

MAYNOOTH STUDIES IN LOCAL HISTORY

Violence and nationalist  
politics in Derry City,  
1920–1923

Ronan Gallagher



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# Maynooth Studies in Local History

SERIES EDITOR Raymond Gillespie

This is one of the six titles to be published in the Maynooth Studies in Local History series in 2003. With these six the series will now comprise of over fifty volumes. The majority of these have their origins as theses completed for the M.A. in Local History course in NUI Maynooth that is itself ten years old. This achievement is evidence of the enthusiasm for the study of local history in Ireland but it also reflects the importance attached to local developments in the writing of the story of the Irish past in a new millennium. These volumes are also testimony to a growing methodological sophistication in the writing of Irish local history in the last ten years. Like many of their predecessors they employ the analytical framework of community in trying to understand local developments in the past. In a rapidly changing society 'community' has resonances of an idyllic society characterized by mutual support and a sense belonging held in tension with insularity and remoteness. As such the idea can conceal tensions and differences in such imagined worlds. Yet these local studies resist the tendency to such stereotyping. With their predecessors they reveal something of the realities of the workings of local communities in the changing world of the past. Individuals belonged to many communities in the past and such memberships were often fluid and determined by a variety of motives, agendas and external forces. Whether the community was that of the landed estate, local town, large city, political party or gentry world, its membership was continually fluctuating and those who belonged to these diverse communities were rarely of the same mind as each other. Social, religious and political divisions were all realities in these local worlds of the past, yet those who were often at odds with each other at least agreed on the basic rules for the debate, albeit sometimes the rules of violence or resistance. Countering the centrifugal forces often threatening to tear local societies apart, there were equally powerful centripetal tendencies holding it together. The way in which these forces combined created the local distinctiveness, or 'personality', of the local regions of Ireland. These studies, like their predecessors, contribute to an understanding of that process, and together they are remaking our understanding of modern Ireland.

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### 3. The fight for independence

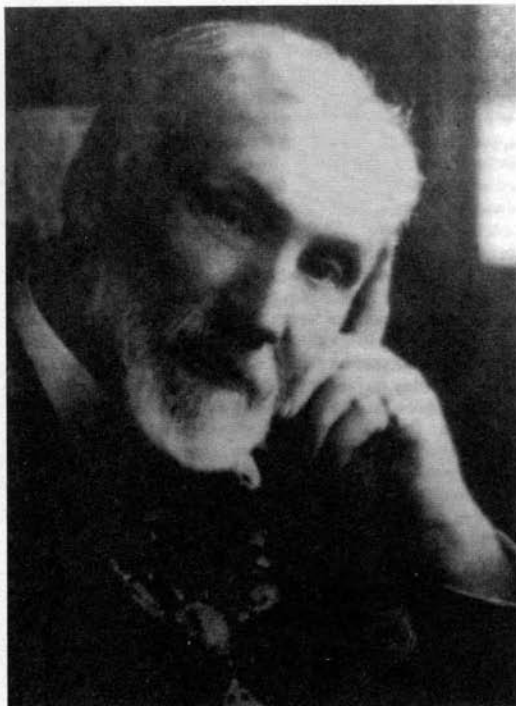
With the exception of August 1919, the last major violence in Derry had occurred in 1913 when the annual Orange parade on 12 August was the scene of serious rioting. From 1913 to 1919, the years passed relatively peacefully with only minor incidents reported. Interestingly, in late 1916 there were 5,559 Ulster Volunteers in Derry city and county as opposed to 4,446 National Volunteers (the Irish Volunteers numbered only 188).<sup>1</sup> Rifles available to each group tell their own story: nationalists possessed no more than 1,000 rifles on the eve of the corporation's victory in January 1920, whereas the UVF possessed almost one weapon per man. This was reinforced as early as 1913 when an RIC report noted: 'nearly all the Unionists of every age in Londonderry carry revolvers'.<sup>2</sup>

Within one week of Hugh C. O'Doherty being elected mayor, the army and RIC officers carried out extensive raids in the city over 5 and 6 February. The *Journal* reported 'that a quantity of ammunition, revolvers, hand grenades and seditious literature, military documents, etc., were seized'.<sup>3</sup> Although it does not specify from which side they came, it can be assumed (due to the reference to seditious literature) that most of these raids were carried out on nationalist/Sinn Féin homes. This was quickly followed by reports that several Derry Sinn Féin members – who had been arrested during the roundup – had been moved from the city to Mountjoy gaol in Dublin.<sup>4</sup> Nationalist Volunteers lost no time bringing disruption to local affairs. On two occasions in February, telegraph and telephone wires were cut in the Termonbacca area.<sup>5</sup> Tension grew throughout February and early March causing Bishop McHugh to cancel the St Patrick's Day parade for fear of violence; he called on nationalist Ireland 'to control her own destiny, to make her own laws, to utilise her own resources and in general to shape her own fortune without inflicting injury on any man or nation'. The modest conciliatory tone of such a statement was perhaps lost on the 'armed' unionist population of the city when he concluded: 'From first to the last the bill [Government of Ireland Act] is an insult to Nationalist and catholic Ireland.'<sup>6</sup>

Derry greeted the news of Tomás Mac Curtain's killing in March 1920 in Cork with horror.<sup>7</sup> He had recently been elected mayor of Cork and the parallel for Derry's own mayor was not lost on the city's nationalist population. It was also reported that the mayor of Wexford had received a death threat.<sup>8</sup> In the same week, British soldiers in Dublin shot several civilians near Portobello barracks, and it was reported that Derry gaol was

now to be officially used as an internment camp; the *Journal* alleged that over 80 men were already being held in the prison, including MPs Joseph Sweeney and P.J. Ward;<sup>9</sup> even more prisoners were brought from Dublin, and the mayor was refused permission to visit Derry gaol to see conditions for himself. House raids continued (one prominent local nationalist activist, Hugh McGuinness, was raided on 3 April) and tensions continued to grow. Throughout April, rumours circulated that another rising was imminent. Reports show that the military had now replaced the police on beat duty, while the police themselves were carrying both revolvers and rifles for the first time. Ships were also searched when docking and material seized.<sup>10</sup> Several events conspired to precipitate rioting on the weekend of 17–18 April. It was reported that Patrick Shiels was now on hunger strike in Mountjoy gaol and in a serious condition. Attacks on police barracks nationally by the Irish Volunteers were reported, while the Irish Trades Council called for a strike as part of the national campaign being orchestrated from Dublin.<sup>11</sup> Skirmishes between nationalists and unionists broke out on Wednesday 14 April at the Great Northern Railway station; co-incidentally, soldiers removing a prisoner from the train to the gaol became the focal point for the agitation, which spilled over to the junction of Fountain Street and Long Tower Street, a scene that was to be repeated over the coming months. By Saturday 17 April, as the country descended into warfare, fierce rioting erupted in Derry after soldiers were attacked in various parts of the city. In retaliation, unionists and soldiers of the Dorset regiment engaged crowds of nationalists: 'during the night it was reported that gangs of unionists, sallying forth from Wapping Lane, Hawkin Street, and Fountain Street, had attacked and beaten catholics returning home'.<sup>12</sup> The Dorset regiment was confined to barracks for the next few days, and only ventured to the city side from Ebrington barracks (which was situated in the Waterside) when an army private, who had been killed accidentally, was buried in the city cemetery on 26 April.

By the end of April there were reports of police barracks in Co. Londonderry being attacked (one such attack was in Feeney) and news came that Patrick Shiels had been released and was returning to Derry along with several other prisoners.<sup>13</sup> Industrial unrest added to an already volatile situation. Railway clerks had approved strike action, while a bakery strike commenced on 4 May. House raids continued, this time in the Lecky Road area, and the first report of policemen being shot occurred under the *Journal* headline 'sensational affair in Derry'. Two RIC constables, Peter Henley and Richard McLaughlin, escaped serious injury when they were shot in separate locations over the weekend of 1–2 May. Within one week, another two police officers were injured when they were shot in Bishop Street. As the countryside descended into war and Westminster debated on the deteriorating situation, both communities in Derry were coming to terms with the partitioning of the country when Lloyd George published a new bill in London. The *Journal* said the bill 'would provide a single parliament for all



2 Hugh C. O'Doherty,  
mayor of Derry  
(*Photograph: O'Doherty  
family*)

Ireland, with the temporary exclusion of Ulster on the basis of a county option'.<sup>14</sup>

As the bread strike continued and the city slowly fell into chaos, the Irish Volunteers stepped up their campaign. Once again, Derry woke up on 14 May to read of attacks nationwide on police barracks, including Burnfoot, Co. Donegal, which was only a couple of kilometres from the city centre. In the city itself, masked men raided the tax office on Bishop Street, tying up staff and taking official papers.<sup>15</sup> Local unionism was infuriated when the corporation's meeting proposed that Lord French, a staunch supporter of Ulster unionism, be removed from the roll of freemen of the city. The *Journal* noted that 'it was reported that French was made a Freeman in August 1918 when his speeches were made noteworthy by the repetition of the words "No Surrender"'.<sup>16</sup> The city was a powder keg. Irish Volunteers were active, and social unrest was extensive. Protestants were organizing themselves for an attack on the city by Irish Volunteers, who they believed would come from Donegal. Rumour and counter-rumour abounded, nationalists believing they were about to be delivered into an Irish Republic and unionists wondering what the future would hold in the light of recent overtures from Westminster. Street fighting and shooting had never before been so intensive or widespread. Both the *Journal* and *Sentinel* remarked on the extensive use of revolvers.



On Saturday 15 May 1920, Irish Volunteers in Lower Bridge Street shot the first policeman killed in Ulster. Sergeant Denis Moroney, a native of Clare, had been on duty when rival gangs fought at flashpoints between nationalist and unionist streets.<sup>17</sup> Rioting continued over the weekend and it was not long before the first catholic met the same fate. Bernard O'Doherty, an ex-soldier from Ann Street, was killed when he was hit by a sniper's bullet on Orchard Street. The *Journal* reported for the first time that some of the rioters were carrying rifles.<sup>18</sup> Although both sides were eager to display their fervour for their own causes, the *Journal* laid the blame for the current outbreak at the door of Unionism, and acknowledged, prophetically, that the city's problems did not always rate highly on Dublin's agenda:

The latest disturbances in Derry which have had calamitous results appear to have been deliberately provoked by an outburst of Orange rowdyism in Bridge Street ... This inherency of Orange aggressiveness and intolerance is a matter for the gravest apprehension in centres like Derry. It is a menacing factor by which localities South of the Boyne are never disturbed.<sup>19</sup>

Nationalists who were arrested on firearms charges proceeded not to recognize the courts. James Cullen, Lecky Road, when appearing before the assizes, stated that although he had no objection to the constitution of the court, 'as a soldier of the Irish Republic I do not recognize its authority'. As the *Journal* reported on the inquest held into the death of Bernard O'Doherty, it also carried the hearings from the house of commons relating to partition. The debate on whether six counties or nine should be excluded, a scenario that brought fear to both communities for very different reasons, was the talking point in the city. Several letter writers to the nationalist newspaper warned the city's citizens not to be sucked into the sectarian war that could come about if a political vacuum was created. One writer from Beragh, Co. Tyrone, who signed himself 'One who knows', said: 'The nationalists of Derry and other areas are great fools if they are drawn into a riot for the purpose of getting shot or bayoneted by military or police; evidently that is the object now in view.'<sup>20</sup> Although violence in Derry was extensive, the death toll had not come anywhere near that of other counties in Ireland, notably Dublin, Tipperary, Cork and Longford.

Still, the violence in Ulster would turn much worse in the coming months, and rather than describing it as 'sudden' (as Phoenix has argued), evidence exists to show that it was premeditated.<sup>21</sup> Dáil Éireann was aware of the deteriorating situation in Ulster for it received correspondence from the Belfast-based publisher, Forbes Patterson, called 'Report on political situation in north east Ulster'.<sup>22</sup> In it, Patterson encouraged Dublin to establish a newspaper in the North to fight British propaganda and to encourage a

workers' revolt against British rule. The general secretary of Dáil Éireann, Diarmuid Ó hEigceartaigh, took a less than flattering view on Patterson's report and idea for a newspaper: 'There are a few interesting views expressed in it, although the efficacy of a propagandist paper for military purposes may be questionable.'<sup>23</sup> More importantly, in light of what was to happen in June, July and August, Patterson stated:

Signs have appeared in the last month [April 1920] of business men being trained as spotters and Orangemen being organised into vendetta against nationalists ... home rule for the six North East countries is in my opinion a setting of the stage for a pogrom against catholics. The object of the British would seem to be towards enticing the Irish Volunteers into the open by producing a state of mob war in the North East, and thus crushing the whole national movement.

He continued: 'Unionism is still the strongest political force in Ulster but it is being steadily broken up by labour. Hibernianism is still strong but also weakening. Republicanism is weak and, comparatively speaking, is not advancing, while Liberalism is now a tangible quantity.' He believed that Labour would inevitably become pro-English if left to its own devices, despite the influence of Councillor James Baird (a protestant member of Belfast corporation) who was moving towards an Irish national position. He continued:

Any paper placed in the hands of Labour in Ulster would gravitate to the strongest section, which is based on English traditions of Labour, and that our policy ought to be, to run such a paper ourselves with a view towards binding to us and strengthening the hands of those Labour men of Irish sympathies.

Given that the Democratic Programme, a radical social agenda to bring justice and equality to the nation's citizens that was part of the First Dáil's social reform in 1919, had gone by the wayside as a result of the political war being fought, it is not surprising that Dublin was lukewarm to Patterson's proposals. Indeed, among the many men involved in processing the current war of independence were many Roman catholic nationalists who had little time for socialism and were content to use Labour and the trade union movement for their own political purposes.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout April and May, the British army kept a high profile as both sides in Derry issued death threats, with partisan notices being nailed to lamp-posts and houses being daubed with graffiti. The *Journal* played down death threats to unionists and said that pranksters issued them with no validity: 'Derry has a liberal quota of practical jokers, who are ever ready for a prank, no matter how grim.'<sup>25</sup> House raids continued while nationally the country

was hit by a railway strike.<sup>26</sup> One local man, James Wray, was shot and wounded in Bridge Street, and catholic families in Wapping Lane were forced to flee after threats by local unionists. At the corporation meeting on Friday 29 May, the earlier motion to have Lord French removed from the roll of freemen was approved. Unionist aldermen and councillors were enraged, as was the general unionist population in the city.<sup>27</sup>

By June 1920, violence was fierce, premeditated, and far from sudden.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is debatable whether or not it could simply be labelled as sectarian. The month began with the burning of two RIC barracks in Co. Londonderry (Park and Ballyronan) while there were daily reports of masked men roaming streets bordering catholic and protestant housing. On Sunday 6 June, shots were fired in John Street, and within two weeks there were several more incidents of indiscriminate revolver fire. After an attack on catholics in the Prehen area of the Waterside on 16 June, the *Journal* accused certain sections of the unionist population of wanton involvement in such incidents over the previous weeks: 'without interference on the part of the police, have night after night since the middle of May kept up a reign of terror in that part of the city, where apparently they are to have a free hand to carry on their murderous escapades.'<sup>29</sup>

The presiding judge at the assizes, Judge Osbourne, was not amused by the lack of police intervention 'when Fountain Street is ready to take a hand along with the police'. This admission that the police were standing idly by and not protecting the citizens was reinforced by a court case in July.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that there was collusion in Derry between the military authorities, the RIC, and unionist squads based on the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). One writer of the period (a secretary in the publicity department of the Dáil) alleged that there was a force called the 'Civilian Guards' operating in Derry under the auspices of Dublin Castle.<sup>31</sup> In a letter to the *Journal*, signed 'Ratepayer', another writer maintained he had 'observed Unionists coming across the Bridge acting in a most provocative and blackguardly manner, with two policemen silently looking on.' Collusion and apathy on the part of the authorities was about to prove fatal indeed.

As a result of the Prehen incident, notices were nailed to trees stating that 'any Sinn Féiner found in Prehen or Prehen Wood after this date will be shot on sight, signed 14 June 1920'. In an article which appeared in the *Journal* many years later, it was alleged that a protestant gentleman sent word to Dublin that the Dorset regiment had given weapons and ammunition to unionists.<sup>32</sup> However, to date, no evidence has surfaced to confirm this.

On Saturday 20 June, a scuffle developed at Bishop Street between rival factions before unionists unleashed a fusillade of shots down Albert Street and Fountain Street into Bishop Street and Long Tower Street. One man, John O'Neill, was injured; but another, John McVeigh, was killed. John Farren died shortly afterwards having been hit by a ricochet bullet. Another group of Orangemen came over from London Street before travelling down Bishop

Street, where Edward Price was shot at the entrance of the Diamond Hotel. Liam Brady, a member of Fianna Éireann in Derry at the time, alleged that 'an ex-army sergeant' led this group.<sup>33</sup> Taking up positions in Butcher Street, they fired shots down Fahan Street, killing another man (Thomas McLaughlin) and injuring a woman who went to his aid. Also to die that night at the hands of unionist gunmen was James Doherty. Brady believed a drunken squabble had been the spark for the violence (an explanation some espoused in the *Londonderry Standard*).<sup>34</sup> The *Journal* editorial of the same day stated: 'That most desirable condition latterly has been departed from because of the recrudescence of violence and unchecked "loyalist" terrorism.' Throughout Saturday night, street fighting occurred at many junctions where nationalist and unionist streets met, with unionist firepower overwhelming. By Sunday, the police and army had restored an uneasy calm to the flashpoints, but this did not stop the *Journal* on Monday accusing soldiers of standing idly by while unionist gunmen had a free hand. Indeed, Brady repeated this allegation: 'No police or soldiers came to protect the nationalists although there was a battalion of the Dorset regiment and hundreds of police in the city at the time.'<sup>35</sup> From the reporting in all the newspapers it is clear that those killed died as a result of firing from the city walls and Fountain area. Even the *Irish Independent* noted: 'It is undeniable that the police and military know the names of 50 or more Unionists who for some time past have kept up a reign of terror.'<sup>36</sup> In separate incidents, stores were looted and, in one instance, in William Street, a company of Irish Volunteers with hurley sticks was despatched to protect shops. Fire tenders were burned and groups of unionist and nationalist supporters exchanged shots in the Waterside, Carlisle Road, William Street and Bond Street.

As local newspapers disagreed on the origins of Saturday evening's attacks in their Monday editions, workers on their way to the docks came under sporadic fire from across the river and snipers soon appeared on rooftops in the city to command strategic junctions: 'snipers on Walker's monument, the protestant Cathedral, Bishop Street, the Orange Hall and the Masonic Hall in Magazine Street had a commanding view over most of the nationalist area and things were such that for a time the city was completely in the hands of the Orangemen'.<sup>37</sup> By Wednesday 23 June, another four men had died (William O'Kane, John Gallagher, Howard McKay and Joseph Plunkett), but the Irish Volunteers were now out in force. The *Journal* noted for the first time that Volunteers were carrying rifles and, on 25 June, they were referred to as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). By Wednesday, machine guns were also in use and unionists had been driven from many of their key positions. The *Journal* again remarked: 'the loss of Derry to the Unionist cause cannot be retrieved by the loss of so many Nationalist lives ... Nationalists cannot be expected to "lie down" under a raid any more than they would expect Unionists to do the same.'<sup>38</sup>

Life in the city stood still, and few, other than the combatants, ventured out. There were gun battles throughout the city, including in the grounds of St

Columb's College, which was the scene of much bitter fighting. Referring to the original attack on the Long Tower, the *Journal* reiterated that it was 'entirely premeditated and unprovoked'.<sup>39</sup> On Friday, extra troops arrived in the city and a Royal Navy destroyer laid anchor in the river Foyle. In the house of commons, MPs such as Lord Cecil and Major O'Neill accused Bonar Law of not supplying the city with enough troops once the violence started. By the end of June there were over 1,500 soldiers and 150 RIC men in Derry, although prior to the fighting it was alleged in the house of commons that only 250 soldiers were on duty.<sup>40</sup> Denis Henry, Irish attorney-general, in a Dáil Éireann debate on Derry on Tuesday 22 June, said the explanation for so much trouble was that 'it was an old city, full of rabbit-holes, from which men could shoot and retire at once out of sight. Derry differed from Dublin, where they shoot men in the back. In Derry there was an element of fight.'<sup>41</sup> With the arrival of troops, a stalemate developed. Liam Brady alleged that the IRA was planning a large-scale attack on Thursday 24 June when news came through that extra troops were being sent; he also accused the authorities of using the violence to gather intelligence on the strength of the IRA in the city. However, another IRA officer, Lieutenant M. Sherrin, although agreeing that this too was the reason for the abandonment of the attack, accused Republicans of cowardice when faced with the new contingent of British troops:

Our force other than the IRA Company which occupied HQ could not be complimented on their conduct, after the first onslaught of the British they turned into a panicky mob. I was at the Headquarters at this time, and the terrible rush to the College; the discarding of rifles, ammunition etc., and hasty disappearance of the men was not edifying.<sup>42</sup>

But criticism of the government's stance came from many quarters. Inaction, it was alleged, had cost the lives of many people. The city magistrates had requested extra troops on Monday 21 June and, not receiving a reply by Wednesday, the following was then sent to the chief secretary:

City magistrates assembled today are greatly alarmed by no action having been taken by the government in response to previous telegram. They consider situation desperate and growing worse hourly. The food supply is running out, and gas supply almost exhausted. More lives lost last night. Magistrates request reply and assurance from government of immediate action to allay panic amongst citizens.<sup>43</sup>

Catholic families were driven from their homes in Carlisle Road, Abercorn Road, Harding Street and other unionist-dominated areas in the city before martial law was declared on Saturday 26 June. The *Journal* reported that catholic homes continued to be raided whereas protestant homes remained unscathed:

Raids have not so far been made on the houses of protestants though it is notorious that a catholic was shot dead by a sniper concealed on the premises of a prominent Unionist in the city ... It is understood that catholic members of the local constabulary force tendered their resignations as a protest against the conduct of certain soldiers who it is alleged permitted looting to go on and who actually shared the loot with Unionists.<sup>44</sup>

Its editorial continued: 'The fires of sectarian passion in Derry have been set alight by a Unionist conspiracy in Belfast and London in order to maintain its squalid ascendancy in the North.' The accusation of collusion was immediate. On 28 June, the *Journal* called for an inquiry into the conduct of soldiers during the previous week's violence (Dorset regiment), and a witness to the killing of Thomas Farren stated that the deadly shots came from Fountain Street, where a cordon had been established by the Dorsets.<sup>45</sup> One of the most interesting incidents of the period occurred when British soldiers arrested several men, whom the *Journal* daubed the 'German Riflemen' (due to the Mauser rifles they carried), in the Waterside district on Wednesday 23 June. When released on bail, they said they were doing a service to the community by protecting the post office in Melrose Terrace.<sup>46</sup> When they appeared before petty sessions court on 1 July, it was apparent from evidence given that they were members of a UVF patrol. Lieutenant Wattle, who was in command of the soldiers, said he asked the men the password to which they replied, 'Scotland'. He had believed the password to be 'Ulster Volunteer Force' and with his evidence it became apparent to those in the court that there was some level of co-operation between unionist gunmen and the British army. However, it is not known how high this went in Derry's chain of command. Liam Brady alleged that communications between the Waterside and cityside conducted by 'expert Morse and semaphore signallers', indicating that the trouble was not the work 'of a number of irresponsible youths'.<sup>47</sup> Other evidence came from the inquest courts and the various charges that were brought before defendants. James Gray was charged with the murder of William O'Kane. But the inquest concluded: 'We find that William James O'Kane met his death on the 22nd June by a bullet fired from an automatic pistol.' The *Journal* asked why the verdict wasn't murder, whereas the *Sentinel* didn't even report it.<sup>48</sup> It seemed that key protestants who had the misfortune of finding themselves in front of the courts were to be treated leniently.<sup>49</sup> The final indictment on the whole episode of late June came from the mayor, Hugh C. O'Doherty:

It was deplorable to think that in this twentieth century citizens' hands should be raised against citizens' lives. It was deplorable to think that for any cause men should band themselves together for the purpose of destroying a section of their fellow citizens ... No adequate measures

were taken (by British army). Bands of military were placed here and there. What did they do? On the first day they actually fraternised with the bands that were terrorising the city. They took no steps whatsoever to control them.<sup>50</sup>

In Dublin, Michael Hayes, referring to the unionist campaign in July 1920, which was to have included Belfast, Lisburn and Derry, said: 'the Derry business frizzled out badly. The catholic was too numerous and determined to make the attempt safe, and this outpost must await until the course of events gives better hope of success.'<sup>51</sup> In one respect, it was obvious that the provisional government believed Derry was being held, but there was little or no evidence to show that this could be done for an indefinite period of time.

By the beginning of July, Derry was burying 20 people, 15 of whom were catholics. One of those killed was Joseph McGlinchey (his father, James McGlinchey, was one of the most senior Irish Volunteer figures in the city at the time), and the funeral also took place of Howard McKay, son of Marshall McKay, leader of the Apprentice Boys of Derry. With the introduction of martial law, a curfew was imposed; Orange parades were banned. The *Journal* believed that, until such parades were without sectarianism, they should continue to be banned:

Until better manners are learned and are put into practice there is only one sure skin-cure for this Orange rash. Presently the attending physician is Colonel Chaplin and his "prescription" is found within the four corners of the published proclamation.<sup>52</sup>

At the end of the month the IRA was in open conflict with British forces and issuing statements concerning the maintenance of peace in the city. On 25 June one statement decreed that public houses were to close between the hours of 9.00 p.m. and 10.00 a.m., a tacit admission that alcohol was playing some part in the whole affair. Indeed, other statements issued said they would defend catholic areas as well as St Columb's College, the grounds of which had seen some bitter fighting at the height of the violence.<sup>53</sup> There were many arrests arising out of curfew violations, most of whom were catholics, as well as numerous shootings.<sup>54</sup> In its 19 July edition, the *Journal* reported that over 8,000 people were without work in the shirt industry as a result of the ongoing strike and social unrest, and the same edition carried news of the death of Commissioner Gerald Smyth, which was to have implications for Ulster nationalists within days.<sup>55</sup> By 23 July, the first reports were coming through from Belfast of shootings and expulsions from the shipyards. The *Journal* reported: 'Belfast joins war on Irish catholics'. Interestingly, the *Journal* also published a letter from Forbes Patterson, who had been in contact with Dublin earlier:

The sectarian bitterness which in their hey-day they raised no finger to allay, nay, which I have known them to deliberately fan, will pull about their ears the unholy temple which they have built. They stand without credit from God or man, and remember the Christ who whipped the money changers out of the House of God, I cannot feel.<sup>56</sup>

On 30 July, two people were shot in Sugarhouse Lane by the British army after it was alleged they had violated curfew hours, while it was noted that, with the arrival of the curfew, people began to obstruct military patrols. Glass was strewn across roads so vehicle tyres would burst, and before long soldiers were patrolling on foot.<sup>57</sup> What was noticeable was the sudden downturn in IRA activity. Although four companies were formed in late June (plus an engineering company under the command of Charles Mawhinney), military activity was far from the level exercised in June. By the beginning of September, headquarters in Dublin had upgraded Derry to divisional headquarters:

We have no intention of tamely allowing a big concentration on the North-West any more than in the South-West ... it becomes now imperative for our units in Donegal, Derry, and Tirone to develop their Organisation and Information service, to improve their training, and above all to study and re-study the ground.<sup>58</sup>

By September, the IRA command in Dublin believed that there had not been enough harassment of enemy troops. But the city was not totally without incident: the Lecky Road police barracks was burned on 5 August and the railway line between Crolley and Kinkasslagh, operated by the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway Company, was destroyed by IRA men.<sup>59</sup> Minor incidents occurred too: although the Relief of Derry parade was proscribed, it did not stop local unionists from raising a Union Jack at the head of Bridge Street, a staunchly nationalist area. Republican flags duly appeared, but a major confrontation was averted when British soldiers removed the Union Jack. On 16 August, the *Journal* reported that over 2,000 unionists marched around – before curfew – terrorizing residents in the Long Tower area; clearly, tensions continued to remain high. Again, throughout August, the local papers carried reports of the ongoing war in Belfast, and extensive coverage was also given on 23 July to the killing of Inspector Oswald Swanzy in Lisburn.<sup>60</sup> This precipitated one of the worst nights of violence in Ireland, when catholic homes and businesses were burned as a result of Swanzy's death and many catholics were expelled from the town.<sup>61</sup>

Isolated incidents of fighting continued in the city, and it was reported that unionists were still holding the bridge despite a heavy police and army presence. On 23 August, Robert John Mitchell, a unionist who had been found guilty of shooting into a house in Nailor's Row (near Bishop Street),



was freed on bail indefinitely. Indeed, such incidents emphasized the duality of law in the city. In another court case, William Glass, the son of an RIC man, was charged with shooting (not attempted murder) Hugh Murray on 23 June. A soldier gave evidence saying shots were fired by a person who happened to be standing with other soldiers of the Dorset regiment; a witness, captain Walter H. Miles, said: 'The impression left on my mind was that it was from the group (behind soldiers). I started running and asked my men what was happening.' Asked if he could state positively that the two shots heard came from the civilians, Miles said that while he could not swear positively that civilians fired the two shots (because he did not examine their rifles), he had no reason to doubt that they were responsible. It is interesting to note that the captain's evidence corroborated that of the injured man. Later, two privates swore that Captain Miles was lying; but it is difficult to know if they were telling the truth, for one of them, Private J. Whatley, was not at his station when the shooting occurred: by saying he saw what had happened, he avoided admitting his dereliction of duty.<sup>62</sup>

At the end of August, disturbances in Belfast over a two-day period left 11 dead and many injured. The *Journal* reported that, in one street in the Shankill district of Belfast, a banner hung across the road saying, 'protestants, avenge young McKay, of Derry'.<sup>63</sup> As Derry watched from the sidelines, Belfast burned. Although Derry was historically more important to unionism, Belfast, where 170 buildings had now been destroyed since July, was the centre of power in the northern half of the country. The vast majority of IRA activity was concentrated in the greater Belfast area, as was the backlash from the RIC, army, and unionist death squads. There can be no doubt that a war was being fought, between two ideologies, two religions, and two forms of government. One republican and self-ruling, the other imperial, loyal to king and the British empire.

The IRA was also active in Donegal at the end of August, and in Derry unionists engaged in revolver firing in the Waterside on 2 September, while shots were fired at soldiers in William Street. By 8 September, extensive raiding was being carried out in the city, this time in the Cross Street, Glendermott Road and Dungiven Road areas. A local councillor, James McClean, was arrested in William Street for being in possession of seditious literature and was released on bail, although the charges were later dropped. The army raided the predominantly unionist Wapping Lane and Fountain Street, yet there was no reporting in the press of the reason. House raids continued throughout the month, but one incident did not go unnoticed. On 15 September, the *Journal* carried a small news piece relating to the establishment of a special constabulary for Ulster to assist the army and police in their campaign against the IRA. This too would have serious repercussions for stability over the coming months.

On 22 September, Mass was celebrated in the Long Tower church for the 'spiritual welfare' of Tomás Mac Curtain, the mayor of Cork who had been

killed in January. Many schools and businesses closed as a mark of respect. Within days, the *Journal* wrote that 'uniformed men' had delivered letters to prominent Republicans containing the following typewritten notice:

In some districts loyalists and members of his Majesty's forces have received notices threatening the destruction of their houses in certain eventualities. Under these circumstances it has been decided that for every loyalist house so destroyed the houses of a Republican leader will be similarly dealt with. It is naturally to be hoped that the necessity for such reprisals will not arise, and, therefore, this warning of the punishment which will follow the destruction of loyalists' houses is being widely circulated.<sup>64</sup>

Unionists in Carlisle Road shot Francis O'Hara on 28 September, while the Derry-Carndonagh train was cancelled as the crew refused to work due to the presence of two armed policemen on the train; a later train was cancelled for the same reason.<sup>65</sup> The crews were promptly suspended. October and November 1920 saw their fair share of violence in Derry, not all of it republican. House raids by the army continued unchecked, mainly conducted on nationalist and republican homes and offices, and the bridge remained under the control of armed unionists, much to the distress of nationalists who tried to cross it. Indeed, on many occasions, nationalists used boats to cross the river Foyle rather than confront unionists on the bridge. On 18 October, Constable John Flaherty was shot and killed near Mullan's Pub, Bishop Street, near the city walls. It was reported in both the *Sentinel* and *Journal* that, prior to the shooting, police arrested a unionist called Cameroon Finlay on Carlisle Road.<sup>66</sup> The *Journal* reported witnesses as saying that some of the soldiers shook hands with Finlay when he was being taken to the police station. Finlay had recently been court-martialled in connection with a shooting incident in the Waterside, but was found not guilty. The *Journal* alleged that Flaherty was shot as a result of Finlay's arrest. Flaherty, who was 46, was a catholic from Co. Galway.<sup>67</sup>

On 6 November 1920, IRA soldiers challenged two policemen at the Customs House to take their weapons.<sup>68</sup> The policemen refused to surrender and in the ensuing confrontation both were shot (Sergeant T. Wiseman and Constable George Waters). In reprisal, RIC men in mufti with their faces covered appeared after curfew and took revenge. In William Street, they fired into Charlie Breslin's shop before proceeding to John Doherty's shed next to Watts Distillery. The shed was torched. In the ensuing fire, 'residents in the locality could hear the agonising screams of the animals but no-one dare venture out'.<sup>69</sup> The police went to the home of Michael O'Doherty, father of Joseph, but the grenade that was thrown through the window failed to

explode. They then destroyed the Doherty's butcher shop in Sackville Street and Patrick Hegarty's tobacconist store on Foyle Street. It is interesting to note that this attack was not random, but planned, with most premises selected belonging to IRA men, their families or supporters. Such attacks were commonplace in Belfast and other areas, but Derry city itself had been spared from such incidents. This particular November night changed that.

The evening's violence was complete when three policemen were found wounded in Foyle Street, one of whom, Constable Hugh Kearns from Monaghan, died later from his injuries. Brady alleged that, at the inquest, the fire brigade superintendent said the men were in civilian clothes and had opened fire on the tender. Additional evidence supports this view and reinforces that taken by Michael Farrell in *Northern Ireland: the Orange state* that the policemen formed part of a reprisal squad that was operating in the city.<sup>70</sup> The British army had mistaken them for IRA soldiers, as they were out of uniform and masked. Jim Herlihy states that Kearns was killed accidentally, and his service record shows he died from 'gunshot wounds on duty'.<sup>71</sup>

The *Journal* reported on 10 November from Kearns' inquest; in evidence, it was clear that the constable was shot by the military and may have been attempting to shoot at a fire tender. This, Head-Constable Cornelius O'Donoghue dismissed, as he did the claim that Kearns was one of several police officers in plain clothes. The affair did not end there. At a special sessions court for the hearing of compensation claims in February 1921, several of the policemen denied, under cross examination, that officers broke ranks from Victoria barracks and were partly responsible for the bloodshed. Asked why constables were in plain clothes when they were shot in Foyle Street, Head-Constable O'Donoghue took a different tack and said that it was normal for him to approve of this. This ran contrary to the evidence of Constable James Henaghan who said that he 'had never been out in plain clothes before'. O'Donoghue, incensed at this remark, said that that was his fault and that the officer (Henaghan) should not have said that.<sup>72</sup> Mr Babington KC produced one witness, James Trimble, superintendent of the fire tender, who stated under oath that they drove down to Foyle Street via the Diamond, Carlisle Road, and John Street before coming parallel to the Criterion Hotel, where they saw armed masked men with rifles. When asked if there was a volley of shots from Butter Market (as claimed by the officer in charge) he said No, and proceeded to allege that it was his impression that the first shot was fired by the men on the street (who subsequently transpired to be policemen). The hearing was then adjourned.

Although the recent analysis by Augusteijn states that the object of the attack was to acquire weapons (a view taken from Liam Brady's later testimony) this is at odds with other aspects of Brady's recollections which states that arms and ammunition were plentiful.<sup>73</sup> Another possible reason for

the attack at this time was the arrival in the city, on 31 October, of Black and Tans, soldiers hired by the government to supplement the police force in Ireland and who had a fearsome reputation nationwide. Perhaps in Derry the IRA was marking the arrival of the new force, or they were trying to increase their activity as a result of requests from headquarters in Dublin to do so. On the first of the month, the local papers carried notice of the formal establishment of the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC).<sup>74</sup> There were three groupings – ‘A’ specials (full-time); ‘B’ specials (part-time); and ‘C’ specials, who were to be used for occasional duty, mainly in the districts where they lived. Ominously for the IRA campaign in Derry and the six counties under the threat of partition, the *Journal* stated that ‘all classes will be armed similar to the regular forces, and will be under their own officers, but in the execution of duty will be subject to the control of the police authorities.’<sup>75</sup>

By the end of November, events outside Derry eclipsed those of the city itself. In London, the third reading of the Government of Ireland bill took place on 11 November, while all the local papers carried reports of the infamous Bloody Sunday killings in Dublin on Sunday 21 November. Derry republicans were shocked to learn of the deaths in Dublin of Richard McKee and Peter Clancy, and continued to grapple with industrial unrest.<sup>76</sup> Whereas in the rest of the country Labour had been successfully harnessed to fight the war against British rule, in Derry, as in other northern areas, it was a hindrance. In the six northern counties, the trade union movement put loyalty to religion and king before co-workers.<sup>77</sup> The shipyards had made 100 people redundant while a lockout continued at the local Watts Distillery.<sup>78</sup> The *Journal* reported that Eoin MacNeill had been arrested in Dublin while also noting that arms and ammunition had been landed in Derry to arm the USC.<sup>79</sup> Again there was extensive trouble in the city over the weekend of 27–28 November, with many windows being smashed in both catholic and protestant areas. The army continued their unrelenting campaign of house raids, and by the end of the year, St Columb’s Hall, so long a nationalist meeting place in the city, had been commandeered by a detachment of the Yorkshire Light Infantry. While the Government of Ireland bill was confirmed and received the royal assent effectively leading to partition on 21 December, neither side was prepared to remember 25 December in a Christian spirit. The *Journal* reported on 29 December that Christmas Day was passed in the Carlisle Road area by rioting.

With the exception of isolated incidents (such as the cutting of communication lines), the IRA continued to be inactive in the early months of 1921, the one major exception being the successful jailbreak and rescue of Frank Carty who had been shot and captured by Black and Tans in Tubercurry, Co. Sligo.<sup>80</sup> The raiding party included Captain Charles McGuinness,<sup>81</sup> Dominick Doherty, and B. Doherty. Carty was taken from the city by sea on a boat called the *Carricklee*, which belonged to a Norwegian fisherman sympathetic to the republican cause.<sup>82</sup> However, most media reports refer to minor rioting,

stone-throwing, and house raids, although shots were fired in the Midland Railway Station when armed men tried to board a train that had just arrived.<sup>83</sup> By the middle of the month, the first USC constabularies were active in the city, and by February local republicans seemed more preoccupied with enforcing the Belfast Boycott than using the weapons Liam Brady alleged the movement possessed. The boycott had been sanctioned in Dublin in September 1920 at the instigation of Sinn Féin members from Belfast, notably Denis McCullough and Sean MacEntee. Although most commentators saw it as a direct response to the plight of the catholic community in the city, one prominent clergyman, Bishop MacRory, primarily saw the boycott as a means of preventing partition.<sup>84</sup> In Derry, two IRA volunteers, Patrick Shiels and P. Fox, oversaw the campaign.<sup>85</sup> How well 'republican Derry' heeded the campaign can be gauged from two letters that appeared in the *Journal* on 11 and 23 February respectively:

Derry readers should now carefully read the statement of the Star correspondent in to-day's *Independent* to the effect that a big trade offensive in the South and West is being organised by the Belfast merchants. The offensive is also being carried out in Derry. Belfast goods are being offered on exceptional low terms. Now is the time to be on the alert. If those people who have been shouting 'No partition' would stop their shouting and carry out the boycott Sir James Craig's little conventicle would never meet, signed 'Business'.

There is a matter I would like to bring to the notice of the Derry Committee of above. The protestant shopkeepers of Derry, and especially in the Waterside district, are stocking nothing but Belfast goods, and what do we find? Their best customers nearly all catholics. The committee should try and devise some means of bringing home to these people – some of those pose as patriots – their duty in a matter so important to the 40,000 catholics who are starving at the hands of the pogromists of Belfast, the upholders of civil and religious liberty. Things are shaping in a way just now that Derry merchants and shopkeepers may find that unless the unforeseen happens they will be brought under the boycott, too. Unfortunately there is catholic shopkeepers still dealing in Belfast goods, as only yesterday I was in a catholic shop and saw Belfast commodities for sale. You will always find such types in every community.

Whether the same author penned both is debatable, but the general point was that nationalists in the city were not doing enough to isolate unionism. Augusteijn, writing of the violence in June 1920, touches upon this ambivalent attitude. In this instance, the IRA, like their counterparts in the UVF, co-operated to maintain order.<sup>86</sup> While the rest of the country descended into

chaos, Derry volunteers were perhaps not as pro-active as they might have been for the republican cause.

There was serious rioting in March sparked by unionists marching around the Diamond area in military formation. One letter writer to the *Journal* said that 'as a witness of the incident, can you tell me why a unionist mobilisation of rowdies were allowed to assemble at Carlisle Square on Friday evening last and march in military formation to the Diamond, attack and beat catholics without any interference of the custodians of the peace?'<sup>87</sup> Perhaps as a direct result of this action, military pickets were positioned on the Diamond on 25 March, yet within one week, one of the most sustained nights of IRA attacks since June 1920 occurred. On 1 April, Sergeant John Higgins was shot dead at the junction of Windsor Terrace and Creggan Street, and a military post on Strand Road near the City Electrical Station was attacked with bombs and gunfire. In this latter incident three soldiers were injured. A short time later there was an attack on the RIC barracks at the junction of Nelson Street and Lecky Road: one RIC constable and a 'special' were injured. Later, a British soldier, Private J. Whyte, was shot dead when a weapon was accidentally discharged. Several civilians were also injured during the attacks.<sup>88</sup>

It is unusual, given the level of IRA activity throughout the country, that Derry's input to the war of independence should have been so sporadic. In many ways, the Derry Brigade was conspicuous by its absence. Augusteijn writes at length about dissension within the ranks of the organization as well as other factors contributing to the low level of IRA activity.<sup>89</sup> Seemingly, few members were willing to risk their lives for their country, perhaps not so surprising after the losses sustained in the war of 1914–18. Yet there is no doubt that local commanders such as Peadar O'Donnell, Patrick Shiels and Frank Carney disagreed on a strategy to execute the war in the city. Liam Brady talked about things they intended to do rather than events that actually happened. In one instance, he recalls how 'various districts were visited with the intention of making it tough for the British raiding parties, by blowing up bridges, by trenching and blocking the roads, and other types of instruction'.<sup>90</sup> In reality, local newspapers carried little evidence of such activity, while IRA raids were restricted by the presence of three battalions of British soldiers, plus the RIC, plus the newly arrived Ulster Special Constabulary and Black and Tans. One other factor was the tightly knit nature of the community: almost everyone knew each other. As one RIC county inspector remarked in February: 'The Derry city company of the IRA is no doubt ever watchful for an opportunity to strike a blow, but the Ulster Volunteers and the Orange lodges watch its members too carefully to permit of their doing much at present.'<sup>91</sup>

The advent of elections for the new Northern parliament in Belfast along with signs that both Irish and British representatives were active in coming to a compromise dented the military campaign. In a city where constitutional nationalism was as dominant as Sinn Féin's doctrine, notice in April of an

election pact between Nationalists and Sinn Féin for the elections in May was not surprising.<sup>92</sup> April and May also saw several buildings burned, mainly in the Waterloo Street vicinity.<sup>93</sup> An end to military activity was more or less guaranteed with the announcement that de Valera had met Sir James Craig, leader of northern unionism and future prime minister of Northern Ireland. On 6 May the *Journal* said it was an important development:

The meeting between the two leaders may be regarded as important, in view of Sir James Craig's statement in Banbridge on Monday, that he was prepared to meet Mr De Valera and his colleagues at any time he wished to do so, and Mr De Valera's statement in his proclamation, that in home affairs Sinn Féin stood for such devolution of administration and authority as would make for the satisfaction and contentment of all sections of the people.

The May election passed off without serious incident being reported and was followed by the announcement of the Truce on 11 July 1921.<sup>94</sup> Between July and Christmas of 1921, the city remained quiet with only isolated incidents reported. Even the August 'Relief' parade passed over without much comment:

The most notable thing about it being the way it was shunned – save for a few extremists – by the great mass of the protestants and Presbyterian citizens. The better class people avoid a demonstration which only serves to keep alive a rancorous and un-Christian spirit of wrath and defiance ... they were celebrating the relief of Derry, and no greater relief could come to Derry than that as a result of all the present debating there should issue a family gathering of all Irishmen in around-table conference<sup>95</sup>

The *Journal* also noted a resolution passed in the P.H. Pearse Sinn Féin Club:

That we, the members of the P.H. Pearse Sinn Féin Club, of the city of Derry, in public meeting assembled, do hereby pledge ourselves to resist, if necessary, to the domination of any Parliament governing from Belfast, and that a copy of this resolution be sent to the press

As violence continued unabated in Belfast with the birth of the new parliament, the idealism of the Pearse Sinn Féin club did not translate into military activity. In Derry, life was occupied more with the numerous strikes and trade union problems: Watts' Distillery continued to be crippled by a dispute over union recognition, while the carters stopped work once again over pay conditions. The price of commodities was of more concern to

nationalists than ways to remove the British army and the 'Specials'. It was not until December that the city saw any IRA activity again. In the first instance, two police constables were killed during a botched jailbreak, and Clooney barracks in the Waterside area was attacked. The attempted jailbreak had repercussions for Collins in Dublin and the RIC in the newly established state of Northern Ireland. Three men were sentenced to hang for their part in the attempted breakout, but on Collins' instructions a rescue squad was assembled under Major General Dan Hogan in January 1922 and sent to Derry. Much to Collins's embarrassment, they were arrested by the USC in Dromore, Co. Down. All were carrying weapons, and it was not until the release, on Collins' orders, of Orangemen who had been kidnapped along the new border, that the Derry prisoners and General Hogan saw their freedom, too.<sup>96</sup> For the RIC, as it was rumoured that a prison officer or warder was involved in the failed prison escape, it gave the new unionist regime in Belfast ammunition to talk about disloyal Catholics within the regime. Indeed, on 7 December, the *Journal* quoted William Coote MP as saying that the Special Constabulary would take control of the Derry gaol until there was a 'revision' of the warders.<sup>97</sup> Another incident occurred on 16 March that strained relations between Belfast and Dublin further. The 'Specials' and the RUC seized weapons and a Crossley tender from Free State soldiers who were arrested in Coshquinn, just inside the border on the Londonderry side, while attempting to buy drink in a public house.<sup>98</sup> Those arrested were William McCloskey, Patrick Lee, Charles Coll, Edward Gallagher, Charles Zammitt, Owen Sharkey and William Sherrin.<sup>99</sup> McCloskey spoke on behalf of the defendants and referred to them as being soldiers of the IRA (national army of the Free State). Although they did not recognize the court, McCloskey said they wanted to cooperate as they had crossed the border accidentally. When the soldiers went on trial in September, they were recognizing the legitimacy of the court. Whether this was to obtain a release after being incarcerated for several months, or whether this coincided with the Free State's revised policy on the North in the light of Collins' death, is open to debate. What was important was how it was perceived in Belfast. Home Affairs said the important issue at stake was one of policy, as it was noted that the soldiers who were arrested 'recognised the court and were defended by counsel'.<sup>100</sup>

Although this book is not concerned with the Treaty debates of December 1921 and January 1922, it should be noted that when the split in the IRA occurred in the Free State in 1921, the six northern counties were not exempt from repercussions. Indeed, much has been written on how the ensuing civil war in the Free State split the northern divisions of the IRA depriving them of a united front in the face of unionist hostility and political violence.<sup>101</sup> In Derry, many IRA men who took the side of the anti-Treaty forces moved to Donegal and saw action there throughout 1921 and early 1922. For those that stayed loyal to Collins and HQ in Dublin, the only option was also a trip to



Donegal to fight with the Free State army (against the anti-Treaty forces) or remain in Derry and hope that the Boundary Commission – established between Dublin and London to fix the border of Northern Ireland with the Irish Free State at a later stage – would remove the city from unionism's net, giving it back to Dublin. How impotent republicans had become can be gauged from ideas circulating on how to take the war to the British in the Six Counties. The use of poisonous gas was considered in February 1922. Correspondence received by Shiels from HQ in Belfast shows how cyanide gas could be made. Belfast concluded by saying, 'If you should (think) this is worth any further consideration and desire further details, I will be pleased to let you have them.'<sup>102</sup> It is also interesting to note that during the extensive arrest operation of May 1922, the *Journal* quoted the Press Association saying that additional documents were found concerning poisonous gas in Derry, and that in some cases, 'Specials' involved in the arrests wore gas masks.<sup>103</sup> Until May, with the exception of incidents in March and April, Derry saw little in the way of serious IRA activity. Many members had gone to Donegal to fight with either the Free State army or the Irregulars, while the authorities in and around the city itself seemed to have the upper hand.

The year 1922 saw Belfast burn while James Craig and Michael Collins met (on two occasions) to resolve the political situation. Indeed, there was little let up in the campaign against 'disloyal subjects' and, when the IRA killed David Twaddell MP on 19 May, Craig used this to move against whatever nationalist political base remained.<sup>104</sup> It was also reported that the IRA in Ballyronan, Co. Londonderry, killed two members of the USC in early April: Special Constable Hunter, whose father was the caretaker in the Guildhall, and Special Constable Heggarty, originally from Ferguson's Lane in the city, died when several men ambushed them.<sup>105</sup> The three killings coincided with the arrest of many Catholics by the USC under powers bestowed upon it by the Special Powers Act (Northern Ireland) 1922. One author stated that the arrests initiated over the weekend of 20–22 May decimated nationalist and republican thought, leaving the minority population without political direction for many years to come.<sup>106</sup>

The Belfast parliament proscribed the IRA on 22 May. Local newspapers noted that, in the massive round-up, 14 men were arrested in the city itself and over 50 in the county. Many more Catholic houses were subjected to searching. Some of the Derrymen arrested included: James Campbell, de Burgh Terrace; James Horner, Mountjoy Terrace;<sup>107</sup> Seamus Cavanagh, Alexander Place; John McLaughlin, Waterloo Street; P. Friel, Nelson Street; three brothers called Mackey; and Captain Charles McGuinness, Argyle Terrace, who was already well-known to the authorities.<sup>108</sup> Horner was captured after he had evaded the original search party.<sup>109</sup> The *Journal* noted that the Mackey brothers and Friel were subsequently released, but another man, Charles MacWhinney, a Protestant, was also detained. (It was noted that he was a

science teacher in the Technical School.)<sup>110</sup> By the end of May, another 19 battalions of the British army had been deployed to the six counties.

In June, James Murray from Cable Street was shot dead by 'Specials' when a bullet fired at a man after curfew pierced Mr Murray's bedroom window. Several Derry-bound trains were raided in Donegal, and local newspapers reported the bombardment of the Four Courts in Dublin, the first shots in a bitter civil war that was to last until summer 1923. Train raids were becoming ever more frequent, a situation that had not gone unnoticed in Belfast. The protection of the Derry–Strabane line was seen by Colonel Spender, Minister for Home Affairs, to be as important as the neutral zone in the Pettigo–Belleek salient in Co. Fermanagh.<sup>111</sup> Major General Sally-Flood, special military advisor to the Northern Ireland parliament, believed it necessary to 'enter the Free State Territory in order to protect the Railway and Commerce of the country which the Free State Government have failed to do.'<sup>112</sup> Sally-Flood also suggested that the 'military ... be allowed to advance to the Line, Letterkenny, Ballybofey, Donegal'. The Ministry of Commerce also pressed hard for the protection of the railway by British troops, saying that they had 'no difficulty in having a Neutral Zone established', but worried that troops used for this purpose could not be used to protect towns like Strabane. The ministry was keen to use the newly established Royal Ulster Constabulary (regular police force created to replace the RIC in the new six-county state) more effectively. On 29 June, the *Belfast Newsletter* carried a short piece saying that the 'strip of Free State territory between Derry and Strabane through which the Great Northern Railway runs will be occupied by British Troops'. However, the publication of this annoyed Spender as it inferred that not all of his conversations were private. By mid-July, after extensive debate and despite the largest train raid yet at Churchill, Co. Donegal (12 July), Home Affairs concluded that 'the Minister is of [the] opinion that the matter (Sally-Flood's plan to invade Donegal) need not be pursued further at present'.<sup>113</sup>

More Catholics were arrested in July (Patrick McLaughlin, Samuel Canning, John Doherty and John McGowan) and the Twelfth celebration was marked by extensive revolver firing and curfew breaking: 'the display, which was intended to usher in the twelfth of July celebration, was obviously carried out in utter disregard of Curfew regulations.'<sup>114</sup> July also saw the first deaths of Derry men as a result of fighting in Donegal between Free State troops and IRA Irregulars. William Browne, Bishop Street, died at Derry Infirmary after being brought there by 'Specials' to receive treatment. This led to an important incident involving other Derry IRA men who were now operating in Donegal. Albert Devine, of Brooke Street Avenue, was killed along with another soldier at Glenties when a man dressed as a parish priest tricked them. At his funeral in Derry over 2,000 attended, despite the appearance of a party of Special Constables that caused great anxiety to the mourners,

according to the *Journal*. On 2 August, the *Journal* reported that James McCann, a Derry man and leading figure in the Irregulars in Donegal, was captured. He had given himself up after it was reported that the manner of Private Devine's killing had caused the hardcore of his force to break up. It was apparent that anti-Treaty activity in Donegal, which was driven in many instances by Derry men, was soon to peter out. There were also reports that Patrick Shiels and John Fox had gone on hungerstike in Raphoe in protest at their conditions, while the *Journal* reported that James Craig had gone to London to discuss with Westminster the implications for the Six Counties of the Boundary Commission.<sup>115</sup> But the two most striking events of the month occurred many miles from Derry. Arthur Griffith, president of the Free State and negotiator of the Treaty, died on 12 August, and on Friday 25 August the *Journal* reported the death of Michael Collins under the headline 'The Slain Chief'. Its editorial concluded: 'the cause of the tragedy, too poignant almost for tears, is indeed, enmity that is unnatural as it is un-National'. A mass was celebrated for Collins on 4 September in St Eugene's cathedral, with the *Journal* saying that 'the music of the mass was appropriately rendered by the Cathedral Choir. Handel's "Largo" and Beethoven's "Funeral March" were played on the organ.'

With the death of Griffith and Collins, most commentators believed that the Six Counties' chance of rejoining its southern neighbours in the Free State evaporated. Indeed, a memo sent to Dublin by Seamus Woods, then an IRA commander in Belfast, stated that he could detect 'a marked change in some members of GHQ' to the Northern problem since Collins' death, and it was apparent that Dublin was revising its northern policy and deciding that fighting the British authorities in the Six Counties was a task they could not consider any further – particularly since they were now in the midst of a civil war themselves.<sup>116</sup> Hugh C. O'Doherty encapsulated the futility of resistance at a corporation meeting when he said, in a reply to Councillor Robert McAnaney's request for a military post to be removed from Castle Gate: 'times are such that the military and the guns, not this council at all, speak in the city of Derry'.<sup>117</sup> By December, general headquarters in Dublin was stating that 1st and 2nd Northern Divisions, which had previously been amalgamated, were now to be stood down 'and communications are not to be sent to them until further notice'.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the stomach for the fight to retake the Six Counties was not there. It was shown by the acceptance of the Treaty by the people at elections in June 1922 but more eloquently by the national army's director of chemicals in March 1922:

Since the publication of the peace terms and the subsequent debates in An Dáil I have lost all interest in the country and am absolutely devoid of any wish to sacrifice myself [in] any way whatsoever for this ...

country. I look upon the above matter [appointment as director] now simply in the light of a job and while believing the Republican Party right I am too selfish to make any sacrifice on their behalf.<sup>119</sup>

With many of its key men behind bars in the Six Counties (James Moore, James Kavanagh, William Cullen, Thomas O’Gara, Michael Devlin and James McCafferty) and further numbers detained in the Free State, IRA activity in Derry was non-existent after August 1922. Many Catholics in Derry, as in other parts of the border, were happy to revert back to constitutional politics and hope that the Boundary Commission would deliver their ultimate goal. But as history has shown, this was not to be. On 4 January 1923, the *Sentinel* reported that ‘the Dawn of 1923 found the streets of Londonderry deserted save for the “B” Special patrols, Curfew keeping indoors all those who by watchnight services and in other ways usually signal the passing of the Old and the arrival of the New [Year].’<sup>120</sup> The arrival of the new in this instance heralded isolation – some of it imposed, some self-inflicted – for nationalists in Derry and throughout the Six Counties, and many IRA members simply melted into the background, moving to the Free State on their release from prison, be it 1923, 1924 or 1925, or emigrating from Ireland altogether. Indeed, the final word could be left to the USC. When a dinner was held to honour the men and officers of South East Battalion, Hawkins Street (their operational headquarters was called ‘Whitehall’) in February 1923, the *Sentinel* remarked that this particular unit ‘was the battalion which did the most spade work of the force in the most troublous time in Londonderry.’<sup>121</sup> Among many of its members were corporation councillors, some of them the same people that Alderman Meenan would accuse of being responsible for the trouble in June 1920.<sup>122</sup> The newly elected mayor of Derry, Captain Irving-Moore, concluded in his after-dinner speech: ‘the Specials, and the “B’s” in particular, had been the salvation of Ulster’.

# Violence and nationalist politics in Derry City, 1920–1923

Ronan Gallagher

This book concentrates on three critical years in the development of Derry, when the corporation was controlled by a nationalist/Sinn Féin majority.

In January 1920 the city elected its first nationalist mayor and corporation since the 1600s. The book recounts the life of this corporation and the subsequent violence and destruction, as the city sought to define its position within the national struggle for independence. Particular attention is paid to 1920 when, for a brief moment, the city came to the brink of civil war. The book also examines the day-to-day operation of the corporation (particularly the ambitious Banagher water scheme) as well as the

circumstances the corporation found itself in nationally, when Sinn Féin accepted a truce with the British in 1921.



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