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Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ireland

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Introduction

Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ireland

In 1905, Arthur Griffith founded the Sinn Féin party, Sinn Féin roughly translates to ‘We Ourselves’, and this was an assertion of a desire for national sovereignty and self-determination in Ireland.¹ Griffith was an advocate of full economic independence from Britain and was in favour of tariffs to protect Irish industries from economic exploitation. Griffith was majorly influenced by German economist Friedrich List, and List argued that free trade was a technique of British economic exploitation.² On Easter 1916, Irish revolutionaries inspired by Griffith and others, although Griffith himself did not participate, reacted against Britain’s direct control over Ireland by taking up arms against the British government, in the hopes of achieving independence. The rebels seized the General Post Office of Dublin and read out a proclamation which outlined a radical vision of an independent Ireland. It declared the ‘right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible.’³ The proclamation was signed by Thomas Clarke, James Connolly, Padraig Pearse, Sean Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, Eamonn Ceannt and Joseph Plunkett. The Rising was suppressed by the British and the signatories of the proclamation as well as others were executed after a court martial. Despite the failure of the rising, it instigated a national uprising against the British which lasted until the Anglo-Irish treaty commenced in 1921. The results of this treaty were outcomes which were unsatisfactory to many revolutionaries as it among other things, did not implement full independence but rather kept Ireland in the commonwealth with dominion status, like Canada. The treaty led to a split in the Republican movement, between those who supported the treaty and those who were against it. The pro-treaty side, such as Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, adopted a pragmatic view arguing it was a stepping-stone towards greater independence. The anti-treaty side, led by Eamonn deValera, believed the treaty was an unacceptable compromise and demanded full independence immediately. The treaty was narrowly ratified in the Dáil, which was the alternative republican government during the revolutionary period. The Free State was established in 1923, but this state was not recognised by the anti-treaty side, who took up arms and refused to take up seats in the Dáil. The pro-treaty side defeated the anti-treaty IRA in the civil war, and they formed the Cumann na nGaedheal party, taking its name from an organisation founded by Arthur Griffith in 1900. The abstention of the anti-treaty side allowed for Cumann na nGaedheal to win the election

¹ Colum Kenny *A Man Who Has Both Arms’: Arthur Griffith, the Economy and the Anglo-Irish Treaty Agreement (1921)* pp 3

² *Ibid* pp 9

³ <https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Collection/Resilience/Artefact/Test-3/fb71e3dc-2e95-4406-bc46-87d8d6b0ae5d> accessed on 20/6/23.

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of 1923, which they believed gave them a mandate to implement the terms of the treaty and build the new state.

Cumann na nGaedheal grappled with the balancing acts of living up to the ideology of the revolutionaries, and the reality of political independence with a bleak economic situation worldwide. The revolution, through the 1916 proclamation and the 1919 Democratic Programme, established radical visions for the future and sought to break the political and economic link between Britain and Ireland. The question then was once independence was achieved; can these radical demands be put into practice on a small island over-dependent on Britain. Balanced with a catastrophically damaging civil war, which accrued costs of around £50 million, the government led by Taoiseach WT Cosgrave adopted a fiscally conservative approach which stressed the need for a pragmatic rather than an idealistic approach to building the independent Irish nation. The brutality of the Civil War bitterly divided Irish society and the financial implications of such a devastating phase of Irish history naturally gave the government less financial power. Nonetheless, the balancing of the books approach taken by the Free State government has generated much debate amongst Irish historians. Sympathetic historiography to the Free State has positively emphasised its attempts at building a democratic nation. Joseph Curran's 1980 study, *The Birth of the Irish Free State* emphasised the state-building of Cumann na nGaedheal and he argued that 'the Civil War was fought to preserve democracy.'⁴ Tom Garvin expressed a similar outlook in 1922: *The Birth of Irish Democracy*, which focused on the supposed democratic credentials of the Free State government against the Republican purist minority in opposition. Pro-treaty historians thus put a positive spin on the Cumann na nGaedheal party, arguing that they continued the revolution and built a democratic Gaelic state against all the odds. Jason Knirck argued that 'the language of the revolution continued to exert a dominant influence on Cumann na nGaedheal's approach after 1922.'⁵ Knirck was writing in response to critics of Cumann na nGaedheal, such as historian John Regan, who argued that the Free State government negated revolutionary ideology and instigated a counter-revolution. Knirck's assessment of Cumann na nGaedheal concluded that 'the party's post-revolutionary strategy was predicated on the notion that some of the slogans and policies and mantras from the revolution could be embraced, while others were quietly or noisily discarded. The memory of the revolution, as

⁴ Mel Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan (2017) pp 10

⁵ Jason Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution*, The University of Wisconsin (2014) Kindle edition

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well as its prime movers, should be honoured. However, the revolution need not be taken as a whole, and all its guiding ideas need not be implemented.⁶ Knirck does effectively show some aspects of Cumann na nGaedheal's policies that reflected a continuum of revolutionary ideals such as the advancement of the Irish language. Regarding tariffs, he conceded that the party did not outright follow revolutionary Sinn Féin's economic policies on protectionism and maintained a cautious approach to their implementation, implementing some tariffs.

Some historians who have been less sympathetic to the Free State have argued that the tariffs that were implemented were largely insignificant and designed to impact trade with Britain as little as possible. The Free State's critics have also emphasised anti-democratic tendencies inherent in the Free State government, while also arguing they negated much of the revolutionary dogma. Michael Cronin began his article on the 'Tailteann Art' competition by describing the disappointment he felt with the Free State government: "The Irish Free State that was brought into existence in 1922 was not the state that had been dreamt of by the insurgents of 1916, nor the state imagined by those that had fought in the Anglo-Irish War."⁷ Cronin argued in the 'Politics of Independence' book he collaborated with John Regan on, that Ireland remained part of an informal British economic empire, by negating revolutionary Sinn Féin policy of breaking the economic link with Britain. Cronin used the concept of informal empire, advanced by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in 1959, where they argued that the nineteenth century spread of British imperialism was conducted on both an informal and formal basis. Cronin conceded that this theory was not written for Ireland's particular situation, but colonial nations in the nineteenth century. Ireland was not a colonial nation, rather it was formally part of the union. However, he argued that with the enactment of the Irish Free State Constitution in December 1922, Ireland attained the substance of an independent sovereign nation, and in line with Gallagher and Robinson, he argued that Ireland, far from being independent in the economic sphere, remained part of the informal empire.⁸ In other words, the Free State after 1922, resembled the model that Gallagher and Robinson had articulated for nineteenth century colonial nations, through economic policies which Cronin believed, kept Ireland economically subservient and firmly contained in the

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Mike Cronin, "The State on Display: The 1924 Tailteann Art Competition," *New Hibernia Review* 9, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 50.

⁸ John M. Regan and Mike Cronin, *Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922-49*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2000) pp 147

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realm of the British informal economic empire. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson argued that if Britain's essential interests could be protected informally, they were willing to hand political control over. By loosening the formal political bond at the appropriate time, it was possible to rely on economic dependence and mutual good feeling to keep the colonies bound to Britain while still using them as agents for further British expansion."⁹ C.R Fay argued that:

'There was a sphere of British commercial enterprise which extended far beyond the boundaries of the political empire but connected to the metropolitan economy in the same way. It could be thought of as an "economic empire" because British commerce and investment dominated regions and countries, sometimes to the point of monopoly. To survive, informal empire needed the support of British power and prestige. But mostly it owed its existence to individual merchants, financiers, and entrepreneurs. The state's support was indeed necessary, but once freedom of access and security of property had been secured, British merchants and manufacturers did the rest: By free trade they secured political empire, and something more, which we may call economic empire.'¹⁰

John Regan in the book 'The Irish Counter-Revolution' argued Cumann naGaedheal instigated a conservative and authoritarian counter-revolution. John Regan's central idea in his counter-revolution thesis is that the party elite were torn between two approaches, those who were more committed to upholding the revolutionary ideals of protectionism and those who were less interested in protectionism and more inclined to advocating free trade. He argued that those who advocated free trade held greater sway over economic policy and this was reflected in the resignation of doctrinaire Griffith protectionist, JJ Walsh as well as others from the party, in 1927. Regan argued that the Cumann na nGaedheal party constitution of 1923, compared with the 1916 Easter proclamation or the 1919 democratic programme adopted by the Dáil, was devoid of a radical agenda or vision for post-revolutionary society.¹¹ The democratic programme of 1919 outlined radical ambitions for the future, such as the reinvigoration of Irish industries and trade being conducted on terms that benefit Irish people

⁹ J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', in *Economic History Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, (1953) pp 1-15

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

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the most. Regan argued that the 1923 party constitution, in contrast, was mired in a ‘conservativeness which reflected the political culture that had triumphed in a revolution which for the treatyite elite had now spun full circle into counter-revolution.’¹² Brian Maye, Arthur Griffith’s biographer, accused Cumann na nGaedheal of not following Griffith’s economic testament.¹³ Social and cultural historian Fergus Campbell believed that the revolution had radical potential, but it was undermined by the “reactionary element among the elite of Sinn Féin” that had triumphed post-revolution.¹⁴ The historian Terence Brown’s ‘Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present,’ argued that the Cumann na nGaedheal government sacrificed all idealism and imagination to its narrow and quotidian world view.¹⁵ Brown depicted the replacement of revolutionary idealism with despondence after 1922. Anne Dolan’s ‘Commemorating the Irish Civil War’ book charged the Cumann na nGaedheal government with betraying the legacies of the revolution and accused them of having been actively disinterested in revolutionary era goals.¹⁶ Maryann Valiulis, declared that the leaders of the Free State were “conservative, not terribly committed to the ideals of a Gaelic Ireland, and they seemed more willing to mould the new State in the image of British society, with token gestures thrown to those who clung to the old ideals.”¹⁷ Reacting against historiography that credited Cumann na nGaedheal as democratic nation builders, critics of the Free State have dismissed Cumann na nGaedheal as reactionaries and conservatives who undermined the revolution and anglicised Irish society.

Cumann na nGaedheal and their relationship to the revolution that propelled them to power as has been shown, has been heavily debated by historians. This paper will examine Cumann na nGaedheal’s approach to building the nation by focusing on the economic policies that they implemented. It will examine this idea of informal empire and assess whether Cumann na nGaedheal attempted to break the economic link between Britain and Ireland or not. Central to this question is tariffs, Cumann na nGaedheal’s approach to implementing tariffs will be

¹² John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite*

Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland Gill & Macmillan, (2001) pp 87

¹³ Brian Maye, *Arthur Griffith*, Griffith College Publications Limited (1997) pp 128

¹⁴ Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland, 1891-1921* Oxford University Press, (2005) pp 282.

¹⁵ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹⁶ Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory, 1923–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 184, 124.

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examined, did they attempt to protect Irish industries as Griffith desired, or were they reluctant to do so, as their critics have argued. The Dail Eireann debates will be analysed in order to understand Cumann na nGaedheal's approach to the economy. The problem with this as a source is that often it doesn't tell the full story and can conceal as much as it reveals, what Cumann na nGaedheal members say in public and what they say in private can be totally different things. Biographies will also be examined, such as that of Arthur Griffith and WT Cosgrave in order to develop an understanding of their revolutionary and post-revolutionary ideas and outlooks. Chapter one will examine the ideologies that inspired the revolutionaries to action. It will also analyse some of the key revolutionary figures such as Arthur Griffith and James Connolly and their roles in shaping revolutionary thinking. In order to determine whether there was an economic counter-revolution, it must be analysed how much socio-economic factors shaped the mindset of the revolutionaries. What was the revolutionary language and did much of this language remain in the political discourse in the post-revolutionary period or can a significant deviation from revolutionary dogma be detected. Chapters two, three and four will proceed chronologically to examine the rise of the Dail and the development of Cumann na nGaedheal economic policies, starting from their ascension to power until their eventual defeat by the anti-treaty Fianna Fáil party in 1932.

Chapter One

Ireland's relationship to Britain, at least in pre-revolutionary times, was defined by both British political and economic control over Irish affairs. In 1846, Home Rule Party leader Isaac Butt, leader of the Irish Home Rule Party, lectured on the necessity of protectionism in Ireland.¹⁸ These lectures titled 'Protection to Home Industry: Some Cases of its Advantages Considered' emphasised many advantages to protection, such as potentially creating employment.¹⁹ Thomas Davis, who was part of the Young Irelanders which was a political movement in the 1840s and they were struggling for Irish independence, argued that an Irish parliament should be able 'to create vast manufactures here by protecting duties in the first

¹⁸ Collison Black, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question*, Cambridge University (2015) pp. 141–2.

¹⁹ Devlin, A., & Barry. *Protection Versus Free Trade in the Free State Era: The Finance Attitude*. *Irish Economic and Social History*, 46(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0332489319853703>

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instance and to maintain them by our general prosperity.’²⁰ Daniel O’Connell and the Repeal Association alluded to the ‘premature withdrawal of the protecting duties’ in the textile industries as having a ‘disastrous effect’ on the Union.²¹ On 28 November 1905, at the first annual convention of the ‘National Council’, Griffith’s ‘Sinn Féin policy’ was positively received. Griffith, influenced by Thomas Davis whom he greatly admired, spelled out his ideas for economic policies, telling delegates at the convention that, among other things: ‘Protection does not mean the exclusion of foreign competition, it means rendering the native manufacturer equal to meeting foreign competition. It does not mean that we shall pay a higher profit to any Irish manufacturer, but that we shall not stand by and see him crushed by mere weight of foreign capital.’²² Crucial to Griffith’s economic doctrine was the belief that Irish manufacturers are being crushed by foreign competition and protectionism will serve the dual purpose of building an economically independent and self-sufficient Ireland while also weakening the commercial dominance of the English economic empire. The essence of Griffith’s doctrine was industrial development behind a wall of protective tariffs. ‘The reason our citizens are unemployed is because we are debarred from fostering our suppressed industries by the only policy that has ever proved effectual – the adoption of protective tariffs.’²³

A major influence on Griffith’s Sinn Fein Policy was German economist Friedrich List’s writings in the *National System of Political Economy* (1841). Griffith saw List as having ‘thwarted England’s dream of the commercial conquest of the world.’²⁴ According to List, ‘development and political independence required a combination of agriculture, manufacturing and commerce. Commercial restrictions were justifiable for nations ‘which are retarded in their progress by the competition of a foreign manufacturing power which is already farther advanced than their own.’²⁵ List had in mind nations that possessed a ‘large population, and an extensive territory endowed with manifold national resources, in the case

²⁰ *The Nation*, 2 December 1843, quoted in Collison Black, *Economic Thought*, p. 140

²¹ Devlin, A., & Barry. *Protection Versus Free Trade in the Free State Era: The Finance Attitude*. *Irish Economic and Social History*, 46(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0332489319853703>

²² A. Griffith, *The Sinn Féin Policy* (Dublin, 1907), p. 14.

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ *United Irishman*, 9 Dec. 1905

²⁵ F. List, *National System of Political Economy*, Volume 2: *The Theory* (London, 1909), p. II.XV.16.

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of small states, ‘protection becomes mere private monopoly’.²⁶ List was by no means a strong believer in small nations protecting themselves. Despite this, Griffith somewhat haphazardly attempted to adopt List’s economic outlook to his own economic policies for Ireland. List even mentioned the union between Britain and Ireland as an example of the ‘immeasurable efficacy of free trade between united nations.’²⁷ Despite the differences in List and Griffith’s outlook, List’s critiques of free trade would remain a key component of revolutionary Sinn Fein’s policy.

Griffith rejected the Manchester Economists, arguing this school was responsible for shaping British economic policies and therefore responsible for the economic subjugation of Ireland. With Arthur Griffith’s initial policies, we can see a radical strategy to break the economic link between Britain and Ireland through tariffs. He argued that ‘Eighty years ago England pursued the most rigidly protective policy in Europe. Ireland was forced [as a member of the United Kingdom] to pursue the same policy without regard to whether it suited her or not. Sixty years ago, England reversed her fiscal policy and Ireland was forced to do the same. Five years hence England may return to Protectionism, and Ireland must be forced into protection.’²⁸ Griffith’s Sinn Féin party would rise in prominence with the outbreak of the Easter Rising which would be associated with the Sinn Fein name. The Easter Rising commenced in April 1916, the rebels consisted of members of the Irish Volunteers led by Pádraig Pearse and was joined by the Socialist Irish Citizen Army, led by James Connolly and 200 women of Cumann na mBan. The rising was organised by the Irish Republican Brotherhood who since 1858, were a small and secret revolutionary body, committed to establishing an independent democratic republic in Ireland. The rebels at the GPO read out a proclamation which declared the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible. It also declared its resolve ‘to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation, cherishing all

²⁶ Devlin, A., & Barry. Protection Versus Free Trade in the Free State Era: The Finance Attitude. *Irish Economic and Social History*, 46(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0332489319853703>

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. II.XI.13.

²⁸ Sinn Féin, 28 Oct. 1911

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the children of the nation equally.’²⁹ It indicated a radical vision for an Ireland more open to socio-economic equality.

One of the signatories of the proclamation, Scottish born James Connolly, was actively involved in socialist politics leading up to the revolution. Connolly believed it was only through the destruction of the oppressive institutions that were placed in Ireland by Britain that Ireland would be truly free of British control. The proclamation, while it outlined a radical vision for Irish society, did not commit to any grand socialist ambitions of destroying British capitalism. Connolly’s extremely radical teachings were not entirely shared by the other signatories, although Padraig Pearse seems to have shared the socialist opposition to private property. Arthur Griffith himself, was not a socialist, he favoured a recalibration of capitalism to suit the needs of Ireland. This was a source of contention between Connolly and Griffith despite their shared ambitions for political and economic independence from Britain. However, Connolly’s importance to the rising cannot be understated, as Sean T. O’Kelly, a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, later wrote that ‘if it had not been for Connolly, the rising would not have occurred when it did’.³⁰ Through Connolly’s writing and founding of the Labour Party, Connolly helped shape emerging class consciousness in Ireland and his principles were a key influence on revolutionary ideology. By 1920, 120,000 workers had joined the ITGWU. Trades Councils- or Workers' Councils, as they were known, rose in prominence across the country.³¹ The role of the workers in the revolution has been minimised by historians, but organised labour under the influence of Connolly played a significant role in damaging the British Empire’s stranglehold over Ireland. Sinn Féin in their 1918 manifesto, committed to adhering to his principles. The Labour party, after his execution by the British army, would play a key role in formulating the socio-economic policies of the revolutionary government.

The Irish general election took place in 1918 which was contested between Sinn Féin, (now under the leadership of Eamon deValera), the moderate nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party

²⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/bfa965-proclamation-of-independence/>

³⁰ Kieran Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly*, Pluto Press (1990) pp 145

³¹ *Ibid* pp 162

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and the Ulster Unionist Party. The IPP represented a less radical strand of nationalism and advocated for Ireland, a limited form of independence in the shape of home rule. Sinn Féin advocated for full independence, political and economic through favouring protectionism as per Griffith's economic doctrine. The IPP did not advocate for protection, in fact some of its MP's such as Tom Kettle showed outright condemnation of this economic policy. Kettle was appointed to the Professorship of National Economics at University College Dublin in 1910 and was one of the leading figures in the constitutional movement towards home rule. Kettle dismissed as 'imposters' those who 'run round the country claiming that everyone can be made richer by adding a tax to the price of everything'.³² Protection, he argued, served to oppress the poor to the advantage of the rich, sheltering the inefficient and leading to 'a profound corruption of the national political life.'³³ Kettle died fighting for the British in World War 1 in 1916. The Sinn Féin election manifesto of 1918 declared that if elected Sinn Féin will be 'withdrawing the Irish Representation from the British Parliament and by denying the right and opposing the will of the British Government or any other foreign Government to legislate for Ireland.'³⁴ The manifesto also declared that Sinn Féin 'represents the old tradition of nationhood handed on from dead generations; it stands by the Proclamation of the Provisional Government of Easter, 1916, reasserting the inalienable right of the Irish Nation to sovereign independence, reaffirming the determination of the Irish people to achieve it, and guaranteeing within the independent Nation equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens.'³⁵ 'Sinn Féin, however, goes to the polls confident that the people of this ancient nation will be true to the old cause and will vote for the men who stand by the principles of Tone, Emmet, Mitchel, Pearse and Connolly.'³⁶ Signalling their intentions to stand by the principles of the socialist James Connolly and committed protectionist John Mitchel, the party received a clear mandate in the 1918 general election.

Convincingly beating the IPP with 49% of the vote across Ireland, Sinn Féin stuck to their promise of refusing to take their seats in Westminster. Dáil Eireann emerged as the Irish

³² Devlin, A., & Barry, F. Protection Versus Free Trade in the Free State Era: The Finance Attitude. *Irish Economic and Social History*, 46(1), 3–21

³³ T. Kettle, 'The Economics of Nationalism', in *The Day's Burden: Studies, Literary and Political and Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1918), p. 141 - 143

³⁴ <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:448847#?c=&m=&s=&cv=2&xywh=-1279%2C-265%2C4485%2C1962> accessed on 1/7/23

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Ibid*

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republican government where elected Irish politicians participated. The early activities of the Dáil were involved in formulating economic and political policies to subvert British activities in Ireland. Connolly's Labour Party, now led by Thomas Johnson, chose not to contest the 1918 election. The move was justified because it was hoped the election would serve as a democratic vote for independence. They did however, work closely with the Dáil government in devising socio-economic policies for national independence. When the first Dáil was preparing to meet, Johnson was asked by Sinn Fein, to draw up the programme. The purpose of the programme was political and done with the intention of getting international recognition from the Socialist International which met in Berne on 3rd of February. It became known as the 'Democratic Programme', and it offered a radical vision for Ireland. Johnson began the draft by quoting from the 1916 proclamation to link the Easter rising with the need for socio-economic policies for the Dáil. Pádraig Pearse's last major pamphlet was quoted, 'no private right to property is good against the public right of the nation.'³⁷ This illustrated the influence which James Connolly had on Pearse's beliefs in later years.³⁸ In the revolutionary period, the labour movement and the Dáil worked closely together. In September 1920 Frederick Dumont asserted that 'Sinn Féin's greatest triumphs have been possible only because of the whole-hearted support given to Sinn Fein by organised labour.'³⁹

Johnson's draft proclaimed that 'the Irish Republic shall always count wealth and prosperity by the measure of health and happiness of its citizens' and as such, the first duty of the government of the republic would be to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children. It set out how natural resources would be exploited for the good of the people and how where 'productive wealth' was 'wrongfully used or withheld from use to the detriment of the Republic, there the nation shall resume possession without compensation.'⁴⁰ Furthermore it detailed that 'it shall be the purpose of the government to encourage the organisation of the people into trade unions and co-operative societies with a view to the control and administration of the industries by the workers engaged in the

³⁷ Arthur Mitchell, Thomas Johnson, 1872-1963, a Pioneer Labour Leader, *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Winter, 1969, Vol. 58, No. 232 pp 399

³⁸ *Irish Times* 31 January 1944; interview with Cathal O'Shannon featured in 'The First Dáil', first broadcast by Raidió Éireann 19 January 1969

³⁹ Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland*, Gill and MacMillan Ltd (1995) pp 242

⁴⁰ <http://www.niamhpuirseil.ie/2019/01> Accessed on 1/7/23

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industries. It concluded that ‘the Republic will aim at the elimination of the class in society which lives upon the wealth produced by the workers of the nation but gives no useful service in return, and in the process of accomplishment will bring freedom to all who have hitherto been caught in the toils of economic servitude.’⁴¹

Johnson’s programme draft was debated at a meeting of Irish Republican Brotherhood members, which was convened by Michael Collins before the inaugural session of the first Dáil.⁴² P.S O’Hegarty who was present at the debate noted that ‘the Democratic Programme gave rise to a lively debate, the preponderance of opinion being against it. It was urged that this declaration was in fact ultra vires for the Dáil, whose one and only business was to get the English out of Ireland, and that all internal and arguable questions like this should be left over until the English had been got out, and, on a vote, that view was upheld. Collins then said that he would suppress the democratic programme, and he did so; but, next morning, the others refused to go one without a democratic programme and the draft was handed to Seán T. O’Kelly, who finally produced what was put before the Dáil.’⁴³ Johnson’s initial draft generated heated debate with many of the leading IRB members finding the programme unacceptable. What’s interesting in O’Hegarty’s statement is that it alleged that some of the IRB members, although they found some of the more radical statements objectionable, did have a desire for a programme which outlined socio-economic policies, to go before the Dáil. Others in the revolutionary movement favoured a focus on policy which left the socio-economic questions to be established once independence had been achieved. Michael Collins was not successful in suppressing the programme, but it was agreed that it would need to be edited. Sean T. O’Kelly was tasked as Ceann Comhairle (chairman) of the first Dáil to edit the programme down. The result of the editing was a removal of the more radical aspects such as the ‘elimination of the capitalist class and the confiscation of misused property’ clauses as well as the rephrasing of other sections. Despite the alterations by O’Kelly, it retained much of its socialist character, and it was presented to the First Dáil to be debated on.

⁴¹ The text of Johnson’s original document was first published on 1 February 1944 in the Irish Times

⁴² <http://www.niamhpuirseil.ie/2019/01> Accessed on 1/7/23

⁴³ P.S. O’Hegarty, *A history of Ireland under the union* (London, 1952) p.727 quoted in Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Get with the programme’ p.3

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The revised Democratic Programme was unanimously agreed upon and was promptly adopted by the Dáil in 1919. The revolutionary years of 1916 to 1919, from the Easter 1916 proclamation to the Sinn Fein electoral victory in 1918, and the adoption of the socialist Democratic programme in the Dáil. This showcased that the revolutionary dreamers envisaged an equal and fair Ireland, completely sovereign with the economic and political link with Britain broken. Arthur Griffith's revolutionary economic policies of protectionism received a clear mandate in the 1918 election and the influence of the Connolly socialist agenda remained strong by 1919. However, not everyone in the revolutionary movement shared the views of Connolly and Griffith and underneath them were counterrevolutionaries waiting for the opportunity to take power and reverse everything that the revolutionaries had fought and died for. Turbulent times lay ahead for Ireland as it moved into the 1920's. The next chapter will examine the development of the Dáil in the first half of the 1920's, the treaty negotiations and the civil war. The rise of Cumann na nGaedheal in its earliest days will be examined too and their approach to dealing with the legacy of the revolution.

Chapter Two

The revolutionary cabinet decided to instigate a boycotting of British made goods. In September 1920 in a Dáil debate over a bill for the protection of Irish industries. The decree, put forward by future Cumann na nGaedheal Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe, stated that 'whereas it is impossible at the present juncture to establish a customs tariff and impose regular duties upon foreign goods on their entry into Ireland, and in consequence the protection of Irish Industries must take the form chiefly of discrimination by individual citizens in favour of Irish products'.⁴⁴ The revolutionaries asked citizens to only buy Irish goods in order to help protect Irish industries at the expense of foreign firms. The Department of Trade and Commerce declared it will compile a schedule of goods 'which it shall be the duty of citizens of the Irish Republic to purchase, to the exclusion of similar articles of

⁴⁴ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1920-09-17/38/>

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foreign origin.⁴⁵ It was decreed that goods will be excluded from the list if it is made by a foreign firm that is hostile to national interests or if the makers do not give support to Irish industry. The various clauses that were decreed by the Department of Trade and Commerce show a revolutionary commitment to protecting Irish industry at the expense of foreign firms by the department. The bill however generated much debate in the Dáil and was not unanimously supported. Joseph McBride, a deputy for Mayo and later a Cumann na nGaedheal politician, complained that the ‘system of control outlined in the Bill was an abomination. Traders should not be coerced. Under the proposed Bill foreign firms established in Ireland would be ruled out, with the result that trade could not be carried on.’⁴⁶

J.J Walsh, also later of Cumann na nGaedheal before his resignation in 1927 over his party’s apparent refusal to adhere to protectionist principles, argued in favour of the 1920 Protection of Irish industries decree observing ‘that the retailer would stock whatever there was a demand for. The Irish public were asleep as regards their duty to support Irish manufacture. A big campaign in favour of Irish Industries should be organised.’⁴⁷ Labour’s Countess Markievicz contributed to the debate on 1920 Protection of Irish Industries debate pointing out that ‘This Bill by prohibiting the stocking of foreign goods, placed a premium on one of the worst forms of trading, shopping by post. She admitted on the other hand that there were many retailers who would not stock Irish-made goods unless they were forced to do so.’⁴⁸ Protectionism had many advocates in Ireland, but it also had some detractors, namely in future Cumann na nGaedheal TD Joseph McBride. Even before independence was achieved, there was already some ideological opposition to the revolutionary economic policy of protectionism. The Cumann na nGaedheal counter-revolution would be facilitated by those who shared McBride’s scepticism of the merits of protecting Irish industries. The objections raised by the five deputies about the burden this would place on shopkeepers, the proposal was handed over to a committee. However later in January 1921, Blythe told the Dail that he believed a boycott would not work without a propaganda campaign, as the decrees might not

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

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be obeyed by the traders who were being encouraged to not trade British goods.⁴⁹ A decree was eventually passed, and Blythe's department was given the task of listing the goods to be banned. In May Stephen Gwynn observed 'a new form of Republican activity' — the holding up of people to inspect their cigarette sand matches. 'If these are of English make,' he said, 'the owner is liable to have a leg cut off his trousers'.⁵⁰ The British boycott appeared to be successful, and Blythe was enthusiastic about its results. Blythe emerged as an initial advocate of the boycotting of British goods in the revolutionary period, however it remained to be seen whether this policy remained consistent with his later views on the matter post-revolution.

A truce in the War of Independence was agreed between Britain and Ireland in 1921. Arthur Griffith, who was then Minister for Foreign Affairs, was sent to London to negotiate the Anglo-Irish treaty.⁵¹ Minister for Finance Michael Collins as well as members of an Economic Relations Committee which was created to support the treaty delegation. The members of this committee included Diarmaid Fawsitt, Sir Lionel Fawsitt and Timothy Smiddy. It also included Ernest Blythe TD, future minister for finance from 1923 to 1932.⁵² Griffith demanded complete fiscal freedom for Ireland. As the British cabinet secretary Thomas Jones noted: 'They (the Irish delegation) asked to be protected against unfair competition'.⁵³ Article 9 of the treaty was proposed by the British which was an explicit provision against protectionism. Griffith was successful in resisting this suggestion and article 9 was omitted from the final treaty agreement. It was replaced with a simpler text which read 'The ports of Great Britain and the Irish Free State shall be freely open to the ships of the other country on payment of the customary port and other dues.'⁵⁴ While this was contrary to the revolutionary desire for complete sovereignty over Irish ports, it did not

⁴⁹ Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, pp 245

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 246

⁵¹ Colum Kenny 'A Man Who Has Both Arms': Arthur Griffith, the Economy and the Anglo-Irish Treaty Agreement (1921) pp 14

⁵² *The Men and Women of the Anglo-Irish Treaty Delegations 1921*, ed. Fiona Murray and Eda Sagarra (Dublin, 1921), pp. 60–1, 66–8, 93–6, 137

⁵³ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, Vol. 3 (London, 1971), pp. 160–1 (10 Nov. 1921).

⁵⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 23 Aug. 1922; *Young Ireland*, 19 and 26 August 1922.⁶³ See also Barton's notes, 5–6 Dec. 1921 (NAI DE 2/304/1, no. 213).

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necessarily hinder Ireland's ability to restrict trade if it wished. Griffith pushed for economic freedom right to the end of the negotiations and was apparently satisfied by the fiscal and financial independence the treaty offered. The treaty was signed in London on 6th of December 1921. While the economic aspect of the treaty has received scant attention compared to the political implications. The success of the negotiators in amending Article 9 to a less restrictive article and therefore giving the Free State more scope to implement protectionism should not be overlooked. Nevertheless, the treaty disappointed many, in that it led to limited political independence. Eamon de Valera stepped down as president and it paved the way for a devastating civil war.

Institutions that made up the revolutionary movement fragmented into pro and anti-treaty sides. The anti-treaty side seized Dublin's Four Courts which was met with violent retaliation by pro-treaty forces. The pro-treaty forces shelled the Four Courts on 28 June 1922. Pro-treaty forces seized the capital and by 1923 emerged victorious after suppressing much of the opposition using draconian public safety laws as well as superior military performance. For Regan, the activities of the pro-treaty forces in their brutal prosecution of the civil war led by Michael Collins, until his early death, represented the first phase of the counter-revolution. The Civil War has traditionally been analysed as a political conflict between pro and anti-treaty forces with scant mention of the conflict's social dimensions. However, as Gavin Foster observed, most commentators of the civil war, have associated 'the staunchest support for the free state with propertied and wealthiest interests, while militant republicanism has tended to be portrayed as a mostly lower-class and rural phenomenon.'⁵⁵ Gavin M Foster showed through an examination of the social terrain of the treaty split 'that the pro- and anti-treaty movements' political animosities and perceptions of one another were shaped by powerful class and social status currents'.⁵⁶ A key component of John Regan's criticism of the pro-treaty elite who would go on to form the Cumann na nGaedheal party is their wealthy backgrounds which he believed shaped their dismissive outlook towards the revolution that propelled them to power. The question then worth asking is can it be demonstrated that wealthier people were more likely to advocate for free trade while less well-off people

⁵⁵ G.M Foster, *The Irish Civil War and Society*, Palgrave MacMillan (2015) pp 9

⁵⁶ *Ibid* pp 223

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favoured protection? However, as will be shown, the pro-treaty elite remained bitterly divided over the issues of living up to the revolutionary ideals of protectionism.

Cumann na nGaedheal was founded in April 1923 by the pro-treaty wing of Sinn Fein, taking its name from an earlier political organisation founded by Arthur Griffith in 1900. The leadership of the pro-treaty wing in 1922 was Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and W.T. Cosgrave. The deaths of Griffith, who died just seven months after the treaty negotiations commenced, and the killing of Collins, left Cosgrave to lead the pro-treaty Provisional Government in its prosecution of the civil war. A constitution for the party was adopted on 27 April 1923. Regan argued this constitution reflected a shift towards ‘new nationalist politics in the post-revolutionary era, a retreat from the revolutionary agenda of Sinn Fein in favour of an expansion toward the right’.⁵⁷ The programme was watered down from its original draft in order to appeal greater to Conservative interests, of whom the party garnered much of its support from. The party constitution, unlike the earlier 1916 proclamation or the Democratic Programme, was vaguer in its outlook and did not commit to any radical socio-economic agenda. Regan observed that ‘it was broadly aspirational but essentially non-committal, offering platitudes, not hard policies.’⁵⁸ Regan argued therefore, that this constitution read as ‘an agenda for the negation of revolution, not its implementation.’⁵⁹ Clause four of the constitution vowed to ‘stimulate and safeguard the development of suitable manufacturing industries by all means at our disposal.’ The insertion of the word ‘suitable’ effectively left the parties position on protection open to interpretation. This compared to the Democratic Programme of 1919 which stipulated ‘that the duty of the Republic was to adopt all measures necessary for the creation and invigoration of our industries and to ensure their being developed on the most beneficial and progressive co-operative and industrial lines.’⁶⁰ In essence, the revolutionary Democratic Programme made a more substantial commitment to safeguarding Irish industries. The Cumann na nGaedheal party constitution planted the seeds for the party’s economic counter-revolution by the lack of ambitious economic policy making in order to appeal to ‘national interests.’ The party constitution lacked a strong commitment to protect Irish industries and as Regan argued ‘its conservativeness, reflected the political

⁵⁷ John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution* pp 138

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ Dáil Éireann debate - Tuesday, 21 Jan 1919 Vol. F No. 1

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culture which had triumphed in a revolution which for the treatyite elite had now spun full circle into counter-revolution.’⁶¹ In a previous debate in 1922, Kevin O’Higgins criticised the Democratic Programme labelling it as a ‘communist doctrine’ and arguing it is not a constitution.⁶²

Connolly’s quote about the possible growth of a conservative outlook among union leaders could perhaps be applied to the Cumann na nGaedheal party in its strive for a theoretical perfect organisation which gradually became at odds with the party rank and file who favoured closer adherence to revolutionary dogma, ‘I believe that the development of the fighting spirit is of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organisation; that, indeed the most theoretically perfect organisation, may, because of its very perfection and vastness, be of the greatest possible danger to the revolutionary movement if it tends, or is used, to repress and curb the fighting spirit of comradeship in the rank and file.’⁶³ Cumann na nGaedheal member and veteran Sinn Fein republican Liam De Róiste, observed that the ‘debate over free trade or protectionism would pose problems for the party in the longer term and noted that some remarked that the new party’s programme was too broad.’⁶⁴ Minister for Local government and later Cumann na nGaedheal Minister for Finance from 1923 Ernest Blythe remarked in the Dáil in May 1923 in the finance bill debate, ‘the whole question of tariffs and of the general system of taxation will have to be considered carefully. It is a question on which a decision should not be rushed.’⁶⁵ Patrick McGoldrick also of Cumann na nGaedheal remarked in the same debate that ‘the general question of tariffs is one that must be carefully considered, and when it is being considered, possibly by another Government, we should have arrived at the stage that will render it possible to formulate a system that will be fully advantageous to the interests of the country.’⁶⁶ Neither McGoldrick or Blythe were willing to commit outright to tariff implementation. They both mentioned that tariffs must be considered carefully to see if they are of benefit to the nation before they could be implemented. Scepticism of Griffith’s economic thinking would remain a characteristic of the Cumann na nGaedheal government until the very end. The Finance department held large

⁶¹ John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution* pp 138

⁶² Dáil Éireann debate - Monday, 25 Sep 1922

⁶³ James Connolly, *Old Wine in New Bottles* (1914)

⁶⁴ Mel Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan (2017) pp 80

⁶⁵ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1923-05-03/12>

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

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influence over party policy, and over the party elite. This department, from the outset, showed reluctance to implement tariffs despite some members of the grassroots of the party favouring their implementation.

Cumann na nGaedheal contested the general election of 1923, which commenced in August 1923, winning 63 seats out of 153. The country was faced with a large national debt as a result of the legacy of the civil war and the Cumann na nGaedheal party manifesto for election reflected this bleak economic situation. Financial pragmatism took precedence over past political promises and the issue of protectionism was skirted around; the question of protection was devolved to a 'Committee of Experts' to be resolved later. The anti-treaty Republican TD's, many of whom were imprisoned, were led by Eamon deValera and they gained 44 seats, but they abstained their seats. This gave Cumann na nGaedheal a majority of seats and they formed the 2nd Executive Council of the Irish Free State in September 1923. The financial department had been placed at the centre of the administration by Michael Collins, who was Minister for Finance in the days of revolution. Many of the officials appointed to the department were as Regan argued, 'schooled in the orthodoxies of British financial practice.'⁶⁷ Gordon Campbell was appointed to the Secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce position; he was the son of the last Lord Chancellor of Ireland Lord Glenavy.⁶⁸ This appointment proved controversial to some and perhaps indicated that there was to be a deviation from Griffithite protectionism.

Regan argued, although Campbell was not necessarily a doctrinaire free trader, his appointment offered the possibility of a more flexible approach to the issue that Diarmuid Fawsitt, his veteran Cork Sinn Fein predecessor, who was a doctrinaire protectionist and was removed by Cosgrave.⁶⁹ Liam de Roiste, an associate of Fawsitt wrote to Cosgrave on his friend's behalf; 'The setting aside of Mr Fawsitt and the appointment of Mr Campbell seems to indicate a change of policy in regard to the advancement of Irish trade and industry from that which we have advocated in the Sinn Féin movement.' The other appointment which caused dismay was the appointment of C.J. Gregg who was seconded from the British

⁶⁷ John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution* pp 98, 99

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

⁶⁹ *Ibid*

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treasury to organise the new Irish civil service. Thomas Markham, one of Collins intelligence officers raised suspicions about the influence of Alfred Cope, chief liaison for the British government over the provisional government and pointed out that Gregg was a British official, loaned from London and in touch with the British war minister.⁷⁰ These two appointments, especially the Campbell appointment, reflected something of a departure from the revolutionary idealists that propelled them to power. The removal of men, such as Fawsitt, with revolutionary pedigree from prominent positions and replacing them with those schooled in British orthodoxy, a key element of economic orthodoxy incidentally was an adherence to free trader. This reflected the pragmatic over ideological approach that the government would take in its economic policies going forward.

This chapter has shown the emerging divisions in the revolutionary movement in the early 1920's. It was established that in the 1920 debate over the protection of Irish industries, there was disagreement over protectionism as a policy. The divisions in the revolutionary movement became more prominent, leading to a politically and economically damaging civil war in 1922 to 1923. The pro-treaty elite, with the assistance of British weapons and supported by much of the upper class of Irish society won the civil war and formed the Cumann na nGaedheal party. The new party did not make any outright commitment to upholding the economic policies of the revolution in their constitution. In fact, the party showed early indications of being reluctant to implement tariffs without proper deliberation and consultation of the facts. The bleak situation Ireland found itself in post-civil war only reinforced some of the conservative minded revolutionary's beliefs that the rhetoric and aspirations of the revolution were unrealistic in the long term. The Cumann na nGaedheal economic counter-revolution commenced with their election victory in 1923 and the next chapter will analyse their economic policies in the period from 1923 to 1928.

Chapter Three

⁷⁰ Ibid

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On June 1923, Fiscal Inquiry Committee was established to investigate and report ‘the existing fiscal system, and of any measures regulating or restricting imports or exports on industry and agriculture, and as to the effect of any changes therein intended to foster the development of industry and agriculture.’⁷¹ W. T. Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council (and, at the time, Minister of Finance), stated at the outset that the ‘Committee is not expected to advocate policy. That will be a matter for the people and the Government when they have the facts before them’.⁷² The FIC’s membership consisted of five academics: T. A. Smiddy, C. F. Bastable, R. M. Henry, J. G. Smith and George O’Brien.⁷³ The final report of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee was reached in January 1924 which outlined objections by the Committee against the application of protective tariffs in Ireland. The committee argued that ‘They lead to no permanent expansion of industry or permanent increase of employment. They increase the cost of living. They increase wages. They increase prices. They provide no remedy against dumping. They hamper agriculture. They are difficult to construct and difficult to administer, and they raise uncertainty as to their duration.’⁷⁴ The larger export orientated firms that it investigated showed opposition to tariffs and the committee felt that the firms that wanted tariffs were in the minority. It warned that protection would create new vested interests that would inhibit its abandonment when conditions returned to normal.⁷⁵ JJ McElligot, assistant secretary in the department of finance, recorded his reaction to the FIC deliberations for discussion with Ernest Blythe. He rejected the simplistic notion that ‘either free trade or protection can be looked on as a panacea for the economic ills of the country.’⁷⁶ McElligot observed one of the greatest disadvantages of protection:

‘Tends to force trade and commerce into unnatural or uneconomic channels and the industry thereby created artificial conditions in which to prosper. Further protection is a medicine which needs to be taken in large doses. If one interest is protected, every interest will demand like treatment. The height of the tariff barrier is... constantly increasing.’ Furthermore, he argued that ‘the best help the state can give them is to help them by reducing costs. The largest element in costs is wages and wages depend largely on the cost of living, which is

⁷¹ Dáil Éireann debate Friday, 15 Jun 1923 Vol. 3 No. 28

⁷² Dáil Debates, 15 June 1923.

⁷³ Anna Devlin and Frank Barry, Protection Versus Free Trade in the Free State Era: The Finance Attitude (2019)

⁷⁴ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1924-01-16/24>

⁷⁵ FIC, Final Report, 1923, para. 124.

⁷⁶ N.A.I. FIN/F/1/3466, Memorandum from McElligott to Blythe, September 1923

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always high in protected countries. The best way we can help is to bring down, say, charges for transport and power...Better organisation, better marketing etc. are matters independent of protection and the incentive to them is often removed by protection.’⁷⁷

In other words, protection, he argued, was a slippery slope that can adversely affect business competitiveness as he believed it could reduce firms’ willingness to better themselves in reaction to competition with foreign competitors. Important to note in McElligot’s analysis is that he associated protected countries with having a high cost of living. The incentive of a firm to organise and market better, he argued, was reduced if protection was implemented. The state, he believed, should have a reduced role in intervening in the affairs of business. Joseph McGrath, Minister for Industry and Commerce, suggested that while limited protection might not injure agriculture, ‘the onus of proof’ lay with ‘the advocates of Protection’. He followed this with a memo to cabinet advocating that protection should be available under strict supervision and to those who could return the cost to the community.⁷⁸ The state, he believed, should have a reduced role in intervening in the affairs of business. While the revolutionaries advocated for the Irish state to intervene in the economy, to ensure the development and betterment of Ireland. The counterrevolutionaries of the Cumann na nGaedheal finance department such as Blythe and McElligot, showed indications that they favoured a laissez faire economic approach.

Sean Milroy, who founded the Irish Protectionist League and was a member of Cumann na nGaedheal denounced the findings of the FIC committee. Milroy was a close friend and political ally of Arthur Griffith.⁷⁹ He accused ministers ‘of relying on civil servants whose loyalties, if not pro-British, were controlled by the old Arthur Griffith enemies, the freemasons’.⁸⁰ He argued the committee was instructed ‘how best to inspire contempt for existing individual enterprise in the Saorstát and as to how to discourage any further effort to

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Brian Girvin, *Between Two Worlds, Politics and Economy in Independent Ireland* Gill & Macmillan (1989 pp 24

⁷⁹ <https://www.dib.ie/biography/milroy-john-ignatius-sean-a5828>

⁸⁰ J. M. Regan, ‘The Politics of Utopia: Party Organisation, Executive Autonomy and the New Administration’, in M. Cronin and J. M. Regan (eds), *Ireland: The Politics of Independence* (New York, 2000), p. 40.

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prevent Ireland from fulfilling the prophecy of a certain English nobleman when he spoke of this country as being destined to be the fruitful mother of flocks and herds to feed the industrial workers of Britain.⁸¹ Critics of the committee have accused the committee of bias, one of its members, George O'Brien was, in his own words 'known to be "rightist" in economics and politics, pro-British and a believer in free trade'⁸² Cosgrave however, stated from the outset that its purpose, on the contrary, was to secure a 'disinterested, balanced and exhaustive analysis of a complex problem.'⁸³ He argued, 'This purpose would not be achieved by drawing the personnel of the Committee from the various business and trading interests, every one of which claims an alteration of the fiscal system for its own particular advantage.'⁸⁴ Cosgrave argued that the purpose of the committee is to reach an apparently impartial decision on important economic policy. Milroy, after the committee published its findings, charged the committee with having a specific agenda, by advocating against tariffs, the committee, he argued, 'was intent on doing its best to maintain British economic domination over Ireland'. Milroy resigned from the party in October 1924.⁸⁵

Cumann na nGaedheal's reluctance to intervene in the economy, up to this point, but rather allow market forces to dictate affairs became something of characteristic of their government. This led to accusations by its opponents that they were committed to letting the British continue to dominate Irish economic affairs, therefore arguably this served to negate the revolution. Until 1927, the Dáil only featured pro-treaty parties such as Cumann na nGaedheal and the Labour party led by Thomas Johnson. Cosgrave's government had governed for five uninterrupted years and the anti-treaty side had failed to offer a genuine alternative to the government ever since they were defeated in the civil war. Historian Mel Farrell argued that '1927 was the year in which the Dáil finally became fully representative of the Free State electorate'.⁸⁶ Eamon deValera founded the Fianna Fáil party in 1926, they formed out of a split in the anti-treaty Sinn Féin movement. The new party were in favour of entering the Dáil to mount a serious challenge to the Cumann na nGaedheal government. This policy put them at odds with others in Sinn Féin who favoured continued

⁸¹ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1924-01-16/24/>

⁸² J. Meenan, George O'Brien: A Biographical Memoir (Dublin, 1980), p. 197

⁸³ Dáil Éireann debate - Friday, 15 Jun 1923 Vol. 3 No. 28

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ <https://www.dib.ie/biography/milroy-john-ignatius-sean-a5828> accessed on 1/7/23

⁸⁶ Mel Farrell, Party Politics in a New Democracy pp 151

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abstention, refusing to recognise the partitionist Free State and the oath of fealty to the British monarch. Mel Farrell observed that, ‘as Fianna Fáil developed as a viable alternative in the late 1920s, the lines of distinction between it and Cumann na nGaedheal were further accentuated. While their original disagreement had been a constitutional dispute over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, as they evolved as separate and distinct parties, the gap between Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal on socio-economic issues widened.’⁸⁷ De Valera outlined his approach to the party supporters establishing that the original anti-treaty approach would be combined with a focus on socio-economic policies.⁸⁸ One key distinction between Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal was the issue of tariffs, Fianna Fáil portrayed their rivals as a dogmatically free trade party, with close ties to the British empire and wealthy interests. They perceived of themselves as the real heirs to the revolution by claiming they will break the economic domination Britain had over Ireland, as Griffith envisaged. They appealed primarily to the less well off in Irish society and adopted some of Labour’s policies to establish themselves as the main opponents of Cumann na nGaedheal.

The government had to this point, shown a pragmatic reluctance to implement tariffs, nevertheless they instituted the tariff commission in 1926 as a result of pressure from critics from within and outside the party. An earlier memo from Gordon Campbell, suggested an establishment of a Tariff Commission, suggesting fifteen industries that could be protected without raising the cost of living. Interesting is that while Campbell’s appointment from the outset potentially signalled a deviation from revolutionary economic policies, he emerged as an advocate for tariffs. Minister for Industry and Commerce Joseph McGrath was replaced with the less protectionist Patrick McGilligan and Campbell’s earlier memo was withdrawn.⁸⁹ JJ McElligott argued that it would be ‘rather absurd that after one Government Committee had turned down tariffs, another Committee should be set up to establish them.’⁹⁰ The Cumann na nGaedheal party remained internally divided over the issue of tariffs. JJ Walsh, the postmaster general of the provisional government, was one of the staunchest advocates for protectionism in the Cumann na nGaedheal party and he initiated a tariff campaign in 1926. Born in County Cork to a farming background, his father James J. Walsh was a

⁸⁷ Ibid pp 155

⁸⁸ Ibid pp 160

⁸⁹ Hogan to Blythe, 9 April 1924, FIN/F22/11/24, quoted in Girvin, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 33–4.

⁹⁰ McElligott response to Campbell memo, 19 March 1924, FIN/F22/11/24, quoted in Daly, *Industrial Development*, p. 25.

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medium sized farmer. Walsh reluctantly voted for the treaty as the better option of two bad choices.⁹¹ He advocated strongly for protectionism which put him at odds with other members of the party. He was highly critical of Patrick Hogan, the minister for agriculture for his apparent reluctance to implement tariffs for the Irish flour milling industry.⁹² He seriously considered trying to take control of Cumann na nGaedheal or breaking away to form a new party with support from businessmen who advocated protectionism.⁹³ At a meeting of the National Executive elected by on 22 February 1927, Walsh demanded the government implement a more extensive tariff system. However, by the middle of 1927 Walsh resigned from the party, after both Blythe and Hogan refused his requests. His resignation letter accused the party of going over to ‘the most reactionary elements of the state who will henceforth control its policies. Followers of Arthur Griffiths’ teaching will now be forced to subordinate their lifelong conviction to the dictates of people whose only concern appears to be the welfare of England.’⁹⁴ Richard Mulcahy, Minister of Defence, who had left the cabinet with McGrath in 1924, remarked years later that ‘the departure of himself, McGrath and Walsh had left Cumann na nGaedheal denuded of those who supported the Griffith approach to industrial development.’⁹⁵ The party saw some of its most prominent protectionists leave the party over their perceptions that the government was negating revolutionary economic policy. The free traders of the party therefore had more scope to resist the implementation of tariffs.

The party suffered too with the assassination of Kevin O’Higgins. John Regan has argued that ‘the loss of O’Higgins in July 1927 was akin to the loss of Collins in August 1922. Devoid of his conviction, youth and intellect Cumann na nGaedheal in the late 1920s had lost a considerable asset as it looked to counter Fianna Fáil’s advance.’⁹⁶ O’Higgins was a polarising figure, praised by pro-treaty figures for his democratic state building, hated by republicans for his prosecution of the civil war as Cumann na nGaedheal Minister for Justice. O’Higgins was responsible for signing off the executions of over eighty-one Republican

⁹¹ <https://www.dib.ie/biography/walsh-james-joseph-a8874> Accessed on 09/07/23

⁹² <https://www.dib.ie/biography/walsh-james-joseph-a8874> accessed on 30/6/23

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution*, pp 87

⁹⁵ Devlin, A., & Barry, F. (2019). Protection Versus Free Trade in the Free State Era: The Finance Attitude. *Irish Economic and Social History*, 46(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0332489319853703>

⁹⁶ John Regan, ‘The Politics of Reaction: The Dynamics of Treatyite Government and Policy, 1922-33’, *Irish Historical Studies*, xxx, no. 120 (Nov. 1997), 563.

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prisoners. Regan portrayed O'Higgins as the architect of the Cumann na nGaedheal counter-revolution. Regan used a quote by Michael Hayes, speaker of the Dail after 1922 who in later years reflected on Kevin O'Higgins by saying that 'he (O'Higgins) didn't understand what the whole struggle had been about. He reduced it to the notion of the Irish people getting a parliament.'⁹⁷ This would suggest that O'Higgins was more in line with the less radical Irish Parliamentary Party rather than revolutionary Sinn Fein, who comfortably defeated the IPP in the election. Within days of the assassination, Liam de Róiste noted in his diary that, 'while he had been politically opposed to O'Higgins on issues such as protectionism, he could not question the late minister's ability.'⁹⁸ In de Róiste's assessment, 'Griffith was a teacher: Collins a leader: O'Higgins a state-builder'. After his death, O'Higgins would take his place alongside Collins and Griffith in the pro-Treaty triumvirate of heroes.⁹⁹

Through a combination of factors, the rise of Fianna Fáil and internal strife with J.J Walsh's and others resignation, Cumann na nGaedheal only narrowly clung onto power in September 1927. While the party helped establish Ireland's international standing and improve its credit rating through a balancing of budgets. The parties' pragmatic economic policies, such as cuts on pensions, proved controversial with many ordinary voters and many were drawn to Fianna Fáil whose policies closer resembled revolutionary ideology. Eamon de Valera's decision (which was controversial among the anti-treaty elite) to enter the Dáil appeared to be vindicated as support increased for his party in the September election. The party had previously competed in the election in June 1927, but they ultimately refused to take their seats because of the oath of fealty. The assassination of Kevin O'Higgins led to a bill being passed by the Executive Council which proclaimed that there would be 'disqualification for five years of any member of the Oireachtas who did not take the oath prescribed in Article 17 of the Constitution of the Irish Free State.'¹⁰⁰ Fianna Fáil eventually declared they will take the oath, and did so in September 1927, under protest it must be added, and entered the Dail.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution* pp 87

⁹⁸ Mel Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy*, pp 171

⁹⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/1927/26/>

¹⁰¹ Dáil Éireann debate Friday, 12 Aug 1927

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1927-08-12/2/>

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In a Dáil debate in November 1927 over unemployment relief, Minister for Industry and Commerce Patrick McGilligan reacted to Fianna Fáil claims that Ireland should be wary of foreign capital by arguing that foreign capital investment was responsible for creating jobs ‘If Ford's factory in Cork had to wait until it would be entirely financed by Irish people, the workers who are engaged there at the moment would be walking the streets now.’¹⁰² Sean Lemass replied that ‘beware of foreign capital’ was first uttered in this country by the late Mr. Arthur Griffith?, it was a favourite phrase of his.’¹⁰³ McGilligan stated in the debate that foreign capital should be welcomed into the country and that the presence of foreign capitalists does not equate to foreign rule of Ireland. ‘At a moment when Irish capital is so shy of investing in this country that we should introduce foreign capital into this country. We need have no fears about it, because we have the control of that capital when it comes.’¹⁰⁴ Sean McEntee of Fianna Fáil argued ‘the workers ought to know that the men who control their industries control their lives. The question for them to consider is this: Is it not wiser to encourage Irish and native capital rather than to bring in the foreigner unnecessarily? We do not wish to shut out foreign capital if it comes here and wishes to invest in Irish industries. We welcome it, but we want to see that it does not get control of Irish industry. Foreign capital has been a menace to the peaceful development and advancement of other countries.’¹⁰⁵ ‘We want to see that the Irish workers are masters in their own land and not the chattel slaves of foreign capital. I think that is a viewpoint nearer to the views held by James Connolly, who was good enough to stand side by side with Irish Republicans fighting for the same ideals and voicing the same principles that we are voicing in this Dáil to-day.’¹⁰⁶ The government stood accused by the opposition of not doing enough in developing Irish industries. They were charged with inviting foreign capitalists into the country at the expense of Irish industry and supposedly allowing foreign capital to have greater influence over Irish affairs. Mc Gilligan also criticised the notion that tariffs would help to reduce the adverse trade balance ‘To make out that that would help to reduce the adverse trade balance would be like the doctor who smashed the thermometer in order to show that the patient was well.’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Dáil Éireann debate - Thursday, 3 Nov 1927 Vol. 21 No. 8

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1927-11-03/38/>

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

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A Tariff commission was established under the 1926 Tariff Commission Act. Justice-Minister Fitzgerald-Kenney remarked, ‘This Committee was set up for a definite purpose, to consider the question as to whether tariffs should or should not be applied to certain industries, and it was then considered that those tariffs should be applied on the report of that Commission as manufacturers actually engaged in manufacture went to the Tariff Commission and asked for protection.’¹⁰⁸ The commission as he argued was not judicial but instead ‘it is the duty of the Commission to examine evidence which is brought before it, to make up its mind upon that evidence fairly and honestly, and then, not to deliver judgment, but to make a report to the Executive Council, for the Executive Council in its judgment, and finally for the House, in its judgment, to act upon or not to act upon accordingly as is thought fit.’¹⁰⁹ This commission was subject to a barrage of criticism when Fianna Fáil entered the Dail. Fianna Fáil’s Sean Lemass complained about the time being taken to prepare reports and the waste of time and money in making submissions to a body that was likely to prove doctrinaire in its opposition to tariffs.¹¹⁰ In a Dail debate in 1928, Fianna Fáil TD Thomas Derrig accused the Cumann na nGaedheal elite of being against protectionist policies and having little desire to break with the British economic control of Ireland despite a strong national element apparently wanting protection.

Derrig accused the government of interfering with the Tariff commission and only being interested in breaking from the British fiscal system in exceptional circumstances ‘It was expected by the national element that it would be a commission independent of political influence, which would calmly and judiciously examine the whole problem of the industries of the country, and take as its foundation a definite programme for the prevention as far as possible of the importation of foreign articles into this country; not that the Tribunal or Commission would take as its basis that the British fiscal system still existed here; that we were only going to depart from it in certain exceptional circumstances.’¹¹¹ He highlighted that the nomination of the tariff commission was made by three ministers. Pointing to examples of

¹⁰⁸ Dáil Éireann debate - Friday, 24 Feb 1928 Vol. 22 No. 4

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1928-02-24/23>

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other countries, he called for tariff boards to be established which include representatives of trade and commerce and not be confined to civil servants who lack knowledge of the issue. He accused the government of being influenced by special interests, ‘the freemasonry of interest between the bankers and the importers, the shipping interest and all the rest of them against Irish trade and industry. These do not want Irish industries to develop. They want to maintain England's hold here, and accordingly they are sending flour into this country at a lower price than they are selling it in Liverpool.’¹¹²

Derrig asked ‘Are we in favour of the present policy under which the land is being depopulated and our industries are being crushed by foreign competition? If we are to endeavour to put a stop to that we must stand for a rigid protectionist policy.’¹¹³ A labour amendment stated that it ought to be the duty of the Tariff Commission to investigate the question of working conditions. Derrig also asked that the commission investigate the foreign dumping of materials into Ireland, which he argued, ‘would reduce the Irish farmer’s standard of living’. The Minister for Industry and Commerce made a statement that if a tariff was placed on flour, flour industries would leave the city. Derrig responded by saying ‘it was pointed out that the firm could receive special treatment, that they could receive a rebate, and that special arrangements could be made to deal with their case. But the Minister for Industry and Commerce came here and quoted that as an argument against the protection of flour. ‘I need not go into his reference which, in my opinion, was in the worst possible taste, about the slovenliness of certain businessmen, who are not satisfied with the findings of the Commission.’¹¹⁴ Professor Michael Tierney of Cumann na nGaedheal argued back against the Fianna Fáil criticisms by accusing them of being blinded by nationalism and their ‘only qualification for discussing such matters is that they are patriots and have the good of the country deep down in their hearts.’¹¹⁵ He disagreed with the attempts by Fianna Fáil to replace the commission arguing that there will be nothing better to replace it. These debates highlight that a concern of those taking a more careful approach to protectionism is the concern that cost of living would rise if greater protectionism was implemented. Cumann na nGaedheal’s concerns over potential negative economic consequences of protection,

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Ibid

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triumphed over any rigid commitment to revolutionary ideology. Cumann na nGaedheal also believed advocates of protectionism were blinded by their nationalism rather than by a realistic assessment of the economic situation facing Ireland.

Although this debate in 1928 that is being examined is about the merits of the Tariff Commission, it devolved into an argument about the merits of protection itself. Sean Goulding of Fianna Fáil argued that the lack of tariffs was responsible for two very important industries, the Cork Spinning and Weaving Factories being closed. He believed that the country is 'being flooded with materials from Scotland and England, which should have been made in Kilkenny.'¹¹⁶ He accepted the argument put forward by the other side of the house that greater protection would lead to a rise in the cost of living, arguing that 'if the cost of living did increase and if there were increased employment and increased circulation of money, it would not be a bad thing.'¹¹⁷ Gerald Boland of Fianna Fáil accused the executive council of working for the interests of British Imperialism and not Ireland. He recounted a personal experience of his working in, the iron industry. 'About twenty years ago there were three good repair shops in Dublin. I worked in one of them myself. There were numerous craftsmen of all descriptions employed, and I also know that the principal managers of these railways were people whose interests were centred more in Leeds than in Dublin or Ireland.'¹¹⁸ Boland accused the people who run the railways of being 'tools of the financial gangs in England, whose representatives in this House have, up to the present, dictated the policy of the Executive Council.'¹¹⁹ The Fianna Fáil opposition accused the Free State government of allowing a continuation of the pre-revolutionary period, by allowing Britain to maintain its control over the Irish economy.

The Independent TD John Good in reacting to the arguments put forward by Fianna Fáil, argued that several industries have already had tariffs applied to them and believed there were

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid

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only twenty to twenty-five industries left to which tariffs might be applied. He also argued that government intervention can be detrimental to the fiscal affairs of business. 'Do deputies realise what it means to a business to upset the fiscal conditions governing that industry? It means that the whole of the money that is invested in that industry may become useless and worthless.'¹²⁰ Arguing against needless state intervention because it could unsettle and even cause industries to no longer exist. He also pointed out that it has been 'unanimously realised in the house that tariffs will increase the cost of living.'¹²¹ George Bennett of Cumann na nGaedheal noted that 'there is only one conceivable way in which tariffs will not raise prices that I know of, and that is where conditions arise that the importer has no other market for his goods but the country he imports to. Otherwise, I think it is held by most economists that tariffs do raise prices.'¹²² Cumann na nGaedheal's former member of the Irish Unionist Alliance and ex British Army Major Bryan Cooper, reacted to Boland's earlier comments about the Irish railways being run by people whose interests were directed towards Leeds rather than Ireland by highlighting an experience he had in Italy. He claimed that he was getting a railway coach in Italy which had a high tariff and public transport controlled by the state, 'getting into the coach, the coach was made in Leeds. I assume that was since Leeds was able to supply the coach at a satisfactory price. Of course, Deputy Boland would have found another reason. He would have found that Signor Mussolini, the Prime Minister of Italy, was under the influence of the hidden hand and had no power of his own and no mind of his own, and that he moved at the actuation of England.'¹²³

Critical of the notion that because these materials are imported from England, it translated to English control over the nation. The Cumann na nGaedheal counter-revolution was being justified by claiming that tariffs caused a rise in the cost of living. There was also a denial that free trade equated to British economic control over Ireland, advanced by Cumann na nGaedheal's Cooper, despite the essence of the revolutionary doctrine stating the contrary. As John Regan noted 'the difference between the negation of the revolution and its elongation was to be an important source of friction in the emergent regime.'¹²⁴ These tensions developed during 1923 and 1927 as those adherents of revolutionary Griffith economics

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution*, pp 87

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clashed with the counter-revolutionary tariff sceptics of the Cumann na nGaedheal elite. The 1923 Committee's findings that protection could have an adverse effect on the economy, perhaps hardened the counter-revolutionaries scepticism of protectionism. The tensions came to a head with the later resignations of Walsh and Milroy, over the failures to implement tariffs. These resignations paved the way for those involved in negating the revolution to have greater control over the party going into the later years of the 1920's. However, Sean Milroy did rejoin the party in 1928 and secured election to the Irish Free State senate in 1928.

Chapter Four

In the summer of 1928, the government created the economic committee.¹²⁵ This committee brought the pro and anti-treaty parties together to discuss economic policy. The committee debated tariffs on flour, potentially to assist the Irish flour milling industry.¹²⁶ The Department of Finance outlined its opposition to tariffs on ground that they often led to 'inefficiency, higher prices and consumer discontent.'¹²⁷ Furthermore, tariff critics also argued that their implementation would reduce efficiency by eliminating competition in the market.¹²⁸ The Minister for Industry and Commerce was accused by Sean Lemass of saying 'we do not want inefficiency protected in this country.'¹²⁹ The Economic Committee issued two reports on the question of subsidies for wheat and tariffs on flour. Cumann na nGaedheal disagreed with the wheat subsidy arguing that 'from the point of view either of the farmer or of the nation there is no justification for any subsidy for wheat'.¹³⁰ On the question of a tariff on imported flour, a majority report from the committee also backed the Tariff Commission

¹²⁵ Mel Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy*, pp 206

¹²⁶ Memorandum for the Economic Committee 'Proposals for the encouragement of Home Production of wheat', 18 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/214/F/12).

¹²⁷ Economic Committee, Note on the proposal for the establishment of a wheat control board, (prepared by Finance), 19 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P 24/ 214/F/12).

¹²⁸ Mel Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy*, pp 207

¹²⁹ Dáil Éireann debate - Thursday, 22 Nov 1928 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1928-11-22/18/>

¹³⁰ Ibid

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of 1926's decision to reject a tariff on imported flour.¹³¹ Patrick Little of Fianna Fáil criticised the government's tariff policy in the debate over the Economic Committee in 1928, 'They have done nothing to build up the industries of the country, or very little, and the very things they have done have condemned them. The success which has been the result of their timid efforts, even in the matter of small things like furniture and the boot industry, is proof that if the same policy had been acted upon courageously and on a big scale this country would be in a different position to what it is.'¹³² He argued that there was success in the government's tariffs on small things like furniture and boots, but the government are refusing to implement tariffs on a wider scale. He argued that 'nothing has been done on a big scale which would go hand in hand with a policy of tariff protection.'¹³³

Mel Farrell argued that the 'key difference in the approach of Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil, was that Fianna Fáil were less interested in economic efficiency and more concerned with worker pay and conditions.'¹³⁴ Sean Lemass argued that 'the tariff would force the Irish mills to work at full capacity, thereby providing more workdays and better wages for existing workers.'¹³⁵ Where Cumann na nGaedheal policy seemed to be influenced by a determination not to intervene in the market, Fianna Fáil advocated for a brand of economic nationalism which attempted to appeal to ordinary workers.¹³⁶ Mel Farrell argued that 'Cumann na nGaedheal's outlook was in keeping with the laissez-faire economics of the roaring twenties'.¹³⁷ The Economic Committee was eventually wound down in 1929 with the two parties failing to agree over subsidies for wheat and flour tariffs. Patrick Belton who, expelled by Fianna Fáil in 1927 for taking a seat in the Dáil before the party had officially announced the end of its abstention policy, but rejoined the party later on as Minister for Agriculture, claimed in the 1927 Cumann na nGaedheal no confidence motion debate, he Cumann na nGaedheal because he felt that 'their economic and financial policy, is not

¹³¹ Irish Times, 4 May 1929

¹³² Dáil Éireann debate - Thursday, 22 Nov 1928 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1928-11-22/18/>

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ Mel Farrell, Party Politics in a New Democracy pp 209

¹³⁵ Dáil Éireann debate - Thursday, 22 Nov 1928 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1928-11-22/18/>

¹³⁶ Ibid pp 210

¹³⁷ Ibid

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following the national lines or the national doctrine preached by those who were the predecessors of those sitting on the Front Benches.’¹³⁸

This committee, despite its ultimate failings, is useful in order to understand the differences in ideology between the Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil parties. Cumann na nGaedheal’s ideological reluctance to implement tariffs of any real consequence was reflected in the ultimate failings of the committee. As Mel Farrell argued, although both parties shared similar origins in revolutionary Sinn Fein, Farrell argued that ‘Cumann na nGaedheal had inched to the right while claiming to be a ‘national party’ capable of reconciling the various national interests Fianna Fáil in contrast, had taken a stand for the marginalised in Irish society by pursuing policies that they believed would benefit small farmers and workers’.¹³⁹ In a review in 1928, Cumann na nGaedheal commanded a dominant position in government, surviving the no confidence motion, however this would soon change as economic recession was on the horizon. Around the end of 1928, economists made bleak predictions for 1929 as a potential economic crash loomed. The changing economic situation led to a worldwide scenario where countries began to adopt protectionist policies in order to combat the looming economic depression. This was the case in Ireland’s neighbour, Great Britain, where the Conservative Party who were rising in popularity in opposition begun to favour implementing tariffs. Britain’s orthodox economic thinking had been a big influence on Cumann na nGaedheal, however the economic crisis emerging brought about a change of thinking in Britain. Some Labour government ministers were reluctant to break with free trade and the Observer complained that ‘Britain had become decadent with its ‘long economic supremacy’ blinding it to the fact that times had changed.’¹⁴⁰ Labour was eventually defeated by the Conservative Party, who now strongly endorsed a policy of protective tariffs. Britain ended its dogmatic adherence to free trade afterwards.

The Free State government similarly faced wider calls to intervene in the economy by implementing protectionism. However, there is little evidence the government would deviate from their policies of the 1920’s. The cautious approach to protection remained and by the

¹³⁸ Dáil Debate, 16 Aug. 1927, vol. 20, no. 21, col. 1737

¹³⁹ Mel Farrell, Party Politics in a New Democracy pp 210

¹⁴⁰ Ibid pp 212

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1932 election, the state was an exception in that ‘it was ruled by Europe’s longest serving democratic government, and it could claim, with some exaggeration, to be one of the world’s last free trading nations.’¹⁴¹ Cosgrave remained reluctant to implement outright protection despite a worsening depression and his failures in tackling the worsening economic situation played into the hands of his enemies. Cosgrave addressed the Dail defending his parties’ policies against critics who were demanding more protection. He argued that ‘international conferences at Geneva had warned against the erection of trade barriers between countries.’¹⁴² Furthermore, Cosgrave described ‘self-sufficiency as a short-sighted policy and warned that the doctrine may indeed amount to recklessness if based on neglect to study world conditions’.¹⁴³ Despite the revolutionary ideology which favoured Irish self-sufficiency, Cosgrave in his own words rejected this as a flawed principle. To Cosgrave, the free trade arguments advanced by international conferences in Geneva had more merit than the teachings of Arthur Griffith. As the depression got worse however, Cumann na nGaedheal relented to an extent, the Finance Bill of 1930 was passed which implemented small protection measures. Sean T O’Kelly was very disappointed with the bill at its fifth stage arguing that ‘this bill merely leaves matters as they were.’¹⁴⁴ He argued that ‘the Minister (Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe) was a disciple for a long time of the late Arthur Griffith. He maintains, and his Party maintains, that they are following the Griffith tradition. But, if I know anything about Griffith’s economic education, he certainly will not follow the industrial and economic policy being pursued by the present Government in propounding Bills of this kind.’¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, expressing his disappointment with the bill he observes that ‘the small measure of protection that it gives is certainly not going to encourage industry. The Minister has rapidly gone away from the policy he preached for so many years, and that he learned, as some others of us did, from Griffith, For some reason that I do not know, he has gone away from that policy. The Government have not had the courage to adopt their own teaching.’¹⁴⁶

Cosgrave established a permanent Tariff Commission, in late 1930.¹⁴⁷ The Commission advocated for greater protection measures. Cosgrave however, advised that the reports

¹⁴¹ Ibid pp 228

¹⁴² Dáil Debates, vol. 36, col. 68, 19 Nov. 1930

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Dáil Éireann debate - Friday, 13 Jun 1930 Vol. 35 No. 9

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Dáil Debates, 19 November 1930

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‘should be examined before adoption and certainly not be adopted as a matter of course.’¹⁴⁸ By 1931, there were fifty-nine categories of goods subject to duties.¹⁴⁹ Subsequent passage of the November 1931 Customs Duties (Provisional Imposition) Act empowered the government to pass emergency charges to prevent the dumping of goods on the Irish market.¹⁵⁰ An Executive Council took powers under the Customs Duties (Provisional Imposition) Act to impose such duties as it might decide were ‘immediately necessary to prevent an expected dumping of goods or other threatened industrial injury’. Some duties were imposed on 20 November 1931.¹⁵¹ While agricultural industries up to this point was largely against protection, on the grounds that it would hinder their exporting, as they benefitted extensively from supplying its goods to Britain, export volumes and agricultural output prices fell which resulted in a greater desire for protection on their part.¹⁵² Rather than any ideological commitment to revolutionary tariffs, Cumann na nGaedheal only felt compelled to implement tariffs in the case of emergency. The wider implementation of tariffs across Europe to cope with the depression also influenced Cumann na nGaedheal to implement some tariffs.

Sean T. O’Kelly remarked in an unemployment debate on December 1931, ‘The President will remember, I am sure, what I remember, and what the Vice-President ought to remember, that the old Sinn Fein gospel was to get control of Ireland's destinies, to make it an industrial country, to develop industries here, to give employment to the people, to grow our own food, make our own clothes and boots, to stop the importation of those goods that can be manufactured here, as long as there are people here willing and able to make them, with a Government in charge that would encourage industry.’¹⁵³ He remarked that this government have negated the old Sinn Fein gospel formulated by Arthur Griffith, ‘I certainly find it difficult to understand how the Vice-President of the Free State, who has been Minister for ten years, could tear up, as it were, all the teachings of Griffith, if we do not even go back any further. He now tears up all the things he was taught and read as a young man and that he himself endeavoured to teach for a good many years. He tears them all up now and throws

¹⁴⁸ Mel Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy* pp 210

¹⁴⁹ Mary E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity*, Syracuse University Press (1992) pp 46.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁵¹ *Dáil Debates*, 4 November 1931

¹⁵² *Ibid*

¹⁵³ *Dáil Éireann debate Thursday, 17 Dec 1931*

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them aside and adopts the British Empire gospel of Free Trade as a suitable gospel for the Free State.¹⁵⁴ He accused the government of not making any effort to implement Griffith's economic doctrine into practice, 'fact is that they have not made so far as I can see, any sincere effort, to put that policy, so well described by Griffith, into operation.'¹⁵⁵

Cumann na nGaedheal Minister for Agriculture Patrick Hogan replied in the 1931 debate that 'I would prefer Buckingham Palace; I would much prefer it. As far as I am concerned, living in this country cut off from the rest of the world and listening to the sort of drivel you hear in this place, and which we will be treated to under certain circumstances, would be too much for me.'¹⁵⁶ Furthermore he accused the opposition of 'knowing nothing about business; the drivel they talked to-day is futile nonsense and I refuse to take it seriously. I will not enter a discussion as to tariff reform and free trade. I will say this. I would rather have one preference from England economically than all your tariffs; one preference on one big item in agricultural exports would give more employment and produce more prosperity in this country than all the schemes advocated from the opposite benches put together. I have no fear either that if we succeed in getting any such preference, we will thereby cause any injury to our nationalism.'¹⁵⁷ Frank Aiken accused Hogan of sneering at Griffith's policy, 'the Minister for Agriculture has damned impudence to get up in this assembly after climbing into power without ever doing anything except running around pretending he was backing Griffith's policy. He has damned impudence sneering at Griffith's policy.'¹⁵⁸ Here, the Cumann na nGaedheal minister plainly outlined his opposition to tariffs in favour of close co-operation with and a trade preference from Britain and the rest of the world, which he believed was necessary for the Irish economy.

Richard Mulcahy of Cumann na nGaedheal in response to opposition asking what has changed from the days of Griffith, argued in the Dail in 1931, 'a very definite thing has happened. We have entered a treaty with the British people for international co-operation for the purpose of bettering our people here and bettering the British people in Britain because

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

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we have always held that the policy of the British in the past towards us was doing themselves as much damage as it was doing us. We are today attending to our business here in a spirit of co-operation with the British, particularly, with whom we are so closely knitted economically, as well as with any other people with whom we have dealings, and we know no better way of improving the condition of this country than to work in a spirit of co-operation with the British.’¹⁵⁹ Mulcahy believed that contrary to Griffith policy, close co-operation between Britain and Ireland, of whom Ireland was apparently closely connected to economically, was the only way the economic condition of Ireland could be improved. Tom Derrig of Fianna Fail observed in the debate that ‘not alone has he departed, as Deputy O’Kelly pointed out, from the policy of Griffith, but he has departed from the policy of every other Irish national leader who believed that the first duty of a National Government should be to build up our own industry and our own country, and to get away from the existing system forced upon us by the Imperial Parliament within the last century—a policy which involved the ruin and depopulation of our country.’¹⁶⁰

The policies of the revolutionary leaders established that the economy of Ireland could be improved by itself without any foreign influence. Archie Cassidy of the Labour Party, in an unemployment relief bill debate asked Minister for Education ‘if what was known as the democratic programme of the First Dáil has been lived up to, or if the Government ran away from it?’ Cassidy argued they (the government) ‘have not even endeavoured to live up to it’.¹⁶¹ The ideology of the Cumann na nGaedheal counter-revolution was that the British were necessary allies for the economic betterment of Ireland. The party also stood accused of failing to live up to the principles of the Democratic Programme. Cumann na nGaedheal’s reluctance to implement protection served as a negation of the revolution and Tom Derrig’s claims that the party have departed from the policies of Griffith ring true. As evidenced by the failings of the 1928 Economic Committee and Richard Mulcahy, Patrick Hogan and W.T Cosgrave’s statements in the Dail about the inefficacy of tariffs and the necessity of close co-operation with Britain.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

¹⁶¹ Dáil Éireann debate - Wednesday, 2 Dec 1931 Vol. 40 No. 19

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Conclusion

While much of Irish historiography has emphasised the idea of democratic nation building by the Cumann na nGaedheal party. A narrative of supposed Free State democrat's vs anti-treaty Republican dictators emerged, which has penetrated much political discourse about the civil war period. The counter-revolution argument advanced by Regan and others, represented a unique approach to understanding this period of Irish history. It can be shown that Irish history is not black or white and in fact complicated and muddled with ambiguities. Both sides of the treaty divide certainly had both democratic and anti-democratic tendencies. The pro-treaty side certainly did, thanks to their policies which actively sought a reversal of the revolutionary dream. The dreams and hopes of millions for a better world were shut down by Cumann na nGaedheal whose pessimistic view of what Ireland could be, shattered any of the optimism that preceded them. In the period covered in this thesis we have seen Irish nationalist politics move from 'revolution to settlement through the agency of counter-revolution,' to quote Regan. The ideas of the revolution were firmly expressed through the economic policies of the revolutionaries Arthur Griffith, James Connolly, Padraig Pearse and others. These economic policies received a democratic mandate with the electoral victory of Griffith's Sinn Féin in 1918. The party manifesto committed to upholding the principles of the revolutionaries by demanding full economic and political independence from Britain. The socialist in tone Democratic Programme of 1919 formulated by Thomas Johnson, spelled out a deeply radical vision of an Ireland which was committed to developing Irish industries to their full potential. The revolution was characterised by a unification of people of a variety of different classes of Irish society. However, while many were united over a desire for political independence, not everyone shared the same economic outlook. Socialists such as Connolly and capitalist sympathisers such as Griffith reconciled their differences in order to fight for independence. The Sinn Fein party's membership reflected this unity, and it had a close relationship with the Labour Party. This relationship was reflected with the adoption of the Democratic Programme by the First Dail.

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As was shown with the 1920 debate over the bill of 'Protection of Irish Industries,' there was disagreement in the debate over protectionism through a potential boycott of British goods, with future Cumann na nGaedheal deputy Joseph McBride likening protection to coercion. Hiding in plain sight were counterrevolutionaries waiting to reverse the results of the revolution where possible. In the revolutionary period, British goods were successfully boycotted under the orders of the Dail. Ernest Blythe who proposed the decree evidently only believed a British boycott was necessary under certain conditions. In the post-revolutionary period, little attempt was made to boycott British goods and Ireland was promptly flooded with British goods. Previously, the British Empire was viewed with suspicion by many revolutionaries, later the tone changed to conciliation with Britain as pragmatism came to rule the day. This stood in stark contrast to the principles of Griffith and Connolly who stressed the need to break the economic link with Britain. The revolution reached its culmination with the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1921. The Anglo-Irish treaty was welcomed by Griffith because it gave economic scope for Ireland to restrict trade as it wished. However, the deaths of Collins and Griffith, led to the leadership of pro-treaty side being usurped by conservative reactionaries who deemed the ideas of the revolution unrealistic and proceeded to minimise the significance of the Democratic Programme. The bourgeois politicians such as Kevin O'Higgins, who triumphed in the counter-revolution labelled the programme as 'communist doctrine' and denied its constitutional significance.

The Cumann na nGaedheal party was created to unite the pro-treaty elite into a national party capable of reconciling all national interests after the turbulent and divisive civil war. The Cumann na nGaedheal elite showcased a conservativeness and this was reflected in the new party's constitution of 1923 which represented an extremely watered-down version of the Democratic Programme. It was non-committal and lacking in hard policies or a radical vision for the future. Rather than committing to a policy of an outright safeguarding of Irish industries, the constitution had 'suitable industries' as its clause instead, leaving their policy on protectionism open to interpretation. If the Democratic Programme was the defining revolutionary text, the Cumann na nGaedheal party constitution was the seminal programme and statement of the impending counter-revolution. It is evident that Cumann na nGaedheal, from an examination of the debates did not hold the Democratic Programme in high regard and it received very little mention by them. Through 1923 to their electoral defeat in 1932, the Cumann na nGaedheal party elite showed reluctance to implement tariffs, despite it being

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one of the key economic principles of the revolution. Griffith's protectionism, while still having many advocates in the Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party and much of the party organisation, had been ruled out by the elite at the April 1923 party convention. The reports of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee of 1923 came down heavily on the side of free trade. Kevin O'Higgins declared countering the charge that the government were betraying a vital aspect of Griffith's revolutionary economic testament 'The propagandist writings of any one man cannot be accepted simply as revealed truth, requiring no further investigations, something that must be accepted forever as beyond question, beyond doubt, beyond the need of examination.'¹⁶² In J.J Lee's view, The Fiscal Inquiry Committee of 1923 seemed to be a major investigation of industrial policy, but Lee maintained it was 'arranged in such a way as to secure a safe majority for dogmatic free traders and provided little of the additional investigation O'Higgins proclaimed necessary.'¹⁶³

The party prioritised the interests of wealthy farmers who railed against tariffs because they argued it affected their ability to export their goods. Cosgrave stressed the importance of agriculture. He believed not only that agriculture was 'the basic industry of the country, but the agricultural population constitutes the foundation and the source of our racial stock'.¹⁶⁴ As Michael Laffan argued, even if these economic policies bore the marks of being grounded in economic theory, they also happened to suit most Cumann na nGaedheal voters; the party drew much of its core electoral support from the urban middle class and the more substantial farmers.¹⁶⁵ As T. K Daniel observed, 'by 1929, 92 per cent of all Ireland's exports went to Britain, and 78 per cent of her imports came from Britain. The Free State provided much needed agricultural produce and in turn imported a glut of British industrial goods and raw materials.'¹⁶⁶ Prices remained determined by the British market, post-revolution, which was highly competitive and were thus beyond the control of any Irish agency. All that could be done was to help the farmer to minimize his costs.'¹⁶⁷ Ireland remained in the British informal empire with the British and Irish economic relationship strong as a result of the free trade policies. The Cumann na nGaedheal party also frequently cited concerns over the rise of

¹⁶² Brian Maye, Arthur Griffith pp 380

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Laffan, Michael. Judging W.T. Cosgrave (p. 223). Royal Irish Academy. Kindle Edition.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Mike Cronin, John Regan, Politics of Independence pp 151

¹⁶⁷ T.K Daniel, Griffith on his Noble Head, Irish Economic and Social History Vol. 3 (1976), pp 62

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a potential cost of living as a reason for not implementing a tariff. What tariffs were implemented; they were designed to hinder trade with Britain as little as possible. In general, the government's approach was to intervene in the economy as little as possible. Economic policy was often determined, not by the government, but by commissions of experts such as the Commission on Agriculture, the Fiscal Inquiry Committee and the Banking Commission. The economic promises of the revolution were undermined by the Cumann na nGaedheal government's somewhat dogmatic adherence to laissez-faire economics. The failure to live up to revolutionary ideals was reflected in the departures of Sean Milroy, J.J Walsh and others who accused them of allowing economic policy to be dictated by Britain. Balanced budgets and socio-economic orthodoxy advanced by English pundits became the dominant ideology in the 'laissez-faire roaring twenties' as Mel Farrell argued. Minister for Industry and Commerce, Patrick McGilligan, remarked in a Dáil debate on unemployment in 1924 that 'There are certain limited funds at our disposal. People may have to die in this country and may have to die through starvation.'¹⁶⁸

The Labour Party led by Thomas Johnson supported the treaty and were the official opposition to Cumann na nGaedheal. However, much like today, their opposition to the government was ineffective and weak. Adherence to Griffith's economic policy proved to be a winning formula for the newly formed anti-treaty party Fianna Fáil, who adopted some of Labour's policies and defeated Cumann na nGaedheal in the election in 1932. Brian Girvin argued that Fianna Fáil in their election campaigns 'explicitly appropriated Griffith's economic policy, spiced with de Valera's own social policy which was presented as the essence of 1916 social doctrine'.¹⁶⁹ Mike Cronin argued that 'Fianna Fáil was turning its back on a decade of harsh reality in the economic sphere and would instead attempt to reinvigorate the golden dream of the revolutionary era.'¹⁷⁰ Throughout the Dail debates from 1927, Fianna Fáil frequently evoked the name of Griffith and the words spoken by him in their criticisms of the government's refusal to implement protectionism. Cronin's argument was predicated on the fact that he believed Cumann na nGaedheal rejected much of the revolutionary ideology. He argued that, in contrast, Fianna Fáil positioned themselves as those who would fulfil the lost revolution by their commitment to implement tariffs and break

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1924-10-30/15/>

¹⁶⁹ B. Girvin, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 106

¹⁷⁰ Mike Cronin, *Regan, The Politics of Independence*, pp 153

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Ireland out of what he termed the 'informal empire'. Girvin argued that 'Fianna Fáil's charge against Cumann na nGaedheal was that their economic policies, however possibly well-intentioned, allowed economic policy to be formulated outside the state.'¹⁷¹ Fianna Fáil's strategy essentially called for the economic policy to be nationalised, in contrast to the *laissez faire* approach of Cumann na nGaedheal which believed in as little government intervention in the economy as possible.

Sean Lemass, the new Fianna Fáil Minister for Industry and Commerce remarked after the election victory that 'we know from experience that the benefits were confined to Britain and that its effects in Ireland were wholly bad. It destroyed our industries and struck down our population by more than half, within less than a century. The agitation for the protection of industries, therefore, is identical with the struggle for the preservation of our Nationality.'¹⁷² Lemass argued that the struggle for protectionism is synonymous with the struggle for Irish freedom, as revolutionary Sinn Féin under Griffith had argued. He blamed free trade for the destruction of Irish industries and the rise of emigration. Free trade, he believed, benefitted Britain solely, at the expense of Ireland's underdevelopment and suffering. Fianna Fáil proceeded in their attempts to break the link between Britain and Ireland, pursuing the revolutionary golden dream of self-sufficiency between 1932 to 1938 which was largely rejected by Cumann na nGaedheal. However, by the Second World War, Anglo-Irish relations were restored after agreements between the Free State and Britain in 1938, Fianna Fáil conceded that, to quote Cronin 'that pragmatic profit, even if that meant a deal with the devil, was more important to Ireland than the revolutionary dream.'¹⁷³

From this point on, the socio-economic differences that separated Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal (later Fine Gael) were minimised as both parties successfully oversaw the negation of the revolutionary dream. As James Connolly argued 'if you remove the English army to-morrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, 'unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule

¹⁷¹ B. Girvin, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 106

¹⁷² Sean Lemass and the Nadir of Protectionism', *Economic and Social Review*, 41:3 (2010), 272.

¹⁷³ Mike Cronin, John Regan, *Politics of Independence* pp 162

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you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country.’¹⁷⁴ Neither of the parties attempted to seriously break the economic link between Britain and Ireland by destroying the capitalist system which was ultimately responsible for the exploitation of Ireland. The Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael and later Fianna Fáil continuation of the inegalitarian economic system imposed on Ireland by Britain has reflected a negation of the revolutionary dream of equality and national sovereignty. Ireland would remain firmly embedded and subservient to international capital by subsequent governments.

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