

Defining the Nation: Ireland and Australia 1916-1922*

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Introduction

In January 1922, just after Dáil Éireann voted to approve the Treaty, delegates of the Irish diaspora assembled in Paris at the Irish Race Convention, an event that had been planned many months before, at a time when the Irish at home and abroad appeared united and single minded in their support of Ireland's struggle for self-determination. But the convention quickly became a "hot-bed of intrigue" as members of the Irish delegation, comprising representatives of both sides in the Treaty debate, attempted to enlist the support of the overseas delegates for their side of the argument.¹

The leader of the Australian delegation was Father Maurice O'Reilly, a 55 year old Corkman who had emigrated to Australia in 1892. Over six feet tall and a master of rhetoric, he was widely regarded in Australia, particularly by the Orange Order with whom he frequently engaged in fiery debate, as an uncompromising and belligerent Irishman – Sydney's answer to Archbishop Daniel Mannix. And like his former class-mate from St Colman's College, Fermoy, O'Reilly frequently propounded the notion of "Australia first, Empire second".

During the convention Father Maurice O'Reilly had a run-in with the anti-Treaty Irish delegate, Mary MacSwiney, the sister of Terence MacSwiney, the late lord mayor of Cork, who died on hunger strike in 1920 at Brixton prison. Dr Herbert Moran, another Australian delegate, described Mary MacSwiney in his memoirs published in 1939:

During all that week I never saw Miss MacSwiney smile. She was the incarnation of a people's hatred for the oppressor. The memory of all the massacres and famines blazed perpetually in her eyes. Her speech was a scalding infusion from all the bitter herbs that ever grew in the crevices of suffering and misfortune.²

Moran gives this account of her clash with O'Reilly:

Quite early in the proceedings our Father O'Reilly found conflict, and in a very characteristic way. He rose to a point of order. We could not agree, said he firmly, to the terms of a certain motion then under discussion because it conflicted with the loyalty we Australians owed and felt as British citizens. Here was the "rebel" of many a Sydney meeting, one whom highly-placed citizens in the Commonwealth would have liked to deport, zealously defending his British citizenship! Mary MacSwiney rent him asunder with her disdain. In acid terms, pointing her finger scornfully at him, she declared to the world that Doctor O'Reilly could never understand the Irish question "because he viewed it solely from the standpoint of a British Imperialist."³

Given Dr Moran's description of Mary MacSwiney, it would be easy to dismiss her attack on O'Reilly as the rant of an extremist. Yet she was right in one respect – O'Reilly did not understand the Irish question, at least as it was posed in 1922, for as Seller and Yeatman observed in their satirical history of England, *1066 and All That*, William Gladstone had "spent his declining years trying to guess the answer to the Irish Question; unfortunately, whenever he was getting warm, the Irish secretly changed the Question".⁴ But was she correct when she accused him of viewing it from the standpoint of a British Imperialist? In seeking to

* A paper delivered to the 11th annual *Shamrock in the Bush* conference of the Canberra & District Historical Society, 8 June 2003

answer that question, this paper examines the influence of the Irish struggle for independence on the competition in early twentieth-century Australia to define the nation and its relationship to the British Empire.

The National Question in Ireland and Australia

Patrick O'Farrell has identified the Irish Australian push for a distinctly Australian identity as the major factor in the development of Australian nationalism: "The distinctive Australian identity was not born in the bush, nor at Anzac Cove: these were merely situations for its expression. No; it was born in Irishness protesting against the extremes of Englishness."⁵ [Although there were clearly identifiable geographical concentrations](#) of Irish in Australia, particularly within [the cities of Sydney and Melbourne and in some rural areas, Irish ghettos](#) did not [develop in the way that](#) characterised Hibernian [settlement in the United States](#).⁶ As well, Irish immigrants tended to discard much of their folk culture as they merged into the patterns of society around them, displaying it only when the occasion demanded, such as on St Patrick's Day. Nevertheless, one of the features that distinguished the Irish was their religion: in Australia the Irish were mostly Catholics and Catholics were mostly Irish by birth or descent. Furthermore, Irish Catholics were mostly on the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder.⁷ [Feelings of hostility towards the Irish because of their class](#), their race and especially their [religion](#) led the [Irish](#) in Australia to hold onto [their](#) distinctive [identity](#), maintaining it [as a defence against a society in which they were not fully accepted](#). In Patrick O'Farrell's pithy phrase, "the Irish banded together to defend themselves against the charge that they tend to band together."⁸

Despite harbouring a sense of being a persecuted minority, the Catholic Irish in Australia did not aspire to separate their country from Britain. They were as one with their fellow Australians in recognising the Empire as the guarantor of their security as a white enclave in a potentially hostile region.⁹ So much was demonstrated in 1914. Behind the façade of sentimentality, youthful bravado and a zest for adventure that appeared to motivate so many young Australians to rally to the Empire, Australia's participation in the great European war was at its core pragmatic. Britain's defeat would have left Australia's future at the mercy of a victorious and expansionist German Empire, which already had a foothold in the region through its colonies in New Guinea and the islands to the north.

Nevertheless, though not separatists, the Catholic Irish in Australia did [demand](#), in Patrick O'Farrell's words, ["a definition of Australia and of being Australian which was broad and flexible enough to include them as they were"](#).¹⁰ Their definition involved a distinctive Australian national identity within the British Empire, a concept that corresponded with constitutional nationalism in Ireland under the leadership of John Redmond, which "embraced the idea of a dual sense of national identity that was capable of embracing both British patriotism and Irish nationalism."¹¹ This congruence between Australian and Redmondite nationalism was no coincidence as John Redmond had been much influenced by Australia when he visited the country in 1883. Indeed, both he and his brother William brought home Australian brides. But in both the United Kingdom and Australia the idea of a dual sense of nationality was abhorrent to imperialists, to whom the Empire was absolute and indivisible, admitting of no shared allegiance.

In Great Britain this view was strongly articulated by Arthur Balfour,¹² who in opposing Home Rule rejected the idea of an Irish nation, believing there was not "sufficient ground for the separate nationalism implicit in Home Rule". He regarded Irish nationalism as the product of "the tragic coincidences of Irish history", which gave rise to its anti-British tradition.¹³ According to Nicholas Mansergh, "[I]n Balfour's view, there was and there could be no

middle ground between Union and separation. ... Either Union stood intact as part of the constitution or the political entity that was the United Kingdom disintegrated.”¹⁴

On the other side of the world, imperialists concerned that “a systematic attempt was being made in Australia to undermine the unity of Empire” established a branch of the British Empire League in 1902 with the motto “One People, One Destiny”.¹⁵ In 1905 the League was instrumental in having May 24 designated as Empire Day, a day on which the achievements – moral, political, imperial – of the British people would be celebrated. The Catholic archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Patrick Moran, however, dismissed Empire Day, with its emphasis on the Union Jack and imperial unity, and its elevation of primary allegiance to Britain and the Empire as a test of loyalty, claiming that its promoters “were many of them avowed enemies of the Catholic Church”.¹⁶

In 1911 a Catholic education conference held in Sydney resolved on the motion of Father Maurice O’Reilly that Catholic schools would celebrate May 24 as Australia Day rather than Empire Day. This they did with displays of the Australian flag, the singing of *Advance Australia Fair* and addresses on Australia first.

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war, therefore, the national issue in Ireland and Australia cleaved along similar lines – imperial exclusivity vs dual nationalism. In Ireland, the introduction of the Home Rule Bill in 1912 gave the debate a sharpened focus. But it was of more than academic interest to Australians, for its outcome would have a bearing on their own struggle to define Australia’s place within the Empire. As a result, the Home Rule debate became enmeshed with the domestic sectarian issue, which at that time had become excited by the introduction into the New South Wales parliament of a bill to allow pupils at Catholic primary schools to compete for state bursaries to pay for their secondary education. At a meeting at the Sydney Town Hall on 14 March 1912 to protest the British Government’s announcement of its intention to introduce a Home Rule bill, a banner on the platform proclaimed “Mark the men who support bursaries to Roman Catholic schools”, and William Robson MLC in his speech against Home Rule raised the subject of the Bursaries Bill claiming that the Government was giving in to the unreasonable demands of the Catholic Church which he alleged was “trying to get hold of educational powers”.¹⁷ Over the next ten years the intermingling of domestic and Irish affairs was to become a feature of the debate between the Irish Catholic minority and the British Protestant majority.

The Easter Rising

In 1914 the outbreak of war brought a truce in the sectarian conflict in Australia. Like many of their cousins in Ireland, who answered the call to arms issued by John Redmond at Woodenbridge, Irish Catholics in Australia rallied to the defence of the Empire and enlisted roughly in proportion to their numbers in the population. They saw the war as an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to both Australia and the Empire. For a while, it seemed to work. At the Orange Demonstration on 12 July 1915 W. T. Kench declared, “This was not the time to indulge in sectarianism. Roman Catholic men were fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in the trenches”.¹⁸ But the truce lasted only twenty months; it was shattered by events in Ireland on Easter Monday 1916.

When news of the rising first reached Australia it was greeted with angry disbelief by both sides of the religious divide. The immediate reaction of most Irish Catholic leaders in Australia was to condemn the rebellion as iniquitous and without popular support. Even Archbishop Mannix initially described the rising as deplorable and its leaders as misguided.¹⁹ However, Catholic condemnation was often tempered by moderate criticism of England’s uneven treatment of Unionists and Nationalists and a call for restraint on the part of the

British authorities in dealing with the leaders of the rising. Such equivocation was regarded with suspicion by many Protestants, a suspicion that was confirmed when Catholic criticism of British policy in Ireland intensified after the military authorities began to execute the leaders.

In Ireland the experience was much the same. Like their Australian cousins, constitutional nationalists had supported the allied cause for pragmatic reasons. According to John Ellis, the war provided an opportunity for Ireland to be reconciled with itself and with Britain: "this constitutionalist blood-sacrifice would produce a united and self-governing Ireland within the embrace of the British Empire."²⁰ As in Australia, Catholic Ireland at first condemned the rising, but as the British exacted retribution so too did sympathy for their cause grow. Lloyd George's plan for immediate Home Rule descended into farce that further damaged the Irish Party and John Redmond. After Redmond had exhausted his political capital to secure his party's endorsement of the proposal Unionist intransigence prevented the British Government from delivering that which Lloyd George had promised. Support for the once dominant Irish Party thereafter collapsed, especially after the party failed to prevent the passage of legislation extending conscription to Ireland. It was never implemented, but the damage had been done. At the 1918 general election Sinn Féin made almost a clean sweep of Catholic Ireland.

Conscription

In Australia after the rising Protestants responded swiftly and bitterly to Catholic criticism of Britain's actions in Ireland, exposing the fragility of the interdenominational comity that had been manifest in the early years of the war. These tensions increased later in the year following the defeat of the first conscription referendum when Prime Minister Hughes and his stunned supporters blamed the Irish Catholic community for the referendum's loss. The perceived role of the Irish Catholic vote in humiliating Empire loyalists in the referendum was to become the occasion of some of the most vitriolic attacks ever made on Australian Catholics. But the reality was that in 1916 Catholic voters were divided in their opinions and did not vote en bloc, while the Catholic hierarchy, most of whom personally supported conscription, publicly adopted a neutral stance.²¹ But it was precisely this neutrality and lack of enthusiasm for conscription that so outraged many Protestants who considered "the war had religious significance, that it was a moral crusade from which no citizen might excuse himself."²² In those terms, the Catholic Church's official silence was a clear breach of its moral and patriotic duty. And, to many Protestants, the fact that some Catholic clergy and Catholic newspapers had made anti-conscription statements proved that the Catholic Church was not only derelict in its duty, it was positively disloyal.

A poignant illustration of the bitter feeling that had soured relations between the Irish Catholic and British Protestant communities concerns the death of Les Darcy. Darcy, a Catholic of Irish descent, had captured the imagination of the Australian sporting public with his brief but spectacular rise to the highest levels of the boxing world. However, as a result of the heightened emotions of the times, he was transformed from a sporting hero into a symbol of the divisiveness tearing at the social fabric of the country. Darcy's clandestine departure from Australia on the eve of the 1916 referendum to fight for the world title in America, when men of military age were not permitted to leave the country without the Government's consent, attracted much publicity and criticism. At the instigation of Australian boxing entrepreneurs, he was banned from fighting where ever he went in America, and after six months without a bout, he became seriously ill and died. To Irish Catholics he was a victim of the machinations of bigots, politicians and businessmen, while to many British Protestants he was a coward and a shirker, typical of his race and creed. In an act of solidarity and defiance, members of the Irish Catholic community rallied in order to show their detractors how

strongly they rejected these slanders. More than 100,000 people visited the funeral parlour in George Street, Sydney to view his body, and tens of thousands lined the streets as the funeral cortege travelled from St Joseph's, Edgecliff to Central Station from where it proceeded to his home town of Maitland where 40,000 turned out for his burial.²³

Archbishop Mannix stirred up more anti-Catholic animus when in January 1917 he described the war as “an ordinary trade war”, sometimes misreported by his opponents as “a sordid trade war”.²⁴ But it was the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, the rotund and pious Michael Kelly, who put the issue of Catholic disloyalty beyond doubt. Whereas Mannix could be dismissed as a renegade and an extremist, Kelly was a well-known supporter of the war effort and a founding vice-president of the Universal Service League, an organisation that promoted conscription. Yet during the referendum campaign of 1917 Kelly publicly urged a No vote, because he feared the military authorities intended to conscript seminarians and teaching brothers.²⁵ And in May 1918 he issued a pastoral letter linking continued Catholic support for the war with a resolution of the troubles in Ireland and of the education question in Australia. Protestants were outraged. The *Methodist* in its report on the pastoral letter concluded: “the conviction is strengthening all round that Roman Catholicism is anti-loyal and anti-British, and must not in any way be subsidised by public funds.”²⁶ It added threateningly that “disgruntled Irishmen are simply impossible and should be dealt with as open enemies.”²⁷

Arrest of the Sinn Feiners

Protestant claims of Irish Catholic disloyalty received a boost when on 17 June 1918 police in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane arrested seven Irish Australian supporters of Sinn Fein who were suspected of conspiring with Irish revolutionaries in America to assist the German war effort. Their arrests prompted an initial outcry from Irish Catholics around the country. A prisoners' relief committee, under the chairmanship of Father Maurice O'Reilly, was established. But, rather than put the men on trial, the Government appointed Justice John Harvey of the New South Wales Supreme Court to inquire into the affair. To Catholics the arrests proved once again that Hughes was persecuting them. Not for a moment did they believe that the allegations might be true.

In fact, the authorities did have reason to be concerned as to the activities of some of the internees. In 1916 the Counter Espionage Bureau had been alerted to pro-Irish activities in Australia by a letter, intercepted by British intelligence, which referred to events and people here. Thereafter, the Bureau undertook surveillance of the Irish National Association and some of its members, intercepting mail and, in March 1918, raiding homes in Sydney and Melbourne. Armed with documentary evidence collected in this way, the heads of the intelligence services reported to the Government that Irish activists were assisting Germany in the war in order to achieve Irish independence.²⁸ Further raids were ordered in May, leading to the arrest of the seven men in June. Although a number of priests had also been under surveillance, no action was to be taken against them because of a directive issued by Commonwealth authorities.²⁹ Father Patrick Tuomey later wrote to his sister, “Needless to say, if they were game, I would have gone too, as I was the chief offender.”³⁰

The evidence presented to the inquiry disclosed the existence within the Irish National Association of an organised group which had been in contact with members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and which had been sending money to America to be forwarded to Germany to purchase arms for the Irish independence movement. It is not surprising then that there were no follow up protest meetings. Irish Catholic opinion leaders were prepared to criticise Britain's mishandling of Ireland, but they were not prepared to condone collaboration with Germany.

Justice Harvey conducted the inquiry with proper regard to legal formality, thereby avoiding the prospect that it would become a ~~witch-hunt~~ witch-hunt against the Irish Catholic community. In limiting the inquiry to the evidence before him and in making clear his belief that the actions of the men were not supported by the wider Irish Catholic community, the judge no doubt did the country a service at a very difficult time, but, according to Patrick O'Farrell, he was not informed of some of the activities in which the men were engaged, including operating a training camp in the Blue Mountains.³¹ Nevertheless, the judge found that there was sufficient evidence before him to justify the continued detention of the men.³² When they were released after the war, they were enthusiastically welcomed at a meeting of the Irish National Association at St Patrick's in the city.³³

At about this time, Father Patrick Tuomey, was charged with contravening the *War Precaution Regulations* by encouraging disloyalty to the British Empire in a lecture which he had given at the Paddington Town Hall in September 1918. During the lecture he had been critical of England's treatment of Ireland. Although the speech was no more than a recitation of the usual indictments against England's governance of Ireland, a subject on which Tuomey had spoken publicly many times before, the magistrate convicted the priest and fined him £30. In an article headed "The RC Menace", *The Methodist*, after referring to the prosecution of Father Tuomey, commented, "That the influence of the church makes for disloyalty and trouble is no longer open for question."³⁴

Both sides of the religious divide became organised. The Catholic Federation had been established before the war, largely to agitate the state aid issue.³⁵ In August 1917 a Protestant Federation was also formed. Its purpose was to "conserve and preserve the rights and liberties possessed by us under the British flag",³⁶ and its principal objective was "To maintain loyalty to the Throne, the unity of the Empire, and to promote the national development of Australia." The platform of the Protestant Federation exemplified the association of Protestantism, Empire loyalty and anti-Catholicism to which a large section of the Protestant community then subscribed.

On both sides, the rhetoric increasingly evoked the struggle in Ireland. Some Catholic leaders began to exhort Australian Catholics to adopt "the Sinn Fein spirit". At a rally in support of Irish independence held at Richmond racecourse on 6 November 1917 attended by over 100,000 people, Archbishop Mannix said:

You in Australia are Sinn Feiners, and more luck to you. To you Australia is first and the Empire second. There are a great many people who will tell you that that is sedition who will tell you that I am disloyal. I am very glad indeed that my type of loyalty is different from theirs. I am very glad that if I am loyal to the Empire, my loyalty, such as it is does not prevent me from being loyal to Australia, my adopted country, and Ireland, the land of my birth. And you Australians, being Sinn Feiners yourselves in the sense that I have explained can sympathise with those in Ireland who are determined to wrest from English hands the government of their own country, and set up in Ireland people who will govern Ireland with Irish ideals and with Irish interests.³⁷

To many Australians, particularly those already fearful of Roman domination, an evocation of "the Sinn Fein spirit" was a call to violence and revolution, a call to emulate those who were opposed to Britain and the Empire. And they were right, for contrary to Mannix's exhortation, the true Sinn Féin spirit had no place for the Empire. But amongst the Catholic Irish in Australia that was little understood or best left unsaid.

The gap between Australian rhetoric and Irish reality was demonstrated during the Australasian Irish Race Convention in Melbourne in November 1919 when two thousand delegates representing the Irish in Australia and New Zealand assembled in the Melbourne Auditorium. While the speakers were unanimous in criticising British misgovernment of Ireland and in affirming Ireland's right to choose its own form of government, there was no express acknowledgement that the Irish people might have already made their choice on 21 January 1919 when their elected representatives meeting as Dáil Éireann had declared Ireland's independence and ratified the Irish Republic. In fact the "R" word was hardly mentioned, and certainly not in the context of the convention's endorsement of Irish separatism. Mannix came the closest when he said, "We are here ... to support Ireland's claims as expressed at the last general election, and to support her chosen leader Eamon de Valera." But, the convention was a carefully stage-managed event designed to demonstrate Irish Australian solidarity with their cousins in Ireland at a time when the War of Independence was escalating – open division would have been disastrous. So the resolutions were drafted in a form acceptable to both Sinn Féin separatists and constitutional nationalists, including the convention chairman T. J. Ryan.³⁸

A Veritable Hurricane of Sectarianism

The second half of the 1910s had seen sectarianism plumb new depths in Australian society. But it was in the following year, 1920, the same year that saw the escalation of the War of Independence with the introduction of the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries, that some of the most notorious incidents in the whole history of sectarianism in Australia occurred. These incidents include the deportation of Father Charles Jerger, the Sr Liguori affair, the arrest of Archbishop Mannix on the high seas by a British destroyer and the expulsion from parliament of Hugh Mahon for criticising British rule in Ireland. It is worth recalling these episodes to get a sense of what it must have been like for those living at the time.

The deportation of Fr Charles Jerger

Father Charles Jerger was born in Germany in 1869. When he was six, he emigrated with his family to England and from there to Australia where he joined the Passionist order. He came under official notice in 1916 when he was reported to the police by a parishioner for making disloyal remarks calculated to discourage enlistment. In 1918 he was interned and despite protest meetings, court cases and official inquiries, he remained in detention until 1920 when the government proposed to deport him. In May 1920 P. S. Cleary, President of the Catholic Federation, addressed a packed protest meeting in Sydney. Cleary linked Father Jerger's case with the troubles in Ireland by charging that the same tactics practised on Father Jerger were being practised in Ireland. The epithet "Brit-Hun" was frequently used during the evening. Once again, the situation in Ireland was dictating the nature of the response of Irish-Australian Catholics to a purely local affair.³⁹

This meeting was a precursor of many protest meetings in Sydney and Melbourne and around Australia. But the biggest protest meeting by far was held at Moore Park in Sydney on Sunday, 30 May 1920. A crowd estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000 attended the demonstration.⁴⁰ This monster meeting, which was organised by the Catholic Federation, almost turned into a riot when a rival group, flying the Union Jack, took over one of the speaking platforms, forcing the speakers off it. The interlopers, who were beaten back by the crowd before the police intervened to restore order, were ex-servicemen who had been holding their own pro-deportation meeting in another part of the park. Despite the protests, Father Jerger was deported.

The counter-meeting had been organised by Major Jack Scott with the backing of Major General Charles Rosenthal. Scott and Rosenthal have been identified with the characters Jack Callcott and Ben Cooley, the leaders of the Diggers movement in D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, and in real life were instrumental in the establishment of the King and Empire Alliance, an anti-Catholic organisation with paramilitary links.⁴¹ Others also had the idea of using the Diggers to defend Australia from Irish and Roman disloyalty. In May 1921 Captain Wilson MLA is reported to have said that "as the Diggers made our outside enemies helpless, so it was their duty to make helpless the enemies inside. They must be prepared to come out and do their duty in a critical hour in the Empire's history."⁴² Later that year Catholic returned servicemen scandalised by the anti-Catholicism creeping into the returned servicemen's movement broke away and formed their own association.⁴³

The Sister Liguori affair

In July 1920, a young Irishwoman from County Kildare, Bridget Partridge, who is better known as Sister Liguori, walked out of the Mount Erin convent in Wagga Wagga, fearful she was about to be murdered by her Mother Superior, and put herself under the protection of the Grandmaster of the Orange Lodge. This incident and the events that followed over the next fifteen months ratcheted up sectarian hysteria to an extent not seen in Australia since the Coningham affair twenty years before, when Cardinal Moran's secretary, Mgr O'Haran, was named as co-respondent in a divorce case. There were reports of Catholics and Protestants confronting each other with guns in Wagga Wagga and of ex-servicemen threatening to storm the Mount Erin convent. Sister Liguori's brother, Joseph Partridge, who was working in Hong Kong at the time, was summoned to Australia to persuade his sister to abandon her new-found Protestant friends. When his ship docked at Townsville he was spirited away to prevent his falling into the hands of the Orange lodge and smuggled into Sydney in a clandestine operation of which John Le Carré would have been proud. In parliament the Opposition called for a royal commission into the convent system while Catholic and Protestant members threatened each other in the chamber. At one stage Sister Liguori was kidnapped off the streets of Kogarah by her brother and a band of Catholic men and in a court case that lasted for ten sitting days Sister Liguori unsuccessfully sued her bishop in the Supreme Court for wrongful arrest.

The hijacking of Archbishop Mannix

But that's not all. In August 1920 Irish Catholics learned that Archbishop Mannix, who was on his way to Rome via America, had been arrested by the British Navy off the coast of Ireland and prevented from landing there for fear he might incite rebellion. The news provoked protest meetings in England, America and Australia. In Sydney 50,000 attended a rally in the Domain where Father Maurice O'Reilly managed to link the incident not only with anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment, but also with a plot by Hughes and "the reptile press" to oppress the workers.⁴⁴ Despite the protests, the ban on Mannix's visiting Ireland was maintained. In the meantime, while in England, he administered the last rites to Terence MacSwiney as he lay dying in the final stages of his hunger strike. The Federal Government came under strong pressure from Protestant and loyalist groups in Australia to prevent Mannix's return to Australia unless he agreed to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown. Fortunately for the Government it was able to avoid a showdown with both Catholics and Protestants over the issue by the declaration of the Anglo-Irish truce on 11 July 1921. The Government announced that it would not administer the oath to Mannix because of the truce in Ireland which it did not wish to upset.⁴⁵

The expulsion of Hugh Mahon

And there's more. On 11 November, a date that resonates throughout Australian history, Prime Minister Hughes moved in the House of Representatives a motion that Hugh Mahon, the Member for Kalgoorlie, be expelled from the House. Mahon, a prominent Catholic, had been born in Ireland and had impeccable credentials as an Irish patriot, having served two months in Dublin's Kilmainham Gaol in 1881 with Charles Stewart Parnell. The following year he emigrated to Australia where he worked as a journalist before being elected in 1901 to the first Federal Parliament. Mahon served in the ministry under Prime Ministers Chris Watson and Andrew Fisher.

On 7 November 1920 Mahon addressed a meeting of the Irish Ireland League in Melbourne called to protest the death of Terence MacSwiney. Mahon denounced British rule in Ireland as "this bloody and accursed despotism". When Mahon's speech was reported there was an outcry in the press. Mahon refused to defend himself against Hughes's charges of disloyalty and sedition and was not present in Parliament when the House voted 34 to 17 to expel him. Mahon's expulsion provoked protests from the Catholic community. Hughes's biographer claimed that Hughes acted to conciliate the right-wing and ultra-Protestant sections of the public.⁴⁶ The King and Empire Alliance passed a resolution expressing its warm approval of Hughes's action.⁴⁷

The events of 1920 prompted the NSW Attorney General, E. A. McTiernan, to describe the fierce campaign of vilification and innuendo to which Catholic Church was subjected as a "veritable hurricane of sectarianism".⁴⁸ That hurricane confirmed in the minds of many Catholics a sense of their being a persecuted minority. At the same time, this remarkable year left many Protestants feeling more than a little insecure. Although Catholics were less than 25% of the population of New South Wales, they constituted almost 60% of the Labor members elected to parliament at the March state elections and held almost 40% of the Cabinet positions in the new Labor government. To many Protestants, this was a potentially menacing situation. In the past, Protestant spokesman who raised the spectre of "Rome rule" in Australia could be dismissed as alarmist and irrational—after all, Catholics were a minority. The year 1920 demonstrated the dangers of such complacency.

To troubled Protestants, militant Catholicism was on the march. Irish Catholics had their hands on the levers of power in the State. In April 1921 the *Australian Christian World* declared "The capture of the Labor Party by the Irish Romanist element is more or less an accomplished fact".⁴⁹ When Labor was last in government, ~~the party was controlled by~~ Protestants ~~controlled the party and~~ ~~who~~ were able to keep the Catholic militants in check. Now that Labor was back in government, with Catholics in control, Protestants feared that it would only be a matter of time before the party and the Government would dance to the tune called by Archbishop Kelly and the Catholic Federation.⁵⁰

The Irish War of Independence

All the while, the deteriorating situation in Ireland fanned the sectarian flames in Australia. News of atrocities committed by the Black and Tans or by the Irish Republican Army were seized upon by one side or the other as confirmation of the evil inherent in British Protestantism or Irish Catholicism, as the case may be, thereby rendering their counterparts in Australia unfit to be trusted with the institutions of government.

By the end of 1920 organised Catholicism and organised Protestantism were lining up for a showdown, with some Protestants predicting a violent conflict. A correspondent to the *Australian Christian World* wrote: "Australia will be embroiled in a war such as that now being waged in Russia; in other words Australia will have a bloody time with Bolshevism and

Sinn Feinism arrayed on one side and constitutionalism and Protestantism on the other.”⁵¹ On the same page there is an account of an organised plot by Roman Catholics to take over Australia by having priests form federations in the parishes so as to train Catholics and to infiltrate trade unions and the ALP. It was alleged that twenty priests had been sent out from Ireland for the purpose. This warning was reinforced by W. Copeland Trimble, a prominent newspaper owner of Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, and a member of the Ulster Unionist Council, who told a Protestant Federation luncheon that the Irish rebels were being financed by Bolshevik and German money and that large numbers of priests were coming to Australia to organise the disintegration of the Empire.⁵² At a Protestant Federation rally at Bondi on 9 November 1921 Rev. James Green warned, “There is a determined effort afoot to establish a Romish Government in Australia. Those behind the movement are establishing themselves in strategic positions with much skill and forethought. Every hill in and around Sydney is in their hands. They are all within easy signalling distance of each other. Every country town and railway station between Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane had the surrounding hill dominated by the Roman Catholic Church.”⁵³

The celebration of St Patrick’s Day in Melbourne in the early 1920s provides another illustration of the volatile mixture of Irish and Australian affairs. The 1920 St Patrick’s Day parade became a source of scandal to Protestant loyalists when the Union Jack was not carried at its head. In the following year, the Melbourne City Council, which was determined not to allow the humiliation to be repeated, imposed a condition that the Union Jack was to head the 1921 parade. With Archbishop Mannix still overseas, it was expected that the organisers would cancel the march instead of complying with the condition. However, the humiliation of 1920 was magnified in 1921 when the St Patrick’s Day committee paid an English-born derelict 15 shillings to carry the flag. The unfortunate man had to be given an escort to ensure that neither he nor his flag came to harm as threats of violence and hoots of derision marked his progress along the route. Bishop Patrick Phelan later remarked:

The Union Jack is all right in its place, but we are living under the Australian flag, and the Australian flag should have been carried in front of the procession. For Irish and Irish-Australian people the Union Jack has a meaning that it has for no other people. The Union Jack stood for unparalleled crimes in Ireland—crimes that would put to shame even the brutal Turkish atrocities in Armenia. It was flying over hired assassins in Ireland today.⁵⁴

In an article on the Australian flag as an ambiguous symbol of nationality, Elizabeth Kwan has written:

The St Patrick’s Day procession had made the Australian flag a symbol of disloyalty. When promoted by the Catholic community for an Irish cause, the Australian flag, unaccompanied by the Union Jack, became a source for suspicion for other Australians. ... To be Australian without also being British was disloyal.⁵⁵

In 1921 the Self-Determination for Ireland League, an international movement, established branches in Australia. In June the league held an overflow meeting at the Sydney Town Hall, which was decorated with the Irish tricolour and the Australian flag. After numerous speeches and the singing of the *Soldier’s Song* and *Advance Australia Fair* the meeting passed a resolution calling for “the immediate withdrawal of the British army of occupation of Ireland, and the cessation by the British Government of the campaign of terrorism, murder and outrage waged on the Irish people”.⁵⁶ The Catholic Federation at its annual conference passed a

similar resolution, prompting the *Daily Telegraph* to complain that the Catholic Church was being seen as a branch of Sinn Féin, a political and racial organisation using its influence over its adherents for anti-British purposes.⁵⁷

The End of the Irish Affair

With the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, events in Ireland soon ceased to resonate in Australia. Partly this was because the Irish in Ireland broke the hearts of many Australian Irish when they started to kill each other, leading many Australians to turn away in disgust from the land of their ancestors. But of more immediate significance, the Treaty, which offered dominion status to Ireland, also settled the Australian debate. When war broke out in 1914 the constitutional nationalism of John Redmond was the dominant ideology of the Catholic Irish in both Ireland and Australia. It was a concept that approximated well to the Irish-Australian idea of national identity, involving as it did an emulsion of local nationalism and imperial patriotism. But just as the Sinn Féiners after the outbreak of war in 1914 had unleashed a withering propaganda campaign against Irish Redmondites for adulterating the purity of Irish national identity by espousing a dual Irish-British nationality, so too did Empire loyalists indict Australia's Irish on the same charge. To them the Empire was absolute and indivisible, admitting of no shared allegiance. Following the Easter Rising, Sinn Féin displaced the Irish Party and separatist republicanism became the dominant force in Irish nationalism. At the same time pragmatic imperialists in Britain began to embrace the idea of the dual sense of nationality as a solution to the Irish question. Even Balfour came to advocate Home Rule, and by 1921 Lloyd George had convinced his government to accept dominion status for Ireland.

Imperialists in Australia also made the necessary shift in thinking, though reluctantly. The *Australian Christian World* in February 1922 lamented:

No true Britisher can witness unmoved the process by which the Empire is being transformed from a solid unity under one flag ... to a fluid diversity of States, held together by little else than a sentiment and protected by a theory rather than the power represented by a diminishing fleet. ...[W]e are witnessing the initial steps in a tremendous experiment. ... Ireland is the first to go We need to pray that in sacrificing our national life we may find it.⁵⁸

The Anglo-Irish Treaty represented a recognition of the principle for which the Irish in Australia had been agitating for years. Ironically, however, the Treaty did not finally settle the national issue for the Irish in Ireland. That was not to occur de facto until the adoption of the 1937 constitution, which was republican in all but name, and de jure when Ireland officially styled itself a republic and left the Commonwealth in 1949.

Conclusion

Thus, as the representatives of the Irish diaspora assembled in Paris in January 1922, Australians like Father Maurice O'Reilly did not understand the Irish question because unbeknown to them, the Irish had once more changed it. It was no longer whether the Irish should have the right to govern themselves, but whether Ireland should have immediate and complete independence from the British Crown. Put in those terms, Irish Australians like O'Reilly who had lived in peace and prosperity in a self-governing dominion under the Crown, wondered at the sense of the question at all. Their cry might have been "Australia First", but the corollary was "and the Empire Second".

Unlike their cousins in Ireland, the Australian Irish did not seek a separate nation for themselves, so much as to be members of a predominantly British nation that would accept them for whom they were. After 1916 they continued to look upon the conflict in Ireland as a metaphor of their own struggle to define a concept of nation with which they could identify. But in truth, the Australian Irish remained Redmondites long after Redmondism had been abandoned in Ireland. Even pro-Treatyites, like Collins and Griffith, with whose ideas the Australian delegates felt more comfortable, were mostly separatists, regarding the Treaty pragmatically as a stepping stone to the republic.

It is little wonder then that in 1922 an Irish separatist nationalist, such as Mary McSwiney, might label an Australian constitutional nationalist, such as Maurice O'Reilly, a British Imperialist.

¹ Richard Davis, "The Self-Determination for Ireland Leagues and the Irish Race Convention in Paris, 1921-22", *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, Volume 24 No. 2, 1977, pages 88-104. Compare Paul Murray, "The Irish Race Congress 21-28 January 1922", *History Ireland*, Vol 9 No 4, Winter 2001, pages 8-9.

² Herbert M. Moran, *Viewless Winds: Being the Recollections and Digressions of an Australian Surgeon*, Peter Davies, London, 1939, page 191.

³ Moran, *Viewless Winds*, pages 190-191.

⁴ W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England*, Penguin Books, Ringwood (Vic.), 1960, page 116.

⁵ Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1993, page 12.

⁶ G. M. Tobin has written that in Australia "economic and geographic dispersal tended to work against the erection of physical ghettos of the New York variety, and the Irish were as a result propelled into colonial society more forcefully than had been the case in the United States." (G. M. Tobin, *The Sea-Divided Gael: A Study of the Irish Home Rule Movement in Victoria and New South Wales, 1880-1916*, Australian National University, M.A., 1969, page 12). For a fairly detailed analysis of the differences between the Irish diaspora in Australia and elsewhere see Oliver MacDonagh, "The Irish in Australia: A General View" in Oliver MacDonagh and W.F. Mandle, *Ireland and Irish-Australia: Studies in Cultural and Political History*, Croom Helm, London, 1986, pages 155-174.

⁷ This conventionally-accepted generalisation may need to be revised in the light of Judith Brett's "Class, Religion and the Foundation of the Australian Party System: A Revisionist Interpretation", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol 37, 2002, pp. 39-56.

⁸ O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, pages 8-9.

⁹ "Australia saw its Commonwealth link as an integral part of its life-line to Europe, which appeared to guarantee security on several fronts." Brian Murphy, "Ireland, Australia and the Commonwealth" in Colm Kiernan, *Ireland and Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984, p. 58

¹⁰ O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, page 9.

¹¹ John S. Ellis, "The Degenerate and the Martyr: Nationalist Propaganda and the Contestation of Irishness, 1914-1918", *Éire-Ireland*, Volume 35, Fall/Winter 2000-2002, pages 7-33 at page 8.

¹² Chief Secretary for Ireland 1887-1891 and Conservative Prime Minister 1902-1905.

¹³ Nicholas Mansergh, "The Unionist Party and the Union 1886-1916: An unresolved dilemma" in Diana Mansergh (ed.), *Nationalism and Independence*, Cork University Press, 1997, page 8.

¹⁴ Nicholas Mansergh, "From Commonwealth towards European Community" in Diana Mansergh (ed.), *Nationalism and Independence*, Cork University Press, 1997, page 197.

¹⁵ Maurice French, "'One People, One Destiny' – A Question of Loyalty: the Origins of Empire Day in New South Wales, 1900-1905", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Volume 61, 1975, page 240.

¹⁶ Maurice French, "The Ambiguity of Empire Day in New South Wales 1901-1921: Imperial Consensus or National Division", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 24 No. 1, 1978, pages 70-71.

- ¹⁷ *Freeman's Journal* 21 March 1912, pages 31, 36; *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 March 1912, page 9. Protestant opposition to the bursaries legislation and to Home Rule is summarised in Joan Rydon, R.N. Spann & Helen Nelson, *New South Wales Politics 1901-1917: An Electoral and Political Chronicle*, NSW Parliamentary Library, Sydney, 1996, page 93.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Rydon, Spann & Nelson, *New South Wales Politics, 1901-1917*, page 151.
- ¹⁹ *Advocate* 6 May 1916, p. 25; Colm Kiernan, *Daniel Mannix and Ireland*, Alella Books, Morwell, 1984, page 95. The immediate reactions of a number of Australian bishops were published in *Freeman's Journal*, 4 May 1916, page 25.
- ²⁰ John S. Ellis, "The Degenerate and the Martyr", page 20.
- ²¹ Archbishop Patrick Clune advocated a Yes vote in a cable to the Defence Minister, Senator G. F. Pearce, that was published in the newspapers (*Sydney Morning Herald* 21 October 1916, page 16; 27 October 1916, page 6). Archbishop Mannix was the only bishop to speak publicly against conscription, but he did so on only two occasions (*Catholic Press* 21 September 1916, page 25; 26 October 1916, page 27).
- ²² McKernan, Michael, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Nelson, Sydney, 1984, page 37.
- ²³ *Catholic Press*, 5 July 1917, pages 20-21; *Freeman's Journal*, 5 July 1917, page 20.
- ²⁴ A report in an early edition of the *Argus*, corrected in later editions, claimed that he had said "a sordid trade war". Reports of Mannix's speech appearing the next day in the *Age*, and during the week in the *Advocate* and the *Tribune* used the word "ordinary". However, in an early edition of the *Argus* the expression "a sordid trade war" appeared. In later editions, however, the word "sordid" is illegible as if the printing plate has been mutilated. In the 3 February 1917 edition of the *Australasian*, a weekly newspaper published by the *Argus*, the word "sordid" has been omitted altogether (Cyril Bryan, *Archbishop Mannix: Champion of Democracy*, The Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1918, pages 72; photographic copies of the articles are reproduced at pages 232-235).
- ²⁵ Jeff Kildea, "Australian Catholics and Conscription in the Great War", *Journal of Religious History*, Volume 26, Oct. 2002, pp. 298-313.
- ²⁶ *Methodist* 11 May 1918, page 7.
- ²⁷ *Methodist* 18 May 1918, page 7.
- ²⁸ See, for instance, the "Report on the Activities of Sinn Fein and Seditious Irish Societies in the Commonwealth" in NAA: A5522/1, M770.
- ²⁹ Report dated 2 April 1918 by Captain W. S. Hinton of the Intelligence Section of 2 Military District in NAA: A8911/1, 217.
- ³⁰ Letter dated 28 October 1918 from Father Tuomey to Bridget Tuomey (Chicago) in NAA: A8911/1, 234.
- ³¹ O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, page 274.
- ³² Report of Justice Harvey 11 September 1918 in NAA: MP367/1, 512/1/907.
- ³³ *Freeman's Journal*, 13 March 1919, page 22.
- ³⁴ *Methodist*, 7 December 1918, page 7.
- ³⁵ For a history of the Catholic Federation see Jeff Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric: Sectarianism in Australia 1910-1925*, Citadel Books, Sydney, 2002.
- ³⁶ The Protestant Federation of Victoria was formed at a series of meeting in Ballarat on 22 and 23 July (*Australian Christian World*, 10 August 1917, page 10; *Catholic Press*, 30 August 1917, page 13). A copy of its platform, setting out its purpose and objectives, is reproduced in *Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1917, page 27.
- ³⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 8 November 1917, page 27.
- ³⁸ Even so, some of the more traditional Redmondite Home Rule organisations did not participate in the conference. The Hobart *Mercury* reported that the United Irish League and the Celtic Club were opposed to Sinn Féin and did not attend (*Mercury* 4 November 1919, page 5).
- ³⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 27 May 1920, page 17; *Catholic Press*, 27 May 1920, page 20.

⁴⁰ Reports of the meeting are in *Catholic Press*, 3 June 1920, pages 20-21; *Freeman's Journal*, 3 June 1920, page 19; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 1920; *Daily Telegraph*, 31 May 1920, page 4. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "there were probably over 50,000 in different parts of the ground at one time", of which 10,000 were attending an ex-servicemen's meeting in support of the deportation of Father Jerger. The *Daily Telegraph* estimated that there were 150,000 in Moore Park but claimed that many were there because "it was a delightful afternoon to be out of doors, and there was a prospect of lively proceedings to spice the pleasantness of the invigorating sun."

⁴¹ The identification of characters in Lawrence's novel with the leaders of the right wing ex-servicemen's movement is discussed in Andrew Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier: Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales 1930-32*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1989, pages 41-50 and Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop: Australia's Secret Army Intrigue of 1931*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Fitzroy, 1988, pages 82-85.

⁴² *Australian Christian World*, 20 May 1921, page 12.

⁴³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1920, page 14.

⁴⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1920, page 21.

⁴⁵ *Australian Christian World*, 5 August 1921, page 9.

⁴⁶ Fitzhardinge, L.F., *The Little Digger 1914-1952*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, page 456.

⁴⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December 1920, page 12.

⁴⁸ *Australian Christian World*, 4 February 1921, page 11.

⁴⁹ *Australian Christian World*, 29 April 1921, page 9.

⁵⁰ *Australian Christian World*, 2 July 1920, page 12; 29 April 1921, page 9.

⁵¹ *Australian Christian World*, 12 November 1920, page 10.

⁵² *Australian Christian World*, 24 June 1921, page 11.

⁵³ *Australian Christian World*, 18 November 1921, page 16.

⁵⁴ *Catholic Press*, 24 March 1921, page 13.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Kwan, "The Australian Flag: Ambiguous Symbol of Nationality in Melbourne and Sydney, 1920-21", *Historical Studies*, Volume 26, 1994, pages 280-303, page 294.

⁵⁶ *Catholic Press*, 9 June 1921, page 18.

⁵⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 7 April 1921, page 20; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 April 1921, page 10.

⁵⁸ *Australian Christian World* 10 February 1922, page 9.