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‘But then they started all this killing.’¹

Attitudes to the IRA in the Irish Republic since 1969

This article examines one of the most intense divisions between Irish nationalists during the Northern Ireland conflict. The Provisional IRA claimed to be waging a similar war to that of the IRA of the revolutionary era (1916-1921); an assertion disputed by many. The argument was significant because all the major political forces in the Irish Republic honoured the memory of what they called the ‘old’ IRA (defined in a popular school history book as ‘the men who fought for Irish freedom between 1916 and 1923’).² They argued that in contrast to the Provisionals, the ‘old’ IRA possessed a democratic mandate and avoided causing civilian casualties. Echoes of these disputes resurfaced during Sinn Féin’s bid for the Irish presidency during 2011. Commemorating Denis Barry, an Anti-Treaty IRA prisoner who died on hunger strike in 1923, Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin claimed that in contrast to men like Barry ‘those who waged war in Northern Ireland during the more recent Troubles were an impediment to Irish unity and directly responsible for causing distress and grief to many families. Yet they still seek to hijack history and the achievements of the noble people who fought for Ireland in our War of Independence...to justify their terrorist campaign.’³ This article contends that while republicans and *some* of their critics rejected these arguments they constituted an important factor in denying legitimacy to the Provisional IRA’s armed struggle. Tracing attitudes to an illegal organization is problematic and issues of class and regional variations in support can be important factors.⁴ I will attempt to suggest ways in which historians can interrogate journalism, opinion polls and archival material to illustrate popular mentalities. I will also examine how republicans themselves attempted to contest criticisms of their campaign.

¹ *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1980.

² Mark Tierney & Margaret MacCurtain, *The Birth of Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1969) p. 188. The authors stressed that these men ‘were not to be confused’ with later organisations using the IRA title.

³ *Irish Times*, 21 Nov. 2011.

⁴ See Bernadette C. Hayes & Ian McAllister, ‘Public Support for Political Violence and Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland’ in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17, (2005) p. 599-617.

Martin's 2011 statement echoed the arguments of leading Fianna Fáil figures from the early 1970s. In November 1972 Jack Lynch asserted that his party was the 'direct descendent of the Old IRA: the true IRA, which would have nothing to do those who now claim to be the IRA'.⁵ In January 1973 Minister for Finance George Colley denounced 'the various groups who call themselves the IRA' for 'desperately trying to fool the Irish people into believing that they are fighting the same fight and have the same moral authority as the real IRA.' Colley asserted that 'old' IRA veterans were disgusted by the way 'the name of and honour of the Irish Republican Army' was being 'abused.' Those who 'recklessly expose civilians to the risk of death and injury when they placed their bombs' were blemishing the reputation of 'the real IRA (who) were the army of the democratically elected parliament of the nation.' Crucially Colley argued, 'the old IRA...was responsible to the elected representatives of the people in Dáil Éireann. The groups today styling themselves the IRA were responsible to no one.'⁶

Fine Gael, while usually perceived as more 'moderate' nationalists than Fianna Fáil⁷, also retained a strong identification with the independence struggle, particularly with Michael Collins, described by party leader Liam Cosgrave as 'the man who above all others (had) achieved success against the ancient enemy.'⁸ During 1984 Fine Gael Minister for Justice Michael Noonan would assert that 'our generation of the Irish owes more to Collins than to any other hero' and promised that 'in our dealings with the British we will, like Collins, have no illusions about their grá for this country.' But neither would Fine Gael let the IRA exploit 'the undeniable misery of northern nationalists' and 'the resentment we in the South correctly feel at Britain's repeated failures to right these wrongs.' Fine Gael were also adamant that the modern IRA had no right to claim on the title of the organization Collins once led.⁹ While the party

⁵ *Irish Times*, 29 Nov. 1972.

⁶ *Irish Times*, 20 Jan. 1973.

⁷ Henry Patterson, "Deeply anti-British"? The Irish State and Cross-Border Security Cooperation, 1970-1974' Political Studies Association of Ireland (Dublin, 2011) p. 2.

⁸ *Irish Times*, 20 May 1972.

⁹ *Irish Times*, 27 Aug. 1984.

would embrace a much less nationalist image by the 1990s, the views expressed by Cosgrave and Noonan retained support within it.¹⁰

The Labour Party too, contained a vocal republican wing, especially during the early 1970s.¹¹ An opinion poll during 1970 found almost twenty-five percent of Labour supporters in favour of armed intervention during a crisis situation in Northern Ireland, compared to 18% in Fianna Fáil and 12% in Fine Gael.¹² Twenty years later the party's leading left-wing figure Michael D. Higgins, would recount with pride his family's anti-Treaty history, including his father's imprisonment during the Civil War. But he firmly rejected any link to the present 'I do not accept that the (Provisional) IRA is in a direct line from the Independence struggle. You cannot, at this stage, with so many civilian casualties, with so many maimed and injured, say that this is the path towards the resolution of the problems on this island.'¹³

Significantly it was not only politicians who made such claims. In 1980 Bishop Cathal Daly argued that while the title 'Irish Republican Army', and 'the noble name and record which it earned 60 years ago' still evoked 'powerful emotional responses' those 'who usurp the name now have no right... historical or moral, to use it.' The modern IRA's 'methods...aims (and) ideology' made them as 'implacably dedicated to the subversion of the very institutions of independence set up in this part of Ireland as the result of the 1916-1921 struggle of the authentic Army of the Irish Republic, as they are to the overthrow of the organs of British Government in the North.'¹⁴

Despite such assertions, many suggested that the revolutionary legacy of the Southern state *did* give credence to republican paramilitaries. Conor Cruise O'Brien stressed that the prevailing ideology of the Irish republic, which justified armed force,

¹⁰ Michael Gallagher & Michael Marsh, *Days of Blue Loyalty: The Politics of Membership of Fine Gael* (Dublin, 2002) pp. 164-165, pp. 186-187. See also remarks by John Deasy TD in *Irish Independent*, 8 Nov. 2002.

¹¹ Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party 1922-73* (Dublin, 2007) pp. 288-299.

¹² Michael Gallagher, *The Irish Labour Party in Transition, 1957-82* (Manchester, 1982) p. 142.

¹³ *Hot Press*, 8 Sept. 1993.

¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 1 Jan. 1980.

legitimized the IRA's armed struggle.¹⁵ He believed that the Provisionals 'hold the warrant from Pearse and the democratic nationalists can say as long as they like that they don't, but they do, and their strength deep down is that everybody knows that they do...they are acting on a faith and credo that the rest of us claim to be living by, but don't really live by. The Provos make people feel dishonest and a little shaky.'¹⁶ Journalist Olivia O'Leary echoed this point, arguing that to people 'weaned on the legend of 1916, the War of Independence, with a war song for a national anthem...there is nothing alien about the concept of using force.' Though some acts of violence might appall, the historical legacy of the independence struggle facilitated a 'no-go area in the Irish public conscience' for the IRA, at least as far as cooperation with the British was concerned.¹⁷ So despite official condemnation of the IRA and poor results for their supporters in elections, popular hostility to their activities could not be taken for granted. A *Hot Press* columnist and critic of the Provisionals identified this sympathy as 'the Wolfe Tone's Syndrome' (after the music group).¹⁸ This was, they suggested, the 'very unhealthy interface between the southern folk memory of the War of Independence and the modern guerilla war in the North' often expressed in pub ballad sessions. Some dismissed this, arguing that since Sinn Féin polled poorly in elections nostalgic republicanism represented only 'drink talking...emotive oul shite.' But, contended the *Hot Press* critic 'the Physical Force people listen in on a Wolfe Tones gig, or a singing bar, or a quiet bar where opinions are generously inflected with nods and winks, and they'll argue that the ballot box is breadbasket voting, and that 'the people' are 'sound on the National Question.'¹⁹ This view, of a large, if submerged constituency for the IRA, was one that both republicans and some of their critics shared.

Modern republicans refused to accept that their struggle was in any way different from that of the 'old' IRA. Provisional leader Ruairí Ó Brádaigh responded to Cathal Daly's critique by claiming that 'the only difference between the current phase of the age old Irish republican struggle and any other former generation is that it has gone on

¹⁵ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Herod: Reflections on Political Violence* (London, 1978) p. 11, p. 137.

¹⁶ *Fortnight*, No. 216, March 18-31, 1985.

¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 20 Feb. 1980.

¹⁸ See interview with Wolfe Tones, *Hot Press*, 14 Aug. 1986.

¹⁹ 'The Whole Hog' *Hot Press*, 16 Aug. 1990.

longer, has achieved more, and is nearer ultimate success than anything in the past.'²⁰ In 1974 *An Phoblacht* stated that 'in no essential way are the leaders of the Republican Movement today different from those of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, of the IRA, of the Irish Volunteers and members of the Citizens Army in 1916...the objective remains unchanged. The strategy remains unchanged. Only the tactics are different-but not all that different-and, of course the weapons.'²¹ It was an potent assertion. As one man, angry at the government's clampdown on republican activists wrote to Jack Lynch 'any denunciation of modern IRA activity must serve also as a condemnation of all those patriots and martyrs of yesteryear your very government revere today.'²² By the 1980s republicans were happy to concede that 'far from the romanticism, which has often been attached to the conduct of the Tan War, people, both innocent, and guilty, died.'²³ In 1985 Sinn Féin published a pamphlet, *The Good Old IRA*, which outlined, in grim detail, incidents where civilians were killed both accidentally and deliberately, by the 'old IRA.'²⁴ The purpose of this pamphlet was to expose the 'hypocrisy of those in the establishment who rest self-righteously on the rewards of those who in yesteryear's freedom struggle made the supreme sacrifice.'²⁵

Uncomfortably for those who suggested a moral chasm existed between them, there were several 'old' IRA veterans prepared to endorse the Provisionals. To republicans, men like Tipperary's Dan Gleeson, (who joined the Irish Volunteers in 1917) symbolized the 'unbroken chain which links earlier phases of the republican struggle to today's struggle for freedom.'²⁶ During 1972 Tom Malone ('Seán Forde' of the Limerick IRA during the 1919-21 period) refuted the suggestion 'that veterans of the war do not support the fight in the North against Britain.'²⁷ Easter Rising veteran (and Free State Army officer) Commandant W.J. Brennan-Whitmore argued during 1975

²⁰ *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 20 Jan. 1980

²¹ *An Phoblacht*, 20 Dec. 1974.

²² J.J. Arthur to Jack Lynch, 28 Nov. 1972, (National Archives of Ireland (NAI) Department Taoiseach, (D/T) 2003/16/590).

²³ *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 9 Feb. 1984

²⁴ Sinn Féin Publicity Department, *The Good Old IRA: Tan War Operations* (Dublin, 1985).

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 1.

²⁶ *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 7 Nov. 1985

²⁷ *An Phoblacht*, 10 Dec. 1972.

that he could not ‘see any difference, moral or legal, between the fight now being waged by the present generation IRA, and that waged by the IRA of my generation. The objective of both is precisely the same-the liberation of our beloved country from foreign domination.’²⁸ Even veterans critical of the Provisionals, such as Peadar O’Donnell, would accept that while ‘British occupation takes place in any part of Ireland, there will be young people that will take up a rifle and have a crack at them. And you may say its daft and its foolish but it has the sanction of the whole of Irish history.’²⁹ Mainstream politicians who questioned the legitimacy of the Provos faced embarrassing reminders of their own legacy. Republican MP Owen Carron asserted during 1981 that ‘it is by armed insurrection and rebellion that the Irish Free State exists today...if a thing was legitimate in 1920, I don’t see what makes it illegitimate in 1981...Dr. (Garret) FitzGerald’s father and his comrades shot RIC policemen. That is how they came to power through the shooting of Catholic RIC policemen...’³⁰

It is also clear that at various points, popular support for the IRA *did* exist in the Republic of Ireland. While it is not true that the IRA was ‘practically extinct’ before the outbreak of violence in Belfast during August 1969, it was after that event that the organisation began to attain a level of public sympathy denied to it since the 1930s.³¹ In late 1971 Irish Military Intelligence estimated that there were ‘20/40,000 active supporters’ of the IRA in the Republic.³² British ambassador John Peck noted in early 1972 ‘a rapid increase throughout the Republic of popular support, particularly among the young, for both branches of the IRA.’³³ In May that year his colleagues found that identification with the IRA’s aims was ‘widespread and can fluctuate violently according to emotion over events in the North.’ However while ‘a majority of the population support the IRA’s main aim...only a minority-say 10%- are prepared to countenance the use of violence. Perhaps 3% are willing to take part in IRA activities,

²⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 31 Jan. 1975.

²⁹ *Magill*, Feb. 1983.

³⁰ *Irish Times*, 27 Aug. 1981.

³¹ John McGarry & Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (London, 1995) p. 259. See Brian Hanley & Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: the Story of the Official IRA and the Workers Party* (Dublin, 2009) pp. 108-130.

³² C/S T.L. Ó Cearbhail, ‘Military considerations’ 23 Aug. 1971, (University College Dublin Archives, Patrick Hillery Papers, P205/37).

³³ John Peck, ‘Republic of Ireland: Annual Review for 1971’ 10 Jan. 1972, (National Archives, Kew, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 87/7).

and the number of those doing so is even smaller. Nevertheless, the IRA groups to some degree speak for the conscience of “loyal” Irishmen and sympathy for them, however irrational and inert, should not be underestimated.³⁴ A key event in radicalizing opinion had been Bloody Sunday. In the wave of protest that followed open expressions of support for the IRA were commonplace. At Kilkenny Corporation Councillor T. Delaney asserted, in terms echoed at similar meetings across the state, ‘I take my hat off to them (the IRA) and salute them as the true freedom fighters of the country.’³⁵ Armed IRA volunteers appeared at rallies and IRA members addressed demonstrations and council meetings.³⁶ Historian F.S. L. Lyons was one of those who ‘certainly got the impression following the Derry shootings of something approaching a post-1916 mood.’³⁷ It was little wonder that the Provisionals believed that ‘we are going to win...for the first time in possibly 800 years the whole Irish Nation is on the march for full freedom.’³⁸

But in 1972 attitudes were complicated by the fact there were *two* IRAs: Official and Provisional. Fine Gael TD Paddy Belton claimed that among Fianna Fáil supporters the view was that “the Official IRA were no good but there was some good in the Provos”.³⁹ Popular cleric Fr. Michael Cleary expressed this view on the *Late Late Show* suggesting that ‘the Provisionals are the genuine successors of the Sinn Féin movement we knew some years ago. I don’t always agree with their tactics and campaigns in the North, but I do respect them and admire their sense of nationalism. The other crowd-the Officials-are Communist-inspired and controlled.’⁴⁰ There is some evidence that such views had currency in official circles. In 1974 a major report into state security was compiled for Justice Thomas Finlay after consultation between

³⁴ ‘State of Security-The Irish Republic’, 19 May 1972, (National Archives, Kew, CAB 134/3574).

³⁵ *Kilkenny People*, 4 Feb. 1972.

³⁶ *The Kerryman*, (North Cork edition) 5 Feb. 1972, *Munster Express*, 4 Feb. 1972, *Longford Leader*, 4. Feb. 1972, *Drogheda Independent*, 4. Feb 1972, *Herald and Western Advertiser*, 5 Feb. 1972.

³⁷ F.S.L. Lyons to G. FitzGerald, 17 Feb. 1972 (University College Dublin Archives, Garret FitzGerald Papers P215/4).

³⁸ *An Phoblacht*, March 1972.

³⁹ *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1972.

⁴⁰ *Sunday Independent*, 12 Dec. 1971.

government departments, Gardaí and the Army.⁴¹ Finlay found that ‘it is an agreed view submitted to me that the greatest long-term danger to the security of the institutions of the State comes from the activities of the Official IRA and of political groups or associations connected with it.’ The Provisionals, in contrast were thought to be focused on the North though their ‘apparent policy of avoiding militant action within the State could be changed by a number of factors, such as the introduction of internment, or the institution of direct co-operation between the Gardaí and the British Army.’⁴² This suggests that the Officials socialism and links with international communism worried the government more at this point than the Provisional’s seemingly more ‘traditional’ anti-partitionism.⁴³

But popular sympathy for either IRA would decrease rapidly. By June 1972 *Hibernia* magazine discerned that republicans were ‘losing public support North and South of the border. Indeed their isolation was almost complete...the IRA had never been more cut off from public support.’⁴⁴ Fianna Fáil faced a republican challenge in a bye-election in Mid Cork during that August. The Aontacht Eireann⁴⁵ party contested the election, its leader, former Fianna Fáil minister Kevin Boland, declaring that ‘armed resistance is justified...the enemy of the Irish people is still the same enemy that was successfully engaged in places like Crossbarry and Kilmichael-and co-operation with that enemy at present operating in the Six Counties means the same thing now as it did then.’⁴⁶ Boland argued that the bye-election was of ‘exceptional national importance’ and an opportunity to reject Jack Lynch’s policy on the North.⁴⁷ But the

⁴¹ The report was commissioned after the escape of senior Provisional IRA members from Mountjoy Prison in 1973. It was not published but sections of it were quoted in the Barron Commission report on the Dublin/Monaghan bombings.

⁴² Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Womens Rights, *Report of Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings* (Dublin, 2003). p. 34.

⁴³ British diplomats had informed Dublin during 1972 of Soviet connections to the OIRA. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 106, 26 Feb. 1972, (National Archives, Kew, Prem 15/1046).

⁴⁴ *Hibernia*, 9 June 1972.

⁴⁵ Established in 1971 by former Fianna Fáil members who felt the party had abandoned republicanism under Jack Lynch.

⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 24 July 1972.

⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 29 July 1972.

government won easily, taking 50% of the vote.⁴⁸ Boland's party gained 1,172 votes, less than 3% of the poll.⁴⁹

The carnage in the North over the summer of 1972, much of it caused by IRA bombs and the increasing street violence associated with Northern issues in the republic contributed to this decline in sympathy. In December 1972 the government was able to implement harsh anti-IRA measures, despite vocal concerns about civil liberties. But these measures also attracted support, one Tipperary correspondent informing Lynch that 'the silent majority are with you...I would like you to know that the ordinary farmers and workers down the country are with you all the way. Violence will not end and peace we will not have, until people who preach violence are...brought to justice.'⁵⁰ Thereafter there was little evidence of electoral support for the IRA. In 1973 Official Sinn Féin won just 1.14%, and Aontacht Eireann 0.91%, of the vote in the republic's general election.⁵¹ In local elections the following year Provisional Sinn Féin won 26 seats on local government bodies.⁵² In 1979 the party took 2.16% of the vote and won 30 seats.⁵³ Despite abandoning its abstentionist policy towards Leinster House in 1986 the party's vote in Dáil elections actually declined, to just 1.6% by 1992.⁵⁴ It was comforting then, for some to believe the colourful words of Fine Gael TD John Kelly, that southern support for IRA violence was restricted to 'a few thousand half-wits and savage old hillbillies.'⁵⁵

But republicans argued that their popular base could not be judged by election results. As *An Phoblacht's* columnist 'Freeman' asserted in 1974 'practical sympathy with militant Republicans is not reflected in support for Republican candidates. There is a great disproportion between the one and the other, to put it mildly.'⁵⁶ A decade later

⁴⁸ *Hibernia*, 25 Aug. 1972.

⁴⁹ Michael Gallagher, (Ed) *Irish Elections, 1948-77: Results and Analysis* (Oxon, 2009) p. 272.

⁵⁰ D. Hunt to J. Lynch, 28 Nov. 1972 (NAI, D/T 2003/16/590).

⁵¹ Gallagher, *Irish Elections*, p. 311. Provisional Sinn Féin did not contest the 1973 general election.

⁵² *Irish Times*, 21 Feb. 1980.

⁵³ *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1979.

⁵⁴ Paul Mitchell 'The 1992 General Election in the Republic of Ireland' in *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 8, (1993) p. 116.

⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 31 August 1979.

⁵⁶ *An Phoblacht*, 5 July 1974.

Danny Morrison⁵⁷ complained that ‘people try to make a defeat for Sinn Féin into a defeat for the IRA. But it’s just not so, because Fianna Fáil, and to some extent Fine Gael, grassroots supporters support the IRA. That’s how the IRA is able to exist.’⁵⁸ Gerry Adams asserted that he had ‘met members of every party in the 26 counties who are in some sense supporters of the IRA, or who have a sneaking regard for the IRA.’⁵⁹ As an ‘active IRA gunman’ Seán O’Callaghan claimed he ‘stayed in houses owned by Fianna Fáil supporters. I was driven by them and helped by them in all manners of ways. Fianna Fáil supporters were the most helpful, followed by those of the Irish Labour Party, particularly in the border and rural areas.’⁶⁰ John Healy of the *Irish Times* agreed, declaring that ‘the Irish will give the IRA everything but the vote...we’ll give them safe houses, we’ll put money in the collection boxes, we’ll give them big funerals, we’ll give them verbal support-but when they put their names on the ballot paper, the Irish draw the line there.’⁶¹

There was some evidence for these claims. Songs celebrating the escape of IRA men from Mountjoy and Portlaoise prisons topped the Irish pop charts in 1973 and 1974.⁶² Republicans believed the success of Dermot Hegarty’s ‘19 Men’, a number one hit despite being banned from radio, was ‘confirmation that the Portlaoise jail-break had stirred the nation.’⁶³ How that number of escapees could find shelter in such a ‘small and intimate society’ worried Minister for Justice Paddy Cooney.⁶⁴ A survey of attitudes among 1,300 young people, published in 1976, found that there was a ‘strong minority favouring the use of force to end British rule in Northern Ireland. It is located primarily among the younger students and those representing the farm and manual labour socio-economic groups. The slim majority who oppose the use of force on this issue draw their strongest support from the older students and from the

⁵⁷ Editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* from 1979 and Sinn Féin director of publicity throughout the 1980s.

⁵⁸ Padraig O’Malley, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today* (Boston, 1997 ed.) p. 276.

⁵⁹ Gerry Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (Dingle, 1986) p. 46.

⁶⁰ *Fortnight*, October 2002.

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 1979.

⁶² Larry Gogan, *Larry Gogan’s Pop File*, (Dublin, 1979) p. 169-170.

⁶³ *An Phoblacht*, 27 Sept. 1974.

⁶⁴ *Hibernia*, 27 Sept. 1974.

professional-management and non-manual labour categories.’⁶⁵ In the view of one teenager, the ‘old’ and ‘new’ IRA were ‘more or less the same...they were fighting to free the country way back. They are doing the same thing now.’⁶⁶ 29.6% of respondents agreed the IRA were ‘doing what is necessary’ in Northern Ireland, while 5.9% thought them ‘national heroes.’ But the survey also found that 18% thought the IRA ‘vicious gunmen and killers’ while 33.8% believed the organization was ‘harming Ireland.’⁶⁷ Micheál MacGréil’s groundbreaking study of attitudes in Dublin, conducted between 1972-73, found strong levels of hostility to both the Provisional and Official IRA with 28.9% and 22.0% respectively in favour of jailing their members.⁶⁸ However a relatively high 35% agreed with the proposition that in Northern Ireland ‘the use of violence, while regrettable, has been necessary for the achievement of non-Unionist rights.’⁶⁹ A 1978 ESRI survey indicated that ‘opposition to IRA activities is not overwhelming and certainly does not match the strong opposition so often articulated by public figures.’⁷⁰ That survey found that 21% claimed to support the IRA, though of this figure, only 8% were ‘moderately to strongly supportive.’ Support was stronger among men than women, among rural rather than urban dwellers, and higher in those over 40 years of age and of lower occupational status. However it was also the case ‘those who are more interested in politics and involved in political discussion (and) ...attentive to political communication tend to be more anti-partitionist, more supportive of IRA activities (and) more sympathetic to IRA motives.’⁷¹ A majority (61%) remained opposed to IRA activities, with 63% favouring tougher government measures against the organisation. Even though there was ‘no evidence that an attitude of support...leads to any concrete actions’, the authors stressed that ‘the stark fact remains that 21% of the

⁶⁵ John Raven, C.T. Whelan, Paul A. Pfretzschner & Donald M. Borock, *Political Culture in Ireland: the Views of Two Generations* (Dublin, 1976) p. 131.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 129.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 127, 187.

⁶⁸ Micheál MacGréil, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland: Based on a Survey of Intergroup Attitudes of Dublin Adults and Other Sources* (Dublin, 1977) p. 415.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 387.

⁷⁰ E. E. Davis & Richard Sinnott., *Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland Relevant to the Northern Ireland Problem*: Vol. 1. Dublin Economic and Social Research Institute Paper No. 97, (September, 1979) pp. 98-99.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 116.

population emerge as being in some degree supportive in their attitude to IRA activities.⁷²

Political responses to the poll were not only negative but ‘characterized by extraordinary vehemence and intensity’, many contrasting it with an IMS survey the previous year that had suggested just 2% support for the IRA.⁷³ Labour party leader Frank Cluskey described the ESRI study as ‘highly irresponsible’ and suggested that it would ‘reinforce the Provisional IRA and their fund-raising activities.’⁷⁴ Predictably republicans were more positive, *An Phoblacht*’s headline declaring ‘IRA Okay! Lynch up the poll.’⁷⁵ A correspondent suggested that ‘despite all the brain-washing, all the black propaganda’ the results showed that there was still ‘a fountain of goodwill’ for republicans and that with ‘free speech’ support would be ‘not 21 per cent’ but ‘91 per cent.’⁷⁶ The idea that such a latent constituency existed was a powerful one. It meant Provisional councillors such as Galway’s Frank Glynn and Leitrim’s John Joe McGirl could argue that successful IRA operations which resulted in British Army fatalities would gain ‘70% acceptance’ privately, ‘despite the public outcry about it’ and that if people ‘thought you were winning the war in Northern Ireland you would get a landslide.’⁷⁷

As to why this support was not more apparent, Gerry Adams blamed the fact that southerners were ‘reared in an atmosphere of revisionism.’⁷⁸ Danny Morrison believed that there was an ‘apalling degree of ignorance down there about the situation in the North... revisionism and censorship have conspired to de-humanise Republicanism in the South especially among young people.’⁷⁹ A young IRA member

⁷² Ibid. p. 98.

⁷³ E.E. Davis & Richard Sinnott., ‘The Controversy Concerning Attitudes In The Republic To The Northern Ireland Problem’ in *Studies*, Autumn/Winter, 1980 p. 179-92. A counter report was undertaken and published a year later. See T. J. Baker, D. Hannan, D. Rottman and B. Walsh., Critique of ESRI paper No. 97, (June- August, 1980) (NAI, D/T 2010/53/877).

⁷⁴ *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1979.

⁷⁵ *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 20 Oct. 1979.

⁷⁶ *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 27 Oct. 1979.

⁷⁷ *Irish Times*, 21 Feb 1980.

⁷⁸ *Hot Press*, 19 May. 1993.

⁷⁹ *Hot Press*, 14 Dec. 1989.

from Derry graphically expressed his frustration with RTE for having Unionist MP 'Ken Maginnis on every show it can squeeze him on...but actual Nationalism is censored. It makes me bitter. It really does.'⁸⁰ Some commentators agreed that measures such as Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act contributed to an atmosphere where any republican views were suspect. Radio One's Joe Duffy claimed that 'Section 31 has a strong domino effect in RTE. If you say you're a republican that's usually taken to mean you're a baby killer.'⁸¹ How much impact such censorship had is extremely difficult to assess, as many television viewers in the republic had access to British television broadcasts, from which Sinn Féin was not banned until 1988.⁸² Republicans identified as 'revisionism', not historians reinterpreting the past but what they alleged were attempts to rehabilitate British rule and demonise past resistance to it.⁸³ This revisionism was particularly associated with Cruise O'Brien and other commentators such as Ruth Dudley Edwards and the extent to which this influenced popular attitudes remains contested.⁸⁴

But a major problem for the Provisionals concerned the refusal of many southerners to accept that their armed struggle was legitimate. During 1980, Paul Farrell, an army cadet from Dublin suggested that 'the Provisionals are the very antithesis of what the army stands for here. Their methods are those of the common gangster. I don't see that the term 'army' can apply to them at all. God knows what sort of a state we would be living under if the Provos got their way here.'⁸⁵ Pat O'Neill an 18-year old Tipperary farmer felt distant from the conflict; 'what happens up there doesn't really affect me...of course Tipperary has a bit of an IRA tradition but I don't think the whole business enters young people's heads very often here.' Similarly June Fitzgibbon from Limerick had never been to Northern Ireland and had no interest in

⁸⁰ *Hot Press*, 21 March. 1991.

⁸¹ *Hot Press*, 20 Sept. 1990.

⁸² For a wider discussion on Section 31 see Mary P. Corcoran & Mark O'Brien, *Political Censorship and the Democratic State: the Irish Broadcasting Ban* (Dublin, 2004).

⁸³ A phenomenon noted in *An Phoblacht* as early as 10 Aug. 1973.

⁸⁴ See Evi Gkotsaridis, *Trials of Irish History: Genesis and evolution of a reappraisal 1938-2000* (London, 2006) and Theo Dorgan and Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (Eds) *Revising the Rising* (Derry, 1991). While far from the only commentators engaged in such reassessments, Cruise O'Brien and Dudley Edwards were among the most prominent.

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 25 February 1980.

going there. She felt that ‘the British are doing no good there at all’ but did not ‘approve of this ‘Brits out, peace in’ thing. It doesn’t make sense to me. If the Brits did get out there’d still be Protestants and Catholics up there shooting at each other. There’d still be trouble.’⁸⁶ These views seemed to confirm Anthony Cronin’s suggestion during 1979 that ‘nobody is listening...the fact is that response to the Provisional’s appeals on any issue whatsoever, H-Block included, is really dead in the South. Even if the old Civil Strife and massacre of Catholics situation were to come about at last, the South would not respond.’⁸⁷ This judgement was accepted, at least in part, by the Provisional’s rivals in the Irish Republican Socialist Party who suggested that ‘the confusion of the Irish working class in the face of the war of national liberation today is as great as was the bewilderment of the citizens of Dublin following the Rising of 1916.’⁸⁸ In part this ‘confusion’ arose because people were tired after ten years of violence, which by the late 1970s seemed to be primarily the responsibility of the IRA, in contrast to the 1968-72 period, when nationalists were seen as the *victims* of violence.⁸⁹

But identification with the idea of the ‘old’ IRA remained strong, as June Fitzgibbon indicated when she suggested that the IRA ‘used to be a great organisation at one time, didn’t they? But then they started all this killing.’⁹⁰ A nephew of Michael Collins stressed during 1996 that the ‘old’ IRA had ‘kept the fight to the fighting areas, whereas the (Provisional) IRA has committed countless acts on violence on civilians in the past 25 years. That sort of violence did not happen in Collin’s time.’⁹¹ If there were veterans prepared to endorse the Provisionals, there were also many who rejected them. As one ‘1916 man’ explained ‘this idea of planting a bloody big bomb here while you and I have a cup of tea, that’s not military work, that’s bloody assassinating people. That never happened in our day. Never.’⁹² Historian John A.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1980.

⁸⁷ *Magill*, May 1979.

⁸⁸ *The Starry Plough*, April 1980.

⁸⁹ Of the 125 fatalities during 1979, republicans were responsible for 104, loyalists for 18 and the British army for 2. David McKittrick, Seamus Kelter, Brian Feeney & Chris Thornton, *Lost Lives: the stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles* (Edinburgh, 1999) pp. 773-774.

⁹⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1980.

⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 9 Nov. 1996.

⁹² *In Dublin*, 3 Sept. 1987.

Murphy, speaking at the 1982 Béal na mBláth commemoration, claimed that the 'urban terrorist violence of the last 12 years...had no counterpart in the events of 60 years ago, at least not on the Irish side.' The enemy fought by Michael Collins had been 'the British Crown and it's imperial servants...devoid of popular support in the greater part of Ireland.' For Murphy it was 'a popular vote, a popular mandate, the popular will' that distinguished 'the IRA of Collin's day from today's gunmen and bombers.' In contrast the Provisionals 'operated without a proper mandate' and were 'a self-appointed group who wish to terrorise the whole Unionist community.'⁹³ Murphy made it clear that he 'profoundly' disagreed with Cruise O'Brien's assertions that endorsing the 'old' IRA meant legitimizing the Provisionals.⁹⁴ Rejection of the Provo's tactics also came from those who understood their appeal. Fianna Fáil's Niall Andrews' family were stepped in Anti-Treaty republicanism.⁹⁵ He was one of only two TDs who attended the funeral of H-Block hunger striker Kieran Doherty in 1981 out of a 'sense of anger that Irish people were still dying in British jails.'⁹⁶ But he was adamant that the IRA were 'vicious thugs to be quite frank...I don't think the IRA has any legitimacy in the eyes of the Irish people: they have no right to carry arms and to shoot anybody.'⁹⁷ While Independent socialist TD Tony Gregory suggested that 'you cannot ignore the fact that part of this country is occupied' he also believed that 'if you join the Provos you support all sorts of things that most people just would not support...I never support the use of military tactics against civilian targets and that's what they do all the time.'⁹⁸

IRA operations could also disturb their own supporters. At the time of Bloody Sunday the legendary Cork IRA leader Tom Barry had spoken on Provisional platforms.⁹⁹ But in 1976 he stressed that he 'wouldn't have done the Birmingham job (the 1974 pub bombings) if it was going to set Ireland free and flowing with milk and honey.'¹⁰⁰

⁹³ *Irish Times*, 23 Aug. 1982.

⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 1 April. 1986.

⁹⁵ Son of C.S. Todd Andrews, IRA activist during the War of Independence and Civil War.

⁹⁶ Doherty had been elected to the Dáil shortly before his death.

⁹⁷ *Hot Press*, 11 Sept. 1986.

⁹⁸ *Hot Press*, 21 June 1985.

⁹⁹ *The Kerryman*, (North Cork edition) 5 Feb. 1972.

¹⁰⁰ *Sunday Independent*, 7 March 1976. 21 people were killed by IRA bombs in Birmingham during November 1974.

When IRA prisoners in Portlaoise went on hunger strike during 1977, Barry ‘refused point blank’ to allow his name be included on a petition of support. He told veteran activist Sighle Humphreys that ‘the men who were carrying out the recent killings...could not be called IRA...Since the hunger strike began he had been approached to use his influence in certain quarters but had refused and told whoever approached him that he should realise that his organisation was losing support from all quarters and they had only themselves to blame.’¹⁰¹ But while Barry was appalled by civilian casualties, he believed that the IRA *did* have a right to attack British soldiers.¹⁰² The 1916 veteran who opposed IRA bombings had ‘no objection to the Provos if they confine themselves to military targets.’¹⁰³ Some opposition to the IRA campaign centred on *civilian* casualties with much more diverse views where the British Army or Northern security forces were concerned.¹⁰⁴

Toleration for aspects of the IRA’s campaign ebbed and flowed depending on events in the North. The H-Block hunger strikes of 1980-81 were the first occasion after 1972 where substantial numbers of people, beyond republican ranks, took to the streets in the Republic.¹⁰⁵ Some veteran republicans believed that Margaret Thatcher’s ‘unyielding attitude (had) awakened the dormant patriotism’ of the South.¹⁰⁶ Certainly, as writer Gene Kerrigan noted ‘by the time Bobby Sands died it was apparent that the H-Block campaign in Dublin was attracting the support of several hundred working class kids.’¹⁰⁷ This would encourage some republican strategists to see the young population of the urban ‘ghettos’ of the ‘Free State (as) the key to the overall struggle.’¹⁰⁸ Journalist and activist Eamonn McCann was one of those who predicted gains for the Provisionals in Dublin because ‘they’ve got all the charisma, and all the buzz of having been involved in the armed struggle...and they’re people

¹⁰¹ Undated note of telephone conversation with Barry (1977) (UCDA, Sighle Humphreys Papers, P106/1566 (6)).

¹⁰² *Sunday Independent*, 7 March 1976.

¹⁰³ *In Dublin*, 3 Sept. 1987.

¹⁰⁴ This was certainly my memory of discussions within my own family circle.

¹⁰⁵ *Magill*, April, 1981 & 7 – 13 June 1981.

¹⁰⁶ S. Humphries to M. Thatcher, 23 May 1981, (Humphries Papers, University College Dublin Archives, P106/1570 (4)).

¹⁰⁷ *Magill*, 31 May- 6 June 1981.

¹⁰⁸ Morrison in O’Malley, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 279

who do things-they don't just talk.'¹⁰⁹ While significant in drawing in new activists, the popular impact of the strikes should not be exaggerated. During the first hunger strike a poll found only 5% approved of the IRA, while 41% admired their ideals but rejected their methods.¹¹⁰ While important to the republican movement politically, the electoral appeal of the H-Block prisoners was limited, nine candidates winning 33,682 votes (2.1%) and having two TDs elected in the June 1981 general election.¹¹¹ A young American visitor that summer reflected that having 'thought that the majority of people in the South would support the H-Block hunger strikers and the idea of unity with the North, I soon found feelings were confused, complex and often, apathetic.'¹¹² Unlike the more emotional upsurge after Bloody Sunday the hunger strikes also illustrated divisions that had emerged since 1972, with issues seeming much less clear-cut.

Nevertheless a significant number of people were radicalised. One of them was the singer Christy Moore, whose father had been an Irish Army officer and his mother a Fine Gael supporter. According to Moore his mother, 'as in the case of thousands of people around the country', found 'her Republicanism...re-awakened by the hunger-strikers.' When asked if he supported the IRA during 1983 Moore was refreshingly honest; 'Yes... I find them quite amazing actually.' He claimed that he 'would like to be a pacifist. I would like to be romantic enough to believe that we could have justice in this country by peaceful means- but from my experience, its impossible.'¹¹³ Moore was one of very few musicians prepared to publicly endorse the IRA¹¹⁴, and his support was reciprocated, Martin McGuinness stating that he admired 'Christy Moore- his music, his courage in Ireland where it is a popular thing to condemn republicans from one weekend to the next.'¹¹⁵ But Moore too, would be affected by the course of the armed struggle. In 1991 he explained how 'at times like

¹⁰⁹ *Hot Press*, 19 Aug. 1983.

¹¹⁰ *Irish Times*, 28 Nov. 1980.

¹¹¹ *Magill*, June 14 1981. In the 1982 general election seven Sinn Féin candidates won 16,894 votes. *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 11 Feb. 1982.

¹¹² Linda O'Connor in *The Kerryman*, 13 Nov. 1981.

¹¹³ *Hot Press*, 15 June 1984.

¹¹⁴ The Wolfe Tones, for example, were loath to admit to having IRA sympathies. *Hot Press*, 29 Aug. 1986.

¹¹⁵ *Hot Press*, 24 Oct. 1985.

Enniskillen...thinking of how Tom Oliver was killed and how a kitchen porter was used in a proxy bombing¹¹⁶, I find I've reached a point in my life where I can't fucking take it anymore. After Enniskillen¹¹⁷...I find I can no longer support the armed struggle. Its reached a point of futility. It doesn't seem possible to carry out an armed struggle against the enemy. It's an armed struggle in which too many little people are blown away...there was a time when I was preoccupied with the war in the North. Now, I really do bring it down to a question of all the little people who are suffering and dying.'¹¹⁸ Despite early hopes, by 1992 it was also clear that substantial political growth had eluded the republican movement south of the border.¹¹⁹ The popular impact of incidents such as Enniskillen cannot be underestimated, as not only did public figures outdo 'each other in their eagerness to distance themselves from those who committed the act' but thousands of ordinary people reacted in similar ways, over 50,000 signing a book of condolence in Dublin.¹²⁰ Journalist Derek Dunne, who had written sympathetically about republicanism¹²¹, noted the 'wave of condemnation' that 'swept the country' after Enniskillen and how in their 'horror, shame and guilt' people in 'the South' seemed to be 'trying to atone for the deaths'.¹²² Further evidence of the unpopularity of the IRA's campaign came in another study undertaken by Mícheál MacGréil during 1988-1989. Just 11% of Dublin respondents thought 'violence while regrettable, had been necessary' in the Northern conflict (compared to 35% who felt this in 1972-73).¹²³ Indeed over 50% of those surveyed

¹¹⁶ Tom Oliver was a Louth farmer accused by the IRA of being an informer. Patsy Gillespie was killed after having been forced to drive a 'proxy' bomb into a British base.

¹¹⁷ An IRA bomb killed 11 Protestant civilians at a Remembrance Day ceremony in November 1987.

¹¹⁸ *Hot Press* 19 Sept. 1991.

¹¹⁹ In 1991 Sinn Féin gained just 1.7% of the vote in the Republic's local government elections. Rona Fitzgerald, 'The 1991 Local Government Elections in the Republic of Ireland' in *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 7, (1992) p. 103-104.

¹²⁰ Pádraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: the Irish Hunger Strike and the Politics of Despair* (Boston, 1990) p. 253.

¹²¹ See Derek Dunne, *Out of the Maze: the True Story of the Biggest Jailbreak in Europe Since the Second World War* (Dublin, 1988).

¹²² *In Dublin*, 26 Nov. 1987.

¹²³ Mícheál MacGréil, *Prejudice in Ireland Revisited: Based on a National Survey of Intergroup Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin, 1996). p. 239.

would have denied Irish citizenship to IRA members, while only 9.3% would have welcomed an IRA member into their immediate family.¹²⁴

While denouncing what they saw as the ‘hypocrisy of historical revisionism’ republicans ironically found common ground with some ‘revisionists’ when they drew links between the conflicts of 1916-21 and the North.¹²⁵ As early as 1973 George Colley had been alive to the danger of this trend when he warned that some ‘would-be historians avail themselves of every opportunity to try to discredit the achievements and traditions of the old IRA...they like to equate the militant groups operating today with the army which upheld the Republic over half a century ago.’¹²⁶ *The Good Old IRA*’s claim that ‘nobody was asked to vote for war’ in 1918 echoed similar assertions by critics of the Irish republican tradition.¹²⁷ Indeed republicans sometimes downplayed the level of popular support that *had* existed in the past. In 1976 IRA leaders argued that ‘a revolutionary movement does not depend on a popular mandate as a basis for action. Its mandate comes from the justice and correctness of its cause and therein lies the basis for our mandate. The men of 1916 and of 1920 had no mandate from the people.’¹²⁸ Gerry Adams recalled discussions with Cork IRA veterans in which ‘one old man cast an interesting light on the way in which the Tan War has been projected as a glorious period in which the Irish people were united behind the IRA...he spoke about an ambush after which they could find no place to stay: no one would let them in anywhere.’ For Adams this suggested that ‘it was a small number of republicans who advanced the struggle and it was only when that struggle was about to be successful that it enjoyed mass support.’¹²⁹ In 1971 Ruairí Ó Brádaigh explained that while ‘the mass of the people’ could be ‘stirred on occasions of high dramatic situations like in Derry’s Bogside’ it was only ‘a minority of people have always in the past and will in the future give solid

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 240.

¹²⁵ *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 9. Feb. 1984.

¹²⁶ *Irish Times*, 20 Jan. 1973.

¹²⁷ Sinn Féin, *The Good Old IRA* p. 7. R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1989) p. 494.

¹²⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 19 Sept. 1976.

¹²⁹ Adams, *Politics*, p.47.

support.¹³⁰ Republicans could convince themselves that the ‘old’ IRA had been just as unpopular as the Provisionals at various points, but that with victory had come legitimacy. Therefore they would have to rely on minority support until they too were successful.

Another response was to blame southerners themselves. In 1971, when addressing what she considered a poorly attended meeting in Limerick, Sinn Féin vice-president Máire Drumm wondered ‘if the people of Munster want us to be part of a free Ireland at all.’¹³¹ In 1973 Martin McGuinness demanded that southerners ‘take some course of action to impress on your cowardly government that unless something is done by them to remove the British Army by force of arms, the people of the 26 (counties) shall be regarded as cowards and traitors with a few honourable exceptions.’¹³² A 1974 Provisional pamphlet claimed that ‘the people of the Six Counties are justifiably angry and bitterly disappointed that their suffering, their hardships, their struggle for survival have been viewed as less important than the price of Guinness in the rest of Ireland.’¹³³ Danny Morrison lamented in 1989 that ‘there is a soulessness about the 26 counties. They don’t have the moral strength to say ‘hey, what your’e doing to our brothers and sisters in the north is wrong, and we’re going to step into the ring and take you on.’¹³⁴ This impression had been evident from as early as 1972 when republican activist Rita O’Hare suggested ‘it’s just unbelievable the apathy down here...the whole outlook is unbelievable...it’s as though we are not their people at all...this is my country but it’s just that the people don’t seem to care, or know, whats going on.’¹³⁵ Nearly twenty years later, Gerry McGovern, an angry resident of west Belfast would rage that ‘the South sold the nationalists of the Six Counties into slavery. The 26 Counties bought its freedom by betraying the nationalists of the Six Counties.’¹³⁶ Such arguments, though, it appeared, had little impact. In 1992 Eamonn

¹³⁰ *An Phoblacht*, Sept 1971.

¹³¹ *An Phoblacht*, March 1971.

¹³² *An Phoblacht*, 15 June 1973.

¹³³ ‘Seán Ó Riain’, *Provos: Patriots or Terrorists?* (Dublin, 1974) p. 19.

¹³⁴ *Magill*, March 1989.

¹³⁵ *Sunday Press*, 30 Jan. 1972.

¹³⁶ *Hot Press*, 14 June 1990.

McCann noted how ‘attempts by Northern nationalists to guilt-trip southerners into a serious, active commitment to the anti-partition cause have failed.’¹³⁷

As the IRA campaign was rooted in the grievances of Northern Nationalists, hostility to it, and hostility to Nationalists themselves, could become intertwined. In 1974, Eamon Dunphy as a professional footballer with Charlton Athletic, had taken an unusual risk in speaking on a platform supporting the Price sisters, IRA prisoners then on hunger strike.¹³⁸ Dunphy later admitted that he was then ‘prepared to countenance the murder of people’ but changed his views after ‘meeting IRA people who weren’t the Che Guevara types I’d romantically imagined.’ Instead he found them ‘crude, politically ignorant (and) glorying in their deeds.’ By 1990 he regarded the IRA as ‘criminals.’¹³⁹ Dunphy suggested that Southerners had ‘virtually no identification with Nationalists in Northern Ireland...by harbouring terrorists over the past 20 years they have forfeited their right to our unquestioned sympathy...our job in the Republic then is to tell the Nationalist community that it has behaved disgracefully.’¹⁴⁰ The IRA’s campaign also caused reflection for journalist Vincent Browne, who had supported the H-Block protests and been critical of those who denounced violence without discussion of the roots of the conflict.¹⁴¹ In 1982 Browne wrote about how armed struggle had created a ‘sordid self-inflicted and nurtured culture which regards life with indifference, which embodies a language of obscene disregard for life, where stories are told of the infliction of death in an off-hand and sometimes boastful manner. This is a cancer which has degraded the republican tradition and indeed degraded our society as a whole, and most of all, those people who have become directly infected by it. i.e. the republicans themselves.’¹⁴²

While some republicans refused to see Southern criticism as anything other than the product of revisionism or censorship, others accepted that it had a basis. Ex-hunger-striker Tommy McKearney, serving a life sentence, argued during 1990 that ‘a united

¹³⁷ Eamonn McCann, *Bloody Sunday in Derry: What Really Happened* (Dingle, 1992) p. 4.

¹³⁸ *Irish Times*, 1 Feb. 1974.

¹³⁹ *Hot Press*, 1 Nov. 1990.

¹⁴⁰ *Irish People*, 7 April 1989.

¹⁴¹ *Magill*, Sept. 1979, Dec. 1980, Aug. 1982.

¹⁴² *Magill*, June 1982.

Ireland is still little more than pub talk down South...most people in the Republic wouldn't lose an hour's sleep for a united Ireland let alone die for it. Surely that's an indictment of the IRA's inability to win any kind of national support for their cause?¹⁴³ The former Peoples Democracy leader Michael Farrell, in the 1970s a strong, if critical, supporter of the Provisional IRA¹⁴⁴, reflected that 'Northern nationalists tend not to understand the South...their attitude is sometimes very much a moralistic sort of one- "We are oppressed, why don't you come to our aid?"' They make a quite legitimate point that a lot of the activities of the IRA are not very different from those of the IRA in the War of Independence. But that's out of the direct memory of most people here now.' Farrell observed that as a result of 'atrocities, completely indefensible actions and killings of civilians...a lot of people here have got very alienated...they have a sort of defence mechanism which is to turn off.' He believed that censorship *did* have an impact on Southern perceptions but that 'some aspects of the violence you could explain till the cows come home and it would still turn people off: such as killing workmen at Teebane.'¹⁴⁵

Some republicans did acknowledge this. Discussing long standing Anti-Treatyite resentment of the 'Free State', which was 'not always sufficiently understood in the North' a writer in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* cautioned that this resentment was 'confined to the tiny minority of activists.' For 'the vast majority' of southerners it was social and economic problems, not Northern Ireland, which dominated their lives.¹⁴⁶ Gerry Adams recognized this too, when he asserted that that 'you can't get support in Ballymun because of doors being kicked in by the Brits in Ballymurphy.'¹⁴⁷ But much republican rhetoric had been based on the idea that people in Ballymun *should* support the IRA precisely because of 'doors being kicked in by the Brits.' Indeed republicans had seemed to threaten the South as well, Drumm asserting in 1972 that 'we have fought the British Army, we have brought down

¹⁴³ *Hot Press*, 31 May 1990.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Farrell, *Struggle in the North* (Belfast, 1972).

¹⁴⁵ O'Connor, *In Search* p. 260-261. In January 1992 the Provisional IRA killed 8 Protestant men in a bomb attack at Teebane, Co. Tyrone. McKittrick, *Lost Lives*, p. 1268-1271.

¹⁴⁶ *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 14 Nov. 1985.

¹⁴⁷ *Magill*, July 1983.

Stormont and we'll bring down Leinster House.'¹⁴⁸ At Bodinstown in 1971 Joe Cahill had promised that after Stormont was overthrown 'Leinster House must go also. These two houses of deceit, betrayal and corruption must go...'¹⁴⁹ In appealing for support the IRA stressed that 'the war in the North is not a local affair for Belfast alone nor for the North alone but concerns everyone South and North alike, the fight in Belfast, Derry, in Newry, in Armagh is a National fight.'¹⁵⁰

By 1988 however Danny Morrison was arguing that 'the IRA doesn't claim to be representing the people in the twenty-six counties...the IRA claims to represent the IRA and the oppressed nationalists who support it...the IRA *isn't* killing people in the name of the people of Limerick or Dublin.'¹⁵¹ In 1993 Morrison wrote from prison that 'no one I know of in this jail has lifted a gun or planted a bomb in the name of the people of the Twenty-six counties.'¹⁵² This was a significant argument and a departure from traditional republican ideology, which claimed the IRA was *the* Irish army. By 2011 Martin McGuinness was prepared to accept that the Irish Defence Forces 'are Óglaigh na hÉireann.'¹⁵³ Indeed Sinn Féin argued that Martin McGuinness's presidential bid was legitimate because 'our country's history is replete with journeys like Martin's. De Valera, Aiken, Lemass, Collins, Cosgrave and MacBride, to name a few, all travelled historic journeys also.'¹⁵⁴ Once republicans would have angrily rejected any suggestion that McGuinness's 'journey' had something in common with those of Collins, de Valera or Cosgrave. Worries expressed by commentators that a victory for McGuinness would 'legitimize' the IRA's campaign ignored this jettisoning of a major part of the Anti-Treaty ethos.¹⁵⁵

Indeed the Provisionals themselves accelerated much of the historical examination of previous armed struggles. Former IRA activist Anthony McIntyre suggests that 'had the Provos fought a much more limited war against state repression rather than claim to be fighting a war of national liberation the amount of revisionist probing of the two

¹⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 10 July 1972.

¹⁴⁹ *An Phoblacht*, July 1971.

¹⁵⁰ *An Phoblacht*, April 1971.

¹⁵¹ *Hot Press*, 25 Aug. 1988 & 14 Dec. 1989.

¹⁵² *Irish Times*, 12 April 1993.

¹⁵³ *Irish Independent*, 29 Sept. 2011.

¹⁵⁴ *Irish Times*, 24 Sept. 2011

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

aforementioned wars (1916 and 1919-21) would not be anywhere near as great. I think what drew revisionist ire was the notion that small self appointed bodies could assume to speak in the name of the nation. If you listen to some of the arguments presented in defence of today's ('dissident') activities you get a sense of how off the wall it can come across.'¹⁵⁶ J. Bowyer Bell, in his classic study of the IRA, *The Secret Army* suggested that 'CS gas did more for the Provos than all the legends of heroes and the patriot graves.'¹⁵⁷ It could be argued that car bombs did more for revisionism than all the writings of Conor Cruise O'Brien and Ruth Dudley Edwards.

Attitudes to the IRA in the republic were confused and contradictory because that is how most southerners felt about the conflict. The historical status attached to the IRA meant many people wanted to identify with them but were repulsed by their actions. The explanation given by a Northern nationalist to Fionnuala O'Connor that she did not 'want them (the IRA) to be bad guys' equally applied to many in the South.¹⁵⁸ Support for the IRA was often more widespread than many were prepared to admit and there *were* periods when aspects of the armed struggle could be tolerated. But fear and horror were often the overriding emotions produced by the violence. By the 1990s some Northerners were angered that people in the republic seemed more outraged by IRA atrocities than those of Loyalists, and far more exercised still by deaths caused by the IRA in Britain. 'How many Irish children equal one English child?' asked one woman after thousands had protested in Dublin following the Warrington bomb in 1993. While real, this anger nevertheless missed an important factor.¹⁵⁹ Most Southern nationalists identified historically with the idea of the IRA. They saw its actions as supposedly representing them and *their* history. The Loyalists had no such cachet, with nobody in the Republic nostalgic about having a grandparent in the 'old' UVF. A recent popular history has astutely noted that the belief 'that the members of the Provisional IRA were the heirs of those who had won independence might be the only thing Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Conor Cruise O'Brien would ever agree on.'¹⁶⁰ Most southern Irish nationalists rejected this proposition however, instead identifying

¹⁵⁶ Anthony McIntyre, *The Pensive Quill*, 11 July 2011.

¹⁵⁷ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: the IRA* (Dublin, 1989) p. 376.

¹⁵⁸ O'Connor, *In Search*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Times*, 1 April 1993.

¹⁶⁰ Eamonn Sweeney, *Down Down Deeper and Down: Ireland in the 70s & 80s* (Dublin, 2010) p. 182.

with the sentiments of Fianna Fáil's Erskine Childers that 'the IRA of those days (the War of Independence) had completely different objectives and ideals to those who called themselves by the same name today.'¹⁶¹ Another indication of this belief came on the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1991. An *Irish Independent* survey found 65% of respondents expressed pride in the Rising, with 58% believing the rebels were right to take up arms. But 66% were also sure that the 1916 insurgents would oppose the modern IRA's activities.¹⁶² A major factor in southern rejection of the Provisionals campaign was a widespread belief in an 'old IRA' which, with overwhelming popular support, had waged a 'noble' fight for independence between 1916 and 1921.

¹⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 14 July 1972.

¹⁶² *Irish Independent*, 29 March 1991.