issue. This, of course, was brought about not only by the government actions but had been carefully cultivated by Fianna Fáil over the previous six years. This gradual wrenching of the anti-annuities campaign from the clutches of O'Donnell allowed Fianna Fáil to pitch their less radical annuities policy on to the electorate in 1932. Fianna Fáil had grasped the significance of annuities across the country and had successfully tailored the

¹²⁸ J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 214. For further reading see McMahan, *Republicans and imperialists*.

¹²⁹ Fearghal McGarry, 'O'Donnell, Peadar', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2012) (<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do?jsessionid=2F9E074910AAF5C1D6ADDD7017565265#>) (accessed 22 Aug. 2016). For more on O'Donnell see Ó Drisceoil, *O'Donnell*; Hegarty, *O'Donnell*.

issue in to a vote winning formula which greatly helped in securing the party's victory in the 1932 General Election.

CONCLUSION

To assess the impact of the annuities agitation on Irish political life, one need look no further than the rise to power of Fianna Fáil in February 1932. This was no ordinary change of government; members of the new government had less than nine years previously been part of the anti-Treaty group defeated in the Civil War, its leader Eamon de Valera had been in prison and its members, coalesced around the IRA and Sinn Féin, were virtually ostracised by church and state. When Fianna Fáil split from Sinn Féin in 1926, one of the activities they embraced vigorously was the anti-annuities campaign. More pertinently, they altered this from the radical agitational campaign of O'Donnell to their own agenda of legal argument, which became a major contributing factor in them attaining power. O'Donnell's objective was to move the annuities crisis from one of individuals defaulting to that of a locally organised movement and further to a nationally organised resistance to annuity payments. He had recognised the explosive political potential of this, which if harnessed properly could ultimately not only defeat the Cumann na nGaedheal government but radically alter the political landscape in Ireland. 1932 was a milestone election, even if this fell short of O'Donnell's vision of where the campaign might lead, and it would take sixteen years and a further six elections before another change of government was effected. This is not to say that the annuities agitation was responsible for all of this. There were other factors and issues that brought a change of government in 1932, but as this thesis has argued the annuities question played a crucial role in what turned out to be a very significant election.

The whole matter of annuities and the agitation that gathered around their payment was a major political, socio-economic and agrarian issue from the mid-1920s until the early 1930s. It was a significant dimension of the overall land question played out at both local and national levels. The issue had its genesis in the historical debate over land ownership in Ireland and more immediately in the succession of Land Purchase Acts between 1885 and 1909 which many believed had solved the vexed Irish land question. But as Dooley has argued, there was still very much a land question in independent Ireland.¹ There were various aspects to this including the vexed issue of the break-up of the remaining large estates, the redistribution of the land that would follow this, and were those most deserving acquiring this land. In the midst of this there was always the annuities, they had come about because of strife (the 1880s Land War) and had become particularly contentious by the mid-1920s. The annuities were never a stand-alone issue but part of the wider land question, but their

¹ Terence Dooley, *'Land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 228.

significance within that question warranted more attention. This thesis has shown that the land annuities became a major feature of the yet unresolved land question but one heretofore neglected by historians.

The broader politics of the annuities transcended local and national concerns in Ireland and placed those leading the campaign, particularly O'Donnell and members of the IWFC within a radical European agrarian movement, the European Peasants' Congress sponsored by the Krestintern. This demonstrated the trajectory of the agitation from local committees to the national Anti-Tribute League and on to an international socialist platform in Europe. While the annuities were not the overriding issue of the European Peasants' Congress, they were an important part of the Irish agrarian question and hence fed into the wider matters of small-farmers which concerned the congress. The broader context to this political involvement was the increasing turmoil in Europe in the early 1930s, particularly between socialism and fascism. It was an era of rapid political change, partly encapsulated by the fact that the European Peasants' Congress could no longer meet in Berlin after 1933, following the ascent to power of the Nazis in January of that year. O'Donnell and the IWFC viewed the agrarian agitation from a local, national and European perspective. Fianna Fáil, meanwhile, saw the issue solely through local and national lens and had less interest in a pan-European movement of small farmers. This approach ultimately proved more successful and had greater appeal with Irish small farmers; Fianna Fáil's message implying immediate relief resonated better than O'Donnell's grander vision of a radical European small-farmers' movement.

When O'Donnell became aware of the extent of the arrears in west Donegal and the volume of court decrees issued to secure those arrears, he knew the situation was unsustainable. While a six-month gale could be met by small farmers with a struggle, depending on prices, harvest yields and weather conditions, growing arrears in an era of depressed prices were now beyond their means. There was the immediate threat of goods and stock being seized but O'Donnell also realised the wider significance that the crisis could result in evictions, people being forced to leave their communities, and farms being taken over by bigger farmers and local business men. This seemed to fly in the face of the promise of a better future for all promised in the years before.

O'Donnell believed the annuities should and could be resisted and saw in it the basis for a wider movement to oppose what he viewed as a tribute that represented the last remnants of British rule in Ireland (and in his view the Cumann na nGaedheal government). In his

opinion, an opportunity had been lost during the War of Independence when republicans were reluctant to allow the break-up of large estates and their occupation by tenants and landless labourers.² O'Donnell's proposal was for the abolition of annuities and a portion of the annuity to provide for a bank controlled by small farmers to assist them with low interest loans. As agriculture was the mainstay of the Irish economy, the annuities could not be divorced from economic and political concerns. O'Donnell believed the annuities could provide the spark for not only radical agrarian change but also economic, social and political change and that the IRA could be at the heart of that agitation. However, he needed to convince the IRA not only of the merits of the annuities campaign but of embracing political activism. While the IRA sanctioned official support in January 1928 and their paper, *An Phoblacht*, highlighted the annuities campaign, they never became the organisational drive behind the agitation, even if individual members were centrally involved.³ O'Donnell had even less success with trying to convince Sinn Féin of the significance of the campaign.

As the agitation failed to transform widespread non-payment into structured opposition, and those areas resisting came under increased threat from decrees and bailiffs, O'Donnell took up the offer of an alliance with Maurice Moore inspired by his legal arguments opposing payment to Britain contained in his pamphlet *British plunder and Irish blunder*. This led to the formation of the Anti-Tribute League and the involvement of Fianna Fáil in an official capacity. Their relationship with O'Donnell remained a constant sub-plot to the agitation. Moore's role was crucial because his writings and pronouncements influenced Fianna Fáil thinking on annuities and as a leader and figure-head gave the campaign a much more sanitised appearance than that of the radical socialist O'Donnell. This, of course, eventually led to a shift in the emphasis of the campaign from an effort to unite small farmers in a national movement, to one where legal arguments took precedence under the guidance and direction of Fianna Fáil.

Fianna Fáil recognised the potential of the annuities and the main plank of their argument followed Moore's thesis on the legal case for retention and revolved around opposition to the Ultimate Financial Settlement of 1926. They tabled a Dáil motion to end the payment of annuities to Britain, which was defeated in May 1929. However, its position was not just driven from the top down. Some of the members of local Fianna Fáil cumainn were small farmers and the annuities issue resonated with these party grassroots. Fianna Fáil policy

² Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be another day* (Dublin, 1963), pp 19-20.

³ Letter to O/C Tirconaill Battalion from adjutant general, re. land annuities campaign, 12 Jan. 1928 (UCDA, Twomey papers, P69/149 (71)); Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 121.

was often ambiguous and as some party members did not exactly go out of their way to clarify this position, it further heightened the belief among farmers that abolition of annuities was imminent with a change of government. These ambiguous signals were attacked by Cumann na nGaedheal, accusing Fianna Fáil of encouraging non-payment but without clarifying what this would mean to the Irish Exchequer.

While there was widespread resentment to annuities (often referred to as the ‘old rents’), the economic downturn and the fall in agricultural prices since the end of the 1914-18 war, undoubtedly also had an effect on farmers’ ability to pay. This was at times exacerbated by poor weather conditions. The unsustainability of small farms was also a contributing factor, heightened by the fact that there was very little other employment to subsidise farm income. As the effects of the American depression began to take hold in Ireland from 1930, with emigration options closed off and a fall in remittances, there was acceleration in non-payment by those ‘unable and unwilling to pay’.⁴ Government concerns in September 1931 about exchequer finances and annuities in particular was further evidence of this.

The Cumann na nGaedheal government always seemed to be on the defensive regarding annuities. Even before O’Donnell organised the campaign it was fending off questions in the Dáil and local media about court decrees and Land Commission methods. This defensive stance was undoubtedly heightened by the agitation and O’Donnell’s writings; he was afforded even greater publicity when he was briefly imprisoned and stood trial in April 1927 for inciting people not to pay annuities.⁵ Ernest Blythe and Patrick Hogan were particularly robust in making the government case on annuities; these were contracts between landlords, tenants and those who lent the money and that the government had merely acted as intermediaries. This was a position that was hard to defend as the British government was centrally involved. Most government efforts went towards securing legislation to aid the implementation of collection, serving decrees and carrying out seizures. There was little attempt to address or alleviate the situation of those struggling with annuities; the government seemed to concur with the view that farmers could pay if finances were managed more efficiently and they were not being led astray by O’Donnell’s campaign. When a proposed moratorium was aired it was rejected on the grounds that if farmers stopped paying it would be difficult to get them to resume. The government failed to grasp that besides economic difficulties in paying there were moral and historical reasons for tenants to dislike the

⁴ Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O’Donnell* (Cork, 2001), p. 50.

⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 Apr. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 7 Apr. 1927.

annuities. Even on the eve of the 1932 General Election the government was making the case for payment to Britain in its memo written by Costello and produced in the Dáil in December 1931.⁶

Timothy M. O'Neill outlined the importance of the annuities campaign as a factor in Fianna Fáil's election victory. He concluded that O'Donnell's contention that he had handed away the trump card of the annuities to Fianna Fáil should be treated with caution, as O'Donnell, the IRA, Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil each had vested interests in enhancing the influence of the annuities campaign during the 1932 election. As O'Neill argues, O'Donnell believed there existed the potential for social revolution but the IRA refusal to support the campaign displayed a failure to comprehend and exploit that potential and so he was forced to pass the initiative to Fianna Fáil. However, Moss Twomey, chief of staff of the IRA at the time, commented later that there was very little revolutionary potential and 'suggested that O'Donnell's agitational organisations were largely limited to his imagination and paper'.⁷ Nevertheless, the IRA did give official backing to the campaign in January 1928, even if it did not fully embrace it, most probably because at this time it still viewed itself as a purely military organisation. It could be argued that Twomey's retrospective dismissal of the potential of the annuities campaign was to cover the fact that the IRA had indeed failed to fully grasp its importance, a potential that was not lost on Fianna Fáil.

Cumann na nGaedheal also identified advantages in exaggerating the dangers of the agitation portraying it as communist inspired and, therefore, sought to link it to Fianna Fáil particularly as the countdown to the 1932 election began. While O'Neill credits O'Donnell as being the first to recognise the potential of the annuities to remove Cumann na nGaedheal from government, he also argues that it was difficult to believe that a politician of de Valera's skill would not eventually have identified the issue and used it to undermine them.⁸ This was, of course, what the Fianna Fáil leadership ultimately achieved, while remaining wary of the radical elements within the agitation.

Non-payment of annuities had a major effect on the financial budgets of county councils, leading to fractious debate in the council chambers. The Anti-Tribute League targeted the councils to publicise the issue and gain tangible support by persuading them to

⁶ Memo on Land Purchase Annuities, 17 Dec. 1931 (NLI, Moore papers, MS 10,560 (3)).

⁷ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Handing away the trump card? Peadar O'Donnell, Fianna Fáil and the non-payment of land annuities campaign, 1926-32' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol. xii, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), p. 38 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660748>) (accessed 27 Jan. 2015).

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 38-9.

support the league's resolutions; this was greatly aided by increased Fianna Fáil representation on the councils. Clare was the first to pass the Anti-Tribute League resolution; it also held a public meeting in Ennis in June 1928 in support of this, attended by de Valera who, thus, shared the same platform as O'Donnell.⁹ This was a major coup for the campaign. The withholding of grants hurt the councils and in some areas defaulters' lists were published, while many questioned the role of the council in collecting arrears, reasoning this was the responsibility of the Land Commission.

Simultaneously as O'Donnell became more disillusioned by Fianna Fáil's legalistic approach he formulated more contact with the Krestintern and with their help and supporters at home formed the IWFC, committed to the abolition of annuities and allied with small farmers' groups in Europe. Annuities featured prominently as an electoral issue in the general elections of 1927 but were to feature even more prominently in by elections in Leitrim-Sligo in 1929 and Longford-Westmeath in 1930. The government memo of December 1931 heightened the debate on annuities before and during the General Election in February 1932, as inevitably this drew a response from Fianna Fáil. It suited Fianna Fáil to have annuities at the forefront of the election; they were comfortable arguing that case. It was the opposite for Cumann na nGaedheal as they sought to deflect the issue from one of economics to the suitability of Fianna Fáil for government.

The annuities agitation had demonstrated the land question remained unresolved, had helped bring about a change of government and had brought together local, national and international concerns. It touched many areas of Irish life as evidenced by organisations and individuals as diverse as O'Donnell, Moore, Fianna Fáil, IRA, Sinn Féin, RWG, IWFC, farmers, priests (including Fr Fahy) and international communists taking up the fight to varying degrees. Eventually the campaign veered from the control of O'Donnell, the man most responsible for propelling it to national prominence, which has been highlighted in this thesis.

The immediate impact of the annuities agitation was the election of the first Fianna Fáil government and the retention of annuities in the summer of 1932. The short to medium effect was a renewal of economic hostilities between Britain and Ireland for six years in the 'economic war'. In the long term, there was arguably no other agitation since of such a radical

⁹ *Irish Times*, 18 June 1928; *Irish Independent*, 18 June 1928.

nature by farmers. For these reasons, the campaign against annuities deserves a prominent place in the historiography of the early years of the modern Irish State.

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