



**NUI MAYNOOTH**

**Díacoll na hÉireann Mhí Nuad**

**The divided political landscape of County Cavan  
1912 - 1922**

by

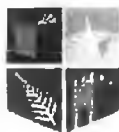
**OLIVER PATRICK MC CAUL**

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**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Professor R.V. Comerford**

**Supervisors of Research: Dr. Jacinta Prunty & Dr. Denise Dunne**

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Díliscoil na hÉireann Má Níad

The divided political landscape of County Cavan  
1912 - 1922

Oliver Patrick Mc Caul

This thesis as its title suggests explores the political landscape of County Cavan in the early part of the last century. These were years of major political upheaval in Ireland. The country was in the process of reinventing itself both culturally and politically and in Cavan the forces that drove these changes were clearly manifested. In 1912 County Cavan was an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain a mere ten years later it was the northern frontier of the newly formed Irish Free State.

Between the years of 1912 and 1922 Ireland experienced two simultaneous revolutions. The Catholics of Ireland were on the main nationalists and their long struggle toward self determination and independence rapidly gathered pace during this period. In response to this the Protestants of Ireland who espoused a British identity created a movement known as Unionism dedicated to preserving the union with Great Britain. The demographic religious make up of Ireland resulted in Unionists being most concentrated in the north of Ireland in the province of Ulster, while nationalism predominated in the other three provinces. Geography therefore became central to both ideologies. While nationalists insisted on national determination on an all Ireland basis, Unionists in the north of the country fostered an Ulster Unionist identity that sought to exclude all Ulster from any form of Irish independence.

The county of Cavan was caught upon this political and cultural tidal wave. It was an Ulster county, but it was on the main Catholic and nationalist, and yet it also contained a large Protestant and Unionist minority. Because of Cavan's unique demographics, as this thesis demonstrates, it reacted quite differently to the rest of Ulster and indeed to the rest of Ireland during this time. Both Unionists and nationalists sought control of the county's political destiny. This thesis traces the uncertain future of the south Ulster county of Cavan from the Home Rule crisis of 1912, right through to the partition of Ireland in 1920 and the subsequent inclusion of the county in the Irish Free State. It demonstrates how external and internal forces sometimes acting together and sometimes conflicting gave Cavan a very distinctive part to play in the history of the period, one that cannot be understated and one that could not go unexplored.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
CCC	Cavan County Council
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
UIL	United Irish League

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I would like to thank the staff of the reference library in the County library in Cavan town. Their help was invaluable for my work. I would also like to thank the staff of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for allowing me to see the papers of Lord Farnham. There are many others who generously gave me their advice and time most especially. Dr Eileen Reilly of New York University who gave over her lunch break to discuss her research on the Great War and Cavan with me. The most reverend Dr McKiernan whom I accosted one rainy day in Cavan town and who gave me a great insight into the actions and positions of the Roman Catholic clergy in Cavan during the period of my study.

Finally I would like to thank my friends for their encouragement and continuing friendship. I would like to thank my family my parents Peter and Breege and my four brothers Shane, Declan, Fergal and Aiden, because their love and support in many ways made this study possible for me.

## Introduction

Ulster is one of the historic and ancient provinces of the island of Ireland. The county of Cavan is the most southerly of the nine counties that make up this northern province. These territorial divisions or shires are a remnant of the English conquest, so too is the inclusion of County Cavan in this old province. The area Cavan now occupies from its earliest history has always been a frontier territory of sorts on the island. It was one of the original 'six counties' during the Ulster Plantation, carved from the ancient kingdom of Breifne. The area still bears the marks of this historic and turbulent period. Local place names like Virginia, Ashfield, Mount Nugent and Mountainlodge are testament to this. It is a dramatic landscape of rolling drumlins, bogs, rivers, and lakes reinforcing Cavan's distinctive nature. The local English dialect further emphasises this fact. It is full of common Ulster idioms, expressions and words yet the local accent is almost flat reflecting Cavan's limbo state between north and south.

This thesis will explore a further aspect of Cavan's dichotomous nature, that of political division. Between 1912 and 1922 it can now be said in retrospect that Ireland experienced two simultaneous revolutions. At the time Ireland to many spectators of its political and cultural landscape and indeed to many of its inhabitants, seemed on the verge of collapse and anarchy. A civil war that threatened to engulf not only Ireland but also its neighbour Great Britain loomed large on the horizon. In the predominately Catholic south there was the culmination of a long struggle for independence and national self-determination. In Ireland's northern province of Ulster quite a different revolution was coming to completion. The majority of the population of the province of Ulster were predominately Protestant and identified themselves as British. They were alienated from a sense of Irishness by the increasingly Catholic and separatist outlook of Irish nationalism. They therefore began to affirm and cultivate a new Ulster identity based on Protestantism, and their real or imagined cultural links with the island of Great Britain. 'Once Nationalism and Orangeism confronted each other directly on the ground during the nationalist "Invasion of Ulster"

from 1883 onwards, both camps were aiming to demonstrate territorial supremacy.’<sup>1</sup>

This thesis will explore the dual revolutions as they unfolded in Cavan. It was in Cavan that the two ideologies of Unionism and nationalism came head to head.<sup>2</sup> The dissertation will assess why Cavan’s political landscape developed in the way that it did. It will examine the many local, provincial, and national organisations, institutions and movements that were present in the area during the period and how they functioned, acted and indeed interacted. Cavan had a high concentration of Orange and Ancient Order of Hibernian Lodges. It had a plethora of religious denominations although Roman Catholicism was the largest throughout the period in question. This thesis explores the many cultural institutions that blossomed in Cavan during this period like The Gaelic League, The Gaelic Athletic Association and Unionist Clubs and how they influenced the outlook of the local population.

The study will move beyond a mere linear narrative of historical events as they unfolded and in doing so paint a clear image of the county during the revolutionary era 1912 -1922. This thesis is the story of Cavan and its people, during ten of the most important years of Irish history of the last century. These were years that resulted in the evolution of two polarized communities, with divergent aspirations for their county’s future.

Ulster contained a large population of Catholics, who unlike Protestants did not identify with a sense of being Ulster-British, or believe in a separate Ulster identity. The county of Cavan contrasted with most other Ulster counties, which had on the main majority or sizable Protestant populations. It was predominately Catholic with a substantial Protestant minority. In this small county of just over ninety thousand people a completely different set of forces came into play. Cavan became an exception to the rule in Ulster as it was swept along by national and international occurrences. It was this territory both these so called ‘camps’ sought to hold and control. Through the period in question

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Wright, Two lands one soil (Dublin, 1996) p.22

because of reversed demographic conditions and its unique geographical location in relation to the other counties of the province this thesis will show that the county's experience of 1912-1922 was very much different to the rest of the province and indeed to the rest of Ireland.

Cavan was the home of the first leader of Ulster Unionism Colonel Edward Saunderson and sometimes remembered as its father.<sup>3</sup> Even after his death his memory was a powerful force within Cavan and indeed Ulster Unionism. His legacy was that Unionism became an integral part of life in Cavan. Cavan it can also be argued witnessed the single most important by-election in modern Irish history an election fought between the waning Irish Party and Sinn Féin in 1918. It was a bitterly contested election won by a man that would become part of the iconography of nationalist Ireland, Arthur Griffith. This election too would have reverberating effects on the nationalist landscape of Cavan.

The single most important event during this period for Cavan was the Government of Ireland Act of 1920. This Act not only partitioned Ireland but also Ulster. The Ulster Crisis, the Great War and the 1916 Rising all had dramatic effects on Cavan. Cavan was caught on a cultural and political tidal wave that carried it to independence. Much of the forces that drove Cavan during this period were external and beyond the control of the local communities.

The relative proximity in historical terms of our own time to the period and subject this thesis will cover, the revolutionary era of 1912 to 1922 in south Ulster, has greatly affected the quantity and the quality of secondary sources available to the reader. At a national level the period for a great many years was taboo. For nationalist historians as well as Unionist, the anomalous position of the three Ulster counties in the South was a constant reminder of the incomplete

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<sup>2</sup> Unionist and Unionism will appear throughout in order to differentiate the terms from the labour union movement.

<sup>3</sup>Saunderson, Col. Edward (1837 – 1906). Born in County Cavan at the family home of Castle Saunderson, he was a Liberal MP for Cavan 1865 - 1874 and was a Conservative MP for Armagh 1885 - 1906. He was one of the main organisers of Irish Unionism and later became the first leader of the Irish Unionist parliamentary party. He was also highly active in the Orange Order from 1882 until his death in 1906. See S. J Connolly The Oxford companion to Irish history (Oxford, 1998) p497



revolutions on both sides, best forgotten or at least ignored. Cavan disappears out of most histories of Ulster after partition and is rarely considered worthy of remark in histories of Ireland. At a local level historical analysis of the period also remained scant. There are a myriad of possible reasons for this. Firstly, the county's historical relationship with Northern Ireland and the continuing 'Troubles' north of the border, alternatively the area may simply have been thought to have played such an insignificant part in the history of the period. What was really at play in Cavan was a collective conscious amnesia. The local historical society *Cumann Seannchais Breifne* clearly demonstrates this. In its journal *Breifne* for a great many years the contributors tended to concentrate the greater amount of their energies and essays on the county's remote and non-controversial past. It could be argued that this was because they in general found the locality's distant past more interesting therefore worthy of analysis and narrative. This is a valid point, but it is debatable that at a local level the historians of the area were possibly reflecting a consensus, that because of the relative immediacy of the events in question, it was best to leave them for fear of opening old wounds. This has thankfully changed in recent years. Irish historiography in all forms Unionist, nationalist and local has matured and grown more confident and there is a marked increase in publications and dissertations dealing with what was once seen as a 'no go' subject. The late realization of this is that much work still remains to be done on south Ulster especially Cavan. For that reason this thesis is on the main a virgin study. Dr Terence Dooley a historian from county Monaghan notes, 'In recent years the development of Unionism in the province of Ulster has been the subject of an outpouring of books and essays. However the vast majority of these works convey the impression that the movement predominated only in the six north-eastern counties which today form Northern Ireland and with few exceptions, they only fleetingly refer to the contribution of Unionism to life in the other Ulster counties of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan in the recent years prior to the establishment of the Irish Free State.'<sup>4</sup> Dr Dooley has begun the process of

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<sup>4</sup> Terence Dooley, The Plight of Monaghan Protestants (Dublin, 2000) p8

redressing the neglected historiography of Co. Monaghan another south Ulster county in his book, *The plight of Monaghan Protestants*. No such work has yet been completed for Cavan. The neglect of Cavan's history from a Protestant and Unionist standpoint has been replicated from a Catholic and nationalist one also. Marianne Elliott in her publication, *The Catholics of Ulster* attempts to redress this imbalance.<sup>5</sup> In this book she examines the different Ulster Catholic and nationalist experience to the rest of Ireland. 'I have always felt different from Catholics elsewhere in Ireland and this is a common feeling among Ulster Catholics. Yet I have found them consistently neglected in the histories of Ireland...'<sup>6</sup> Cavan too has been consistently neglected in the histories of Ireland. This thesis will redress this matter.

There is a rich supply of primary sources for this study. The Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the centrally controlled British police force in Ireland at the time, have left an enormous amount of information for the scholar, in the form of intelligence reports and Confidential Monthly County Inspector Reports. For the county of Cavan the confidential reports and intelligence gathering give accounts of police actions, agrarian outrages, secret societies, sectarian conflicts, political gatherings, Ulster Volunteer Force and National Volunteer Force activity and strength and a host of other information on other organizations in the county. The files create, through the eyes of the RIC, an image of Cavan as it was during this turbulent period. This information, which was initially gathered for the administration of the country, was at the inception of the Irish Free State removed to Britain because of its sensitive nature. It was stored in the British Colonial Office. Some of the files were maintained up to 1926 showing the continuing importance of Ireland for the British administration. These files have been extracted from the Colonial Office files and reconstituted in one single body as the *The British in Ireland; series one*,<sup>7</sup> They are one of the most important primary sources for the study of Ireland's dual revolutions. They are

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<sup>5</sup> Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster* (London, 2000)

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* pxxxiii

<sup>7</sup> British in Ireland Series one, Public Record Office, London (Dublin Castle records) Colonial Office class CO 904 hereinafter abbreviated to PRO, CO 904

available on microfilm in the University library of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

The Farnham Papers from the Farnham Estate outside Cavan town provide a valuable window to the Unionist and loyalist past of Cavan from the 1880s right up to the 1920s. The Farnhams were to the fore in leading the Ulster movement in Cavan. Lord Farnham (Arthur Kenlis Maxwell eleventh Baron Farnham) was chairman of the Irish Unionist Alliance, sat on the Ulster Unionist Council during the period covered by this study, and was one of the most important figures in the organization of the UVF in the county. The papers contain correspondence on all areas relating to the Unionist movement in Cavan to other local leaders and to other Ulster leaders. There are details of UVF drilling and strength and of other Protestant and loyalist organizations in the county such as The Royal Black Preceptorary and The Orange Order. They also contain the many newspaper cuttings Lord Farnham collected from newspapers in Great Britain and Ireland relating to the Cavan Ulster Volunteers. The Farnham Papers, many of which have just come to light in recent months, can be consulted in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

The county newspaper the *Anglo-Celt* referred to locally by the nationalist population as simply the *Celt*. The paper by the period in question had come into Catholic proprietorship and had taken on a very nationalist outlook in its editorials. The disappearance some years earlier of the Unionist orientated *Cavan Weekly News* saw the arrival of Unionist orientated notices in the paper. The paper in fact reports on Unionist, nationalist and with the rise of Sinn Fein republican meetings and rallies with a great degree of impartiality. The paper is an invaluable source for gauging organizational activity in the county from 1914 to 1922.

This thesis is a study that will begin the work of redressing the fact that Cavan like other south Ulster counties during this important period has been repeatedly ignored for various reasons and agendas and as a result has to varying degrees deleted from existence in Irish histories. The thesis will develop the idea

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that Cavan played a peripheral yet pivotal position in Irish politics and the development of the island as a whole.

The county of Cavan in 1922 found itself with the reluctant acceptance of the local Unionist population and with the fulfilment of local nationalist aspirations, in a new state. Cavan however brought baggage. It was cut off economically from its economic hinterland in Ulster. A sizable Unionist minority also were cut off from what they saw as their cultural and religious brethren in the newly formed Northern Ireland. For many Cavan nationalists there was also a feeling they were cut off from and abandoning their fellow Ulster nationalists.

## Chapter I

### Home Rule

#### A Crisis In Cavan

The Ulster Question, as it had generally become known in the early part of the twentieth century, to British and Irish parliamentarians was not a recent development. A solution however was not forthcoming. Ulster had become the Medusa of Irish and British politics alike. The treatment of Ulster flared up emotions on all sides and political careers and the stability of governments were made and shattered there. Conditions in this province threatened to spark off a civil war that could envelope not only Ireland but also its sister island. Ulster had created a modern constitutional crisis and issues of allegiance, loyalty, and nationality were threatening to unravel the whole Union. The Parliamentary Act of 1911, the final passing of Home Rule onto the statute books, was an act of treason from the standpoint of Protestants of Ulster. They felt abandoned and betrayed. Already they had the embryonic stages of a political movement across the province. Cavan was no different. The organisations and clubs such as the Loyal Orange Order, the Royal Black Preceptory and Unionist Clubs, active at local levels within the county, began the work of resistance. Nationalists too had their own exclusive organisations the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), Sinn Féin clubs, the United Irish League (UIL), *Conradh na Gaeilge*, and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). In Cavan these groups would unite to face down the threat to Home Rule.

Between the years 1912 and 1914 the entire province of Ulster exploded into political and sectarian turmoil. The county of Cavan

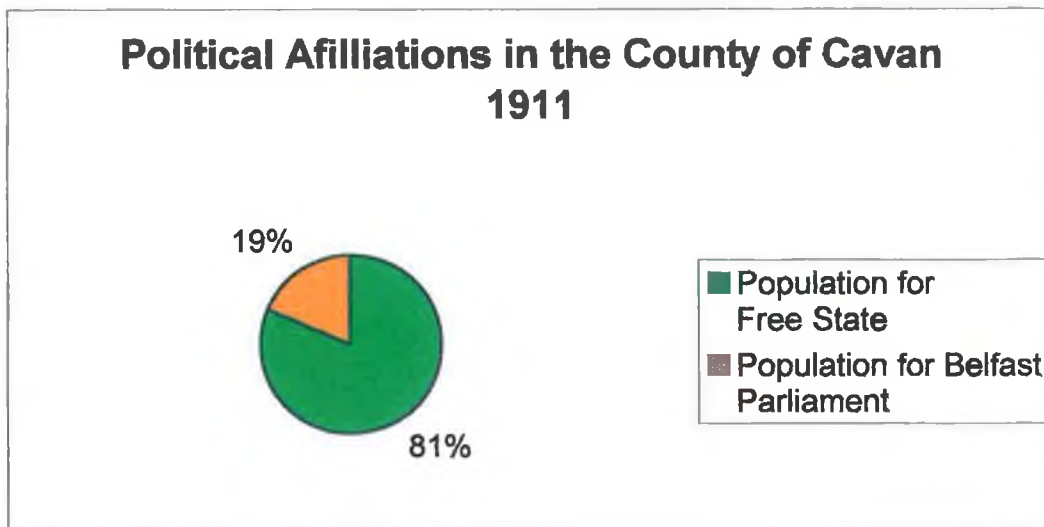
was caught up in and enveloped by this already long running episode. Forces and occurrences from without reacted with the nascent yet very real sectarian and political divisions within the county. The Unionists of Cavan were an integral part of the wider movement within the province. The Protestants of the county along with their fellow co-religionists across the province of Ulster rallied against the threat of Home Rule and their fears of nationalist and Catholic domination. The Catholics and nationalists of Ulster and especially Cavan counter reacted to this development and the politicking that ensued precipitated the so-called Ulster Crisis, the effects of which were clearly visible in Cavan. This chapter will concern itself with the unfolding of the so-called 'crisis' in Cavan. It will display the mechanics of Unionist and nationalist activities at a local level during this time, tracing their development and divergence from the wider movements, from which they had sprung. It will throw light on Unionist actions in the county and the later subsequent nationalist counter reaction.

The Ulster Unionists threatened to take arms up against the crown to defend the crown and set up a provisional government for the province if Home Rule was enacted for Ireland. The ideology of Unionism was clear on this, any monarch, government, or political grouping that tampered with the Union or threatened to change Ireland's constitutional status, within that Union, in any way they viewed as detrimental, in doing so surrendered any right they may have had to their loyalty. When such sentiments as this emerged among the Protestant population of the province, and were espoused by their political leaders, many merely saw them as scare tactics by a desperate minority now virtually impotent since the removal of the House of Lords veto.

It was undeniable that three counties of Ulster, Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal had large nationalist majorities, and two others Fermanagh and Tyrone, had very slight nationalist majorities. At most the Unionists predominated only in the four counties of Antrim, Down, Londonderry and Armagh... at Westminster the Unionists had a majority of only one... This position was actually reversed when a Home Ruler was returned in a by-election in the city of Londonderry early in 1913... Since the Unionists did not until a very late stage in the struggle, relinquish their demand for separate treatment of all nine counties of the historic province... Nevertheless, no one who understood the real nature of the Ulster situation would have been so deluded...<sup>1</sup>

Looking retrospectively at the facts behind Stewart's observation one can definitely see the precarious position of the Ulster Protestants. He also throws light on a very obvious fact, one that this dissertation will further emphasise, that Protestants were only barely a majority in Ulster, a small minority on the island, and in Cavan they commanded less than 20% of the counties population.

**Figure 1**



**A Pie chart representing the political affiliations in the County of Cavan in 1911. Source: Adapted from data in Kevin O'Shiel, Handbook of the Ulster Question (Dublin, 1923) p66**

<sup>1</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis (London, 1967) p49

This was the smallest proportion of all the Ulster counties, yet it did not make these south Ulster Unionists any less vocal or active. However it is not surprising therefore that in this county where Unionism was very clearly present but not dominant that it would develop and react in quite a different way to the north-eastern heartland of the movement. The table below displays data extracted from an Irish government publication in 1923, from figures compiled by the Registrar General, for the year 1911.

**Table 1**

Total Population of Cavan	Population for Free State	Population for Belfast Parliament
91,173	74,261	16,912

**Population of Cavan in 1911 showing political affiliations. Source: Adapted from data in Kevin O'Shiel, Handbook of the Ulster Question (Dublin, 1923) p66**

The table shows the demographic division and political wishes of Unionists and nationalists for the future of the county. Although this book applies the terminology of the early 1920s, the data can be seen to represent those in favour of Home Rule *i.e.* in favour of the Free State and the latter for a provisional government in Belfast if Home Rule was enacted.

The Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), were on the ground to witness the events of these two years in Cavan. The County Inspector provided monthly intelligence reports to the Dublin administration on the growth and development of both the Unionist and nationalist volunteer camps. From the start the communications underestimated the resolve at least in their reports, but accurately gauged the support for both the Unionist and nationalist movements in Cavan. It is possible also as this dissertation will go on to show that the RIC harboured a sympathy for the Ulster Volunteer movement in Cavan



reflected in the tone of the reports to the castle. The economy of county Cavan was essentially an agriculturally based one in 1912 and most of the population lived rurally. Farming was almost at subsistence level and extremely labour intensive. For that reason UVF activity and subsequently Irish Volunteer activity was limited. In May and June of 1913 there was a falling off in attendance and a reduction in drilling according to police intelligence. The police accounted for this 'due to this being the farmers busy time of year.'<sup>2</sup> For many Unionists it seemed the survival of their crops and livelihood was more important than the survival of their political cause.

Nationalists in 1912 believed that they were nearing the end of a long struggle, and it was clearly manifested than in their popular culture through song. '*Ireland long a province been a nation once again*' these are the lyrics to a popular song of the time. Nationalists throughout Ireland greeted the passing of Home Rule with enthusiasm, and Cavan was no exception. The Unionists of the county, as the police reports show, were only beginning to prepare for their struggle to prevent Home Rule. In 1912 Unionists across Ulster and the British Empire signed the 'Ulster Solemn League and Covenant'. Thousands of Unionists across Cavan also signed. It was an act of solidarity. The demography and interdependence economically meant many Unionists held back from signing the Covenant, but while they did not sign, their dedication to the cause did not go unreported. The County Inspector reported 'business men and trades men while active in the movement abstained from signing.'<sup>3</sup> By 1913 it had turned into much more. The County Inspectors report for February noted 'A large meeting will be held in the Protestant hall Cavan town on the 19th by the various Unionist clubs to enrol members in the proposed Volunteer force. No

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<sup>2</sup> British in Ireland: series one, Cavan County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, May 1913, PRO, CO 904/90

<sup>3</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, August 1913, PRO, CO 90/90

trouble is anticipated probably from 1,000 to 1,500 will attend.’<sup>4</sup> In March the County Inspectors report noted that nationalist political societies were quiet while Unionist clubs and Orange Lodges were active. The Unionists of Cavan were stepping up their activities. ‘The Unionists held two large demonstrations during the month one at Derrylane and the other at Cavan, the object being to further protest against Home Rule, and to express their determination to resist it.’<sup>5</sup> The Unionists of Cavan had begun to flex their political muscles and in turn with the rest of their compatriots across Ulster took it to the next stage, the threat of military resistance.

Lord Farnham of the Farnham estate located outside Cavan town stepped into his role as the natural leader of the Unionists of Cavan. He organised them at home and defended them in the House of Lords at Westminster. In the House of Lords he led some scathing and often sectarian debates on the Catholics of Ireland and Home Rule. The *Daily Chronicle* a London newspaper reported

Another Peer, Lord Farnham in a very blatant utterance indulged in violent talk about armed resistance. ‘I hope many of your Lordships will come over and help us’ He effusively thanked Lord Willoughby de Broke, who had organised a British League for the defence of Ulster, and who in last night’s debate used language of menace. Such incitements as these noble Lords indulged in yesterday and today have never been heard before in a legislative assembly.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier in the year, in that same house, he had championed the Protestant cause, and expounded the fears of his people of Roman Catholic control.

Perhaps it is difficult for the people of this country to understand why we Protestants in Ireland dread so much

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<sup>4</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, February 1913, PRO, CO 904/89

<sup>5</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, March 1913, PRO, CO 904/89

<sup>6</sup> *Daily Chronicle*, 16 July 1913 in Farnham Papers PRONI D/3975/E/1/7

being placed under a Parliament which is essentially a Roman Catholic one... Individually, Roman Catholics and Protestants in Ireland can live peaceably and contentedly side by side, and they do so, and they are the best of friends, but only so long as they are ruled by a firm Government under an Imperial Parliament by Protestants, and I firmly believe many Roman Catholics dread the idea of the Church of Rome getting control of secular affairs.<sup>7</sup>

Lord Farnham threw all his energies into the movement and it did not go without notice. It was quite clear in his own home county of Cavan, that Roman Catholics did not hold his political beliefs. It was also quite evident that the people he represented did not live contentedly side by side with their Catholic neighbours. It is arguable from examining the language of these speeches and many others that Farnham was trying to draw on the sectarian elements within the British establishment, and as many of his speeches made the press he could hope to stir up Protestant opinion in his home county of Cavan. Events as they unfolded in the county would show this. New Unionist clubs were being formed across the county, in September 1913 one was formed in Cootehill, and that same month there was a break-in at a Hibernian hall.<sup>8</sup>

The UVF, as the Ulster Volunteers were now known, were being drilled and armed with increasing regularity throughout 1913. They were however impeded at their foundation by a shortage of military equipment. Lord Farnham became at least on paper, if the police reports intelligence are accurate, the main, but not sole importer of arms and ammunition into the county. He was not alone; the majority of the Cavan nobility played a role in the movement. A look at the intelligence gathered by the police in July 1913 listing the organisers of the UVF in Cavan, 'Lord Farnham of Farnham, Colonel The Right Honourable H. Maxwell of Mount Nugent, Captain S.

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<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Debates, January 28, 1913 in Farnham Papers PRONI D/3975/E/1/4

<sup>8</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, September 1913, PRO, CO 904/91

Saunderson of Castle Saunderson, Major Hamilton of Castle Hamilton, Captain M. Pratt of Kingscourt, Mr. William Matthews of Cavan, Rev. W.J. Askins of Kilmore and Rev. A.W Mc Larvey of Drung.’<sup>9</sup> It was illegal for the force to drill in public. This problem was circumvented by Farnham, who put his demesne outside Cavan town at the disposal of the Ulster Volunteers. Cavan made the national press in June 1913 when the *Irish Times* reported that a consignment of arms had been seized in Dublin and impounded in the Custom House en-route from England. ‘The address of the consignee, “To Lord Farnham, Farnham, Co. Cavan, Ireland,” being written in large bold hand... A Cavan correspondent states that Lord Farnham left Cavan on Saturday morning by motor car, and that his destination was supposed to be Dublin.’<sup>10</sup> Farnham was determined to make a formidable force out of the Cavan volunteers.

The RIC reported that in July 1913 the high point of the Protestant processional calendar a large public meeting took place in Farnham Demesne outside Cavan and that approximately 9000 people attended, Lord Farnham, Captain Saunderson of Castle Saunderson and Mr Butcher MP for York spoke. This was followed by a procession around Cavan town of 2,400 a similar rally was held in Bailieboro 2,500 people attending.<sup>11</sup> By this point the Ulster Volunteers in Cavan had grown to 2,500 and according to police intelligence were drilling regularly. Their drill instructors were all ex soldiers and policemen.<sup>12</sup> The County Inspector routinely played down the UVF as an organization, while noting their rapidly growing support and membership. ‘[The] UV Force as it exists in the county at present would be very troublesome if there was rioting in the county but as a force against disciplined troops it would not be taken seriously

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<sup>9</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, July 1913, PRO, CO 904/90

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 June 1913

<sup>11</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, July 1913, PRO, CO 904/90

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

into account.’<sup>13</sup> He furthers this by offering his superiors his opinion for the existence of the force. ‘I feel sure the county leaders hold the same opinion so I am driven to the conclusion that the force exists for the purpose of endeavouring to persuade the democracy of this Kingdom of the seriousness of the position in Ireland so that public opinion may bring about a general election on the Irish question before the Home Rule bill becomes law’<sup>14</sup> It is possible he actually believed what he was saying and possibly in its infancy the UVF were simply nothing more than political weights. The language of the County Inspector betrays his sympathies towards the movement however. Lord Farnham’s speeches and actions however go far to disprove this view of the Ulster Volunteers of being anything less than an army in formation. Like any military operation in the beginning the deficiencies and weaknesses of the Cavan UVF were clearly visible, after a year of drilling this began to change.

The nationalists of Cavan observed the actions of the Cavan Unionists and their high profile leader Lord Farnham. Cavan did not escape the rising wave of sectarianism sweeping the province and the importation of arms and the frequent drilling of the Ulster Volunteers had created bitterness among the Catholic population. The nationalist backlash was directed at the movements’ leader in the county.

Lord Farnham reported at 3.30pm on Saturday that as he and Mr J. F. burrows were returning from Denn, in the sub-district of Crosskeys, District of Virginia, at about 8.30pm on 31<sup>st</sup> of December, where a drill of Volunteers had been held, a barbed wire was placed across the public road at a height of about 3 1/2 feet from the ground, that the motor car in which they were travelling was stopped before they got as far as where the wire was placed.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, January 1914, PRO, CO 904/92

Lord Farnham made a lucky escape from this rather crude assassination attempt and in many ways it fuelled fire on both sides. For the Unionists it manifested all their worst fears about nationalists and for the nationalists it may have led to the realization from this failed attempt that they should come together and form their own volunteer corp. Sectarian tension was again manifest in the county when in what the police termed party feeling a Doctor O'Rourke was evicted. 'His Landlord is a Unionist the Doctor is a nationalist.'<sup>16</sup> For the RIC it had become that black and white, the county of Cavan had split, into two adversarial and polarized political camps

Unionist activity continued unabated in the county as 1914 progressed and if anything gathered momentum. The drilling and training of the UVF became more intensive and professional. This was marked by an increased dedication by the Cavan Ulster Volunteers. The actions of Cavan unionists were highly publicised. The *Dublin Express* reported that a 'camp of instruction' for 230 selected men had taken place on the Demesne of Lord Farnham. 'The majority of the men are farmers and farmers sons, and the fact of their leaving their farms at this busy season for a weeks drills under rigorous discipline affords ample proof of the earnestness of the Unionists of Co. Cavan.'<sup>17</sup> Again in May another camp took place. 'The volunteers attending the camp will be picked men, to the number of 110, who have been nominated as likely to become efficient as non commissioned officers.'<sup>18</sup> As a military force in Cavan the UVF, could no longer be taken lightly, by the civil authorities. They were trained and disciplined, and were increasingly becoming better armed. The Volunteers of Cavan received a huge moral boost with the so-called 'Curragh mutiny'. The RIC report to Dublin for the month of April noted that the 'Unionists and the Ulster Volunteers are jubilant over

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<sup>16</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, February 1914, PRO, CO 904/92

<sup>17</sup> *Dublin Express*, 14 March 1914 in Farnham Papers, PRONI D3975/E/1/7

the actions of the mutinous officers at the Curragh, whilst the nationalists refer to them as rebels.’<sup>19</sup>

**Illustration 1.1**



**‘Lord Farnham teaches the Orangemen of Cavan how to shoot.’  
Source: *Illustrated Chronicle*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 14 March 1914 in  
Farnham Papers, PRONI D3975/E/1/**

The nationalist response to the Unionist threat had been slow. It took the form of unorganised random attacks and bitter intercommunal relations or what the RIC referred to as party tension. The nationalists of the county were again further embittered towards the UVF by the Larne gun running incident. The Ulster Volunteers began to be taken more seriously. They now posed a very real threat to what the nationalists of the county had for so long aspired. By March 1914 the nationalist newspaper in the county *The Anglo-Celt* in its editorials was calling for the setting up of a nationalist volunteer corp. The call was answered and between April and May there was a rush of

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<sup>18</sup> *Irish Times*, 7 May 1914

<sup>19</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, April 1914, PRO, CO 904/93

nationalist activity in the county. In April the confidential report for the county stated that 'six branches of the Irish National Volunteers have been formed and others are in the course of formation.'<sup>20</sup> By May the force numbered 2,000 men and companies were still being formed. 'Most of the members are armed with revolvers and shotguns – The drill instructors are ex-soldiers and ex-militia men.'<sup>21</sup> Cavan was now divided into two opposing armed camps. All shades of Irish nationalism came together in the face of the new threat. 'The Ulster Volunteers are on one side and the Sinn Féiners, Members of the AOH, And members of the UIL now merged in the National Volunteer Corp were very active during the month drilling etc.'<sup>22</sup>

The following months saw the two organizations grow rapidly in size and strength. Cavan was now in real danger of being subsumed in civil war. In May the Cavan UVF had risen in number to 3,000 men and by July this figure had gone up to 3461.<sup>23</sup> The Home Rule bill had been passed through the House of Commons for the third time in May 1914. This was too much for the Unionists and on the 10 July 1914 the Ulster provisional government convened in Belfast. On the ground, the ranks of both volunteer movements swelled, leading to an escalation in an already tense situation. As both movements very clearly geared up for confrontation, events in the wider world would once again overtake, overshadow and to a degree diffuse the situation in Cavan. On the 4 August 1914 Great Britain and Ireland declared war on Germany. In Cavan all had changed and yet nothing had changed. The political landscape had been altered completely. On one side Unionist opinion had been driven to the extreme, and on the other, all shades of nationalism had united to counter the threat that this new militant Unionism posed. The threat of the gun had entered

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<sup>20</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, April 1914, PRO, CO 904/93

<sup>21</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, May 1914, PRO, CO 904/93

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*



the politics of Cavan. Neither Unionists nor nationalists had achieved their desired objectives. Their leaders for the moment put away their differences for the greater good. Civil war had been averted, but the extremity of the situation had placed Cavan on a new uncertain political course. Militant nationalism had been unleashed. Militant Unionism, better armed and drilled was still dwarfed in comparison in the county. This however was not reflected in the province as a whole where the combined UVF stood at 85,000 men.<sup>24</sup> The UVF of Cavan could afford themselves a great deal of quiet confidence with this in mind.

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<sup>23</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, June 1914 and August 1914, PRO, CO 904/93 and PRO, CO 904/94

<sup>24</sup> David Fitzpatrick, The two Irelands 1912-1939 (Oxford, 1998) p46

reach of the Zeppelins, the farms, mills, workshops and shipyards of Ulster strove to meet the insatiable demands of the war effort. Never had the island been so prosperous and rarely had the island known such domestic peace.<sup>2</sup> Both the nationalist and Unionist leaders of Cavan joined in their support for the war effort. 'The County Cavan War Relief Fund was set up in response to the Prince of Wales appeal, by Lord Farnham, Thomas Lough, MP, and Mr J. Maxwell Greene... initially, lists of subscribers included most of the gentry in the county, but was also supported by nationalist leaders.'<sup>3</sup> The County Inspector wrote in the September report to Dublin castle. 'There is not the slightest sympathy for the Germans, (Save the actions of the Ballinagh Sinn Féiners in posting up anti enlisting notices) so far as can be observed or ascertained, all sections are working together to raise funds for the dependants of soldiers and sailors engaged in the war.'<sup>4</sup> Although the sentiments of the population were decidedly anti German and generally supportive of the war effort, they were not as eager as their leaders to go into battle.

(Every section of the public – save the despicable Sinn Féiners – are inclined to back up the government in connection with the war.) The Sinn Féiners have distributed anti enlistment leaflets, which have had a considerable effect in keeping young men from joining the army.<sup>5</sup>

The tone of the County Inspectors report clearly indicated an antipathy towards Sinn Féin and also they were having in his opinion a very subversive effect on the population. Sinn Féin tactics were given fuel to take root among the population of the county and the police report went on to note. 'About 150 young men left for America during last month in consequence of the announcement in the *Irish Daily Independent* newspaper that the government were going to put the militia ballot act in force.'<sup>6</sup> The men of Cavan regardless of political persuasion and loyalties

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A history of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992) p451

<sup>3</sup> Eileen Reilly, 'Cavan in the era of the Great War, 1914-18' in *Cavan: essays on the history of an Irish county* Ray Gillespie ed (Dublin, 1995) p183

<sup>4</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, September 1914, PRO, CO 904/94

<sup>5</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, October, 1914, PRO, CO 904/95

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

were not joining up to fight. The Inspector noted that since the war had begun 238 reservists from the county had been called up, 153 were members of the Irish National Volunteers (INV), 55 were members of the Ulster Volunteers and the remaining 30 were those whose politics were not ascertainable.<sup>7</sup> Only 210 men had actually joined the army in Cavan as new recruits 47 were members of the INV, 76 were members of the UVF and the remaining 87 had unknown political affiliations.<sup>8</sup> As the months went on the numbers of men enlisting dwindled from this meagre number to almost non-existence. The police reports for the duration of the war record this decline and general lack of enthusiasm to go to the front. This was in marked contrast to the province and Ireland as a whole where military mobilisation was the highest in the country's history.

... even more Irish Volunteers than Ulster Volunteers served during the war. The police reported the enlistment of 32,000 Irish Volunteers, including 7,600 reservists mobilized in August 1914. Although this represented only a sixth of peak membership compared with over a third for the Ulster Volunteers, the discrepancy was partly accountable for the greater participation of juveniles and older men in the nationalist force. Ireland's volunteer forces thus contributed massively to wartime military mobilization, which altogether involved the raising of over 200,000 men in Ireland (of whom about three fifths were Catholics).<sup>9</sup>

Cavan went against the grain nationally with its especially low levels of recruitment. The war would therefore seem to have generated more reasons to stay at home than enlist. Cavan had an agricultural economy and at a time when agricultural prices were rising due to the war demands, it made a lot more sense to stay at home. The County Inspector reported for the month of October 1914. 'There has been a plentiful harvest, and the crops have been well saved.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Irish Volunteer Force had split when Redmond called on them to join the war effort. The majority of the force 170,000 renamed the Irish National Volunteers or INV followed Redmond, while the remaining splinter group of around 11,000 under Mac Neill retained the title Irish Volunteer Force

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A history of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992) p450 & County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, October, 1914, PRO CO 904/95

<sup>9</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands* (Oxford, 1998) p54

<sup>10</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, October, 1914, PRO, CO 904/95

Agricultural prices increased with the demands generated by the war. The young men of the county were needed at home, and not off at the front. 'J.M. Wilson (brother of Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson and a Longford land owner) who did a tour of Ulster at this time argued that the failure of the Protestant farming class to respond to the full measure of its obligations throughout the province was largely to be accounted for by 'a natural dislike to leave their homes unprotected as long as their Nationalist neighbours abstain from recruiting'<sup>11</sup> Whatever the reasons recruitment was a non-starter in Cavan and both Unionists and nationalists stayed at home from the front. Between January and March of 1914 the police reports noted 'All efforts to get the farmers' sons to come in have been fruitless... Recruiting for the Army has been very bad... the farmers sons still holding back...' <sup>12</sup> The leadership of both nationalist and Unionist movements were clearly out of touch with their constituents in Cavan.

As the months rolled on the anti-recruiters stepped up their actions in the county, meeting with varying degrees of success. The County Inspector wrote incessantly to the Dublin administration in his monthly reports about the lack of recruitment, and the many reasons he believed were responsible.

It is believed that if troops were stationed here, especially with a band, and moved about the county, it would give great stimulation to recruiting... Recruiting is at a stand still and was greatly hindered by the interference of a pro-German called McTab at a public recruiting meeting... Recruiting for H.M. Army does not appear to be so brisk in this county as elsewhere, and there are plenty of able-bodied young fellows who have not joined... <sup>13</sup>

Efforts continued throughout 1915 to get the young men of Cavan to enlist, but met with little success. The *Anglo-Celt* from the autumn of 1915 into the spring of 1916, reported on the many reorganised local nationalist groups such as the UIL who actively encouraged recruitment. The fact of their existence shows that on some levels there was a continued support among some sections of the nationalists

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<sup>11</sup> Terence Dooley, *The plight of Monaghan Protestants, 1912-1926* (Dublin, 2000) p31

<sup>12</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, January to March 1916, PRO, CO 904/99

toward the war. Their effect among the general population of the county was also nominal, as the police reports have clearly demonstrated. The insurrection later in 1916 to a great extent undermined any if all the work they had done.

When at Easter 1916 news reached Cavan of the failed rebellion in Dublin there was a definite mixed reaction among the nationalist population. At the end of the year the County Inspectors around the country received a précis from the RIC Dublin headquarters requesting them to detail the condition of their county for the year 1916. They were asked to report on a range of subjects, crime, Irish Volunteer and Sinn Féin activity, the attitudes of Catholic clergy and nationalist press and the present attitudes of the people towards the Army and Home Rule. The County Inspector for Cavan returned a detailed report to Dublin, which throws light on the divisions that were beginning to grow among the nationalist ranks of the county. The Inspector reported that the condition of the county for 1916 had been 'peaceable and orderly... boycotting and intimidation are not practiced'<sup>14</sup> As regards political organisations he wrote 'political societies were not as a rule active. The Sinn Féin, GAA and the Irish Volunteers exercised the most influence in the early part of the year'<sup>15</sup> Prior to the rebellion he informed his superiors '[The] Sinn Féin party showed a good deal of activity due to the efforts of IV [Irish Volunteer] organisers James O' Sullivan and Alfred Monaghan.'<sup>16</sup> The police report does not indicate any direct Cavan involvement in the rebellion. The language and tone of the report clearly intimated towards the County Inspectors belief however the Cavan members of Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers were aware that a rising would take place even if they were not actively engaged in it. The Inspector informed that both Roman Catholic clergy and the nationalist press were in general neutral. He did single out one Father M. Dolan from Saint Patrick's College, Cavan town who preaching in the 'Convent Chapel asked the congregation to pray for the Cavan men who died for their country in Dublin, and

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<sup>13</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, February to May 1915, PRO, CO 904/96 and PRO, CO 904/97

<sup>14</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, January 1917, PRO, CO 904/102

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

said that any man who does not sympathise with the rebels was not worthy of the name Irishman.’<sup>17</sup> The voice of dissent was rising in Cavan.

The Easter Rising of 1916 had a major effect on Cavan. Increasingly interests were shifting in the county away from the war, people were progressively more interested with the rebellion and the governments reaction to it. ‘By the end of May, however, he [the editor of the *Anglo-Celt*] noted changes in feelings, the rebels now being described in milder terms as ‘misguided’. Ten arrests had been made in the county following searches... resulting in deportations to prison camps.’<sup>18</sup> Raids in a county, that had not risen in rebellion provoked a reaction in nationalist ranks. Other major domestic concerns increasingly turned attentions in Cavan away from the front. Home Rule seemed as far off as ever now and Gladstone’s plan to partition Ulster in an Irish settlement was received with mixed feelings. Redmond had agreed in principal, to a temporary exclusion of the six northeastern counties of Ulster. ‘When Redmond canvassed the views of the bishops from the northern province whose dioceses lay within the proposed new state in June, they let him know they were opposed to partition on any basis.’<sup>19</sup> Cavan was not immune to the agreement. A large section of Cavan was part of diocese of Kilmore so too was part of Fermanagh the proposed settlement would therefore partition the bishopric. The ugly head of conscription would not go away either and the threat of its’ enforcement still hung over Ireland. In 1918 conscription was extended to Ireland. A ‘public protest meeting’ reported in the *Anglo-Celt* newspaper in April 1918 shows another reason for low Protestant recruitment, quite the opposite situation to Wilson’s observations on their attitudes towards the war effort. Present at the meeting were all the major nationalist groupings in the county the UIL, GAA, Sinn Féin, the AOH also on the platform were representatives of the Catholic clergy. ‘The most commendable unanimity prevailed, and the spirit of brotherhood in the face of a common danger was very marked. All the Nationalist traders and a few of the Unionists closed their

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Eileen Reilly, ‘Cavan in the era of the Great War, 1914-18’ in Cavan: essays on the history of an Irish county Ray Gillespie ed (Dublin, 1995) p190

premises to enable the assistants to attend the meeting. A number of Unionists were also present.<sup>19</sup> Many Protestants in Cavan this shows were prepared to break ranks and join with their Catholic neighbours in a sense of threat they seemingly shared. The Irish Party and its leader Redmond came to be seen increasingly as weak and ineffectual. In the run up to a general election this was the boost that Sinn Féin needed and the disillusioned nationalist masses of Cavan began to flock to the party. A look at the table below which was included in the County Inspectors reports for January illustrates the fragmented nature of nationalism in Cavan and the growth Sinn Féin as an alternative route for achieving Irish national aspirations. This was a trend that was going to continue in the county.

**Table 2**

	<u>Name of Society</u>	<u>No of such societies</u>	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1	<i>Sinn Féin Clubs</i>	57	2927	-
2	<i>A.O.H. (Board of Erin)</i>	43	3155	-
3	<i>United I. League</i>	42	5959	-
4	<i>Town Tenants League</i>	5	446	-
5	<i>G.A. association</i>	21	943	-
6	<i>Gaelic League</i>	6	143	-
7	<i>Evicted T. association</i>	1	27	-
8	<i>Unionist Clubs</i>	27	2499	-
9	<i>Irish Nat. Volunteers</i>	42	3073	-
10	<i>Irish Volunteers</i>	6	177	-
11	<i>Irish Nat. Foresters</i>	3	178	-
12	<i>Labour League</i>	3	105	-
13	<i>Ulster Vol. Force</i>	38	2498	-
14	<i>Cumm-na-mBhan</i>	4	118	-

**'List of Political associations on 31 January 1918' Source: County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, February 1918, P.R.O., CO 904/105**

The year 1918 was the beginning of a political revolution in County Cavan. The county took centre stage in the battle between the Irish Parliamentary Party and Sinn Féin. The *Anglo-Celt* reported the opening volleys of the campaign on

<sup>19</sup> Father Dan Gallogly, 'Patrick Finnegan and the birth of the Irish Free State 1900 to 1923' in *Breifne: Journal of Cumann Seanchais Bhrefne*, viii no. 1, (1989-1990) p648

<sup>20</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 20 April 1918

the 1 January in the aptly named headline ‘Sinn Féin in Co. Cavan demonstration at Belturbet.’<sup>21</sup> All the speakers carried a similar line Sinn Féin was now the peoples only option. ‘The Chair was taken by Dr. J. Stuart, who, in a brief address in Irish, welcomed the contingents to Belturbet for the opening of the Sinn Féin Campaign. Sinn Féin he said was the only straight path to Irish independence.’<sup>22</sup> In a letter read from the very reverend P. O’Connell of Cootehill mention was made of the upcoming election. ‘As we know that the Irish Party and other parties who stand for English domination in our land will be well supplied with funds out of the British Treasury.’<sup>23</sup> Sinn Féin brought to the county the high profile vice-president of the party Arthur Griffith who also spoke at the meeting. Griffith introduced to the crowd as ‘the father of Sinn Féin’ was informed that pride was taken from the fact that ‘his ancestors belonged to Co. Cavan.’<sup>24</sup> In his speech Griffith informed the people ‘Sinn Féin is Ireland and Ireland is Sinn Féin... They were opening a year that would be a fateful one in Irish history.’<sup>25</sup> In the West Knockbride branch of the UIL different sentiments were expressed

We unanimously welcome the recent weighty pronouncement of his Eminence Cardinal Logue against Sinn Féin, in which he declared that the establishment of an Irish Republic by force of arms, a dream which no man in his sober senses can hope to be realised, and as the head of the Catholic Church in Ireland we are bound to follow him in obedience, who was ever the faithful and fearless of Catholicity in this land.<sup>26</sup>

Arthur Griffith was right they were opening a year that would be fateful in Irish history and decisive in the history of County Cavan. The nationalist population of the county were now being forced to choose which side they would take. The Irish Party had failed to deliver Home Rule and was at odds with the Catholic Church over partition. The party seemed unable to prevent the implementation of

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<sup>21</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 5 January 1918

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*



conscription. Sinn Féin was their only alternative yet the Catholic Church had also branded their objectives 'a dream'.

The death in April 1918 of Samuel Young, MP, for East Cavan and the subsequent by-election began the contest between the two parties for the control of the county. It was to be the last election fought in Ireland before the general election of that same year and Cavan took centre stage in the struggle between the two parties for the hearts and minds of nationalist Ireland. The two parties threw all their energies into the election campaign. The *Anglo-Celt* on 20 April 1918 reported a Sinn Féin meeting in Virginia with an estimated 20,000 people taking part.<sup>27</sup> Sinn Féin fought their campaign in Cavan on the Irish Party's failure to prevent conscription. The Chairman opened his address with a very strong nationalistic and emotive speech that was greeted the newspaper reported with 'loud applause', indicating that the large crowd present were in agreement with his sentiments.

Fellow countrymen I thank you for the honour you have conferred on me to preside at this monster meeting. It is not a political meeting, but a meeting where men of all shades of political opinion are asked to join hands and help to ward off a terrible calamity that threatens our young men and old men too. An alien Government is trying to conscript Irishmen to save the British from their cousins, the Germans, a rather difficult task. This war was started without our consent and without consulting the people of this country, therefore we are in no way bound to carry it out.<sup>28</sup>

The East Cavan vacancy created what could almost be called a crisis in some of the political intelligentsia of the county. The *Anglo-Celt* carried the sentiments of many who viewed the idea of two opposing nationalist candidates running in the by-election as creating 'turmoil and division which such a contest must produce.'<sup>29</sup> In a letter to the editor printed in that same issue one reader wrote '... as a native and voter in the constituency I earnestly appeal to the good sense and patriotism of

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<sup>27</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 20 April 1918

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 27 April 1918

the electors to see that in view of the present grave menace which overhangs our country East Cavan will not endanger the national unity which now, thank God exists.<sup>30</sup> Many letters also called on the parties to agree on a 'common' or 'independent' candidate. On 30 April 1918 Dr Finegan the Roman Catholic bishop of Kilmore addressed a letter to the press appealing for unity in nationalist ranks.

There can be no doubt that an election contest in East Cavan will seriously endanger if not break up, the present national unity... I make earnest appeal to Mr. Dillon and Mr. de Valera, that for the sake of the union so necessary in the face of the coming crisis, that they make some compromise by which this deplorable contest may be avoided... Especially I appeal to the Nationalist members of East Cavan, both Sinn Féin and Parliamentary... to send messages to their leaders... All this requires the sinking of personal and party views, but why not that for the sake of Ireland and of unity in the struggle before us?<sup>31</sup>

The appeals and protestations of these people did not carry any weight in the ranks of Sinn Féin. Eamonn de Valera at a meeting in County Roscommon was reported as saying it was up to the people of East Cavan to decide.<sup>32</sup> Sinn Féin chose Arthur Griffith to run in the election. He had already been introduced to the electorate at rallies earlier in the year and as vice-president of Sinn Féin was a high profile candidate. His views and ideas were well known and his book *The Resurrection of Hungary* which expounded his ideas on the separation of Ireland from England. In response to the public outcry Irish Party waited almost two weeks before they followed Sinn Féin into the campaign. They chose Mr. John F. O'Hanlon editor of the *Anglo-Celt* as their candidate. He too was a well-known local figure and his nationalist politics were well known to the electorate who read his editorials. He offered to immediately stand down if Arthur Griffith did likewise 'for the sake of unity'<sup>33</sup> The Irish Party opened their campaign in Bailieborough at which Mr Dillon leader of the Irish Party was present. Clearly the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>31</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 4 May 1918

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

party did not want to be out done by Sinn Féin if this election was to come down to a high profile contest. The *Anglo-Celt* for the months of May and June 1918 was dominated by the election campaign. Nationalist MPs and leading Sinn Féin figures flocked to East Cavan and each group held meetings right round the constituency. O'Hanlon challenged Sinn Féin to 'stand down in favour of any neutral candidate.'<sup>34</sup> Griffith's response was to the point 'there was no political truce and there could be none as long as there were men in Ireland who would not work for a complete and independent Irish nation.'<sup>35</sup> The campaign continued with O'Hanlon responding 'it could not be expected that a seat which the Irish party had held for forty-three years, and which had gave Joe Biggar to Ireland could be surrendered without a contest.'<sup>36</sup> The election campaign began to gather importance nationally when Dillon stated 'I have come here today to put fully and frankly before the electors of East Cavan, and the Nationalists of Ireland the position of the Irish National Party.'<sup>37</sup> The position he stated was as before this contest threatened the 'national unity'. The announcement that followed showed the importance that the party placed on this election. 'That twenty members of the Irish Parliamentary party in addition to other speakers will be in the constituency next Sunday, and addresses will be delivered after mass at every Catholic church in East Cavan.'<sup>38</sup> The Parliamentarians intended to fight and fight hard. The fighting strayed from the vocal when an attempt was made allegedly by 'Sinn Féiners' to break up a nationalist meeting in Virginia. 'A few of the speakers were struck with mud and eggs, and on one occasion an attempt was made to rush the platform. This attack was beaten off by Mr O'Hanlon's supporters and in the scuffles that ensued blows were freely exchanged.'<sup>39</sup> The prophesised divisions were appearing in the nationalist ranks of East Cavan and the 'national unity' based on party lines no longer existed. The editorial of the *Anglo-Celt* the week before the election summed up the enormity situation.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 18 May 1918

Yesterday, in the Courthouse, Cootehill, Mr. John F. O'Hanlon, the Nationalist candidate, and Mr. Arthur Griffith, Sinn Féiner, were nominated for the East Cavan Parliamentary constituency in the House of Commons, to which place Mr. Griffith has declared he will never go, if elected and before the next issue of the "Anglo-Celt" is printed the voters shall have declared, in the ballot-box, which of the policies submitted to them so definitely they believe in.<sup>40</sup>

The infighting and fighting among the nationalists of East Cavan continued right up to polling day on 20 June 1918. The result would be a defining moment in the politics of Cavan. Arthur Griffith won by a large majority taking 3,795 of the votes polled to O'Hanlon's 2,581.<sup>41</sup> The Irish Parliamentary Party and what it represented had been defeated in East Cavan.

The Irish Party lost its footing in the county as a result of the election. It never recovered. Sinn Féin ran unopposed in the general election of 1918 in Cavan's two constituencies. Arthur Griffith was again returned for East Cavan and Peter Paul Galligan was elected for West Cavan. The people of Cavan had abandoned constitutionalism for the revolutionary idea of abstentionism preached by Sinn Féin. The Great War had ended one crisis in Cavan, but at its culmination it had created a new constitutional crisis far beyond what had ever been envisaged on a popular level. The nationalists of Cavan had chosen a new political route. They too shelved 'Home Rule' they now aimed for the greater prize of an Irish republic. The gulf between them and their Unionist neighbours naturally widened as a result. The political landscape had been changed dramatically.

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<sup>40</sup> *Anglo-Celt* 15 June 1918

<sup>41</sup> Brian M. Walker ed Parliamentary results in Ireland 1801 – 1922 (Dublin, 1978)

## Chapter III

### Cavan a future

#### North or South?

The general election of 1918 marked a watershed in Irish history. It radically transformed the political face of Ireland. The Great War, which had lasted four years, was finally over, and to those servicemen returning from the fighting they found a very different reality to the one that they had left. The Unionists of south Ulster returned to the realization that they had been abandoned by their brethren in the six northeastern counties, for a settlement based on partition. The Irish National Volunteers who had enlisted also came home to a country where the Home Rule doctrine they had left to fight for was now obsolete, with nationalists now dedicating themselves to full independence. The course of the war had brought many changes in Irish public opinion. The war had steadily lost the support of both Unionists and nationalists in south Ulster and neither the Protestant nor Catholic inhabitants of this area enlisted in any great numbers. The majority if not all Irish nationalists had now shifted in their allegiances from constitutional nationalism to militant republicanism. In the election of 1918 a completely new political landscape emerged at national level. In Ulster, the redistribution of seats and enlarged franchise returned twenty-three Unionist MPs, and four of the six remaining Irish Parliamentary Party MPs were also from the province.<sup>1</sup> Three of these seats actually won by the Parliamentarians were 'partly as the result of a pact with Sinn Féin, arranged by Cardinal Logue, in constituencies where Unionists were certain to win, if there had been three way contests.'<sup>2</sup> Sinn Féin claimed the remainder of

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A history of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992) p462

<sup>2</sup> Logue, Michael born 1840 in Co. Donegal, ordained at Maynooth 1866, taught on the continent, became Catholic bishop of Raphoe in 1879 and from 1887 until he died in 1924 he was archbishop of Armagh and Catholic primate of all Ireland. 'A pragmatic prelate he was anxious that neither domestic

the seats in the province. The Irish Parliamentary Party now almost totally eclipsed, along with the Ulster Unionist Party and the Unionist MPs from Dublin University and County Dublin now constituted the only Irish representation in the House of Commons. Sinn Féin captured the remainder and majority of the nationalist seats in Ireland and initiated their revolutionary strategy for self-determination. Sinn Féin withdrew from Westminster under their policy of abstention and set up Dáil Éireann. Over the next four years, from 1918 on, the forces shown to be at play in Ireland from 1912 would reach a dramatic conclusion, and by 1922 the constitutional status of Ireland would be completely altered.

**Table 3**

<u>County of Cavan</u>				
<b>List of Political Organizations on 30 June 1920</b>				
No	Name	Number of Branches	Number of Members	Remarks
1	<i>Sinn Fein</i>	64	4873	Secretly Active
2	<i>AOH (BOE)</i>	40	3851	Inactive
3	<i>UIL</i>	40	5585	Inactive
4	<i>GAA</i>	22	869	Inactive
5	<i>Town Tenants League</i>	9	446	Inactive
6	<i>Gaelic League</i>	20	926	Inactive
7	<i>Evicted Tenants League</i>	1	27	Inactive
8	<i>Unionist Clubs</i>	26	2478	Inactive
9	<i>IN Foresters</i>	3	178	Inactive
10	<i>I.V.</i>	12	519	Secretly active
11	<i>I.N.V</i>	40	2889	Inactive
12	<i>Labour League</i>	1	25	Inactive
13	<i>U.V.F.</i>	37	2468	Inactive
14	<i>Cumann na Ban</i>	12	343	Inactive
15	<i>IT. &amp; GW Union</i>	13	1029	Inactive

**'List of Political associations on 30 June 1920' Source: County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, July 1920, P.R.O., CO 904/112**

The table above, which appeared in the County Inspectors report to Dublin Castle for July 1920, is interesting in a number of respects. It displays the still

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politics nor Roman directives should compromise the interests of the Irish Church..' See S. J. Conolly ed *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998) p327 and Jonathan Bardon, *A history of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992) p462

fragmented nature of Cavan's political landscape in 1920. The same groupings were all still extant as in the table shown for 1918, with the addition of some new labour groupings.<sup>3</sup> The table also displays the massive growth in sectarian nationalist organisations such as the AOH, cultural nationalist groups like the GAA and the Gaelic League (*Conradh na Gaeilge*), which had almost doubled their membership. These groups as much as any other had a very political appeal in their drive for an Irish Ireland and were the fertile recruiting grounds for the more militant republican societies, like the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin. The table also demonstrates the phenomenal growth Sinn Féin had experienced and yet the United Irish League (UIL), which had developed over time into the Irish Parliamentary Party's grass roots, remained the largest nationalist group. More important possibly is the reported inactivity of moderate nationalist factions along with the Unionist clubs and UVF, while the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin were reported as being 'secretly active'. The table provides an invaluable backdrop on the condition of the county during the period.

Cavan along with the other Ulster counties from 1918 on was again on the verge of civil war. Sinn Féin was intent on implementing its program 'by any and every means', and coupled with the 'politics of exaltation' confrontation between Unionists and nationalists in Ulster was a foregone conclusion.<sup>4</sup> The East Cavan by-election of 1918 was in many ways the starting point that fundamentally changed the course of the county's and indeed the island's political history and future. 'It was important to Sinn Féin as it was their first electoral success in Ulster.'<sup>5</sup> Afterwards in the general election of the same year the Irish Party 'conceded a walkover to Sinn Féin both in Leitrim and Cavan.'<sup>6</sup> Arthur Griffith was again elected in East Cavan and Peter Paul Galligan was now elected the abstentionist Sinn Féin MP for West Cavan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See table two 'List of Political associations on 31 January 1918' p27

<sup>4</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972* (Oxford, 1989) pp 490-494

<sup>5</sup> Father Dan Gallogly, 'Patrick Finnegan and the birth of the Irish Free State 1900 to 1923' in *Breifne: Journal of Cumann Seanchais Bhrefne*, viii no. 1, (1989-1990) p660

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p660

<sup>7</sup> Brian M. Walker ed, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992) p5

Both Unionist and nationalist groupings took routes almost completely independent of each other. The republican ideology espoused in the infamous 'Proclamation of the republic' in April 1916 in many ways gets to the root of the Irish dilemma.

The Irish republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all its parts, cherishing all the people of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided the minority from the majority in the past<sup>8</sup>

Nationalists could not reconcile Unionism within their ideology or recognise as a fact its existence in Ireland, except as another manifestation of the British occupation. While Irish nationalists maintained their tunnel vision, and directed their entire grievance at the 'old enemy' viewing Unionists as deluded and misinformed. Both movements continued on their divergent courses.

Cavan had become a Sinn Féin stronghold from a nationalist perspective and this fact was also undeniable to the government, its agencies and possibly more importantly, by Ulster Unionist leadership. The activities of local loyalist groups within the county was surprisingly low key between 1918 and 1922 to the point where the RIC recorded their organisations although still extant as 'inactive'.<sup>9</sup> The local Unionist leaders instead concentrated their efforts at provincial and now to a greater degree at national levels. Lord Farnham was now the chairman of the Irish Unionist Alliance, an organisation representing Unionists on an all-Ireland basis. He continued through this turbulent period to give prominence to, and lead the cause of Cavan Unionism. When in 1920 the British government introduced the Government of Ireland Bill to the House of Commons, on the basis of a partitionist settlement of the 'Irish question' giving

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<sup>8</sup> 'Proclamation of the republic' in E. Curtis ed and R.B. McDowell ed, Irish historical documents 1172-1922 (London, 1943)

<sup>9</sup> See table 3



Ireland two devolved parliaments, one for the six north-eastern counties and one for the remaining twenty-six. He was to the fore in arguing against it. The Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) decided they would not oppose the bill to the frustration of the delegates from Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. They pleaded with the council to reconsider, and in their defence produced a pamphlet entitled *Ulster and Home Rule: no partition of Ulster* which argued on economic, geographical and sectarian grounds that it would be illogical to exclude their counties. Belfast the pamphlet argued ‘had traditionally been seen as the commercial capital of Ulster and it was argued that all trade, business and railways in Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal were thus connected with it.’<sup>10</sup> ‘The G N R [Great Northern Railway] runs direct from the town of Cavan through the county of Monaghan to Belfast. If a barrier is to be enacted between our counties and Belfast, it will be injurious to all.’<sup>11</sup> The council however dismissed the supplications of the south Ulster delegates. On 10 March 1920 Lord Farnham, the Cavan representative, passing the following motion before the body, made a renewed attempt to convince the UUC to rethink their decision.

That this council abiding by its Covenant refuses to accept any kind of government which does not include the whole geographical province of Ulster and calls upon its parliamentary leaders to take such steps as may be necessary to see that the term Northern Ireland in the permanent bill is altered to include the whole province of Ulster<sup>12</sup>

The council refused to support the motion and went further by stating ‘that as the new bill recognised the right of the six north-eastern counties to separate treatment... They should not assume responsibility for attempting to defeat it.’<sup>13</sup> The Unionists of south Ulster felt they were being systematically

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<sup>10</sup> Terence Dooley, *The plight of Monaghan Protestants* (Dublin, 2000) p39

<sup>11</sup> *Ulster and Home Rule: no partition of Ulster*, pamphlet issued by the Ulster Unionist Council delegates of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal in 1920, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland D/1545/8

<sup>12</sup> Terence Dooley, *The plight of Monaghan Protestants* (Dublin, 2000) p40

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* p40

sidelined, by their own brethren, and the stunned delegates from Cavan, along with their Monaghan and Donegal associates believed they had no other options left open to them, when they resigned from the UUC.<sup>14</sup>

The *Ulster Guardian* an Ulster Unionist provincial newspaper took up the cause of the ‘betrayed’ three counties on the basis that the other delegates had by accepting the bill as it stood broken the ‘Ulster Solemn League and Covenant’. Under the headline ‘The Ulster Covenant’ it repeated the many statements of Sir Edward Carson on the Covenant back in 1912 and asked simply ‘Have words lost their meaning?’<sup>15</sup>

What do we mean by the covenant? We are going to make a mutual pledge, one with the other and any man who, having made the pledge, goes back on it, or fails, at the critical moment, let him beware that he is the betrayer of his brother... Ulstermen are not in the habit of breaking their contracts and once we have entered into it there is not a single man who signs it will ever go back on it until the day of his death... I ask no separate treatment for Ulster; we will take no separate treatment. That is not our policy and has never been our policy. We want no separate Parliament. We want and will take nothing less than the Parliament of the United Kingdom...<sup>16</sup>

Words had definitely lost their meaning, if present conditions were contrasted with the sentiments of ten years previous. Carson and the other delegates who supported the bill proposed by the government had unequivocally abandoned the Unionists of south Ulster in what the Unionists of Monaghan saw as ‘a selfish policy’, they had been abandoned by the UUC in order ‘not to endanger their precious six-county safety.’<sup>17</sup> The Unionists of Co. Monaghan went further in protestation, at the Orange celebrations in the county in July 1920 J.C.W Madden a leading Monaghan Unionist ‘went on to encourage his fellow

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* p40

<sup>15</sup> Carson, Edward (1854-1935) born in Co. Dublin, had a highly prolific professional and political career. Solicitor General for Ireland 1892 and England 1900, MP for Trinity College, he became leader of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party in 1910 and leader of the Ulster Unionists until 1921. See S. J. Connolly ed *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998) p71 and *The Ulster Guardian* 1 May 1920

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 1 May 1920

<sup>17</sup> Terence Dooley, *The plight of Monaghan Protestants* (Dublin, 2000) p40

Orangemen to owe allegiance to a southern parliament should it ever be established.<sup>18</sup> Lord Farnham was relentless in his canvassing of British opinion. He tried desperately to reverse the situation. In a letter addressed to all the government MPs, he pleaded on behalf of the 'Irish Unionist Alliance'.

We speak with knowledge of what is going on in Ireland, which few in England appear to understand. There are two forces at work in Ireland to-day---the forces of treason, which seek to drive the last vestige of British constitutional authority, and the forces of loyalty... we appeal to you to stand firm before our country is reduced to a second Russia. The very lives of your loyal fellow subjects are now at stake. Their liberties have long since vanished. Insist that the Government shall tell the country the truth... and insist that they shall apply their undivided attention to the task of restoring law and order before the remaining land-marks of civilization are swept away. In the name of honour, we appeal to you.<sup>19</sup>

The pleas and protestations of the Cavan Unionists and their brethren in south Ulster fell on deaf ears, and they were left alone, abandoned, and virtually impotent. With their organizations intact, armed and well drilled, yet because they were now no longer part of the greater Ulster Unionist movement they were forced to ride out the revolution as it reached its culmination both north and south. When King George opened the Parliament of Northern Ireland in 1921, the story of Unionism in Cavan was virtually over.

Much of Ulster had maintained, however artificially, in what would become 'Northern Ireland', its traditional Irish Parliamentary Party versus the Ulster Unionists. With Cavan now adopting the increasingly separatist Sinn Féin, it was almost diametrically different to the rest of Ulster and conditions in the county reflected in many ways what was happening in the southern provinces. In July 1920 the Inspector General in his synopsis of the County Inspectors report stated 'Sinn Féin is stronger in Cavan than in any other Ulster

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* p40

<sup>19</sup> Copy of letter sent to the government MPs on 5 May 1915, by Lord Farnham, as Chairman of the Irish Unionist Alliance, in Farnham Papers, PRONI D3975/E/11/16

county.’<sup>20</sup> Even County Monaghan, the closest comparable county had fielded a Unionist candidate in the election of 1918. The Unionists of Cavan could offer no such opposition. This would have consequences also when the Anglo-Irish war broke out in 1919. Cavan Unionists and the local UVF were mere spectators on the political future of their county. The war, as it unfolded in Cavan, according to Father Dan Gallogly was very much a mild affair, in comparison with the sectarian conflicts that broke out in the other counties of the province and the hostilities in the south, in particular Munster.

True, there was an amount of activity – burning RIC barracks recently vacated to prevent them being reoccupied, a number of minor ambushes, the cutting of roads and felling of trees across roads to prevent the mobility of the British army and the police and the boycott of Belfast goods following the pogroms there in 1920. On a more serious note there was also a number of shootings of RIC constables.<sup>21</sup>

All the same Cavan was at war, and although the role the county played at a national level in the military struggle for national determination may indeed have been small, the county did play a part. Police reports of the time do not convey as conditions to be as placid as Gallogly suggests. The RIC report for June 1919 tells quite a different story.

Great hostility was shown to the police who could not obtain transport anywhere and were compelled to go about everywhere armed in sufficient strength to resist attack... There were several instances of holding up of the mail and damaging Government property. On the 21 June a number of men armed with weapons of destruction gathered in Belturbet apparently to destroy the military barracks there but were prevented by the timely arrival of a party of solders there from Cavan.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Inspector Generals Report, July 1920, PRO, CO 904/112

<sup>21</sup> Father Dan Gallogly, ‘Patrick Finnegan and the birth of the Irish Free State 1900 to 1923’ in Breifne: Journal of Cumann Seanchais Bheifne, viii no. 1, (1989-1990) p661

<sup>22</sup> Inspector Generals Report, June 1919, PRO, CO 904/109

Some short-lived respite was granted to 'Crown Forces' in January 1920. 'The proclaiming of Sinn Fein and kindred societies has had a quieting effect on those bodies in this county.'<sup>23</sup> And yet this was still not enough in the same report it was noted that one 'Mr Reilly of Killydoon [was] arrested for posting up and having in possession posters of Dail Eireann loan.'<sup>24</sup> By July 1920 conditions had rapidly disintegrated for the British police in Cavan. The county was now in a very 'unsatisfactory state' with nearly forty offences of and 'indictable nature being reported. The majority of these directly attributable to Sinn Fein.'<sup>25</sup> The police report lists a sample of some of the more serious offences. 'A police patrol was fired on near Belturbet by a party of Sinn Feiners who had been raiding a mail car and the sergeant was wounded. An attempt was made to derail a mail train, there were several raids for arms, cases of robbery, malicious injury and intimidation.'<sup>26</sup> The police reports contrast pointedly with Dan Gallogly's analysis of the war being merely a 'mild affair'.

Local government in the county from 1918 onwards sympathised with the Sinn Féin cause, and the minutes of county council meetings display the enormous shift that had taken place in political opinion in the county. From 1919 Sinn Féin controlled Cavan County Council (CCC). The Inspector General in his synopsis of the County Inspector report stated. 'The Local Government Elections throughout the county resulted in large Sinn Fein majorities due to good organization and intimidation.'<sup>27</sup> At the 'ordinary meeting' of CCC on 15 October 1918 a resolution was adopted from City Hall, Dublin 'in connection with the recent arrests of public men in Ireland... Copies of same to be sent to the United States and French Consuls, Dublin.'<sup>28</sup> The council was clearly vocal in its condemnation of the governments treatment of Sinn Féin activists and this was repeated time and time again at ordinary and committee meetings of the council. On the 13 February 1920 the Finance

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<sup>23</sup> County Inspector's Confidential Monthly Report, January 1920, PRO, CO 904/111

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> Inspector Generals Report, July 1920, PRO, CO 904/112

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Inspector Generals Report, June 1919, PRO, CO 904/112

Committee ‘decided unanimously, that as a protest against the treatment of Irishmen detained in prison without any charge being preferred, against them no business be done.’<sup>29</sup> Again on the 13 April another resolution was moved ‘by the Chairman and seconded by James O’Reilly – That a protest against the brutal treatment by the government and its employees of the many Irishmen presently held without trial in Mountjoy Prison, we do not transact any further business today.’<sup>30</sup> The first shots the nationalists of Cavan fired in the War of Independence were not bullets but political statements. The resolutions and motions adopted and passed by this body appeared regularly in the *Anglo-Celt*. Cavan nationalists although their military activities have been found lacking by some historical commentators would fight an unquestionably effective propaganda campaign.

Dáil Éireann formally met in session for the first time on 21 January 1919 in the Mansion House, Dublin. ‘Early in 1919 Carson received a summons in Irish to attend Dáil Éireann, an assembly of the elected representatives of the Irish nation... The amused Ulster Unionist leader kept it as a souvenir and there was laughter in the Dáil when the reading out of his name at roll call was greeted by silence.’<sup>31</sup> All humour aside the new body set about the difficult task creating a national government for Ireland, in opposition to the British régime, when it formally declared the republic as proclaimed in 1916. The partition of the country was not recognised by nationalists either within the six north eastern counties or in the remainder of the country and Teachta Dálaí (TDs) attended from the entire island.<sup>32</sup> Cavan County Council did not formally recognise the authority of the Dáil until 19 June 1920, but when it did it offered its full and unconditional allegiance.

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<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the meetings of Cavan County Council, 1912 – 1927, in the council offices, Court House, Cavan, p59

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* p124

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* p120

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A history of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992) p462

<sup>32</sup> Teachta Dála (Deputy of Dáil Éireann) was the title accredited to those elected to the House of Commons in the 1918 general election who chose instead to convene in Ireland and form a national government.

It was then proposed by the chairman, seconded by the vice chairman, and unanimously adopted. 'That this council of the elected representatives of the county of Cavan, at a duly convened meeting hereby acknowledge the authority of Dáil Éireann as the duly elected government of the Irish people and undertake to give effect to all decrees duly promulgated by the said Dáil Éireann in so far as the same affects this council.' 'That copies of this resolution be forwarded to the republican minister for foreign affairs for transmission to the governments of Europe, and to the president and chairman of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the USA.'<sup>33</sup>

The county council had come down on the side of the provisional government and threw its lot in with the republican war effort. This was a big commitment as the British authorities had the previous September declared the Dáil an illegal assembly. Before it had been proscribed by the Crown, it had begun the initial stages of setting up the workings of a national government, with ministries mirroring the British administration in Ireland. The CCC representatives passed a number of resolutions to work within the new system and formally extricate themselves from recognising or complying with the British government. The council agreed 'that no books or documents belonging to this council be produced or any inspection whatsoever permitted to any inspector, auditor, or other persons except those appointed and given authority by Dáil Éireann with the consent of this council.'<sup>34</sup> The resolve of the body was challenged when 'the constabulary authorities sent in the accounts for conveyance of prisoners, weights and measures, food and drugs for June and September quarters; both were now submitted and a proposal to pay same [was] unanimously rejected.'<sup>35</sup> Again on another occasion it was moved 'that the accounts of Cavan County Council be not submitted to the Local Government Board auditor on the 22 October; No dissent.'<sup>36</sup> The council resolutely showed where its loyalties were when a 'letter from Local

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<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the meetings of Cavan County Council, 1912 – 1927, in the council offices, Court House, Cavan, p126

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* p141

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* p147

Government Department (Dáil) [was received], asking when the accounts of the past half year would be ready. [It was] read and instructions given.<sup>37</sup>

The minutes of the council meetings also throw some light on the attitudes of the local nationalist community and the conditions they were experiencing. At the Quarterly meeting of Cavan County Council on the 5 August 1920 it was proposed by Mr Fallon and seconded by Charles Fitzpatrick. 'That we appreciate the manly conduct of those Cavan men who resigned from the English police force rather than cooperate in the burnings, pillage and bloodshed ordered to be carried out against their own kith and kin.'<sup>38</sup> Of course the fact they were being shot at by their own 'kith and kin' if they continued in their posts was not recognised as motivation for the timely resignations. Police intelligence conveys similar stories from the government side in marked contrast to the councillor's resolution. 'The police were largely boycotted and unable to do ordinary police work. About 15 magistrates in the county were obliged mainly by intimidation to resign their commissions...'<sup>39</sup> The Irish Republican Army (IRA) as the Irish Volunteers had now become known was now the recognised army of the Irish republic under the supposed control of the Dáil. They undertook policing duties in areas controlled or under partial control of the provisional government. In many ways the provisional government was now shadowing the Dublin Castle organisation. This made the IRA as much open targets as Crown forces. Cavan County Council extended its sympathy to the relatives of the 'late Commandant Seamus Eagan who was killed by enemy forces while discharging Volunteer duties.'<sup>40</sup> Neither side was immune to the death, destruction and divisions brought on by the war and clearly Cavan was not escaping.

In October 1920 the Catholic Church in Kilmore organised a 'novena for peace', speaking in his cathedral in Cavan town Dr Finegan encouraged the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p148

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* p148

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* p139

<sup>39</sup> Inspector Generals Report, July 1920, PRO, CO 904/112

<sup>40</sup> Minutes of the meetings of Cavan County Council, 1912 – 1927, in the council offices, Court House, Cavan, p139



people to keep praying ‘for the continued immunity of their county from the terrible trials to which other places have been subjected.’<sup>41</sup> The people of Cavan clearly wanted peace not war and The Anglo-Celt reported ‘it is doubtful if ever at the most successful mission or retreat held in Cavan cathedral more men and women attended mass each morning and received Holy Communion as during the novena which concluded last Saturday.’<sup>42</sup> The nationalists of Cavan seemed on the surface however still soundly behind the war effort and Sinn Féin in the General Election of 1921 under the new system or proportional representation Cavan returned three uncontested Sinn Féin TDs to Dáil Éireann Peter Paul Galligan and Arthur Griffith were again elected and they were joined this time by Seán Milroy.<sup>43</sup> But defeat was not going to be the price of peace and nationalists were intent on keeping their movement organised and disciplined. The Dáil in 1920 had imposed a ban on Belfast products in an attempt to break the resolve of Ulster Unionists. In Cavan the local IRA enforced the decree. The RIC intercepted a letter from the ‘West Cavan Boycott Committee’ to a trader who had breached the command.

A Chara,

After fully investigating your case the above committee have fined you £20 for trading with firms within the prohibited area. The fine must be paid before the 14 October, Otherwise you will again appear on the black list.<sup>44</sup>

The Cavan IRA was able to enforce Dáil decrees quite effectively, with the establishment of Sinn Féin courts in Cavan. The RIC saw almost the complete erosion of their role in the county and they became mere intelligence gatherers for Dublin Castle. The County Inspectors monthly report for October reported one such Sinn Féin court sitting and the history behind it. The Hibernian Bank, Bailieboro town had been held-up by three armed men and £1,300 had been

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<sup>41</sup> Father Dan Gallogly, ‘Patrick Finnegan and the birth of the Irish Free State 1900 to 1923’ in Breifne: Journal of Cumann Seanchais Bhreifne, viii no. 1, (1989-1990) p662

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* p662

<sup>43</sup> Brian M. Walker ed, Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1918-92 (Dublin, 1992) pp 99-101

<sup>44</sup> County Inspector’s Confidential Monthly Report, October 1921, PRO, CO 904/116

taken. The RIC arrested three suspects James Duffy, Phil Crossan and Thomas McPhillips. The men were released without charge due to a lack of evidence. They were 'arrested afterwards by Sinn Fein who took them to a secret location... These men wont give any information as to what transpired while in Sinn Fein custody.' The money was anonymously returned sometime after.<sup>45</sup> It was now quite clear who was policing County Cavan.

When the truce between the IRA and the British army was agreed in July of 1921, Dáil Éireann and the IRA had become the *de facto* government and army of the majority of the populous of County Cavan. The county council had accepted unequivocally the authority of the Dáil and in two successive general elections the electorate of the county had returned Sinn Féin TDs to the newly formed Dáil. The IRA was policing the county and Sinn Féin courts were administering justice. The voice of more moderate constitutional nationalism had been silenced in the county, but still it remained in the form of the UIL, which as the police report demonstrated was in 1920 still the largest political organisation in Cavan. The fact that Sinn Féin ran the two general elections uncontested after the by-election of 1918 cloaked the fact that many of the divisions that divided nationalists in the past still remained. For Unionists in County Cavan it was quite another story. They had reluctantly acquiesced in developments as they unfolded within the county and had desperately pleaded with their brethren in the north of the province not to abandon them and all to no avail. In 1921 their position within Cavan seemed futile and their efforts without in vain, but their continued existence was testament to the unresolved divisions within the county.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

## Conclusion

The provisional government had in July 1921 won a victory over the British. This was brought about in no part by the escalation of IRA activities from 1920 onwards and the increased political pressure being placed on the British government by the Dominions and United States, who wanted to see a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Lloyd George and his administration agreed to a truce and subsequently to negotiations while the IRA were still in the field, and more importantly while the institutions of the provisional government were still to a degree functioning. The truce brought many of the heretofore on the run 'rebel leaders' like Michael Collins out of hiding and into the public light. This made a return to the covert style guerrilla warfare of the IRA difficult if not impossible. Still a major victory had been achieved. The British had by agreeing to a truce conceded at least in essence the status of belligerent to the IRA and by agreeing to negotiate a settlement with the rebel leadership, recognised the *de facto* if not the *de jure* existence of Dáil Éireann, as representative of the Irish people. After preliminary negotiations between Lloyd George and Eamonn de Valera it was agreed to hold a conference in London 'to ascertain how the association of Ireland with the community of nations known as the British Empire might best be reconciled with Irish national aspirations.'<sup>1</sup> De Valera under the auspices of the Dáil chose Michael Collins and the Cavan TD Arthur Griffith to lead the delegation of plenipotentiaries to London, to conclude a treaty on the future of Ireland. What they returned with was less than the Holy Grail, recognition of the independent Irish republic. Dominion status creating an 'Irish Free State' was all the British were prepared to concede. The Irish would also have to take an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. Northern Ireland was to remain, but a Boundary Commission was to be set up to revise the border between north and

south. The Irish delegates signed the agreement and returned to Dublin to have it ratified by Dáil Éireann.

Roy Foster argues that a treaty was made possible because ‘Ulster Unionist Ireland had already been catered for. The Treaty of 1921 did not enable Partition to take place as sometimes assumed; Partition cleared the way for the Treaty.’<sup>2</sup> This was possibly so from a British standpoint, but the reality as expressed by the Irish electorate in two successive general elections was that TDs attended Dáil Éireann from within the newly formed Northern Ireland. It was not ideologically compatible with Irish republican thinking to accept partition of the country. Irish nationalists had never recognised the ‘Government of Ireland Act’ and had continued after 1920 in some areas of Northern Ireland to control local councils, which gave allegiance to the Dáil and not the newly formed parliament in Belfast. When Dáil Éireann ratified the treaty on the 6 January 1922 by sixty-four votes to fifty-seven it gave in fact tacit recognition to partition. The bloody civil war that ensued the ratification of the Treaty in the south centred not on partition but the ‘Oath of Allegiance’ to the British monarch. Those who had sworn an oath to the Irish republic would not take such an oath and viewed those that did as traitors to the cause. The general election of June 1922 gave a substantial majority to those in favour of the Treaty; still it was not until April of 1923 that de Valera called off the republican campaign. Even before the dust had settled and the civil war was over, the provisional government took over from Dublin Castle and were promoting under Collins the so-called ‘Border War’. This war united the south Ulster IRA who continued to raid into the new northern state. The Provisional Government were now in control of the institutions which only months before they were intent on destroying. With the reigns of power now firmly in hand the government of the Irish Free State turned its attention northward to Ulster.

County Cavan found itself within the new Irish Free State in 1922. This had by no means been a certainty. ‘The [British] government had tried for a

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<sup>1</sup> S. J. Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998) p15

<sup>2</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972* (Oxford, 1989) p503

nine-county Ulster, stressing that religious balance in such a unit would facilitate eventual reunification, Ulster Unionists insisted on a six-county unit that would contain a heavy weighted protestant majority.<sup>3</sup> They decided to secede completely from the south, as was their prerogative. ‘Many knew that they had gained a near-impregnable position, and saw it as the effective legalization of Carson’s pre-war provisional government.’<sup>4</sup> For south Ulster Unionists it was a betrayal, surprisingly they followed the government line stating in their pamphlet *Ulster and Home Rule: No partition of Ulster* that such a parliament would be parochial and contain too large a Unionist (protestant) majority. Regardless of all this the simple reality was in 1922 they had become citizens of the newly created Free State. For south Ulster nationalists as well as their cross border compatriots the border was simply ignored. When civil war broke out and engulfed the south, local folklore in the county maintains that the Cavan IRA stayed neutral, waiting for the fighting to end, so that they could set about the task of reclaiming the rest of the province. There may be a degree of truth in this. ‘On the 11 February 1922, a train carrying a number of B Specials was halted at Clones by the IRA. One of the Specials seems to have panicked and opened fire, killing Commandant Matt Fitzpatrick of the IRA. In the gun battle that ensued, four B Specials were killed, one was wounded and five were taken prisoner.’<sup>5</sup> Tensions grew afterwards along the frontier with Northern Ireland and intensified the ‘Border War’ and IRA brigades sniped across the frontier at their opposites the B Specials. The common enemy across the border saved Cavan much of the bitterness and death that was the civil war. ‘Cavan and Leitrim were fortunate to have escaped the horrific violence that characterised the civil war elsewhere, especially the south. Both had a share of petty violence, bank and post office

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* p503

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p503

<sup>5</sup> Clones is a market town in south County Monaghan, on the border with County Cavan and County Fermanagh. In 1922 the town had one of the main hub terminus for the rail network of south Ulster. Also Terence Dooley, *The Plight of Monaghan protestants* (Dublin, 2000) p45

robberies, disruption of roads and railways, attacks on barracks recently occupied by the Free State army and general lawlessness.<sup>6</sup>

Article twelve of the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1922 stipulated the setting up of a 'Boundary Commission' to revise the political boundary between the north and south of Ireland. 'Constitutional Irish Nationalists of the early 1920s saw the treaty as a 'stepping stone' to eventual Irish unity and complete national independence from Great Britain. Their phraseology underlies their realization if not acceptance of the political realities of the time.'<sup>7</sup> Nationalists had accepted the reality of partition, but only as a temporary anomaly. 'A more concerted rejection of partition was expressed in the propaganda campaign co-ordinated from October 1922 by the North-Eastern Boundary Bureau... The bureau maintained its activity throughout the prolonged attempt to redraw the border through a boundary commission, being dissolved only early in 1926.'<sup>8</sup> This so called Boundary Bureau was set up under the directorship of Kevin O'Shiel TD for Co Louth but originally an Ulsterman and a catholic from County Tyrone. The bureau employed all the institutions now at the provisional governments disposal including the Registrar Generals office and the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. In 1923 the bureau produced a book entitled *Handbook of the Ulster question*, which categorically argued against partition on any basis.

The object of this Handbook is to assemble and arrange in convenient form all the material facts relating to the Ulster question generally, and in particular to that aspect that comes within the purview of the Boundary Commission, as provided by Article 12 of the Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland... The facts and figures contained in the book are derived from authoritative sources, which cannot be seriously challenged. The conclusions drawn from those facts and figures, viewed from every angle, are against any form of Partition, and particularly against the form of partition set up by the Act of 1920<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Father Dan Gallogly, 'Patrick Finnegan and the birth of the Irish Free State 1900 to 1923' in Breifne: Journal of Cumann Seanchais Bhreifne, viii no. 1, (1989-1990) p668

<sup>7</sup> Oliver Mc Caul 'Kevin O'Shiel and the boundary bureau.' Unpublished essay p1

<sup>8</sup> David Fitzpatrick, The two Irelands 1912-1939 (Oxford, 1998) p138

<sup>9</sup> Kevin R. O'Shiel, Handbook of the Ulster question (Dublin, 1923) pv

For argumentative purposes he took the whole province of Ulster as the unit his study, (including County Cavan) instead of the new six-county statelet of Northern Ireland. In close similarities with the contentions of the south Ulster Unionists earlier in 1920, the study demonstrates the disproportionate amount of nationalists within the new northern frontier and the adverse economic effects that partition would create for Ulster and indeed for Ireland. The boundary commission as outlined in the Treaty never convened. Instead the British nominated a delegate on behalf of Northern Ireland who would not recognise such a body. The body was hampered over allegations of legitimacy therefore from the start. Regardless it amounted to nothing alleviating the fears of the Ulster Unionists. The findings of the commission were leaked to the press in 1925. The commission collapsed as a result and its recommendations were indefinitely shelved. The boundary between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State remained intact. County Cavan had remained the southern frontier between the two new states.

Geography was centrally important right through this turbulent period of Irish History. Territory was intrinsic to both the Ulster Unionist and nationalist movements. For nationalists the island of Ireland was the territorial expression of the nation, while for Ulster Unionists the province of Ulster was the physical manifestation of the movement. These simple facts were embodied in such documents as 'The Ulster solemn league and covenant' and 'The Proclamation of the Republic'. In Cavan the importance of these beliefs during this period cannot be understated. Cavan Unionists were aware of their precarious minority position in the County, a mere twenty percent of the population, but they were also aware of their majority in Ulster. They were to cling to this idea as embodied in the infamous 'covenant' right up to 1920 when a whole new series of forces came into play. Cavan nationalists too would and could not contemplate anything other than their objective of independence for the country in its entirety. The polarized attitudes the county contained could not be reconciled.

The reality of post independence Ireland and devolved Northern Ireland was that south Ulster entered a political limbo of sorts. Cavan in 1912 had been an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; in 1922 it had become a border county in the fledgling Irish Free State. Cavan was undeniably an Ulster county; it was also a reminder of the divided province from which it had sprung. For Irish nationalists and Ulster Unionists Cavan was a symbol of their 'incomplete revolutions'. Cavan along with the two other Ulster counties of Monaghan and Donegal were the Free States foothold in Ulster, reminding both Unionists and Nationalists that neither had really achieved their goals, but compromised quite dramatically on their aspirations. The legacy of the revolutionary period in Cavan was almost bitter sweet, it was scarred by betrayal in many respects, it was also marked by economic and demographic decline brought about in no small part by the frontier with Northern Ireland which cut off much of the county's natural hinterland and infrastructure. For the betrayed Unionists of Cavan it was now time to acquiesce with the new regime, and to make their way within their new surroundings as best they could. For the nationalists of the county what they had achieved in 1922 was far beyond what they ever had realistically hoped for back in 1912. The political divisions that had ravaged the county for ten years had finally run their course and Cavan was once again at least on the surface at peace.



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