For J.C.

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IRELAND
1798–1998
War, Peace and Beyond

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'Three Quarters of a Nation Once Again': Independent Ireland

6.1 Saorstát Éireann, 1922–32

I turned my back
On the vision I had shaped
And to this road before me
I turned my face
Patrick Pearse, 'Renunciation'[1]

There are parallels between the dreams of legislative independence envisioned by the patriots of the early 1780s and those which comforted the separatists of the early 1920s: there are some parallels between the 18 years of Grattan's parliament and the 18-year span binding the Treaty and the outbreak of the Second World War. In each period an uncharismatic but gifted political elite sought to enact a constitutional settlement which fell short of absolute independence; in each period an elite sought to tie down constitutional ambiguities and to expand upon Ireland's legal freedoms. Ireland in the 1790s was buffeted by economic and political squalls which had their origin partly in continental Europe and in the United States; the Ireland of the late 1920s and early 1930s was challenged by political movements and economic crises which, again, had been born in Europe and North America. Much of Irish politics and society in the 1780s and 1790s had been vitally shaped by the American war of independence; much of Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s still bore the sombre imprint of the Great War. The experiment of legislative independence ended in the context of British military conquest in 1798–9 and a still unstable international arena; the fragile newly independent Irish Free State might well have ended in the military turmoil of 1939–45.

But the creators of the new Ireland, while sharing some of the limitations of the patriots of the 1780s, possessed a grander political vision. Even here, though, in the realm of political ideology, there were strong linkages, as Jeffrey Prager has

skilfully argued (Prager has defined the political divisions between Free Staters and republicans in the 1920s in terms of a cultural and intellectual tension between an 'Irish-Enlightenment' tradition, rooted in the 1790s, and a 'Gaelic-Romantic' tradition of more recent vintage).[2] The state-builders of the 1920s were committed to the idea of an efficient and inclusivist parliamentary democracy, and they were prepared to face down military challenges as well as educate their 'slightly constitutional' republican opponents in pursuing this grail. If, in the context of the civil war and in the experience of other newly independent ex-colonies, this quest seemed hopelessly ambitious, then from the start the Free State ministers possessed a number of indispensable tools. They inherited from the British an administrative system which, while it was unwieldy and contained at the highest levels a disproportionate number of 'anti-national' mandarins, had also recently been overhauled (in 1920), and had been progressively expanded and popularized since the late nineteenth century. The Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924 refined the existing structure into 11 major departments, but the overwhelming majority of civil servants were retained: more than 98 per cent of the old British administration in Ireland transferred to the service of the Irish Free State in April 1922. These administrators would become a focus of republican resentment, both for their perceived political influence as well as for their apparently cushioned lifestyle; but they provided an essential element of continuity in the transition between British and Irish rule. In addition the British bequeathed to the new regime a model of policing which, while it was modified in certain crucial and visible respects (arms, uniforms), was incorporated into the new Garda Síochána (1922): indeed, remarkably, the Dublin Metropolitan Police, which had been the popular and inefficient agency of the crown in the capital, survived until 1925, when it was amalgamated wholesale into the Gardaí. The limited nature of the Irish revolution, and the curious mixture of intimacy and antipathy which characterized the relationship between the new rulers and the departing British, meant that the Irish Free State emerged with an unusually large number of relics from the *ancien régime*.

The new governing party was Cumann na nGaedheal, formed in 1923 out of a variety of pro-Treaty forces. Even though it had sprung from a bloody civil war, Cumann na nGaedheal retained much of the mind-set of earlier, hegemonic nationalist parties, preoccupied by the Anglo-Irish relationship, sensitive about outside perceptions of the national cause, and cavalier towards local political evangelism. Its mission seemed to involve not a narrow and ruthless consolidation of its military and political victory in 1923, but rather the incorporation of a highly disparate political culture within the institutions of the new state. As will become clear, the government was prepared to sacrifice its own party interests in its attempt to construct political life on the foundations of the Treaty and the constitution of 1922. This meant wooing both the ex-Unionists of the south and west of Ireland as well as the republicans who had been pursued so mercilessly in 1922–3. On the whole Cumann na nGaedheal found it easier to appeal to the influential but unthreatening Unionist community; but by 1927 the party was also able to compel the participation of the main republican party, Fianna Fáil (1926), within the

structures of the hated Free State. By this time Cumann na nGaedheal had seen off a military challenge from its own forces, resolved (in however unsatisfactory a fashion) the question of the boundary with Northern Ireland, and established the economy of the new Ireland in a sound if unimaginative fashion. But in truth these achievements were won only to be bequeathed to Fianna Fáil: it is hard to escape the impression that Cumann na nGaedheal had performed as a warm-up routine for the republicans of 1932. The state-builders of Cumann na nGaedheal offered the Irish people structures, not symbols, and an international dignity at the price of petty domestic humiliations. Cumann na nGaedheal ministers like Kevin O'Higgins would establish themselves with ease within the rarefied world of international diplomacy, while neglecting both local party organization and local sensibilities.

This strategy of incorporation began, arguably, with the former Unionists of southern Ireland. The system of proportional representation, which was bound into the Irish Free State constitution of 1922, was designed in part to ensure some voice in the Dáil for the scattered ex-Unionists of the new polity. In addition the new upper house of the parliament, the Seánad, or Senate, provided balm for the comfort of the ex-Unionists: Unionist hopes of guaranteed representation within the house, as well as a power of veto over Dáil legislation, were swiftly broken, but there was some recognition of their case. As a temporary placatory measure 30 out of a total of 60 senators were to be appointed by the President of the Executive Council 'with special regard to the providing of representation for groups or parties not then adequately represented in Dáil Éireann', and William Cosgrave proceeded to appoint 16 former Unionists of different descriptions.[3] The first chairman of the Senate was Lord Glenavy, a former lieutenant to Carson and one of the most prodigious supplicants for patronage in the history of the Unionist movement: his son, Gordon Campbell, also emerged as a prominent supporter of the new Free State administration, and indeed held the critical appointment of secretary to the department of industry and commerce. Generally, the 'troubles' of 1919–21 and the civil war wrought havoc especially within the vulnerable Unionist communities of southern Ulster and south Munster, where there were numerous killings and expropriations: there was a significant decline in the southern Protestant population, which occurred between the censuses of 1911 and 1926 – not all of which can be accounted for by the Great War. But for those who emerged, dazed, into the relatively more settled conditions of the mid-1920s, the Irish Free State offered a home: a home where there were some restrictions and some threats, where some territory was out of bounds, but a home nonetheless.

The Cumann na nGaedheal government had won the tentative loyalty of the ex-Unionists, first to the new dispensation, and eventually to the party itself: after 1927 a number of prominent ex-Unionist figures (the Dockrells, Bryan Ricco Cooper, the Jamesons) identified themselves with the Cosgrave administration. This was a not unmixed blessing for the government. On the one hand, the adherence of Unionist capital and Unionist votes represented a welcome addition of strength as well as a tentative but vital step towards new forms of political dialogue, and away from the

essentially sectarian politics of the Home Rule era; on the other hand, the resonant unpopularity of Unionism within the Irish Free State meant that republicans could argue convincingly that Cumann na nGaedheal was the tool of 'imperialists' and 'freemasons'. Not the least of the Cosgrave government's achievements in state-building was its willingness – without unduly compromising its commitment to popular sovereignty – to ride out this challenge and to seek the incorporation of former enemies not just within nationalism, but beyond as well.

The assimilation of the ex-Unionists was important in terms of political symbolism as well as in some practical, but undramatic, ways. Winning the adherence of the army to the civil authorities of the Free State was a much more treacherous undertaking, and one which threatened to overturn the constitution itself. The National Army had a strength in June 1923 of almost 50,000, representing both an enormous burden on the finances of the new state as well as a potential challenge to civil government. Although it might have been expected that victory in the civil war would have unified and elated the army, in reality its condition was more problematic. There were tensions between the IRB-dominated (and pro-Treaty) Army Council and other senior elements within the officer cadre; and there were also tensions between those who had served in the British army – generally First World War veterans – and those soldiers whose patriotism was apparently less sullied (a record of service to the crown was generally a source of suspicion in the spy-obsessed, conspiratorially minded Ireland of the early 1920s). In addition the army, having successfully fulfilled its purpose, was to be reduced to a strength of around 35,000; and on 2 November 1923 another series of cuts was announced, designed to bring numbers down further, to around 20,000.

Tensions had been evident from late 1922, when several of the veterans from Michael Collins's 'Squad' established a ginger group, the Irish Republican Army Organization (IRAO), within the ranks of the National Army. The IRAO saw themselves as the particular military guardians of Collins's legacy, and indeed in June 1923, just after the republicans had 'dumped' their weapons, the organization formally petitioned the government to make 'a genuine effort . . . to keep absolutely to the forefront the ideals and objects for which the late commander-in-chief [Collins] gave his life'.[4] In reality, as Ronan Fanning has argued, the issues related not just to grand questions of strategy or to the memory of the fallen hero, but also to sectional jealousies and personal concerns among the petitioning officers.[5] As the pressure of the demobilization intensified and caught up with the officers of the IRAO, so their desperation, or boldness, grew; and on 6 March 1924 the ringleaders – General Liam Tobin and Colonel Charlie Dalton – demanded an end to the lay-offs as well as the sacking of the Army Council as a precondition for talks with the government on the future of the Treaty settlement. This was accompanied by reports of acts of mutiny in different army barracks, and of the theft of weapons from military stores. On 18 March the leaders of this incipient mutiny gathered at Devlin's Hotel in Rutland Street, Dublin; but the army command, true at least to Collins's faith in intelligence work, tapped a telephone exchange, discovered the details of the conspiracy and was able to suppress it with little difficulty.

The fall-out from this complex and resonant episode highlights the inter-twining of several issues. The mutineers were defying the authority of the government, but so, too, were the officers who had suppressed the revolt: the military action of 18 March took place without any authorization from Mulcahy or any of his ministerial colleagues, and indeed it ran counter to a deal which the government had earlier struck with the mutineers, granting them until 20 March to surrender. The casualties from the episode, therefore, included both mutineers as well as over-zealous government loyalists: Mulcahy, as responsible minister, resigned, along with the three senior army officers who comprised the Council of Defence. The Minister for Industry and Commerce, Joe McGrath, who had been the mutineers' single ally on the Executive Council, had resigned as early as 7 March. In total almost 100 officers, mostly holding the rank of captain or commandant, lost their commissions as a consequence of the affair. But the government, and principally the ruthless and brilliant Kevin O'Higgins, had demonstrated a breathtaking confidence in enforcing the principles of democratic civilian government: it had, after all, disciplined the very officers who – acting on their own initiative – had been defending its immediate interests (this masochistic regard for political principle was the defining feature of the Cumann na nGaedheal record). There were other benefits from the episode: as Prager has argued, 'the mutiny illustrated the remarkable increase in the strength of the parliamentary structures and in the government's ability to respond to political challenge'.[6] Not that there can have been much doubt after the civil war – but it was also the case that the government's actions in 1924 underlined its unyielding commitment to the construction of a democratic state. Indeed here, as with so much else of the Cumann na nGaedheal record, it was patently clear that some of the Free State ministers were at least as steely in their idealism as the most unyielding of their republican opponents.

It has been argued that the Cumann na nGaedheal government was distinguished more by its regard for democratic structures than for popular symbols; it has been argued, too, that its 'last major effort to develop a symbolically significant political program' lay with its investment in the Boundary Commission of 1924–5.[7] The northern policy of Sinn Féin and of Cumann na nGaedheal had been riddled with paradoxes from the start, and the symbols and structures which the parties generated were utterly at variance. Sinn Féin had emphasized the essential integrity of the Irish nation, yet in September 1920 had instituted a boycott of Belfast industry and commerce as an act of solidarity with the beleaguered Catholics of the North. Michael Collins had deployed the IRA in the North in 1922 with a view to protecting Catholic interests and destabilizing the Unionist state: for Collins and for later Sinn Féin and Cumann na nGaedheal leaders, 'our people' were, in a northern context, the nationalist people, while the Unionists were – in private and in practice, if not in separatist theology – the defining 'others'. The civil war and the death of Collins had undermined the northern IRA offensive and had given rise to a more pacific and gradualist approach to reunification, outlined first by Ernest Blythe in August 1922. But, despite Blythe's insistence that even economic sanctions might prove counter-productive, pin-pricking assaults on partition and on the Belfast

government continued: in April 1923, remarkably, the Free State authorities established a chain of customs posts along the boundary with Northern Ireland, thereby – as Ronan Fanning has observed – 'giving it a permanence and physical appearance it had not had previously'.[8] Free State policy towards Northern Ireland was thus a self-defeating mixture of consensual rhetoric, petty coercion and an increasingly passive sympathy with Ulster Catholics: the symbolism suggested a commitment to an inclusivist unitary state, but the programme of action riled northern Unionists without bringing much benefit to northern nationalists. But perhaps the supreme paradox of the reunification strategy was that Dublin sought an end to partition through consolidating the structures and attitudes that maintained it. When – as in early 1922 – the Belfast government was politically vulnerable and open to moderate concession on the constitutional question, the Dublin ministry, sensing blood, ruthlessly applied the principle of northern subordination to any cross-border deal. When – in early 1923 – the northern government was economically vulnerable, the Dublin ministry sought to reinforce the economic divide between the two territories. Reunification was admittedly never likely in the early 1920s: but there were certainly junctures when perhaps critical cross-border institutions might have been put in place. These passed unattended, partly because of the Free State government's untenable claims of absolute supremacy over its northern counterpart. Cumann na nGaedheal's unconvincing efforts to incorporate northern Protestants failed, therefore, because the price of this incorporation might well have racked the southern state, and partly because these northern Protestants were not, and never had been, central to the vision of Ireland embraced either by the party or by its republican opponents.

By 1925 this position had been reluctantly abandoned, but by then partition had been consolidated and the political and financial position of the Belfast government was comparatively strong. If the Anglo-Irish Treaty was the central tenet of the Cumann na nGaedheal political creed, then article 12 – which made provision for a Boundary Commission – was central to their stand on the partition question and reunification. This, combined with a variety of other pressures, may explain the party's initial reluctance to explore other more effective, if also more circuitous, routes around the border issue. Cumann na nGaedheal had fought a civil war in defence of the letter of the Treaty, and the party leadership continued – even after May 1923 – to be harassed by a strong republican movement in the country as well as by those pro-Treatyites who, like Collins, had some sympathy with the republican aspiration. Just as the party adhered to the other articles of the Treaty, so it would not be lured away from its commitment to a Boundary Commission as a vehicle for progress towards reunification: for example, a British initiative in February 1924, which proposed limited ministerial and parliamentary cooperation between Belfast and Dublin for a prescribed period, met with a swift rejection and renewed calls for the establishment of the commission. But, as is well known, the Boundary Commission – when it came – proved in many ways less satisfactory than some of the deals that had been put on the table by London ministers – and even, remarkably, by Belfast – earlier, between 1922 and 1924 (the Belfast view of the Commission is reconstructed

later in the book). The Commission, chaired by a South African judge, Richard Feetham, and manned by Eoin MacNeill (for the Free State) and by J.R. Fisher (coopted by the British on behalf of the truculent Belfast administration), produced a plan which, when leaked to the press in November 1925, caused outrage in Dublin. For the deeply grounded nationalist expectation that any boundary revision would apply a mortal wound to Northern Ireland was exposed (as some in Dublin had suspected all along) as a fantasy: indeed, not only was it clear that Northern Ireland would emerge largely undiminished, it was also likely that there would be a minor exchange of border areas in which the Free State would unquestionably come off best – but which would also involve the cession of southern territory to Belfast. In the event the Commission was not given time to deliver a formal report: MacNeill, the embarrassed southern representative, resigned, and his former colleagues hurried to strike a deal with the British and with the Ulster Unionists on the basis of the suppression of the draft report. The Irish border was left untouched and the British (as usual) showed themselves to be happy to pay for the temporary, if strategic, amity between Belfast and Dublin: the authority of the Northern Ireland government was enhanced by a minor revision of the Government of Ireland Act, and the Irish Free State's liability for a portion of the United Kingdom war debt – a liability confirmed by the treaty of 1921 – was waived. Each of these concessions in fact underlined the vitality of partition rather than the reverse; and, indeed, this was entirely appropriate, for, whatever the rhetoric, the effective actions of both the northern *and* the southern government had been tending in this direction.

It has been argued that the Boundary Commission debacle left the Cumann na nGaedheal government 'symbolically bankrupt'.[9] Certainly, the central potent, if uninspiring, symbol of the party – the Treaty – was further diminished. Indeed, the failure of the Boundary Commission was a failure for the Treaty settlement, and it was a humiliation for those who, like Collins, believed that the Treaty had brought 'the freedom' to achieve more: this was the first great test of the Treaty as a vehicle for national aspirations, and it was an embarrassing failure. In terms of popular symbolism, the government was therefore left denuded. In practical terms, there was much dissension within the ranks of Cumann na nGaedheal: three deputies broke away from the party to form their own grouping, Clann Éireann, a parliamentary mutiny which, in the wake of the Army Mutiny of the previous year, the government could ill afford. But in truth the short-term fall-out might have been much worse. The government had handled with skill the political dimensions of the crisis of November–December 1925, limiting the damage by swift action and by levering minor but useful concessions from the British. The desertion of the deputies might also have been much more problematic, had it not been for the fact that the main parliamentary opposition to the government – supplied by Sinn Féin – was still adhering to its policy of abstentionism. Indeed, the debacle coincided with a mounting schism within the ranks of Sinn Féin – a split which came to a head in May 1926, when Eamon de Valera and his revisionist supporters left the party to form Fianna Fáil: this meant that the government was spared some of the

extra-parliamentary difficulties which the suppression of the Commission might well have created. At the same time, however, there could be no mistaking that partition had been anything other than entrenched; nor – from the perspective of late 1925 – did it seem that 'the freedom to achieve freedom' was other than a euphemism for a divided nation and the shackles of imperial power.

It was not that Cumann na nGaedheal failed to make the Treaty work in terms of the consolidation of Irish sovereignty. On the contrary, Free State ministers, in particular O'Higgins, were able with the support of other Commonwealth countries, notably South Africa and Canada, to elaborate the dominion status that had been granted in 1921: at the Imperial Conference of 1926 O'Higgins worked with the Canadians and South Africans to establish the co-equality of the dominions with Great Britain; and in 1931, with the Statute of Westminster (where again Irish influence was evident) the legislative authority of the British parliament over the dominions was effectively abolished. Equally, the Treaty was tested and arguably extended through the independent foreign policy of the Free State, and the establishment of missions at Washington in 1924 (where Timothy Smiddy was minister), and – in 1929 – at Paris and Berlin (a brilliant young lawyer and Celticist, Daniel Binchy, was appointed at the age of 29 as the first Irish minister to Germany). But, impressive though these diplomatic triumphs were, they did not permit the Cumann na nGaedheal ministers to claim the high ground of nationalist morality and integrity. On the contrary, the crowning glory of the party's diplomatic offensive within the Commonwealth – the Statute of Westminster – came too late, and was in any case an insufficiently dramatic national achievement to be of any electoral use. This apparently legalistic victory paled beside the ongoing humiliation of partition: it provided a somewhat shrill battle-cry when compared with the republican credentials trumpeted by the new Fianna Fáil.

Nevertheless, Cumann na nGaedheal's true failure was not so much that it did not play the green ace as that it held aloof from the electoral card school. A good case has been made by Richard Dunphy for believing that the party's failure extended far beyond its perceived loss of nationalist initiative to Fianna Fáil.[10] Cumann na nGaedheal had won widespread, if sometimes grudging, loyalty to the institutions of the new state, and had concentrated on developing these institutions; but it had scarcely bothered to stimulate any more narrow, partisan loyalty. In other words, and paradoxically, the party had successfully attained its grail, but had failed utterly to stimulate any excitement for the missionary quest.

Part of the reason for this failure was that the party had no exclusive constituency, and, furthermore, never felt the need to acquire any. Cumann na nGaedheal was the party of law and order, and it was associated with the classes who depended upon law and order: the large farmers, major commercial and professional interests. In addition, it was the party that seemed most capable of sustaining good relations with the British: it therefore could appeal to ex-Unionist sentiment as well as to the interests of those who profited from commercial ties with Britain. But, taken together, these groups scarcely constituted a popular constituency, and indeed, as the issues that had recruited a majority for the Treaty in 1922–3 fell into

the background, so too the strength of Cumann na nGaedheal dissolved. Even in 1923, in the immediate aftermath of the civil war, there had been a strong republican vote (anti-Treaty Sinn Féin won 44 seats to Cumann na nGaedheal's 63), and in June 1927 the infant Fianna Fáil, which proclaimed itself as 'the republican party', came within three seats (with 44 deputies) of the Cumann na nGaedheal total (47). The assassination of Kevin O'Higgins in July 1927 permitted his party to consolidate some of its support on the basis of the law and order question; but, even then, when a second general election was held in that year, in September, Cumann na nGaedheal emerged with a lead of only 10 seats over Fianna Fáil (67 as opposed to 57 for 'the republican party').

It was not just that Fianna Fáil was able to tap an electoral core which was unreconciled to the Free State: it was rather that the party was able to reconstruct the political chemistry of Parnellism by combining nationalist fundamentalism with a carefully tailored social and economic appeal. Cumann na nGaedheal, by contrast, was almost Redmondite in terms of its apparent tolerance of the vestigial British connection, its uncharismatic political loftiness, and its distance from crucial sections of the Irish electorate. The force of this distinction may easily be demonstrated by turning to the social and economic programmes of the two parties. Cumann na nGaedheal's economic policy has often been noted for its lack of adventure – but of course this was scarcely surprising, given that these 'most conservative revolutionaries' (in O'Higgins's famous description) were anxious to avoid dangerous experiments which might jeopardize the stability and the international credit of the new state.[11] Three key committees of inquiry determined the broad outlines of the party's economic strategy – those examining fiscal policy (1923), agriculture (1924) and banking (1927) – and, as Mary Daly has noted, their reports upheld the status quo: 'Ireland would maintain financial links with sterling, produce food for Britain, and retain a free-trade industrial sector'.[12] The government remained strongly committed to the grazier interest and to the cattle trade, and it did little to aid industrial development – except indirectly through its programme of electrification (the Shannon hydro-electric scheme was begun in 1925 and led to the establishment of the Electricity Supply Board in 1927). The Hogan Land Act of 1923, which was amended in 1925, finished off the work of the earlier British land purchase measures by transferring the remaining property in landlords' hands to the possession of the tenant farmers. The Agricultural Credit Act of 1927 was designed to offer a degree of protection to indebted farmers, and came six years in advance of Fianna Fáil's parallel Industrial Credit Company (of 1933). All in all, however, the government had little appeal for the small producers of the country, whether agricultural or industrial. It wooed the middle classes by lowering personal taxation, but offset some of the electoral utility of this device by pruning the salaries of those in the public service. It offered little to the urban and rural labouring classes, except lower wages and an impecunious old age: its policies did nothing to encourage labour-intensive tillage farming or industrial employment, while – in one of the most notorious penny-pinching exercises of the era – it reduced old age pensions by 10 per cent.

Fianna Fáil not only benefited from this electoral wrist-slashing, it was rescued from its own suicidal abstentionist politics through the actions of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Fianna Fáil was prepared to participate in the institutions of the Free State (this had precipitated the original split with Sinn Féin in 1925–6), but only on the (for Cumann na nGaedheal) impossible condition that a central feature of the Treaty settlement, the oath of allegiance, be removed. However, the assassination of O'Higgins stimulated the government into introducing an Electoral Amendment Bill in July 1927, which demanded that all candidates for the Dáil pledge their willingness, if elected, to take the oath of allegiance to the Free State constitution and the British crown. This has been widely seen as an act of political self-sacrifice in the interests of the democratic political culture of the newly independent state ('the decision by Cumann na nGaedheal leaders to sacrifice their own popularity for democratic order probably knows few parallels in other nations'): it certainly had the effect of compelling the Fianna Fáil deputies, albeit with much begrudgery and equivocation, to enter the Dáil after the general election of September 1927.[13]

The Electoral Amendment initiative has been seen as an act of political suicide by the Treatyites, partly because of the popular nationalist credentials of Fianna Fáil, but also because the party had constructed both an organization and a socio-economic programme designed for mass appeal. The party was able to attract republicans who were disillusioned with the dead-end politics of Sinn Féin: it built swiftly and securely upon the foundations of the 'troubles', exploiting the charisma of local IRA heroes, tapping into the networks of republican ex-prisoners and commandeering the loyalties of those who had sworn their allegiance to the republic. Fianna Fáil was therefore from the start symbolically charged as well as highly disciplined, combining republican mystique as well as a military formality: 'organisational success was immediate and impressive', with by 1927 a local base of 1,000 cumainn and an effective propagandist weekly, the *Nation* (a title which in itself evoked the heady idealism of Young Ireland, and the contrast with the sullied and worldly O'Connellite movement).[14]

But Fianna Fáil was much more than a republican veterans' organization. Republicans were certainly a core constituency, but – unlike Cumann na nGaedheal – the party was able to remain loyal to its civil war origins, while simultaneously transcending them. For Fianna Fáil developed a broad social as well as symbolic appeal which (not unlike the Conservative hegemony in Britain from 1979 to 1997) brought an electoral ascendancy in the 1930s and 1940s and ensured that the party has for long remained the largest and most formidable political 'movement' in Ireland. Fianna Fáil appeared at the start to be sensitive to the needs of women: its first executive (in 1926–7) included Kathleen Clarke, Linda Kearns, Dorothy Macardle, Constance Markievicz, Margaret Pearse and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Seán Lemass, one of the party's founders, appeared to be particularly supportive, combining an appreciation of the role and the political potential of women with an admiration for leading women republicans such as Markievicz. If these appearances very quickly proved to be deceptive (Lemass would soon emerge as the author of the hated

Conditions of Employment Act), then at least Fianna Fáil momentarily put up a front – in contradistinction to the patriarchs of Cumann na nGaedheal.

Fianna Fáil was the party of the small producer, promising tariff protection to nascent industry as well as action on the land annuities question for the small farmers: Cumann na nGaedheal, by contrast, appeared to favour the small export-oriented and (in Fianna Fáil eyes) pro-British classes, as well as the grazier interests. Fianna Fáil promised jobs and a cure to emigration; Cumann na nGaedheal presided over high unemployment and the leeching away of the country's population. Fianna Fáil conjured up a vision of an over-powerful and overfed bureaucratic elite, which it promised to cull; Cumann na Gaedheal by contrast seemed to be the mouthpiece for insensitive, even anti-national civil servants, and to be simultaneously oppressing the poorest beneficiaries of state support. Without being socialist, Fianna Fáil ate into the support of the Labour Party; without being violently republican, the party provided an alternative to the IRA regrouping of the later 1920s. Without being markedly more Catholic than Cumann na nGaedheal, the party was able by the early 1930s to credibly defend Catholic sectarian interests; without being strong on law and order, the party was able to pose as a force for stability in Irish society. In other words, by 1932 Fianna Fáil was offering something to workers and to capitalists, to small farmers and to the urban petite bourgeoisie. It had reinvented the republican tradition as both a superior and an accessible caste among the untouchables of the Free State.

While Fianna Fáil focused obsessively on electoral domination, Cumann na nGaedheal pursued an equally unyielding commitment to the consolidation of the state, and indeed the nation: the two processes – Fianna Fáil's partisan successes and Cumann na nGaedheal's national achievement – were of course intimately connected, and indeed some final observations need to be directed towards this paradoxical relationship. Like many recent US Presidents, Cumann na nGaedheal had sought to compensate for domestic failure or, at best, blandness with international success and spectacle. But the party's tragedy was that its long-term investment in foreign and commonwealth relations only really bore marketable fruit when it was too late: the Statute of Westminster, the product of years of work within the imperial conference circuit, came only in 1931; while the close Irish association with the League of Nations blossomed fully only in 1932, just in time for Eamon de Valera to take on the Presidency of the Council of the League. In addition the party had done nothing to disconnect the fate of the Irish economy from that of the British; and, when the American and British economies went into free-fall after 1929, so the Irish followed. It is of course difficult to see how the Cumann na nGaedheal government could have fully insulated the Irish economy from the general downturn of the late 1920s; but it is unquestionably true that Fianna Fáil's economic nationalism – its protectionist ideas as well as its pump-priming and other interventionist proposals – presented a favourable contrast to Cumann na nGaedheal's defeatist austerity.

Cumann na nGaedheal had established the credibility of the new Irish state within the international community and had defined its financial probity in terms that

were appreciated both by local business interests and by the British. But the price for this exercise in statecraft – the price of applause in London and Geneva – was the electoral disillusionment of those teachers, gardaí and taxpayers whose incomes were cut through the supplementary budget of 1931, as well as the disillusionment of those smallholders who saw their land annuity payments drain out of the country at a time of mounting economic difficulty. There were other areas where this tension between state-craft and partisanship was all too painfully evident. Cumann na nGaedheal was strongly associated with the Catholic Church, and Cosgrave in particular was a highly devout man who was strongly influenced by the hierarchy in all matters touching public morality: in 1923 the Church had in effect dictated the policy of the government with regard to the sensitive issue of divorce. Clearly this influence had a bearing on sectarian relations within the state; but, while leading Protestant intellectuals (such as Yeats) decried what they saw as clericalism, most Protestants in the south of Ireland probably thought little differently about the issues of divorce and contraception and censorship to the majority of their Catholic compatriots. What has been described as the Catholic triumphalism of the new state was therefore possibly much less important for southern Protestants than the recognition of their interests through the Senate and through the presence of the Ulster Protestant, Ernest Blythe (from Lisburn, County Antrim), in the Executive Council (indeed, the symbolic significance of Blythe's ascent to the Vice-Presidency of the Council in 1927 is easily overlooked). Without compromising its Catholic orthodoxy or integrity, the government made a number of limited but – in electoral terms – expensive gestures towards the southern minority which helped to reconcile these (for the most part) ex-Unionists. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that Cumann na nGaedheal was expanding the traditional definition of the Irish nation by winning the allegiance of these former opponents.

Equally, such gestures of reconciliation created opportunities for the government's ambitious electoral rival. As the economic climate worsened, so the almost traditional sectarian bitterness within the area of local government patronage intensified. Some ultra-Catholics renewed their opposition to the appointment of Protestants as dispensary doctors (this was a suppurating issue which dated back at least to the mid-Edwardian era). But it was the case of Letitia Dunbar-Harrison which focused sectarian passions and which proved the greatest test of the Cumann na nGaedheal government's resolve to defend its national achievement. Dunbar-Harrison was sufficiently gifted to win in 1930 an open competition for the post of county librarian in Mayo: she was also a Protestant, a Trinity graduate and anglophone. The library committee of Mayo county council, backed by the council itself, refused to confirm the appointment; and they were supported by the local Catholic clergy and by Fianna Fáil. There was little electoral mileage for Cumann na nGaedheal in championing Dunbar-Harrison against such a formidable local coalition; but the government recognized that, for the southern minority as well as for international opinion, the integrity of its commitment to an inclusivist state was under trial. It therefore resisted the opposition, dissolved the county council and maintained Dunbar-Harrison in post. Cumann na nGaedheal had held on to the moral high ground (if the

morality of the case is to be judged in terms of a meritocratic appointments policy); but while it preserved its integrity, Fianna Fáil garnered the votes.

In another, final key area the government's determination to guard and consolidate the state proved to be electorally counter-productive, and indeed very nearly self-defeating. One of Cumann na nGaedheal's chief claims on the electorate was its record in having established law and order within the Irish Free State after the turmoil of the revolutionary era. But this record came under threat between 1929 and 1931 with an escalation of IRA violence, and the launching in 1931 of Saor Éire, a leftist (or, in the Department of Justice's judgement, 'frankly communistic') political initiative emanating from the IRA army convention.[15] The 'communistic' aspirations of the IRA aside, there were ominous echoes of the struggle against the British: two men were shot as 'spies', one of whom was killed; a Garda barracks in County Galway was bombed (a – for the South – late example of a republican tradition dating back to 1867), and detectives as well as uniformed gardaí were denounced as 'social pariahs' (in a manner reminiscent of the verbal attacks on RIC men). The government responded with the Constitution (Amendment No. 17) Bill, a measure which has been deemed, with some justification, to be 'really a Public Safety Bill of a most ferocious kind': the measure banned 12 organizations, including the IRA and Saor Éire, and it instituted military tribunals in order to circumvent the intimidation of jurors and witnesses (a state witness had been killed by the IRA in February 1929).[16] For the government, nearing the end of its term of office, the emergence of what it deemed a 'red scare' might well have proved to be an electoral blessing in its campaign to ward off the challenge from Fianna Fáil. But in reality the new military tribunals were widely condemned; and the prosecution of the Fianna Fáil organ, the *Irish Press*, backfired, serving only to highlight the government's apparent heavy-handedness and its opponents' case.

Fianna Fáil's line was – by way of contrast – both electorally more shrewd as well as apparently more compassionate. In the highly schizoid political culture which was common to both parts of Ireland, it was possible for voters to – as Jeffrey Prager has remarked – 'culturally applaud' militant republicanism, while withholding electoral support.[17] Fianna Fáil, through its still active, if discreet, links with militant republicanism, was able to associate itself with the ideals and motivations of the 'green' left, while avoiding any more damaging connection. The party was therefore able to exploit the popular understanding or tacit approval of radical republican activity, while publicly distancing itself from violence and from the sins of 'Bolshevism'. Once again, the Cumann na nGaedheal government lacked this potent symbolism; and even though it argued that it was defending the achievements of independence (and indeed saw itself in this light), ministers offered nothing of more immediate relevance to Irish voters. The election of February 1932 was fought by the government with the weapon of a red conspiracy; but Fianna Fáil replied by conjuring up an unholy trinity of Cumann na nGaedheal, Unionism and freemasonry. These were more familiar and more potent demons; and it was therefore the 'orange scare' rather than the 'red scare' which seems to have had the greatest electoral force. But above all, of course, Fianna Fáil provided more than spectral

threats: it offered a skilfully tailored and apposite social programme to which the government had no effective response. And on 16 February 1932, with the end of the campaign, Fianna Fáil's choice of lures as well as threats was thoroughly vindicated.

6.2 Manifest Destiny: De Valera's Ireland, 1932–48

With the change of government in 1932 came a change not merely of party, but also of style and of substance. The workaday offerings and aspirations of Cumann na nGaedheal were dispelled, to be replaced by the republican mystique of Fianna Fáil and the quirky charisma of its leader, Eamon de Valera. De Valera was Parnell to Cosgrave's Justin McCarthy, a 'chief' rather than a 'chairman'. Indeed, Tim Pat Coogan has recorded that in later years, as President of Ireland, de Valera graciously absolved an intimate official from the need to append 'Your excellency' to every sentence of conversation: 'you need just call me Chief'.[18] This self-appointed guardian of the national conscience was deemed (by T.K. Whitaker, no less) not to be Irish 'in his manner': he could exercise a frosty charm, and seems to have relented a

Plate 15 Eamon de Valera.
Source: Hulton Getty.

little in conversing in Irish or with scientific or scholarly acquaintances. But on the whole his intensity of purpose, both personal and political, combined with a highly calculating intelligence to create a rather formidable personality. This was bolstered both by his political and military *cursus honorum* (he was the senior surviving officer of the Easter Rising, and Pearse's direct successor as President of the Republic), and indeed by the quiet passion of his religious faith: Maurice Moynihan, the long-time secretary to the government, described 'his thought as being primarily political and Catholic'.[19] Even in the early 1930s the new President of the Executive Council had a sure sense of his own dignity and destiny, and seems to have actively cultivated the veneration surrounding him. His penchant for dramatic clothing – black cloaks and wide-brimmed hats – emphasized a slight but useful detachment from ordinary Irish people. His speaking voice, never mellifluous, had an almost oracular quality: Liam Skinner, writing in 1946, drew a pointed contrast between the public utterances of the latterday 'Chief' and the 'high-sounding words and gripping phrases cultivated by the old Irish Parliamentary Party'.[20] For Skinner, too, the Chief's charisma was reinforced by his mixture of asceticism and high-voltage intellectual attainments: de Valera sacrificed himself for his people as their leader, and when he had had time to spare – largely, evidently, during his earlier periods in gaol – 'Einstein became his companion, and an occasional game of chess with jailers and comrades his relaxation'.[21] Indeed, de Valera's knowledge of relativity became one of the defining features of his apparent intellectual ascendancy: his son would boast that the great physicist himself had declared that 'Dev' was one of only nine people in the world who had a thorough grasp of the theory.[22] Such was the stuff of the legend: it is hard to imagine a similar claim being made for Cosgrave, and harder still to imagine his son, the laconic Liam Cosgrave, making the attempt.

It is easy to highlight the technical political skills both of de Valera and his party; and it is dangerously easy to highlight their constitutional agenda to the detriment of other issues. The ambience of the Fianna Fáil movement was certainly rife with civil war passions and a defensive national pride; the movement was also unusually authoritarian, and ridden with clientilism. However, the party had a social conscience, and – even though its relationship with the Church was always complex – it had a commitment to holy charity and some interest in the corporatist thought fashionable among Catholic political ideologues in the 1930s. It has been argued with justice that 'possibly no aspect of Fianna Fáil's programme explains the breadth and solidarity of the party's popular support better than the social welfare reforms which it introduced when first in office' – even though these tend to be overshadowed by de Valera's apparently all-consuming passion for national sovereignty.[23] The first Fianna Fáil budget, outlined in May 1932, raised spending on welfare, bringing a greater investment in housing, unemployment benefit and old age pensions: an additional 250,000 pounds was allocated to the elderly during the first Fianna Fáil cabinet, a sum which outraged the Department of Finance and which would have scarified the Cumann na nGaedheal ministers. A large-scale building and slum-clearance programme brought the construction or renovation of 132,000 homes in the first ten years of Fianna Fáil power. The sustained nature

of this investment indicates the long-term nature of the party's commitment: this was not a welfarism which waxed and waned according to the electoral calendar.

Fianna Fáil had been returned to power in 1932, dependent upon the votes of Labour Party deputies; and it was undoubtedly the case that Labour priced its support in terms of welfare expansion. But Fianna Fáil was reelected in January 1933, this time with a majority of one over a combination of all the other Dáil parties. The votes of Labour deputies were unquestionably useful for the government, yet it was also true that the programme of welfare reform often had little connection with Labour pressure and, indeed, came to be an electoral embarrassment for them (in so far as Fianna Fáil appeared to have all the ideas). For Fianna Fáil had stolen the Labour Party's agenda, expanding the application of unemployment assistance through a measure of 1933, legislating for workmen's compensation in 1934 and for widows' and orphans' pensions in 1935 (a measure which, according to Seán T. O'Kelly, had no more to do with Labour 'than the King of Bulgaria').[24] Seán Lemass, the exciting and unconventional Minister for Industry and Commerce, sponsored a Conditions of Employment Act in 1936, a sweeping measure which affected working hours, holidays, rest rooms within the work-place, and which regulated areas of abuse such as piecework and the employment of young people or children: it was also, however, a measure which reflected widespread concern at the high level of male unemployment and which (under its controversial section 16) empowered the government to regulate the number of women working within industry. Lemass enacted a Shops Bill, designed to improve the often Victorian working terms and conditions of the army of shop workers. A Wages Board, a blasphemy in the eyes of the liberal economists of Finance and the new Fine Gael party (1933), was established in 1938.

It would of course be wrong to infer from these initiatives that the Ireland of the 1930s was a veritable workers' paradise, or that Fianna Fáil was simply the Irish for socialism. On the contrary, if the party was concerned about the living and working conditions of the poor, and if – in the assessment of Richard Dunphy – it thereby created an army of dependent supporters, then it was also acutely concerned about the health of the native capitalist class – and this, allied with the party's national pride, fed a protectionist zeal and brought high prices and comparatively modest increases in the standard of living.[25] There was always an underlying ideological spin to economic planning (for Fianna Fáil, to paraphrase Horace Plunkett, political economy was always spelt with a capital 'p' and a small 'e'): but the ideological priorities (despite the later ruminations of senior Fianna Fáil ministers) were not socialist. A combination of the great depression, which was hitting both Britain and Ireland severely by the early 1930s, as well as an ideological inheritance from Griffith and from the early Sinn Féin movement, led Fianna Fáil to what has been called its protectionist 'spree' during its first years in power. As with so much else of the Fianna Fáil record, its 'spree' was in fact made possible by structures established under Cumann na nGaedheal, and indeed the new government has been seen (by John Horgan) as inaugurating 'more a change of pace than a change of policy': in 1931 the Cosgrave government had passed the Customs Duties (Provisional

Imposition) Act, which enabled it to impose emergency import tariffs.[26] But the measure was used only once by Cosgrave, and in total, in 1931, only 68 articles were liable to import tariffs. By 1937, after five years of Fianna Fáil government, the tariff net had been widened to take in 288 articles, with just under 2,000 other articles being restricted through the application of a quota system. Some types of import were completely banned. In addition, Control of Manufactures legislation was passed in 1932 and 1934 to prevent non-Irish companies cutting through this protectionist trap by disguising their control of Irish businesses. By 1936 the average level of impost was 35 per cent, as compared with the level of 9 per cent sustained in 1931 under the departing Cumann na nGaedheal administration.

There were some positive features of this strategy, both in terms of the growth of the heavily protected Irish industries and with regard to what Mary Daly, writing in the early 1990s, has called 'the first sustained growth in industrial employment for a century at a rate not yet surpassed'.[27] Moreover, there was an efflorescence of the semi-state (or what Lemass preferred to call the 'state-sponsored') sector, and many new bodies were created – following the Cumann na nGaedheal initiatives of the 1920s – to develop and manage particular critical areas of the economy: the Irish Sugar Company was founded in 1933, as was a 'state merchant bank', the Industrial Credit Company; the national air line, Aer Lingus, followed in 1936. But recent scholarship has tended to stress the limited impact of these initiatives, in terms of both their relatively modest scale and what Daly had judged 'their non-competing status vis-à-vis private business'.[28] Moreover, bigger government and protection brought high levels of personal and corporate taxation, and an indirect tax structure that was amongst the most oppressive anywhere in the world. Offering meaningful comment on changes in the quality of life in the Ireland of the 1930s is equally difficult: but it is certainly the case that Fine Gael was able to attack the government on the issue of living standards as early as 1933–4, while the level of emigration, temporarily depressed because of the bleak economic prospects in Britain and the USA in the early 1930s, rose with the improvement of the host economies. Fianna Fáil's quest for a thoroughgoing autarky had ended by 1938 amidst the shambles of high prices (especially for vital raw materials), bloated uncompetitive industries (the 'rats who could not race', in Joe Lee's memorable indictment), and a still endemic poverty.[29]

Underlying Fianna Fáil industrial strategy was the Sinn Féin impulse towards an economic liberation from Britain: import duties were, almost by definition, directed towards this end, since the overwhelming bulk of Irish imports came from Britain. Within the arena of agricultural policy this mixture of politics and economic strategy is even more unmistakeable. The abiding argument against stringent industrial protection had always been the threat of retaliatory levies on Irish agricultural exports, and indeed the prophecies of the free-trade jeremiahs were broadly fulfilled, if in a much more complicated way than had been envisioned. The immediate cause of the trade war, or – more grandiloquently – 'the economic war' between Ireland and Britain was not Fianna Fáil's dream of a self-sufficient and protected Ireland, but rather the party's dream of an Ireland untrammelled by what it perceived as

degrading linkages with the former imperial power. One of the many continuities linking British rule and independent Ireland had been the payment, by Irish farmers, of the annuities on their land purchase agreements: these monies, which represented a form of repayment on a British-supplied mortgage deal, were garnered by the Treasury in London until 1922, and continued to be collected and transmitted under the Cumann na nGaedheal administration. Indeed, the annuity payments were guaranteed to the British by two agreements (signed by the Cosgrave government in 1923 and 1926); but de Valera rejected the moral and legal force of both these deals, and all the more emphatically since neither had been ratified by the Dáil. The annuity payments were therefore withheld from the British (even though they were still collected by the Irish government from the farmers). Efforts at diplomacy failed; and the British acted swiftly to recover the outstanding sums by imposing a 20 per cent import duty on a wide range of Irish goods, including cattle. With the Irish retaliation (duties on numerous British raw materials) the basic structures of the 'economic' war were in place – though, as Ronan Fanning has pointed out, the political nature of the conflict was plain to all.[30] For de Valera the issue of the annuities was tied up with the quest for sovereignty; for the British, the Irish default was looked upon as the repudiation of long-standing agreements – and it also provided the pretext for a campaign which, it was hoped in Whitehall, would undermine the Fianna Fáil administration in favour of Cumann na nGaedheal.

It has been said that Fianna Fáil used 'the screen of the economic war' to implement some political and economic goals of a more fundamental nature.[31] The party cast itself originally as the champion of the small farmer, and it envisioned an Ireland widely populated by smallholders, who would eke a modest living primarily from tillage. Viewed in this light, the British assault on the cattle trade, while surprising in its swiftness and brutality, was not without some political utility. De Valera's government was prepared to bolster some agricultural exports, but live cattle exports, though half-heartedly subsidized, were not among the government's economic or indeed ideological priorities. While the cattle trade reeled from the impact of the British attack, the government did as much as it could to promote Irish tillage: a guaranteed price was promised for Irish wheat, while tremendous efforts were expended to develop the sugar-beet industry. Barley was protected for the benefit of the brewing industry. The land annuities, which were still being levied by the government though not transmitted, were halved and used for rate relief: this in turn was directed particularly at smallholders and at tillage farmers.

But there was no return on this investment. There was no massive conversion from the failing livestock trade to tillage, and indeed the principal movement occurred within the tillage sector, from unsubsidized crops to those carrying government support. Moreover, though the government had no love for the graziers, their centrality to the Irish economy was underlined as the cattle trade collapsed between 1932 and 1935, and as the knock-on effects were felt within the broader economy: the graziers may have been unloved and unlovely, but their trade helped to pay for the industrialization drive which was another central feature of the Fianna Fáil agenda. In brief, Fianna Fáil's efforts to boost rural employment were incompatible with

its strategy for industrial employment, and this inconsistency was recognized by the government's willingness to come to terms with the British, first of all through the Coal–Cattle Pact of January 1935. This modest deal involved raising the import quota on British coal, and the British reciprocating with Irish cattle. It was hardly an overbrimming testimony to mutual goodwill, but it represented the first tentative step towards the comprehensive agreement struck in 1938 (and which will be reviewed shortly).

But the main focus of the attempted disengagement from Britain was not economic; and the populist appeal of the first Fianna Fáil governments was certainly not confined to its protectionist mission. For de Valera the Fianna Fáil accession to power in 1932, confirmed in the election of January 1933, provided the opportunity to continue the civil war by other means: indeed, there is a satisfying symmetry and symbolism in the fact that, even though the republicans 'dumped' their weapons in May 1923, apprehensive Fianna Fáilers, including Eamon and Vivion de Valera, entered the Dáil in March 1932 armed with revolvers (de Valera's grim expression on the eve of his empowerment was apparently to be explained by his lack of faith in his son's marksmanship).[32] As has been elaborated, the party was now much more than a haven for recusant republicans: nevertheless, the anti-Treatyite agenda was central to the purpose of the new Fianna Fáil government. A little over a month after assuming power – on 23 April 1932 – de Valera introduced the Constitutional Amendment (Removal of Oath) Bill, a measure which sliced through the Gordian knot that had choked Irish party politics between 1922 and 1927. The Senate, still largely pro-Treaty in its sympathies, and with a vestigial ex-Unionist presence, used its powers to delay the bill; but, in the context of de Valera's remarkable political tenacity, it was a forlorn hope, and the measure passed into law in 1933. Indeed, the government's hands were strengthened by the Fianna Fáil electoral victory of January 1933, a contest which spelt the end not only for the oath, but also for the Senate itself. This chamber, viewed by de Valera as an integral part of the alien imposition of December 1921, and also as a practical obstacle to his own authority, survived only until May 1936: its expiry stimulated little grief in the broader Irish electorate, but it had been an important focus for ex-Unionist sentiment, and to that extent had been a useful if minor tool in the programme of national reconciliation tacitly pursued by Cumann na nGaedheal. But there was little electoral advantage in appeasing 'Orangemen' and 'Freemasons'; and, given the bitterness of the revolutionary struggle, it is scarcely surprising that the Fianna Fáil of the 1930s should have been short on consensual gestures. The surprise is rather that their predecessors should have done so much towards expanding the embrace of the Irish nation.

Nor does the Fianna Fáil assault on the office of governor general pose any significant interpretative problem. At one level, the governor general was a creation of the Treaty agreement, and was therefore *ipso facto* an outrage to party sentiment. The governor was also, of course, the representative of the British crown, and – even though his functions were largely ceremonial – he represented an offence to the broader republican movement. Setting aside republican principle and civil war passion, the office of governor general looked like a continuation of the viceroyalty,

which throughout the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had seemed to many nationalists to be the epitome of British excess and abandon (the reign of Earl Spencer – the 'Duke of Sodom and Gomorrah' – in the early 1880s, and the Crown Jewels affair of 1908, episodes spiced with revelations concerning the sexual and financial proclivities of the viceregal court, appeared to confirm long-standing suspicions). The gubernatorial reigns of T.M. Healy (1922–8) and of James McNeill (1928–32) provided little by way of grand larceny or gay 'outing' to fire the prurient imagination, but there remained the lingering fear that the governor generalship involved 'the inevitable re-creating of the old sham Court, gathering round it all the hovering sycophants and certain social types alien to the National life of the country'.[33] Moreover, if it seems rather improbable that the 'Heliotropolis' of the 1920s (as the Dublin wags dubbed T.M. Healy's official residence), together with its septuagenarian occupant, constituted much of a distraction from 'National realities', it should not be forgotten that both Healy and McNeill were heavily implicated with the Cumann na nGaedheal administration and provided their office with a partisan taint. Healy was the veteran of the Land League era who had been most accessible to the Sinn Féin elite, but part of the reason for this was that he was connected by marriage to Kevin O'Higgins; James McNeill had been the Irish High Commissioner in London, but in addition he had served in the Indian Civil Service (and was therefore embroiled in British imperialism) and was the brother of Eoin MacNeill, who had been a Cumann na nGaedheal minister. In fact McNeill responded in a proper and dignified manner to the new Fianna Fáil government, even upturning protocol by journeying to the Dáil in order to confirm the new ministers in office. But such tokens of sensitivity did nothing to divert de Valera from his purpose in downgrading and marginalizing the governor generalship. After a series of humiliating affronts, McNeill was forced into resignation with effect from 1 November 1932: his successor, Dónal Ó Buachalla, lived as a private citizen, surrendering some of his powers to the Executive Council and obediently falling on his court sword in 1937 when, with the new constitution, his office was abolished. The idea of appointing a plain man as governor general had probably arisen from the inventive legal genius of (ironically) a British signatory of the Treaty, Lord Birkenhead, but it had also been prefigured in the satirical imagination of the journalist F. Frankfort Moore, whose comic creation, *The Viceroy Muldoon* (1893), in some ways resembles Governor General Buckley.

This meticulous demolition of the constitution of 1922 involved as well a re-excavation of the idea of external association, which had been buried since the civil war: in effect, de Valera, with a breathtaking self-confidence, and with only the scantiest acknowledgement of the Cumann na nGaedheal achievement, was reaffirming his main constitutional strategies of 1921 (Deirdre McMahon has, however, warned against any overly simplistic equation between 1921 and the 1930s).[34] This meant dismantling the Treatyite shrine, even though it had served Irish national aspirations pretty well; but it also meant the painstaking installation of the old deity, external association, whose effectiveness was still untested and unknown. This latter task began in 1935, with the passage of two measures – the Irish Nationality

and Citizenship Act and the Aliens Act – which established and defined Irish citizenship and, in doing so, classed British subjects as 'aliens'. A decision was taken in June 1936 to promulgate a new constitution; and – as an interim measure – the Constitution (Amendment No. 27) Act was hurriedly passed on 11 December in order to excise from the existing constitution all references to the crown. A second bill was approved on the following day, the Executive Authority (External Relations) Act, which in clumsy language recognized that the King was head of the Commonwealth and might act on behalf of the Free State for as long as it was a member nation. The proximate cause of this legislative flurry, Edward VIII, seemed (unusually for the House of Windsor) to have some sympathy with Irish national aspirations: his long-standing embroilment with Wallis Simpson and his departure on 10 December may well have simultaneously robbed the Irish of a benign monarch while making possible the emergent republic. But the abdication crisis was certainly not the sole inspiration behind this legislation, in so far as many of its objectives had been mooted much earlier in the year: the abdication did mean, however, that the Irish government could accomplish the most difficult part of its reform agenda well ahead of schedule, and without the breakdown of the slowly improving Anglo-Irish relationship.

The British accepted these repudiations of the Treaty, partly because in late 1936 and early 1937 they did not want to pursue an international quarrel on the still sensitive question of the monarchy. But it was also the case that they had little choice but to acquiesce, given the ambiguities of the 1921 settlement as well as the developing nature of the Commonwealth. Lionel Curtis, one of the secretaries of the British delegation at the time of the Treaty, hailed the agreement as 'one of the greatest achievements in the history of the Empire' and Lloyd George promised action if its terms were broken – but in reality, as many recognized at the time, it was impossible that the Treaty should remain a static formula, and it became therefore well-nigh impossible to judge what constituted a breach of terms.[35] In particular the ever-expanding definition of the dominion status contained within the Treaty meant that the Irish could – paradoxically – alter its substance without contravening their obligations. In addition the British had from the start denied that the Treaty was an international agreement, and had therefore deprived themselves of the protection of international law: the Irish, by way of contrast, had a double protection in the international registration of the Treaty as well as in the highly sensitive Commonwealth audience for the Anglo-Irish relationship. All this meant that the Treaty, a characteristically ambiguous and ingenious achievement of imperial diplomacy, could be simultaneously upheld and overturned, and honoured in the breach. More specifically, as Alan Ward has observed, 'this appeared to mean that the Irish could whittle away the link with the Crown because no one knew where the breaking point lay'.[36] Like Alice's Cheshire cat, the Treaty faded away, leaving only a taunting smile – the memory of British complacency at what had been 'one of the greatest achievements in the history of the Empire'.

The first steps towards the new constitution had already been taken by the time Edward lugubriously broadcast his farewell to the British public from Fort Belvedere.

The single-minded nature of de Valera's quest for sovereignty, and the fervour of his desire to prove the viability of 'external association', or a version of it, have already been highlighted. But, within clear limitations, the new constitution that was published in 1937 was the outcome of a series of compromises. The new Ireland, or Éire, was to be a republic in all but name, with a President as head of state, a Taoiseach (or Prime Minister) and cabinet, and a bicameral legislature. The self-denying refusal to embrace the republic was explained by de Valera as a concession to Ulster Unionist feeling – a recognition of the loyalty felt by the northern community towards the British crown. But this is only really acceptable either as a feint or as an expression of the immense gulf separating de Valera from the northerners whom he affected to conciliate: articles two and three of the new constitution laid claim to the territory of Northern Ireland (despite the opposition of influential figures like J.J. McElligott of the Department of Finance), and the special position allotted to the Roman Catholic church (article 44) and to Catholic social teaching was certainly not calculated as a harbinger for a settled, reunified Ireland. In reality, de Valera did not want to compromise his vision of a Gaelic, Catholic, rural nation, and he therefore did little to promote the unity to which he paid lip-service. There was no Irish republic in 1937 either because de Valera thought northern Unionist sympathy could be bought on bargain-basement terms, or (much more likely) because the straitened economic climate of the late 1930s provided too bleak a backdrop for the final act in an 800-year struggle.

Even the apparently unambiguous deference to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church was the outcome of a protracted negotiation between different interested parties. Early drafts of the constitution had affirmed that 'the true religion is that established by Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ Himself' and that 'the Church of Christ is the Catholic Church' – the logical inference being that Catholicism alone represented 'true religion'.[37] But, while this was the formula endorsed by Cardinal MacRory, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, other senior figures within the hierarchy (such as Archbishop Byrne of Dublin) were more accommodating. Moreover, the Vatican was prepared to turn a blind eye to an assertion of Catholicism which was less than triumphalist, and perhaps even less than strict orthodoxy might have required (Cardinal Pacelli genially told an alarmed Joseph Walshe, secretary of the Department of External Affairs, and an exceptionally devout Catholic, that the government might be guilty of heresy in its suggested approach).[38] The mixed attitude of the hierarchy, combined with the apparent indifference of Rome, provided de Valera with some space to negotiate with the Protestant churches and to avoid an affirmation of Catholic identity which would cause outright offence to the spectrum of Irish Christianity. In particular de Valera seems to have been impressed by the intellectually distinguished and flinty Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, John Allen Fitzgerald Gregg, who insisted that the formal title of the Catholic Church be applied in the constitution ('the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman church'), thereby preserving the claims of his own communion to be 'catholic'.[39] One last aspect of this article 44 deserves emphasis: this was the specific recognition of the Jewish congregations in Ireland, a constitutional blessing which may not in practice

have amounted to much, but which in the context of the rabid anti-semitism of the time was a more liberal proceeding than might have been expected. Indeed, as has frequently been noted, the entire constitution reflected an uneasy accommodation between Catholicism and liberalism – a blend, as Richard Dunphy has remarked, 'of cultural and moral authoritarianism and political liberalism'.[40]

The constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and 'the free practice and profession of religion', but only 'subject to public order and morality': this qualification may well have been intended to address the issue of public preaching by, in particular, evangelical Protestants – an issue which had for long simmered, occasionally blazing into life when such preachers had inspired a backlash among those to whom they purported to preach 'the Word'. Otherwise, the constitution embodied the gamut of Catholic social teaching, emphasizing the centrality of the family within society, prohibiting divorce and locating women firmly within the home: Mrs Tom Clarke's feminist critique of the constitution won short shrift at the Fianna Fáil ard-fheis of 1937. Efforts by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and the Women Graduates' Association to obtain the deletion of the most offensively anti-feminist articles (40, 41 and 45) produced a stir in Dublin, but not beyond: some minor and grudging amendments ensued. A Women's Social and Progressive League was created in November 1937 to carry on the campaign, but it won little support at the general elections of 1938 and 1943. The constitution also defined the highly limited role of the state, upheld private property and affirmed a preference for 'private initiative in industry and commerce'. Yet, if all this reflected Catholic social teaching (and, more specifically, the influence of de Valera's friend, Father (later Archbishop) John Charles McQuaid), it should be emphasized that the values which were propagated chimed with the convictions of much of Irish Protestantism. Secularized middle-class Protestants along with Catholic liberals may have had qualms about the intrusive nature of the constitution, but in practice it did not so much impose as reflect a shared value system.[41]

In terms of the relationship with Britain, the constitution defined a bold compromise between separatist principle and political practicalities: it was a macro-political essay in keeping options open. Ireland might be associated with the Commonwealth for some purposes, but not for others: the British King, now George VI, might fulfil certain diplomatic functions for the Irish government without having any internal role, however nominal, and – emphatically – without being head of state. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of April 1938 addressed some of the older and – for the Irish – more problematic ambiguities in the relationship with Britain, completing the work of the constitution in overturning the Treaty of 1921. But while substantial British concessions in 1938 – the evacuation of the Treaty ports (at Berehaven, Cobh and Lough Swilly), the resolution of the land annuities dispute on bargain-basement terms (the Irish paid 10 million pounds as a final settlement), and the effective lifting of duties on Irish imports – bought a certain amount of cautious personal goodwill between de Valera and the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, they did not purchase any broader cross-channel reconciliation: instead, Irish resentments focused ever more sharply on the issue of partition, while the British

(who tended to treat Anglo-Irish relations as an irritating diversion from the European floor-show) turned from mollifying the Taoiseach to the more intricate task of appeasing the Führer.

De Valera eventually came to regard the settlement of 1938 as his greatest political achievement, and historians on the whole have concurred (Theo Hoppen has described the deal on land as – for the Irish – 'the bargain of the century').[42] Seán T. O'Kelly, de Valera's Tánaiste, or Deputy Prime Minister, expressed one prevailing ministerial view in his 'John Bull' speech when he declared: 'look at the last agreement that we made. Why we won all round us. We whipped him [John Bull] right, left and centre, and with God's help, we will do the same again when opportunity arises'.[43] The explanations for the Fianna Fáil diplomatic coup are varied, but are not hard to find. The British, unsettled by the development of German and Italian ambitions and fearful of the strategic consequences of having an unfriendly Irish neighbour, were determined to have an agreement, even though the price might be high. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was clearly viewed by Chamberlain not simply within its own terms, but very firmly within the international context and as part of a series of interlocking diplomatic settlements forged between Britain and Italy and Germany. In addition, although the British government was dominated by the Conservative Party, the ultra-Unionist leaders of the Home Rule era had all but passed away: indeed, there was a powerful vestigial Liberal influence within government, represented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, and by the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Treasury, Sir Warren Fisher, both of whom had been educated as Gladstonians, and both of whom accepted the moral debts owed by Britain to Ireland ('it is too often forgotten by us English that our record over the larger part of the period has been outrageous', opined Fisher in January 1938; and later in the same month he affirmed that 'the Irish are historically on incontestable ground in their view of England as an oppressor').[44] These rats in the skull of British diplomacy, allied with a certain amount of confusion and wishful thinking about Irish strategy, helped to create opportunities for Irish gain which a relatively weak bargaining position might not otherwise have provided. In addition the ailing and erratic Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, James Craig (from 1927 Lord Craigavon), was prepared to defy his Stormont ministerial colleagues by unilaterally accepting an unattractive Anglo-Irish trade agreement (whether he was motivated by the promise of British compensation or by Chamberlain's appeals about the international situation, or – as Sir Wilfrid Spender, the Northern Ireland cabinet secretary grimly believed – by the hospitality of Mrs Annie Chamberlain, is unclear).[45] The British were under no illusions that their settlement with the Irish had been bought on other than difficult terms: Neville Chamberlain prophesied that 'I shall be accused of having weakly given way when Éire was in the hollow of my hand', and indeed the accusations came – not immediately, it is true, but when, during and after the Second World War, British opinion sought the 'guilty men' responsible for appeasement.[46] In 1938, however, Chamberlain believed that 'we [British ministers] have only given up the small things (paper rights and revenues which would not last) for the big things – the ending of a long quarrel, the beginning of

better relations between North and South Ireland, and the cooperation of the South with us in trade and defence': he believed that the trauma of the Austro-German Anschluss would reinforce the popular perception 'that there is no time for keeping open old sores'.[47] Few British (except the small group around Winston Churchill) were unduly worried by the 'small things' surrendered in 1938, whether the land annuities or the Treaty ports (which were generally regarded as run-down and obsolete, and hard to defend in the case of Irish opposition). On the other hand, Chamberlain's conviction that 'small' tactical concessions might allay historic grievances was as ill-founded in the Irish case as it was elsewhere in his diplomatic endeavours. De Valera, while he was able to win a general election in June 1938 partly as a result of the trophies brought back from Chamberlain, continued to profess himself aggrieved by partition. And while Chamberlain thought that he was completing his father's and brother's work in defining a just Anglo-Irish relationship, the truth was that the Agreement of 1938 was seen in Ireland not so much as the ending of a long quarrel as the ending of a brief and – for the British – unsuccessful round in an ongoing contest.

Where the British were hampered by internal division and were highly sensitive to a range of external diplomatic and economic factors, de Valera was the overwhelmingly dominant influence within Irish strategy, and he professed himself (and indeed probably was) ready to sacrifice economic well-being in what he saw as the wider national interest. He was also helped, in terms of both his Anglo-Irish diplomacy and broader external affairs, not just by his own dominance within Fianna Fáil but also by the lack of a coherent opposition (one further explanation of British tractability is that they had all but given up hope of a Treatyite electoral revival). In order to demonstrate this point, it is necessary to return once again to the early and mid-1930s and to the state of Cumann na nGaedheal after their electoral humiliations in 1932 and 1933. Cumann na nGaedheal had existed only to govern, and out of power it seemed directionless and desperate: the party leadership flirted with paramilitarism and with the trappings of fascism, and eventually agreed to submerge itself within a broader anti-republican alliance. Having lost control of state power, and increasingly harassed by a resurgent IRA, the more militant supporters of the late government formed themselves into the Army Comrades' Association (ACA) in February 1932. By January 1933 the ACA was claiming a membership of over 30,000 and had adopted the blue shirt as its uniform: by the summer of 1933 the Association had been reborn as the National Guard, and had acquired its own charismatic, if erratic, duce in the shape of Eoin O'Duffy, a former Free State general. It is an eloquent testimony to the confusion and demoralization of the pro-Treatyite tradition that in September 1933, when Cumann na nGaedheal, the National Guard and the Centre Party of James Dillon and Frank MacDermot came together as the Fine Gael, or United Ireland Party, O'Duffy rather than Cosgrave or any of the other ministerial veterans was selected as the overall leader. However, these rather extreme efforts to provide Cumann na nGaedheal with an increased popular leverage backfired: the fascist trappings supplied by O'Duffy were an inadequate substitute for a broader socio-economic base or programme, and in fact were

counter-productive in the sense that they scared off some of the middle-class property owners who had been natural Cumann na nGaedheal voters. As de Valera distanced himself from the IRA (which was banned in June 1936), accommodated himself with the Irish business elite and took up the role of international statesman, so it seemed that Fine Gael were the fashion victims of Irish politics: momentarily modish, perhaps, but soon faintly ridiculous. In fact O'Duffy's fondness for outrageous rhetoric and elaborate uniforms was more O'Connellite than Hitlerian: his march on Dublin, planned for August 1933, was swiftly abandoned after government intervention, and was therefore closer to Clontarf in 1843 than Rome in 1922 or Munich in 1923. The death of a young Blueshirt, Michael Lynch, in August 1934 might in different circumstances have provided a Horst Wessel to the movement (and perhaps even lyrical inspiration to its most celebrated literary sympathizer, W.B. Yeats), but in fact the movement was already in decline by this stage, and in September O'Duffy was ousted with comparatively little difficulty from the leadership of Fine Gael and replaced by the unflagging Cosgrave. In 1935 O'Duffy and his supporters founded the National Corporate Party; and in the following year the Blueshirts were formally wound up, with O'Duffy and 700 volunteers departing for Spain and a brief and inglorious campaign on behalf of Franco. But the damage inflicted on the Fine Gael tradition was lasting. Even though (as Cumann na nGaedheal) it was the party which had defended the ostensibly secular constitution of 1922 and defined the role of Ireland within the League of Nations, it was also defensively Catholic and – now – corporatist: it was therefore divided over the issue of sanctions on Italy in 1935, and over the Spanish civil war in 1936. Moreover, the workable if tepid relationship between Cumann na nGaedheal and Unionism was dramatically chilled by O'Duffy's periodic declarations of war on the North. Those who had supported Cumann na nGaedheal as the party of stability had to reassess this support in the light of Blueshirt aggression: those who had opposed de Valera on the grounds that he was a herald of revolution had, by the mid-1930s, to come to terms with a more workaday and politically acceptable reality. By the time of the elections of 1937 and 1938 Fine Gael had not yet outlived its association with the excesses of O'Duffy and the Blueshirts: nor had the party sought out new constituencies and a new purpose. Support for the Treaty was now an anachronism, a sentimental rather than a practical political choice, since the last vestiges of the Treaty had disappeared in 1938. Political initiative as well as the middle-ground of Irish politics had fallen to de Valera; and he would reap the electoral rewards for the following ten years.

Nowhere was de Valera's moral authority and his command of the political centre more starkly revealed than with the issue of Ireland's neutrality during the Second World War. Here was the true test of Irish self-determination, and more specifically of the doctrine of external association – for if external association meant anything, then it offered the Irish the chance to buck the trend of mainstream Commonwealth opinion by remaining neutral when Britain and its dominions were at war. Yet the pressures on the Irish government were intense, and especially between 1939 and 1941, when a German invasion of Britain and Ireland seemed to threaten, when the Battle of the Atlantic between Allied shipping and the German submarine packs

was developing, and before the accession of American strength to the Allied cause. De Valera explained the Irish position partly in terms of the ongoing affront represented by partition: in the past he had scuppered the prospects of Anglo-Irish defence cooperation with this weapon, and on 10 May 1940 he led the British representative in Ireland, Sir John Maffey, to believe that Irish military engagement 'would probably be the consequence' of reunification.[48] And indeed the British – with the fall of France in June 1940, the sole survivor of the western combatants – were prepared to consider paying over Northern Ireland as the price of an all-Ireland military effort. In June 1940 the unflagging Malcolm MacDonald, together with Neville Chamberlain, put forward a tentative proposal for Irish unity, and (as in 1938) began the politically fraught task of edging towards de Valera's stated position. Despite these efforts, however, the Fianna Fáil cabinet rejected the deal on 4 July on the grounds that the British were demanding immediate Irish engagement and offering only the future and hazy prospect of reunification: de Valera 'mentioned that when he was a child it was customary for two boys swopping treasures to insist on "equal holds" – that each should have a firm grip on what he was to receive before he loosened his grip on that with which he was parting. The offer . . . did not give "equal holds" '.[49] But the truth behind this homely metaphor seems to have been, as John Bowman has remarked, 'that no British offer, other than the establishment of a guaranteed, united, neutral Ireland would have had any serious appeal to the Fianna Fáil cabinet'.[50] Partition represented, despite the rhetoric on the subject, a secondary concern for the Irish, just as it had done in December 1921; and just as it had done in 1921, it was also both a bargaining counter and a breaking-point.

In fact the MacDonald–Chamberlain initiative of June 1940 represented the high-water mark of British tractability and was stimulated by the desperate conviction that Ireland represented a vital strategic asset. But of course precisely the same circumstances which made the British anxious to trade on partition made the Fianna Fáil government aware that the goal of a united Ireland might be bought at too high a price: both sides were frightened by German success, and the Irish in particular calculated on the possibility that their neighbours might be beaten. In addition any deal on reunification was subject to the approval of the government of Northern Ireland, and while some Ulster Unionist ministers (including the rising star, Basil Brooke) were willing to countenance tighter cross-border ties in the interests of the war effort, it was clear to Dublin that any substantive progress towards union involved some very difficult manoeuvres. It is easy to imagine ways in which the chances of an agreed union might have been improved in June 1940, but it takes a very great leap of imagination to envisage a deal actually being clinched: if Lemass had had greater influence in the Fianna Fáil cabinet, and Frank Aiken less, if Brooke had achieved power in Northern Ireland in the threatening circumstances of 1940 rather than (for the Allies) the comparatively more favourable context of 1943, then perhaps some form of agreement might have been visible on the horizon. It is also possible to suggest that, by rejecting the MacDonald–Chamberlain détente, de Valera may have played too safe a political hand, when the chance of the jackpot was at its height. It is difficult to see how else he might have acted, however:

the bottom line was that neutrality was an extremely popular policy (even, evidently, with southern Protestants) upon which Fianna Fáil was consolidating its national leadership of Éire; while in Northern Ireland the war had served to bolster support for the Union and British patriotism. As in 1914–18, therefore, the impact of a European war in Ireland was centrifugal rather than centripetal, with the acceleration of the political forces that maintained partition; as in 1914–18, however, there was an initial moment when the war also seemed to have dramatically upset the natural tensions within Irish politics.

But the moment of unity passed. With the Battle of Britain (August–October 1940) the threat of German invasion receded, and with the resignation and death of Chamberlain at the end of 1940 the single most sympathetic presence (so far as the Irish were concerned) within the British government disappeared. The enforced goodwill of June 1940 speedily evaporated, to be replaced in December with sanctions on Irish trade, and in May 1941 with a row on the issue of extending conscription to Northern Ireland. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 was the occasion for Churchill's 'nation once again' telegram to de Valera – but the allusion was rhetorical rather than substantive, and reflected not just Churchillian bombast but also the extent to which mainstream British political opinion had moved on since June 1940.[51] For as the war developed reunification became barred, not just by northern Protestants but also by hitherto ambivalent British voters: the 'nation once again' telegram might, in June 1940, have represented a serious offer, but it did not – and could not – do so in December 1941.

Much has been written on the subject of Irish neutrality during the Second World War. In part this reflects a still active sensitivity concerning the apparent ambiguities in the Irish response to the horrors of national socialism and fascism: but yet again other European neutrals (such as Sweden or Spain) have addressed their wartime record with greater equanimity than the Irish or, alternatively (as in the case of Switzerland), have only recently been forced by outside pressures to confront the moral difficulties of their stand. The Irish historiographical response to neutrality has been intricate and defensive because Irish neutrality was a highly complicated political strategy, which was rooted in a concern for national unity and sovereignty, and which reflected a traditionally ambiguous response to Britain's European wars. Neutrality accommodated all but the most fanatical republicans, and was treated as holy writ by senior ministerial anglophobes such as Frank Aiken; neutrality was equally acceptable to many southern Irish Protestants, mindful perhaps of the devastating impact of the First World War on their community. On the other hand, neutrality did little to undermine the tradition of Irish service in the forces of the crown, and perhaps 50,000 Irishmen and women were recruited to the British armed forces, including recipients of the Victoria Cross like Leading Seaman James Joseph Magennis of Belfast, and the unsung recipients of the Military Cross (such as the Mullingar doctor, Captain K.F. Patton of the Royal Army Medical Corps) or of the Military Medal (such as Sergeant E. Maher of the Irish Guards, from Bandon). In addition, the Irish government increasingly defined neutrality in a pro-Allied manner, permitting the use of Lough Foyle for Allied naval

craft and of a corridor of land in South Donegal for the British flying boats stationed in Lough Erne. Other valuable concessions were offered in the areas of military intelligence, meteorological information and prisoners of war (Allied service personnel who found themselves in Éire could expect a speedy repatriation, while their German counterparts – possibly the more fortunate – were destined for a spartan but safe period of internment). This slant grew more marked as the likelihood of an Allied victory increased, but there were other explanations: Dublin's acquiescence in certain Allied infringements of its neutrality may have been as much enforced as voluntary (policing air space would have been a problem, for example, given the limits of the air corps and the – at best – 'half-armed' nature of Irish neutrality). But it also seems to be the case that, while most Irish people endorsed neutrality, there was a broad sympathy for the Allied cause: massive recruitment to the British army was compatible with popular support for de Valera in his tough handling of both the USA (as with the American note affair of February–March 1944, when Washington pressed for the expulsion of Axis ministers from Dublin) and the British (as with de Valera's famous radio address of 16 May 1945, quietly repudiating Churchill's earlier broadcast complaints about Irish 'frolics' with the Axis powers).[52] Indeed, de Valera's adroit treatment of the American note affair, an interlay of public defiance and private conciliation, illustrates his skill in simultaneously coping with Irish patriotic sensitivities as well as macro-political realities: his reward was a ringing popular endorsement in the general election of May 1944.

But, while de Valera preserved Ireland from the European military conflagration, his political ingenuity did not extend to fending off some of the more sweeping ideological and practical consequences of the war. As in much of the rest of Europe the war brought to Ireland more elaborate government (despite Fianna Fáil's old suspicions of fat-cat civil servants), and a leftward surge in terms of economic planning, social welfare and even (despite the heroic conservatism of the Irish electorate) in terms of voter preferences. The paradox of neutrality was that, because it involved the wholesale export of Irish people to the British army and the British workplace, so it tended to strengthen Irish susceptibility to British social and economic trends; and once the influence of the intensely conservative Seán MacEntee had temporarily waned within government (as was arguably the case after his 'serious demotion' from the Finance portfolio in 1939), and that of Lemass had begun to consolidate, so Ireland began to follow the British lead in terms of long-term economic planning and welfare reform.[53] De Valera may have been seeking to 'stifle Lemass in the interests of cabinet unity and caution' through the cabinet committee on emergency problems (May 1940) and the committee on economic planning (November 1942), but it is Lemass's interest in Beveridge and even in Keynesianism that shines (sometimes rather faintly, admittedly) through many of the government's wartime initiatives.[54] MacEntee's Wages Standstill Order (1941) and the Trade Union Act (1941), though limp alternatives to the draconian proposals that this uncompromising northerner had originally advocated, were still severe when set aside the initiatives that would shortly be pursued by Lemass. Lemass, who followed MacEntee as Minister of Industry and Commerce from August 1941, was by no means an unqualified

friend of the proletariat, and particularly not of the relatively advantaged members of the amalgamated unions: nor was he willing to hand back to the labour movement the gains that had been won under his predecessor. However, his Trade Union Act (1942) 'was of symbolic importance in restoring a consensual style to labour-state relations', even though it did little to mitigate the severities of MacEntee's original legislation.[55] Lemass also oversaw the relaxation of wage restrictions for the very poor and increases in unemployment benefit: he was a supporter of free food and free fuel for the poor (1941–2) and of a non-means-tested children's allowance (1944), a piece of 'Beveridgeism' that was viewed by MacEntee as a communistic heresy calculated to demoralize the faithful. Lemass's appointment as Tánaiste in 1945 strengthened his position within the cabinet (and also his claims over the succession to de Valera), and gave more weight to his reformist objectives: a new Industrial Relations Act (1946), based on a measure of agreement between the union movement and the employers, made provision for a labour court and appeared (however momentarily) to herald a new era of industrial tranquillity. In December 1946, in the first major overhaul of the administrative structure created in 1924, the new departments of social welfare and health were created with Lemass's support and blessing.

If a concern for full employment and for social welfare mimicked British domestic preoccupations, then there were some shuffling movements within the electorate which – if only in a small way – resembled the seismic rifts within British and continental European politics in the post-war years. There was a modest, if temporary, upsurge in the fortunes of the highly fissile Irish Labour Party: in August 1942 Labour became the biggest electoral force in Dublin, capturing the lord mayoralty, and in the general election of June 1943 the party won just under 16 per cent of the vote and 17 seats in the Dáil. Bitter internal divisions, which produced a breakaway National Labour Party under the talented but authoritarian William O'Brien, hamstrung this electoral sprint and allowed Fianna Fáil an unremarkably comfortable win in the election of 1944. But the social and economic problems that had fostered the momentary Labour revival did not go away, even if the party itself had fractured so readily. A rising cost of living (between 1937 and 1945 industrial wages rose by 30 per cent, while prices rose by 74 per cent), rationing and shortages combined with the relative weakening of some traditionally 'respectable' professions such as teaching to create an upsurge of industrial unrest in 1946–7: the Irish National Teachers' Organization strike of 1946 was a particular embarrassment since it won the endorsement of Archbishop McQuaid and gave rise to episodes such as the Croke Park protest of September 1946, when demonstrating teachers invaded the pitch in the interval of the All-Ireland football final and were roughly beaten back by the Guards. In addition to problems within the area of labour relations, the government – and even the hitherto largely sacrosanct de Valera family – were afflicted with a series of 'sleaze' controversies which damaged the preferred party image of self-denial and national self-sacrifice: the most potent of these controversies related to the sale of the Locke distillery, Kilbeggan, and gave rise in November 1947 to a judicial investigation.

Shortages, strikes and allegations of graft fed into mounting popular electoral resentment. Hitherto Fianna Fáil had relied not only upon its own organizational tentacles and carefully modulated appeal but also upon the shambolic nature of the opposition: Labour, as has been noted, split asunder in 1943, while Fine Gael remained largely bereft of imagination and leadership, the 'somnambulist of Irish politics', in Theo Hoppen's striking description.[56] In 1946, however, an alternative to these rather jaded forces emerged in the shape of Seán MacBride's Clann na Poblachta. The Clann offered a radical social programme which seemed to be in tune with electoral feeling throughout western Europe – though crucially it did so in a thoroughly safe, unthreatening manner, sculpting its proposals around the traditional framework of Catholic social teaching. But the new party not only appeared to be able to cut through the problems that were befuddling the government, it also boasted an apparently more genuine and effective social conscience and a more uncompromising republican integrity: in other words, the Clann threatened to steal the traditional electoral garb of Fianna Fáil. The Clann bound together the economically disaffected (such as many teachers), impatient republicans (the Fianna Fáil record on partition was blustering but ineffectual) and radical youngsters (such as Dr Noel Browne) who were unlikely to find much comfort within the existing party structure: its Catholic reformism and lurking republican militancy seemed to unite the O'Connellite and United Irish traditions within Irish nationalism. In particular there was an overlap between the Clann and the well-organized support networks for the republican prisoners (one of whom, Seán McCaughey, had died while on hunger strike in 1946): there are some faint parallels between this political chemistry and the support for the Fenian prisoners of the late 1860s which carried into the Home Rule movement. Two by-election victories for the Clann in the Fianna Fáil heartland in October 1947, following local government triumphs in June, simultaneously announced the arrival of a new force in Irish politics and scared de Valera into calling a general election for February 1948, despite his Dáil majority and the prospect of a further year in office.

This characteristically nifty piece of electoral timing, along with Seán MacEntee's loaded constituency revision of 1947, helped to contain the threat represented by MacBride and the Clann. The election of 1948 removed the Fianna Fáil majority, but the party still captured just under 42 per cent of the vote and 67 seats in the new Dáil. Clann na Poblachta, on the other hand, was to some extent a victim of de Valera's strategic shrewdness, as well as MacEntee's unscrupulousness: the newcomers won only ten seats, as opposed to the 19 which – with a popular vote of 175,000 – they might have expected to claim. But the Clann was also damaged by its over-brimming confidence, since part of the explanation for its relatively poor showing rested with an extended electoral machine and an army of under-resourced candidates. This mixture of over-confidence and gaucheness proved to be damaging in yet another respect: rather than consolidate its unity and its roots, the party made a lurch for office in the bizarre coalition which was the first Inter-Party government. United only by a suspicion of de Valera, and certainly not by any shared ideological conviction or political vision, the Inter-Party government bound the Clann

with Fine Gael, Labour, the farmers' party (Clann na Talmhan) and numerous straggling independents: it is hard to fault Roy Foster's judgement that 'the combination of Fine Gael's Mulcahy and McGilligan with hitherto intransigent republicans was as surprising as any rapprochement since that of Charles James Fox and Lord North'.[57] On the other hand, neither Fox nor North had graduated from University College Dublin into the intimacy of the Irish bar – a professional trajectory which was traced both by the new Taoiseach, John Aloysius Costello of Fine Gael, and his ostensibly very different Minister for External Affairs, Seán MacBride. Nor had the eighteenth-century 'odd couple' shared a schooling at Mount St Benedict's, the exclusive academy in Wexford which claimed both MacBride, the former IRA Chief of Staff (1936–8), and James Dillon, the new Minister for Agriculture and a co-founder of the National Centre Party (1932), among its alumni. It was also therefore the case that 'the [new] government functioned as well as it did more because of inter-locking family, educational and temperamental affinities among its more important members than because of anything as mundane as agreement over aims and policies'.[58]

The fall of the Fianna Fáil government in February 1948 marked the end of a 16-year period of rule by de Valera – an unrivalled personal record and a party achievement matched only by the Fianna Fáil reign from 1957 to 1973. In these years between 1932 and 1948 Fianna Fáil had achieved a virtual hegemonic status, appealing materially to the small producers of the country and emotionally to the working classes: the party satisfied national pride by appearing to score off the British in the 1930s, and provided a focus for national unity during the 'Emergency' years. Fianna Fáil came quickly to be seen as reliable by Irish business, while – especially given the populist leanings of Seán Lemass – it was simultaneously able to forge a working relationship with the union movement. It advertised one or two token Protestants (such as Erskine Childers) without compromising its assertively Catholic identity: it broadcast its concern for northern Catholics while privately treating them as political pawns in a bigger game. Fianna Fáil satisfied republicans by sounding off on the partition question; but here again it did not rock the already leaky vessel of Anglo-Irish relations by converting rhetoric into sustained action. Equally, in the electoral sphere, though Fianna Fáil had originally endorsed the claims of the small farmers, a declining and therefore expendable interest group, it offered little practical assistance when in power; and the farmers duly realigned themselves behind a new party, Clann na Talmhan (1938).

The formation of the first Inter-Party government signalled perhaps the end of Fianna Fáil's hegemony, but certainly not the end of the party's dominance over the Irish electorate. It had lost its virtual monopoly over republicanism and social reformism; it had been seen to spar with the Church and with powerful interest groups such as the teachers. The party had appeared to lose its direction and dynamism. But, in the end, all these were perhaps the natural consequences of such a lengthy command of government. Clann na Poblachta achieved its limited success precisely because it appeared to be a reversion to the purer Fianna Fáil of 1932, the Fianna Fáil unsullied by office: its success was therefore a vindication of the Fianna Fáil tradition. That the newcomers responded so badly to the pressures of power

and were soon bitterly divided was a further mute testimony to the achievement of their predecessors. For if (as it seemed) the Clann had inherited the O'Connellite–Christian Democratic tradition within Irish politics, then there could be little doubt that the Great Dan's cuteness had fallen to de Valera alone. Yeats was perhaps never further off the mark when he judged that de Valera 'will fail through not having enough human life as to judge the human life in others'.[59]

What is remarkable, therefore, is not that Fianna Fáil should have been ousted in 1948 but that this defeat should have been so long in coming, and so narrow when it came. For Fianna Fáil was above all a romance, spiced with republican chiliasm, cultural ideals, social reformism and personal loyalties forged through war or (equally emotive and equally binding) through patronage. If there was always a leap of faith involved in reconciling the party's rhetoric with its achievements, then – such was the charisma of de Valera and the siren call of his movement – the faithful were always to hand. These political acrobatics brought inevitable casualties, however: the IRA men executed by Fianna Fáil for attempting to put the party's history and trumpeted ideals into action; the farmers who dared to believe that de Valera was the reincarnation of Parnell; and the northerners of both main traditions who took the party's stand on partition at face value, and adjusted their fears and ambitions accordingly. But in February 1948, despite strikes and shortages and rising prices, and despite the international isolation of the country, there were still many Irish voters (42 per cent of the total, in fact) who were prepared to judge Fianna Fáil on the basis of its creed rather than its record. This is the true measure of the party's success and of its leader's stature.

6.3 Towards a Redefinition of the National Ideal, 1948–58

These years, from the fall of the Fianna Fáil government in 1948 through to the resignation of de Valera from the Taoiseach's office in 1959, represented the heyday of an Irish Butskellism – in the sense at least that it was an era characterized by an unrelenting party warfare but also by minimal ideological and policy distinctions. Disagreements (as over the utility of the new Industrial Development Authority) seem to have been exaggerated beyond the conventions of manufactured controversy. Indeed, the unpredictable, apparently combustible first coalition seemed – even though its brittle links were forged through an antipathy to de Valera – to be chiefly concerned with proving to the Irish people that it was another Fianna Fáil, albeit one endowed with a French accent and youthful flair and bereft of its rival's military discipline. The Inter-Party government was anxious to yield nothing in terms of either Catholic or republican orthodoxy to its outgoing opponents; and the most striking features of its tenure of power (1948–51) bore the stamp of the Fianna Fáil legacy.

The new Minister for Finance, a talented lawyer named Patrick McGilligan, pursued an expansionist policy which, while it certainly outraged some of the more conventional economic thinkers on the Fianna Fáil frontbench (such as Aiken and

MacEntee), nevertheless chimed with the ideas being mulled over in private by Seán Lemass (his public attitudes – as Bew and Patterson and, more recently, John Horgan have remarked – were much more bland).[60] Both Lemass and McGilligan were Keynesians, albeit of a fairly gentle hue: Lemass had been an early (if relatively ineffectual) evangelist for both Keynes and Beveridge within the Fianna Fáil wartime cabinet, while McGilligan became, in the words of Joe Lee, 'an intellectual as well as a political convert to the potential of a moderate Keynesianism in Irish circumstances'.[61] This, at any rate, was the message conveyed by the McGilligan budget of 1950, a modestly expansionist measure which represented a liberation from the austere, revenue-centred approach of the past. McGilligan's defence of his strategy against the troglodytes of Finance might well have been privately recited by Lemass: 'we value the production of national expenditure in terms of (1) social stability (2) expanding national income (3) efficient operation of government services, in that order of importance'. (On the other hand, those who remembered McGilligan in an earlier incarnation – as Cumann na nGaedheal Minister for Industry – may have been less than convinced: he was then intoning that 'people may have to die in this country and die through starvation').[62]

The creation of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA, 1949), a particular enthusiasm of the politically omnivorous Seán MacBride (the Inter-Party Minister for External Affairs), also echoed some of the concerns expressed by Lemass when at Industry and Commerce. The IDA was intended to encourage new industry and the expansion of existing industries, and in addition was briefed to investigate the effects of protection on the Irish economy. Although it was initially the victim of some vicious sibling rivalry from Finance and of some tactical grousing from Lemass, the IDA survived and thrived: it has been rightly described as the Inter-Party version of Lemass's Industrial Efficiency Bill (a measure that proposed an Industrial Efficiency Bureau similar in some of its powers to the IDA).[63]

MacBride proved himself to be a follower not merely of Lemass, but also of his old 'Chief', de Valera: the Inter-Party government veered little from the foreign policy guidelines laid down by their Fianna Fáil predecessors. There were, however, some intriguing differences of emphasis. Fianna Fáil, the republican party, had resolutely held back from a final excision of the monarchy, even though the constitution of the country was widely acknowledged as republican in form: the reasons for this self-denial have already been outlined, and probably relate more to de Valera's acute sense of political timing than his professed concern for the monarchist sympathies of northern Unionists. The new Taoiseach, John Costello, had represented the Cumann na nGaedheal government at a succession of imperial conferences in the 1920s and early 1930s; but he was a firm opponent of de Valera's External Relations Act, and he recognized the cogency of Fianna Fáil's claims to be better patriots than their Fine Gael rivals. He also saw an opportunity to undercut the IRA by an inexpensive (indeed, perhaps even politically profitable) gesture. In addition he was under general (though evidently not immediate) pressure from MacBride, an even more strident opponent of de Valera's legislation than himself, and an even more ardent republican than was commonly found in the Fianna Fáil hierarchy. Costello therefore

took the apparently outrageous step (for a Fine Gael Taoiseach) of announcing his government's plans to remove the legislation of 1936, with its attendant ambiguities, and to establish an Irish republic. The announcement was made abruptly at Ottawa on 7 September 1948, and has since been the subject of an unflagging controversy. On the whole it seems that, while the issue may have been previously discussed within the Inter-Party cabinet, no detailed plan of action was agreed. MacBride, for example, though strongly republican, was not pressing for immediate action on the External Relations Act, and indeed had not even made its repeal a condition of entering the government: Costello's announcement was conveyed to him while he was dining with the British representative in Ireland, John Maffey, Lord Rugby, and seems to have taken him by surprise. Whether or not the rookie Taoiseach had committed a diplomatic gaffe remains open to question: although he was in some respects a gauche successor to de Valera, he had experience on the international stage and was too skilled a lawyer to be easily tempted into indiscretion or pique. In addition, as has been mentioned, there were good tactical reasons for acting as Costello did: he was thereby able to play the republican ace before either de Valera or MacBride, and to underline the patriotic credentials of his own party (as distinct from the coalition as a whole). Though the Irish people were deeply unexcited by the formal establishment of the republic in April 1949, this should not divert attention from the long-term party political utility of Costello's initiative.

Elsewhere in the realm of foreign affairs the Inter-Party government ventured little from the paths of righteousness explored by Fianna Fáil. Indeed it is arguable that, as with the issue of the republic, the new government acted in a more rigidly orthodox Fianna Fáil manner than had the de Valera government itself. The new government was certainly anxious to underline its Catholic orthodoxy: its ministers therefore telegraphed Pope Pius XII at the conclusion of their first meeting, pledging 'devotion to your August Person, as well as our firm resolve to be guided in all our work by the teaching of Christ' (this has been described as 'the most effusively Catholic message ever sent by any Government of the Irish state').[64] The government also facilitated the efforts of the Irish Catholic hierarchy to aid the Christian Democrats of Italy in their apocalyptic struggle against the godless reds of Italian communism. Indeed, despite the radical dimension to Clann na Poblachta and the revolutionary pedigree of its leader, MacBride, the Inter-Party government was resolutely pro-western in its sympathies. MacBride was an enthusiastic Europeanist, supporting the Council of Europe (1949) as a bulwark against communism and sponsoring the proposed membership of right-wing clericalist dictatorships such as Franco's Spain and Salazar's Portugal. Just as de Valera had been prepared to consider trading defence concessions for progress on the issue of partition, so MacBride attempted early in 1949 to abandon neutrality and join NATO in return for American support on the issue of the border. But the Irish offer was refused (Britain was too valuable a cold war partner for the Americans), even though the seriousness of MacBride's intentions seem clear. Nor were the Americans much more forthcoming over the issue of Marshall Aid: Irish hopes for massive grant support were disappointed, although substantial loans were made available by the Federal

government. Apparently so much like his 'Chief', MacBride was more concerned about the republic than about political practicalities, and much more concerned about partition than about neutrality: de Valera, on the other hand, rarely made the mistake of allowing rigid principle to stand in the way of the exercise of power.

The crispest illustration of these truths, and of much else, came with the 'mother and child' debacle of 1951: here MacBride, through personal obtuseness as well as uncomplicated religious conviction, helped to create a political crisis out of problems which the smoother diplomats of Fianna Fáil might well have defused or at least handed on. And indeed the origins of the 'mother and child' affair lay with an inheritance from the previous Fianna Fáil administration. The Fianna Fáil Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Dr Jim Ryan, enacted a measure in 1947 that was designed to tackle the problem of infectious diseases within the community and also to limit the risks for expectant or recent mothers as well as children up to the age of 16. The Ryan Health Act provoked some considerable resentment from both the Catholic hierarchy and the Irish medical profession: the Church saw threats to its social teaching, and indeed to its broader educational function, while those doctors who (in the memorable indictment of Joe Lee) 'worshipped at the altar of Croesus while demurely wrapped in the robes of Hippocrates' saw a threat to their income in the shape of 'socialized medicine'.[65] But, since the Fianna Fáil government fell in February 1948, it was left to the Inter-Party ministers to face down the formidable union of scalpel and crozier which Dr Ryan had inadvertently helped to forge.

In the late summer of 1950 the crusading but temperamental Minister for Health, Dr Noel Browne, moved to implement the 'mother and child' proposals of the Ryan Act: his plans were leaked in the *Sunday Independent* in September and stimulated a lengthy rebuttal from the hierarchy in the following weeks. After this preliminary skirmish, there followed a phoney war of some months before hostilities were resumed in March 1951. But the short, sharp conflict that emerged was fought not between the Irish government and the hierarchy, or between ministers and doctors, but rather between, on the one hand, an alliance of the government, the Church and the medical profession and, on the other hand, the embattled Noel Browne. No Inter-Party minister, including Browne, proposed to act in defiance of the Church's verdict on the morality of the 'mother and child' proposals: the rights of the Church to intervene in legislation affecting Catholic welfare and morals were not in dispute. What was questionable (at least in Browne's eyes) was the precise nature of the Church's attitude: Browne chose to argue to his colleagues – in defiance of the evidence – that the bishops were not opposed to his proposals and were in fact open to negotiation. Throughout the controversy Browne made some hamfisted efforts at intrigue (he tried unsuccessfully, for example, to represent his plans as approved government policy and thereby to widen his quarrel with the hierarchy into a genuine Church–state clash); but he was outclassed in terms of strategic ability by Costello. Nor did the hierarchy help Browne's case: despite his affected optimism, the bishops remained resolutely opposed to 'socialized medicine' (confirming their attitude on 4 April 1951) and the Inter-Party ministers followed happily in the episcopal wake. Browne was now thoroughly isolated from the Church and from his government

colleagues – including his own party leader, MacBride; and on 10 April the Clann na Poblachta boss demanded and won his errant minister's resignation. Falling, Browne helped to bring down the Inter-Party edifice with him: embarrassed by the Health Minister's loud departure (Browne published the correspondence relating to the affair in the *Irish Times*), and weakened by the desertion of three independent deputies over a separate issue, the first Inter-Party government fell in May 1951. The 'mother and child' episode, coming on top of a succession of other ministerial humiliations (including the 'Battle of Baltinglass', where the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs was exposed to the country dishing out patronage in a more than usually overt and insensitive manner), had put paid to Ireland's first experiment in coalition government.

The 'mother and child' affair illustrates a number of home truths – and not always expected truths – about the first Inter-Party government. Costello was perhaps only reiterating the values of the old Cumann na nGaedheal tradition when he declared during the affair that 'I am an Irishman second; I am a Catholic first'.[66] But though the relegation of national identity behind religious conviction may not be especially surprising, the emphatic publication of this priority is of greater interest, given that the Costello government was associated with the most determined effort to address the issue of partition since the early 1920s. Moreover, while Costello's very public expression of his faith echoed similar pronouncements from de Valera and other Fianna Fáil frontbenchers, Fianna Fáil on the whole showed themselves to be more effective – equally respectful, but more assertive – in dealing with the hierarchy. The 'mother and child' controversy also provoked the most unambiguous assertion of the Church's views on this key area of social policy, and the most explicit – though polite – rebuke to government for venturing into areas where it was argued that the family, informed and guided by the clergy, should be autonomous. Again, this is scarcely surprising, except when viewed in the light of the shifts of emphasis within Catholic social teaching in the 1960s: what is more important, again, is not the fact of this dialogue between ministers and bishops, but that the Church's views should be expressed so emphatically and – because of Browne's leaks – so publicly: as Conor Cruise O'Brien has remarked, 'the episode was atypical in its blatancy'.[67] This is to be contrasted with the more discreet and more dexterous handling of a related issue (the Health Act of 1953) by de Valera and the incoming Fianna Fáil government. The near-unanimous ministerial acquiescence with the Church's line is also, superficially, surprising, given the nuances within a complicated coalition: but then religious fidelity crossed the boundaries of party, with the Labour Tánaiste, Willie Norton, as loyal a member of the Knights of Columbanus as long-standing Fine Gaelers such as Richard Mulcahy (Minister for Education) or Seán MacEoin (Minister for Justice). Seán MacBride, it will be remembered, defined the social radicalism of Clann na Poblachta within the formal bounds of Catholic teaching; and indeed one of the central thrusts of his project was the alignment of Catholicism and republicanism. Outside government, as Kieran Allen has observed, even the Irish Trades Union Congress (somewhat less Catholic in its ethos than the rival Congress of Irish Unions) backed away from any endorsement of Browne.[68] Thus the 'mother and child' affair, far from being a crisis in Church–state relations, highlights the

solidity of the consensus on social and religious values within the Ireland of the early 1950s. The affair says as much about the political power of an influential professional lobby, the Irish Medical Association – 'the most successful trade union of all', in the verdict of Desmond Williams – as about the authority of the Church; and it says as much about the energy, the obtuseness and the bloody-mindedness of Noel Browne as it does about the energy, the obtuseness and the bloody-mindedness of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid.[69]

As has been mentioned, the new Fianna Fáil administration, returned in the general election of 30 May 1951, defused the 'mother and child' issue with a characteristic combination of briskness and menace. Jim Ryan (who returned to the Health and Social Welfare portfolio) promoted a new Health Act (1953) which, while it has been understandably deemed a 'sideshow compared to the fundamental question of the management of the economy', is nevertheless not without interest.[70] Ryan proposed to proceed along the general lines traced by Browne (whose support, along with that of another left-wing deputy, Peadar Cowan, was important to the survival of the Fianna Fáil government); like Browne – though possibly with greater reason – he seems to have thought that he had episcopal support when he introduced his bill into the Dáil on 26 February 1953. As with Browne, this was not in fact the case – and it seemed as if the coalition between the hierarchy and the Irish Medical Association would be reactivated: more worryingly, the bishops proposed to announce their opposition (and therefore entrench their position) through a letter to the press, to be published on 19 April. It was at this stage that de Valera intervened, mobilizing the moral and political self-righteousness which the British and other political opponents had found so formidable: in this case de Valera, by sounding out a theological advisor to Pius XII, Cardinal Michael Browne, was able to inform the Irish bishops that their position was not in absolute accord with current thinking at the Vatican. Having threatened to separate the Irish hierarchy from Rome, de Valera and Ryan proceeded to negotiate an agreement with the bishops, which in turn meant that the episcopal alliance with the Irish Medical Association was now broken. There were certainly concessions to the hierarchy's case: but the most recent commentators accept that, while the bishops were given enough to save face, the compromise that was struck favoured the government.[71] Much of the Browne–Ryan scheme had been salvaged (even though Browne himself saw the agreement as an example of Rome Rule): here again – Browne's discontent notwithstanding – the continuities between the administrations are striking.

However, the differences between de Valera's handling of the issue and that of Costello are no less instructive: de Valera, a respectful and faithful son of the Church, nevertheless treated the bishops at least partly in political terms – as an influential force in Irish society who could not be ignored, and whose support was important, but who certainly could be outplayed or, indeed, faced down. Costello, by way of contrast, following in the Cosgrave tradition and lacking the spiritual and political self-confidence of the 'Chief', tended towards a more submissive approach to the hierarchy. For Costello, the views of the bishops were holy writ rather than a bargaining position.

But on the whole, as ever, it is the continuities between Fianna Fáil and the Inter-Party team which impress. In part each had to deal with the same apparently endemic problems in Irish society – high levels of unemployment and devastatingly high levels of emigration. In addition, both the Fianna Fáil government of 1951–4 and its successor, the second Inter-Party government (1954–7), struggled with balance of payments deficits. On the whole each political tradition responded in a similar manner to these challenges, combining a moderate social reformism with an orthodox approach to budgetary management. Seán MacEntee, whose fortunes were – briefly – on the rise in the 1951–4 government, was Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance and presented a viciously deflationary first budget in 1952: the centre-piece was a hike in the standard rate of income tax by one shilling (or 5 per cent). MacEntee saw himself (or affected to see himself) as righting the misdeeds of the voluptuaries in the previous Inter-Party administration, and he was therefore anxious to present corrective measures as speedily as possible (so as to deflect the blame): no less a commentator than T.K. Whitaker endorsed this thinking. But, faultless though MacEntee's political sense may have been (at least in the short term), it is now generally accepted that his economic timing may have been badly misjudged and that he was hitting the fragile Irish economy with a deflationary salvo at precisely the moment when the balance of payments was improving.[72] In any event, MacEntee certainly compounded, if he did not create, the slump of the mid-1950s, pursuing the same broad deflationary policies in 1953–4 even when the evidence suggested that they were not warranted. He thereby helped to crush local consumer demand and to undermine the manufacturing base of the still protected Irish economy. The MacEntee strategy produced minimal levels of economic growth, and even a measure of industrial contraction: it helped to consolidate an environment unsuited to export achievement and entrepreneurial risk-taking.

Nor was the main Inter-Party response to the problems of the economy any more imaginative (at least in the first instance). Costello, who returned as Taoiseach at the general election of May 1954, inherited a still fragile economy, characterized by some cosmetic improvements and some apparently irreducible problems (such as the growing figures for emigration). The new Minister for Finance, Gerard Sweetman, pursued the same broad strategies as MacEntee (the intellectually more adventurous McGilligan, aged 65 and apparently in poor health – in fact he lived until he was 90 – chose to serve as attorney general rather than return to Finance). But MacEntee's strategies had addressed symptoms rather than the disease itself, and a series of devastating announcements in 1955–6 suggested that the country was being bled of its people as well as its capital. The balance of payments crisis reappeared, with a deficit of £35 million in 1955; more worrying, the census of 1956 revealed that, even after 35 years of independence, the Irish population was at an all-time low. Sweetman's instinctive response to this statistical pummelling was to apply more taxes (he did so between March and July 1956). But (as MacEntee had found) this was a politically very dangerous strategy: it had provoked, for MacEntee, unrest even in the normally submissive civil service as well as carefully orchestrated and embarrassing militancy from the Dublin Unemployed Association; it threatened,

for Sweetman, to alienate the Inter-Party government's working-class support – and this at a time when the labour movement was progressing towards a reunification after the split of 1943–4 (unity was eventually completed in 1959 in the shape of the ICTU). In addition Lemass, still the most populist of the Fianna Fáil leaders, was outlining a programme for the creation of 100,000 jobs over five years, based upon hikes in public expenditure and external investment and drawing upon the Italian Vanoni Plan of 1954: this was the substance of his famous (though somewhat ambiguous, even 'intellectually incoherent') 'Clery's' speech of October 1955.[73] The Inter-Party government was therefore goaded by political and economic pressures into traversing some underexplored outreaches of economic policy: a Capital Investment Advisory Committee was formed in 1955 in order to scrutinize public investment and to seek more productive means of deploying capital. Willie Norton, the Tánaiste, began pressing openly for foreign investment in 1955–6, while Costello incorporated this cry into a sweeping economic revitalization plan, published in October 1956. Costello's initiative combined the familiar with the more daring: it called for agricultural research and expansion, tax breaks for exporters, grants for new plant, an advisory committee on capital investment, as well as foreign capital. It signalled a breakdown of the cross-party consensus on economic management; it represented a striking modification of the traditional tenets of Irish economic nationalism. But, since the government collapsed early in 1957, the Costello plan was in effect still-born; and it fell to Fianna Fáil – united, ironically, around the old war cries of an economic nationalism – to elaborate a radical solution to the social and economic crises of post-war Ireland.

In other respects the second Inter-Party government looked very much like a continuation of the first. With Browne on the opposition back benches, the government was able to represent more directly the interests of its professional base. Dr T.F. O'Higgins, the Minister for Health, bowed to the pressure of the medical lobby through modifications to the Ryan Health Act of 1953: although the original Browne–Ryan proposals might, with the aid of a rose-tinted lens, have looked like the beginnings of a widely embracing free health service, in fact the second Inter-Party government successfully and lastingly bolstered the private sector through the creation of the Voluntary Health Insurance Board. If the government respected the interests of the professions, then it continued to be deferential towards the Church: Costello was not prepared to defy doctors and bishops either in 1951 or (at any rate in the short term) when returned to power in 1954. The Taoiseach tacitly endorsed Archbishop McQuaid's opposition to sporting ties between Ireland and communist countries, withholding any form of official recognition when the Yugoslav and Irish football teams played a match in October 1955. However, it should also be said that Costello seems to have learned from de Valera, and from his experience of submitting to McQuaid: appointments to the censorship board (which included a Protestant) and to the directorship of the Arts Council (Seán Ó Faoláin) in 1956 emphatically did not meet with the approval of the archbishop.

In the realm of foreign affairs the new Minister, Liam Cosgrave, built on the achievements of the first Inter-Party administration, and indeed of his father's government,

in consolidating Irish participation in the international arena. Cosgrave served as chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1955 (Irish membership had been negotiated by MacBride); and also in 1955 Cosgrave led Ireland into the United Nations, an event that had been delayed for some years owing partly to the opposition of the Soviet Union. In these ways the second Inter-Party administration continued to elaborate the European themes originally essayed by MacBride and the first Inter-Party government; and it sought to establish a significant presence on the larger stage, within the United Nations, just as W.T. Cosgrave and the Cumann na nGaedheal government had achieved prominence for Ireland at the League of Nations.

And yet, with the second Inter-Party government in 1957, just as with Cumann na nGaedheal in 1932, Ireland's international standing mattered much less with voters than their standard of living and day-to-day economic matters. The renewed IRA campaign – Operation Harvest (1956) – against the Northern Ireland government also revived republican and anti-partitionist sympathies which Fine Gael, despite Costello's Ottawa pronouncement and his commitment to reunification, was ill-equipped to exploit. The proximate cause of the fall of the government was MacBride's withdrawal of Clann na Poblachta support (the party had three strategically crucial seats in the Dáil): the Clann leader complained about Costello's clamp-down against the IRA and the lack of any long-term economic strategy. And, broadly, these were the dominant issues of the election contest, which was fought out in March 1957 and which produced a dramatic victory for Fianna Fáil (with 77 seats, as opposed to Fine Gael's 40). The IRA campaign seems to have stimulated traditional republican feeling, which helps a little to explain the Fianna Fáil victory as well as the return of four Sinn Féin deputies. But the fundamental issue was the economy and the unpopularity – as well as the comparative inefficacy – of Sweetman's austerity programme.

Much scholarship has concentrated on examining the relative decline of Fianna Fáil in the ten years between 1948 and 1957 – a decade sandwiched between two 16-year periods of uninterrupted electoral triumph. The complete and lasting nature of the victory of 1957 might seem to suggest that the party had at last hit upon a persuasive manifesto with which to reconstruct its support. In fact, it is all too easy to see the election of 1957 as unequivocally a turning point both for Fianna Fáil and, indeed, the country as a whole. Most scholars agree that the 1957 result was less a victory for Fianna Fáil than a defeat for the Inter-Party ministers and for their discredited record of economic management: Joe Lee has drawn parallels with the election of 1944, where Fianna Fáil won 76 seats out of 138 and yet was out of office within four years.[74] The reality was that Fianna Fáil entered the 1957 contest without any agreed economic programme: as Bew and Patterson have argued, 'the election result showed that the two major coalition partners had lost many more votes than Fianna Fáil had gained, and demonstrated that divisions in Fianna Fáil were no compensation for the perceived incapacity of the coalition to deal with the disastrous economic conditions'.[75]

The election of 1957 was important because it gave Fianna Fáil a breathing space – a chance to restructure its electoral appeal and to re-establish its hold over Irish

voters. In the 1930s, as Kieran Allen has argued, Fianna Fáil was able to hold together its support by offering native manufacturers tariff protection and working people a modest reformism; in the 1940s the party was able to muster support on national grounds, and with the benefit of a broken and disoriented labour movement.[76] But the slump of the post-war era had restricted what the party could offer to its support; and though de Valera returned to the question of partition in the late 1940s, both out of principle and as a result of limited alternative options, patriotic drum-beating could never completely divert the Irish electorate from the issues of jobs, emigration and declining standards of living. The pendulum swings of Irish politics in the years between 1948 and 1957 highlighted voter dissatisfaction with each of the parties in power, and underlined the extent to which none of the parties was able successfully to address the key problems of the economy.

The election of 1957 brought most of the failed Fianna Fáil leadership team back into office, and to this extent the party might well have looked forward only to a further prolongation of economic turmoil and a correspondingly brief period in power. But, beneath the apparently dead wood encrusting the heroes of 1922–3, there were signs of rebirth. Seán MacEntee, the architect of the party's austerity programme, had been discredited by the election defeat of 1954 and had never fully recovered ground: in a remarkable demotion (for the otherwise comparatively static Fianna Fáil frontbench), MacEntee was moved by de Valera from the Finance portfolio to Health and Social Welfare. This humiliation served to emphasize the ascendancy of MacEntee's old rival, Lemass, who once again held the office of Tánaiste, and who now – for the first time – looked like the unbeatable successor to the aging 'Chief' (though, when the time came, there was in fact a tussle between Lemass and Frank Aiken). Lemass's newly consolidated strength had other connotations, however. The Tánaiste had always been careful not to stray too far away from the economic nationalist creed of his colleagues, at least in terms of his public pronouncements. But since the Second World War Lemass had been interested in the possibilities of greater state involvement in the Irish economy, together with an improved relationship with the unions: he had looked forward to the possibility that the old economic doctrines might be refined along Keynesian lines. There was some tactical camouflaging of these opinions, when necessary, but the outlines of Lemass's intellectual and political development were clear enough. In 1953 he had spoken in favour of foreign investment in the country, a turnaround from the pretty determined efforts he had made in the 1930s to gaelicize Irish business: in January 1954 he asked the IDA to review the effects of the long-standing protectionist policies of successive Irish governments. Lemass's progress from what Joe Lee has called 'the age of faith to the age of reason' was gradual and was accompanied by much trimming and apparent recantation.[77] But its significance is unmistakeable, because Lemass's own prominence within Fianna Fáil was, by the late 1950s, assured. Moreover, the importance of Lemass's development was enhanced because an intellectually self-confident and skilful young civil servant – T.K. Whitaker, from 1956 the Secretary of the Department of Finance – was making roughly the same philosophical trek. This concord between minister and bureaucrat would shortly

have the most profound consequences for both the Irish economy and the balance of Irish politics: both Fianna Fáil and Ireland were to be rescued from what looked in 1957 like the edge of the abyss.

6.4 The Age of Lemass, 1957–73

> *If Mr de Valera is the architect of modern Ireland, then Mr Lemass is indisputably the engineer, the contractor and the foreman rolled into one . . .*
>
> *Irish Times*, 25 July 1953

Is there a faultline in Irish history, marked by the return of the Fianna Fáil government in 1957? If there is, what is its nature and completeness? The geological strata on either side of the apparent divide are evidently related: the economic policies which Lemass and the new Minister of Finance, Dr James Ryan, pursued had been foreshadowed by a variety of initiatives or ideas launched by earlier administrations. The fossil remains are similar: underperforming veterans of the civil war and the 'troubles' occupied much of the Fianna Fáil frontbench, both in opposition and in government. The bedrock is evidently the same in composition: a conglomerate of a passive republicanism, populist conservative values and an intense commitment to the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie.

Debate on these issues tends, inevitably, to have a strong ideological flavour, with leftist historians emphasizing the long-term continuities in elite strategy, and those of a more centrist or conservative disposition tending to highlight divergence and disjunction. Inevitably, too, the evidence is ambiguous. There were indeed, for example, continuities in the personnel of the Fianna Fáil leadership: de Valera remained Taoiseach for the moment (he resigned in June 1959 in order to take up the Presidency), while most of the earlier stalwarts returned to ministerial prominence. On the other hand there were some small but telling changes: MacEntee, the 'high-Tory' of the party, was demoted, his place at Finance taken by Jim Ryan, an ally of Lemass; Gerry Boland, strongly republican and now aging (72 in 1957), was dropped from office; some youngsters were introduced into the cabinet (Neil Blaney, aged 35, went to Posts and Telegraphs, and Kevin Boland, aged 40, went to Defence: Jack Lynch, also aged 40, had already junior ministerial experience in the 1951–4 Fianna Fáil government, and now acquired cabinet rank as Minister for the Gaeltacht). Lemass, reappointed as Tánaiste, had a greater than ever influence, partly because of the eclipse of leadership rivals but also because de Valera was aging (75 in 1957) and ailing, both physically and politically: from late 1958 until retiring as Taoiseach in June 1959 he was buffeted by allegations of impropriety concerning shares in the party newspaper, the *Irish Press*.

Lemass was no radical, nor was he a thoroughgoing modernist: he was too astute a party politician to venture far from the median, and particularly when the demands of opposition imposed the need for old-fashioned patriotic rhetoric. On the other hand, if he was a convinced nationalist, then he was also a pragmatist who saw the

health of the nation primarily in material rather than in spiritual terms: he differed from de Valera, therefore, in the direction but not in the solidity of his nationalism. Lemass may not have been an innovative thinker, but he was certainly the most prominent of the Fianna Fáilers who were looking with interest at the social and economic ideas of those in other parties, and indeed in other countries. As has frequently been said, Lemass bridged the old and the new. He had fought alongside Pearse in the General Post Office and had served (so it would seem) in Collins's 'Squad' on Bloody Sunday, 21 November 1920: but he had the good taste to be discreet about his patriotic achievement and to trade on his ministerial achievements rather than on his prowess as a teenage fighter.[78] He had, in addition, the moral courage to develop and expand his nationalist vision.

Lemass is, with T.K. Whitaker, the Secretary of the Department of Finance, the figure most closely associated with the rapid economic growth of the early and mid-1960s, and the concomitant political and social changes. And yet, even though the names of Lemass and Whitaker are often interlinked, it was the coalition Minister for Finance, Gerard Sweetman, who had been the critical patron of Whitaker, appointing him to the secretaryship at the age of 40, in 1956. It was Jim Ryan who encouraged Whitaker in the elaboration of his ideas; and it was Ryan who sponsored Whitaker's paper on Economic Development (first outlined as 'Has Ireland a Future?' in December 1957) before the Fianna Fáil cabinet: the full-blown plan was published in May 1958. In addition Lemass, though an easy convert to Whitaker's line of argument, was not an unquestioning disciple: Whitaker tended towards a doctrinaire economic liberalism, while Lemass always remained sensitive to the politics of political economy. He was, however, a keen patron of the Programme for Economic Expansion, a modified and expanded version of Whitaker's earlier papers and a document that came to represent the holy gospel of the Lemass years.

The Programme, which was published in December 1958, has traditionally been seen as the blueprint for the rapid process of modernization that occurred in Irish society and in the Irish economy over the following decade: it has been seen as the document heralding the age of enlightenment within Irish economic thought and practice. It should be said at once that it has also long been recognized that Whitaker's Plan and the related Programme reflected not only the Secretary's own gradual intellectual reorientation but also the long-term gestation of Keynesian ideas within Irish politics and also the civil service.[79] Indeed, the Programme has to be viewed at least partly in the context of the political and intellectual life of the bureaucracy: aside from its many other connotations, the Programme represented 'the snatching by the Department of Finance of the initiative in planning' at a time when it seemed that this initiative might fall into other hands.[80] The Programme highlighted the need for a shift away from protectionist policies, a move that had already been cautiously investigated and adumbrated in the early 1950s: it called for a five-year investment programme, with an emphasis on economically productive expenditure, and a target growth rate of 2 per cent each year. As with Costello's plans of 1956, there was also an emphasis on the gearing of agriculture towards the export market. Equally, as with the initiatives of the second Inter-Party administration, there

was a recognition that growth could not be achieved in the absence of substantial foreign capital: the Industrial Development (Encouragement of External Investment) Act of 1958 was the tangible expression of this insight. Whitaker and Lemass therefore owed debts to earlier administrations: but while they were not the earliest government team to shift away from an emphasis on budgetary equilibrium, they were arguably the first to shift towards an economically productive dis-equilibrium. Nor were they the earliest to recognize the importance of foreign investment and export-led growth (the IDA had, after all, been founded in 1949, and an Export Profits Tax Relief measure had been enacted in 1956): but they were the first to combine these ideas with both intellectual rigour and political self-confidence. Earlier administrations had been much more sensitive about the leftist connotations of economic planning; and in the event earlier administrations did not have the political opportunities provided by the Fianna Fáil electoral roller-coaster which ran from 1957 until 1973.

If there has been some scholarly debate about the balance between continuity and change within the Whitaker–Lemass 'revolution', then there has also been some dispute – or at least difference of emphasis – about the relationship between planning and results. What is not in question is that Ireland, in common with elsewhere, experienced remarkable rates of growth: the gross national product rose at an average rate of 4.5 per cent for each of the years between 1959 and 1963. Nor is there any question that growth helped to stimulate social change, perhaps the most important aspect being a dramatic fall in the numbers of emigrants and a parallel rise in the total population of the country: in each year of the period 1956–61 an average of 43,000 Irish people were emigrating, while only 11,000 emigrated in each year of the span 1966–71. But how far was the Whitaker initiative responsible for this social and economic turnaround, and how far did 'the comparatively modest hibernian boomlet' merely reflect a natural and predictable upturn in the business cycle or, indeed, wider international economic improvements?[81] The scale of growth, while unremarkable by international standards, was certainly unusual within the context of recent Irish economic history, and was therefore more than might normally have been expected from a conventional recovery. The nature of Irish growth was also striking: traditional agricultural exports were important, but manufacturing was of increasing significance, and in particular burgeoning new sectors of Irish industry. It would be unrealistic to detach any discussion of these improvements from the global context, or indeed from the initiatives taken by earlier administrations and dating back to the late 1940s: in particular it would be unfair to discount the efforts of Costello's second government, even if this coalition had collapsed before the fruit of its labours had fully matured. Lemass and Whitaker built on earlier achievements, and Fianna Fáil had the good fortune to be in office at the time of an international economic upswing. But it seems clear that the Irish fall-out from this global activity might well have been much more modest had it not been for the Programme for Economic Expansion.

Socialist historians have occasionally asked why the Programme did not create more problems for Fianna Fáil, and more broadly in Irish society, than in fact was

the case.[82] To some extent the answers to this issue should already be clear. The Programme was novel, even revolutionary, but not in obvious ways: it was new, not in its ideas but rather in terms of the political consensus (between government and civil service) upon which it was founded and also in terms of the care with which it was explained to the Irish public. It was novel in so far as it provided the right combination of (albeit familiar) ideas at an appropriate moment both in terms of Irish politics (a stable Fianna Fáil administration was in power with 78 Dáil seats) and of the international economy (which was booming). Still, Fianna Fáil's electoral strength rested partly on its support of native industry, and in particular upon its protectionist policies – precisely the areas identified by the Programme as needing attention and reform. But Lemass and Whitaker were not proposing an immediate abandonment of the tariff strategy, nor were they proposing to smother native industry by favouring more efficient foreign counterparts. On the contrary, tariffs might still be applied for the protection of sapling Irish industries, while the ending of protection was seen in highly gradualist terms. Moreover, foreign capital was seen by Lemass primarily as a means of boosting exports, and not as a way of edging out native industries from their privileged position in the Irish market place. Fianna Fáil was therefore not so much abandoning its economic nationalist convictions as modernizing them and rendering them workable: the party pulled off a remarkable display of two-timing, simultaneously courting foreign business while reassuring Irish entrepreneurs of its undying affection.

Again, socialist historians have tended to see the Programme for Economic Expansion in terms of Fianna Fáil's need to retain electoral control of the Irish working classes.[83] It has been argued that the party's electoral strategies had foundered in the 1950s, having been buffeted by the squalls of the Irish economy: Fianna Fáil had therefore little or nothing to offer either its business or its working-class support. By way of contrast, in the 1930s the party had been able to deliver modest social reform to its working-class constituency while promising protection to its entrepreneurial support and a robust nationalism to everyone: in the 1940s, during the war, the party's patriotic credentials, combined with a divided opposition, meant that Fianna Fáil could still thrive, even though the economic context was becoming progressively more threatening. The initiative of 1958 has been seen as a way of squaring the circle of capitalist politics, by reconciling bourgeois and working-class electoral support. A revamping of the Irish economy meant not just the possibility of gain for the business classes (provided that the new foreign investors were not set in competition with their Irish counterparts for the home market): it also meant the possibility of advance, in terms of employment and social welfare, for ordinary Irish voters. And, indeed, Lemass – in keeping with the substance of his political ideas from the 1940s – saw the Programme for Economic Expansion as working within a corporatist framework: in November 1961 he sponsored an Employer–Labour Conference, and in June 1963 he was invited for the first time (bizarrely, given the rightward thrust of Fianna Fáil) to address the annual conference of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. In 1963 Lemass set up the National Industrial and Economic Council, representing government, employers and

labour, with a view to harmonizing industrial relations and informing debate about the broader development of the Irish economy. In fact, despite these initiatives, the rapid economic growth of the early 1960s was accompanied by severe labour unrest, and particularly in 1962–3. But the broader party aim – of balancing the political support of the working and business classes – was triumphantly sustained for 16 years: the business elite demonstrated its loyalty to the party through subscriptions to Taca (the aptly named Fianna Fáil fund-raising body), while the workers repaid growing opportunities for employment and a more generous welfare provision with their votes.

The most serious political challenge to Lemass's delicately balanced social partnership came, ironically, not from working-class protest or the desertion of the business interest but from within the Fianna Fáil cabinet, through the resignation in 1964 of P.J. Smith, the Minister for Agriculture. Smith, who, in the (somewhat ambiguous) verdict of Liam Skinner in 1946, allowed 'nothing to restrict his close and constant touch with the people he represents', was an agrarian republican from Cavan who articulated the farmers' belief that Fianna Fáil had surrendered to the labour movement.[84] The resignation was the first to have been sustained by a Fianna Fáil government on a matter of policy, and it was instantly the subject of a damage-limitation exercise, involving even President de Valera. But despite some tactical obfuscation from the party managers, and despite Smith's own relative (perhaps enforced) discretion, the issues were clear enough: the belief among some rural Fianna Fáilers that the unions were gaining the upper hand, and the simultaneous conviction that farming incomes were coming under challenge. The Smith affair, muted though it was, highlighted both the political difficulties inherent in Lemass's very urban strategies and a glaring defeat in another key area of policy – the Irish government's failure to win admission to the European Economic Community (EEC), and its consequent inability to lead restless farmers to the over-brimming trough of the Common Agricultural Policy.

The snub experienced by the Irish in 1962 at the hands of the EEC, and in particular the French, was mitigated by the fact that the British received similar treatment: it was, however, an expensive setback, and one which Lemass – who of course recognized clearly the benefits that would flow from membership – laboured hard to correct. On the whole, however, this was the only major failure sustained by Fianna Fáil within the realm of foreign policy. As with the Programme for Economic Expansion, so with foreign affairs, some of the groundwork for later achievement was laid by earlier administrations: as with the economy, it was the good fortune, or perhaps the good electoral housekeeping, of Fianna Fáil to survive in office long enough to reap the benefits of long-term diplomatic labour. Ireland had been admitted to the United Nations in 1955 under the second Inter-Party government, and in July 1956 John Costello, as Taoiseach, enunciated the principles governing the Irish presence in New York (non-alignment and – characteristically – the maintenance of 'Christian civilization').[85] It was Frank Aiken, however, who, as Fianna Fáil Minister for External Affairs (1957–69), put these principles into action and who, with, as Joe Lee delicately puts it, the 'cerebral support' of some brilliant civil servants,

in effect reconstructed Irish foreign policy after the false starts and diplomatic setbacks of the immediate post-war era.[86] Ireland's commitment to the UN was expressed materially through involvement in seven out of 12 peace-keeping missions in the period 1955–70: in November 1960 ten Irish soldiers were killed at Niemba, in the Congo, in one of the most bloody episodes of this international activity. The independence of Irish foreign policy was underlined by Aiken's decision, taken in 1957, to support the idea of discussing China's membership of the UN: this created horror at the State Department and within Irish America, and involved some later backtracking, but was nonetheless an interesting signal of the mixture of cussedness and idealism that would characterize Aiken's track record at Iveagh House. Generally, however, Lemass's consensual instincts in terms of social partnership were applied, through Aiken, within Irish foreign affairs (even if – according to Brian Lenihan – the Taoiseach regarded Aiken as 'a fool'): relations with the United States and with the British were improved after the troughs plumbed in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[87] The China episode notwithstanding, and despite some uncharitable private assessments of the Fianna Fáil cabinet, the State Department applauded Lemass's efforts to modernize Ireland and to make the country more open, both politically and economically: this judgement was made all the more easily after John F. Kennedy, of Boston Irish descent and a Catholic, assumed the Presidency of the USA in 1960. Kennedy's visit to Ireland in June 1963, which was an emotionally intense occasion for both guest and hosts, set the seal on the restoration of relations between the two countries.

Equally, the strained Anglo-Irish relationship of the 1930s and 1940s was reworked by Lemass and Aiken along more businesslike and less emotive lines: a trade agreement was forged between the two countries in April 1960, a herald of the more comprehensive Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement of December 1965. This deal, a highly characteristic piece of Lemass diplomacy, gave the Irish immediate tariff-free access to the British market, while calling for the gradual elimination of Irish duties on British imports: a free trade area was to be in place by 1975. Irish exporters were given an immediate boost, while home producers were given time to adjust to the demands of the market place: the agreement conveyed some immediate advantages on the Irish while being simultaneously a modest but useful piece of national reconciliation, as well as a valuable preparation for membership of the EEC. Republicans affected to see a restoration of the Act of Union and a betrayal of 1916; but the focus of Lemass's vision had shifted from the General Post Office towards Brussels.

In 1966, with the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising, it was by no means easy to look beyond the parapets of the GPO; nor was it altogether clear whether mystical republicanism had in fact been thoroughly overtaken by the new materialist nationalism and the new pragmatism of Lemass. The links between the celebration of the birth of the republic, and therefore of militant nationalism, and the resurgence of violence in Northern Ireland in 1968–9 are complicated but real: it would, however, be quite wrong to argue for any straightforward connection. A younger and unblooded generation of republican was certainly made aware of the magnificent seven who had signed the Proclamation of the Republic, of their stand

against the odds and of their ultimate self-sacrifice on behalf of the Irish people. For these young men and women nationalist protest on the streets of Northern Ireland and the rapid regrowth of violent republicanism could not fail to recall the stand made by the generation who had fought in 1916 and throughout the 'Tan' war. Paradoxically, many of those in the Fianna Fáil leadership who had in fact been 'out' in 1916 or who had fought in the flying columns, and who therefore had nothing to prove, were taking a more relaxed line on the partition question and on the subject of relations with Ulster Unionism. De Valera, as the most senior surviving figure associated with the Easter Rising, occupied centre-stage in 1966 and spoke reverentially of his comrades-in-arms: but he was also softening towards the North, and indeed the growing complexity of popular attitudes towards the 1916 legacy was reflected in the fact that the 'Chief' only just scraped home to Áras an Uachtaráin when he stood for re-election in June 1966 (and this despite the formidable assistance supplied by the young Charles J. Haughey). Tim Pat Coogan recounts an anecdote of President de Valera in his later years entertaining members of the Barton-Childers clan, the leading Protestant republican connection: de Valera told the party that Erskine Childers, the martyred patriarch of the family, had written a letter before facing the firing squad in which he had argued that the greatest challenge for republicanism would come from Northern Ireland, and that Ulster Unionists 'were a special people with special fears and ideals which needed to be understood and allowed for'. De Valera reportedly told the gathering that he 'deeply regretted' not having accepted this counsel.[88] This quiet admission was far removed from the extravagance of the anti-partition 'world tour' of 1948.

De Valera's shift towards a more consensual approach to Unionism and partition may well have been partly stimulated not just by uncomfortable memories such as the Childers's letter, but also by the example of Lemass. The integrity of Lemass's nationalism was unquestionable (Joe Lee has suggested that the apparently relaxed Lemass 'took Irish nationalist rhetoric very seriously', and this is confirmed by John Horgan's study): he was perfectly prepared to echo the anti-partitionist polemic of the party when occasion demanded (such as in the 1948–51 period).[89] However, on the whole Lemass took the same functionalist line with Northern Ireland that he applied to so much else. While the IRA campaign in the North was petering out in the 1960s, Lemass delivered a number of speeches in which he acknowledged both the strength of Ulster Unionist sentiment and the need for substantial change in the South as an inescapable prelude to any reunification. These were not in themselves especially remarkable insights: but, in the context of a longer and highly damaging tradition of threat, Lemass's conciliation signalled the beginnings of a shift not just within the Fianna Fáil leadership but within Irish society as a whole. Moreover, these soft words (and even the political vocabulary of Fianna Fáil was changing, with 'Northern Ireland' replacing the more defiant 'Six Counties') were backed up by actions: urged on by Whitaker (who had been born in Rostrevor, County Down, before partition), Lemass opened up communication with his northern counterpart, Terence O'Neill, and journeyed to Belfast in January 1965.[90] This encounter (which is discussed at greater length in the following chapter) can scarcely have looked

Plate 16 Seán Lemass and Terence O'Neill, Stormont, Belfast, January 1965.
Source: Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

like a meeting of hearts and minds: O'Neill was from a landed and military background, was highly anglicized and – if his speeches and autobiography are a guide – was also gratingly patronizing in manner. But appearances were deceptive: in fact both O'Neill and Lemass were laconic technocrats who were each rather distant from their respective parties, temperamentally as well as ideologically. The meeting went well: O'Neill travelled to Dublin in February in order to reciprocate Lemass's gesture and to sustain the momentum that had been achieved. Again, an exchange visit between two chief executives, whose governments were separated by only 100 or so miles, might not appear an especially bold adventure, but this was the first occasion of its kind since W.T. Cosgrave and Sir James Craig had met in the 1920s. Moreover, the visit had been preceded by 40 years of anti-partitionist rhetoric and action from Dublin, sometimes of a determinedly petty kind: nor at any time were the Belfast ministers prepared to be outdone in terms of cussedness.

When Lemass retired in November 1966 his northern initiative, and indeed other aspects of his policy, were only half-formed. The visits to Belfast had resulted in some cautious reappraisal of attitudes and some tentative progress towards cross-border

economic cooperation; but all this was dissipated with the onset of street violence in Northern Ireland in 1968–9. Another casualty of the hardening of attitudes in the later 1960s was Lemass's drive for substantial constitutional change: his cross-party committee on the constitution, which began its work in 1966 and reported in 1967, urged that the territorial claim on Northern Ireland be recast in more emollient language, and that divorce be available to those Irish people whose religious faith accommodated such matters. But with the threat of civil war in the North, and the wave of popular sympathy for Catholic victims of the communal violence, with the revival of hardline republicanism in certain sections of the Fianna Fáil leadership, the time was scarcely ripe for the enactment of Lemass's vision. A referendum, held in 1972, approved one of the constitutional committee's recommendations – the deletion of the section defining the special position of the Catholic Church. But, predictably, it had proved easier to modernize the Irish economy than to achieve a modernization of the national soul.

Jack Lynch succeeded Lemass as party leader and Taoiseach, and inherited not only a process of northern détente that was becoming unworkable, given the rapidly changing conditions within Northern Ireland, but also an economic policy which – as with the efforts towards the North – had once looked highly promising but was no longer delivering the expected results. Lemass's impeccable political judgement had held up, therefore, even with regard to the timing of his departure: he left only 18 months after a ringing electoral endorsement (Fianna Fáil won 72 seats in April 1965), and with his various strategies either blossoming or at least budding. Lemass may have been motivated by health worries (he had heart trouble which would shortly – in May 1971 – kill him); he may also have been sensitive to the needs and ambitions of a younger generation, given that de Valera had only been wrested from the levers of power – in tears and in the context of the *Irish Press* shares scandal – at the age of 77. De Valera had self-evidently outstayed his welcome as Taoiseach, compromising his reputation of the 1930s and 1940s by presiding over the lacklustre Fianna Fáil government of 1951–4 and by threatening an equally uninspired performance when returned to power in 1957. By way of contrast, Lemass left office on a high (at least so far as the Irish public could tell), the victor of two successive general elections (October 1961 and April 1965) and the architect of policies that were transforming the country and its foreign relations. It is interesting to speculate how Lemass would have responded to the political and economic challenges of the later 1960s and early 1970s, and whether his performance would have burnished or occluded his reputation. It is unlikely that Lemass's attitude towards Northern Ireland would have differed significantly from that of his successor: it is just possible that his record as a fighter might have provided him with some more leeway than was available to Lynch, and it is also possible – given the conciliatory nature of his comments when in retirement – that he might have been able to play a more constructive and emollient role than Lynch. In terms of the economy, however, it is hard to see how Lemass would have responded differently to the relative slowdown of the later 1960s, or how he could have overcome the crises of the early 1970s, given that these were largely external in origin. On the whole, therefore, Lemass

timed his departure to coincide with a peak in national morale; and this in itself helps to explain why his name is redolent of the good times and why his reputation continues to stand so high.

In reality Lynch inherited problems that had been gestating under the Lemass regime. The second Programme for Economic Expansion, which had been launched in 1964, was soon proving to be inadequate and was ditched in 1967: the growth rate of the Irish GNP was beginning to slow by the later 1960s, and unemployment was beginning an apparently unstoppable rise. The Lemass reforms had barely touched agriculture: growth rates had remained low within this sector even during the boom years of the early 1960s. Even before Lemass's retirement it was clear that Irish agriculture was set to create both political and economic problems for the government: despite the hopes of Whitaker's first Programme, and indeed of Costello's initiative of 1956, agriculture was not modernized, nor was it the vanguard of the national economic revival. Irish farmers remained wedded to traditional techniques and outmoded economic goals. Shut out from the markets of the EEC, the farmers endured poor working conditions and comparatively low prices until, in the autumn of 1966, their representative organization, the National Farmers' Association, was driven into public protest.

Nor had Lynch inherited an industrial elysium. Despite Lemass's corporatist strategies, and despite plentiful channels of communication between labour, the employers and government, industrial unrest continued to plague the Irish economy: grassroots protest and breakaway unions dispelled any cosy dreams of social partnership. The building workers' strike of 1964 had helped to precipitate potentially the most severe political crisis of the Lemass years – the resignation of Paddy Smith from the Ministry of Agriculture – and politically challenging strikes continued under Lynch. But the most serious threat to Irish industry and the economy came from the spiralling inflation of the late 1960s, driven by economically unrealistic national wage settlements and – after 1973 – by an international crisis stimulated by the hike in the price of oil. Moreover, the rapid rise in wages sustained during these years was accompanied by high levels of unemployment, so that the normal regulatory mechanisms of the economy were failing to function. The growing economic promiscuity of these years was underlined by the decision of George Colley, Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance (1970–3), to permit a deficit to creep into his current budget of 1972 – a grim augury of the free-spending times to come, and a very different approach to public borrowing from that sustained under Lemass.

Still, if Lemass's record provided few clues about dealing with the economic slowdown of the later 1960s, then it was scarcely any more helpful in relation to the main political difficulty faced by Lynch: Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is arguable that Lemass laid down problems both in terms of the economy and Northern Ireland which came to fruition under Lynch: Lemass's conciliatory approach to the unions in the early 1960s may well have helped to foster unrealistic expectations within the labour movement; while his conciliation of Stormont – however imaginative – may have made life more difficult for Lynch in 1968–70, given that Ulster Unionism, under pressure from the civil rights movement, was shifting to the right at this

Plate 17 Charles Haughey, *c.*1970.
Source: Victor Patterson/Linenhall Library.

time. On the whole Lynch accepted Lemass's rhetoric about peaceful reunification, sometimes edging into asperity or (as in August 1969) into menace. But as northern Catholics came under increasing pressure from the Northern Ireland security forces (the RUC and USC), and eventually from the British army, a cadre within the Fianna Fáil leadership saw Lynch's generally mild language as an abdication of responsibility: while he faffed around at the United Nations, seeking support for a peace-keeping force, other party elders sought more direct and militant action.

The full history of the arms affair of 1969–70 is still, despite several books on the subject, unclear.[91] It is certainly the case that several Fianna Fáil ministers – Charles Haughey (Finance), Neil Blaney (Agriculture) and Kevin Boland (Local Government) – were out of sympathy with the Taoiseach, either as a result of a genuine fellow-feeling with their northern co-religionists (Blaney was a Donegal Catholic and Haughey had close family ties with South Derry), or through political ambition (Haughey in particular may have sensed weakness in Lynch's early handling of the northern crisis). It is also clear that Lynch, and many other senior figures in the Dáil, came to believe that there had been a conspiracy, the tentacles of which had stretched within the Fianna Fáil cabinet, to use official channels to buy and supply arms to northern nationalists. Once apprised of these allegations, Lynch moved to crush what was in effect a challenge to his own leadership: Haughey and Blaney were both sacked from the government on 6 May 1970, and Boland followed shortly afterwards, resigning in a display of sympathy with his fallen comrades. Haughey and Blaney were subsequently charged with conspiracy to import arms. But Lynch's troubles were far from over – for the case against Blaney was dismissed on 2 July and Haughey was acquitted on 23 October after a 14-day trial. The subsequent fallout was highly revealing. Despite a generalized sympathy for northern nationalists, Fianna Fáil was always more concerned about internal discipline than about the partition question; and Lynch was able to orchestrate acclamations from the republican elders of the party, such as Frank Aiken, as well as win a vote of confidence among Fianna Fáil deputies. There was noisy support for Boland and Blaney at the party ard-fheis, held in February 1971; but, again, the party's natural sense of hierarchy overcame its visceral republicanism and Lynch was able to win endorsement for his moderate line. If those who had been implicated in the arms affair thought that Northern Ireland provided the materials for a leadership challenge, then these events provided instead a political education: the affair underlined the extent to which Fianna Fáil had inherited not merely the moderation of Lemass, but also the genial hypocrisy of de Valera, who in his prime had roused his followers against partition but who had never been prepared to enact his principles. As Tim Pat Coogan has gruffly commented, de Valera was 'an arch-practitioner of the general philosophy of never putting off until tomorrow what could safely be deferred much longer': the same maxim might well be applied to Fianna Fáil's stand against partition.[92]

But, though de Valera's shadow was hard to escape, and though he seemed unstoppable (he remained President until 1973 and died – aged 93 – in 1975), this was in truth the age of Lemass. Even the Lynch years (1966–73) represented a low-voltage continuation of the governing principles that had been laid down by the Lemass governments – and this should scarcely come as a surprise, given the genial passivity of the new leader, and given the continuities in the Fianna Fáil frontbench (Lynch was something of a protégé, chosen by Lemass in 1959 to take over his beloved Ministry for Industry and Commerce, while Lynch's Minister for Finance between 1966 and 1970, Charles Haughey, was Lemass's son-in-law: other frontbenchers were Lemass nominees, the beneficiaries of his sustained efforts to rejuvenate the party leadership). As has been argued, Lynch inherited Lemass's emphasis on economic

planning and his moves towards a more conciliatory stand on Northern Ireland; as has been argued, in the absence of Lemass's political savvy, these bequests proved to be fraught with difficulty. But there were other aspects of this shared inheritance that would prove, if not less contentious, then at least more workable as policies and less ambiguous as blessings.

A sustained commitment to educational reform and expansion characterized the 16 years of the Fianna Fáil reign. Comprehensive schools were created in 1963; and in September 1966, shortly before Lemass's retirement, his rumbustious Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley, announced during a speech to the National Union of Journalists that free secondary education would be established ('the most celebrated example of policy-making by publicity', as Brian Farrell has termed this episode).[93] Community schools were created in 1970, as was the first polytechnic-style National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) at Limerick: the NIHE at Dublin was to follow in 1976, founded when the Cosgrave coalition government was in office. O'Malley was a graduate of University College Galway; and this fact, combined with his irreverent genius, may help to explain his proposal to unite Trinity College Dublin (founded in 1592) and University College Dublin (1908), by far the biggest constituent of the National University of Ireland. However, even O'Malley's very considerable energy and skill were no match for the clout wielded by each of these venerable institutions. His – viewed from a passionless perspective – entirely logical proposition was an example of Lemass's functionalism and his fixation on performance carried to a politically illogical extreme.

Donogh O'Malley's nephew and political heir was Desmond O'Malley, an equally gifted and courageous figure and a rising star within the Fianna Fáil of the 1970s. Des O'Malley was appointed by Lynch as Minister for Justice in 1970, succeeding Micheál Ó Moráin, whose incapacity had done much to exacerbate the seriousness of the arms affair. It was the younger O'Malley who inherited the Fianna Fáil tradition of toughness towards the threat of the IRA, although he had little of the compromising political baggage of earlier exponents of this tradition. O'Malley re-established the Special Criminal Court in May 1972, a tribunal which had civil judges but no jury: this initiative was followed in November 1972 by the Offences against the State (Amendment) Bill, which authorized the conviction of suspects charged with membership of an illegal organization on the basis of the testimony of a senior garda officer. These actions, much more than the antics of the alleged arms conspirators, represented the true Fianna Fáil: dirigiste, hard-nosed against any hint of challenge, and effective in its thrusts because knowledgeable about its targets.

Another Fianna Fáil strategy from the late 1950s was revived in October 1968, when Lynch attempted to persuade the Irish electorate to abandon proportional representation in favour of a first-past-the-post system: this was an unapologetic effort to enshrine the party's electoral hegemony (the parallels with James Craig's earlier gamesmanship on behalf of the Ulster Unionists are irresistible). De Valera and Lemass had attempted a slightly more insidious version of this stunt in June 1959, when the poll for the Presidency was combined with a referendum on proportional representation. Then the Irish electorate had chosen the Fianna Fáil

candidate for office, de Valera, but not the party's recommended voting mechanism. In 1968 Fianna Fáil's renewed efforts towards electoral 'reform' proved fruitless, when the country once again voted overwhelmingly to retain PR. On this occasion voters showed the same subtlety that they had displayed in 1959: then they had chosen the party's man but not its policy, while in 1968 they rejected the policy while preparing to endorse the party (Fianna Fáil won an impressive 75 seats in the general election of June 1969). Irish voters in the 1960s were thus highly enthusiastic about Fianna Fáil; but they were much less excited by its determined efforts to create, in effect, a one-party state. They endorsed Fianna Fáil in the general elections of 1957, 1961, 1965 and 1969, and in the Presidential contests of 1959 and 1966, but they reserved the right to change their mind.

Ireland's application for membership of the EEC was an additional legacy of the Lemass years, which – like PR – might have functioned as an electoral prop to the party and which was unresolved at the time of Lemass's resignation. With the retirement of General de Gaulle from the French Presidency in April 1969, the chief political obstacle to Irish and British membership of the Community disappeared; and in May 1972 the Irish people overwhelmingly approved the idea of the country's admission (83 per cent of a high poll voted 'yes' to membership). Ireland formally joined the EEC in 1973, an act which brought to completion many of Lemass's ambitions and strategies dating back to the 1950s. Membership of the Community had eluded Lemass in 1961, and this failure had professedly represented one of the most bitter disappointments of his career: admission to the Common Agricultural Policy would certainly have dissolved much of the farmer protest that plagued Fianna Fáil in these years, while the prospect of generous economic subsidies more than offset any perceived threat to national sovereignty. Lemass, however, had long retired before the Irish application for membership of the Community was reactivated; and he did not even live to see the negotiations and referendum that delivered the prize for which he had long worked and schemed.

In fact, when Irish membership of the Community was formally ratified, on 1 January 1973, Fianna Fáil itself was at the end of its 16-year electoral reign: a general election, held in February 1973, ousted the party and produced an electoral coalition, led by Liam Cosgrave and Fine Gael. Historians are naturally wary of over-rigid categorization, or indeed of overdramatization, but there are grounds for arguing that, just as the Programme for Economic Expansion and the accession of Lemass as Taoiseach inaugurated a new period in Irish political life, so the early 1970s, with the death of Lemass, the referendum on EEC membership and the oil crisis, brought that period to an end. These years between the late 1950s and 1973 were, arguably, the era of Lemass.

The changes wrought in this era were unmistakeable. Economic growth soared in the early and mid-1960s, stimulating employment and applying a brake to the emigration figures. The importance of the media expanded: Radio Telefís Éireann began broadcasting in December 1961, immersing Irish viewers (as Ronan Fanning has argued) in a culture which was 'essentially Anglo-American or mid-Atlantic'.[94] The censorship of literature, so active even in the 1950s, was relaxed under the regime

of Brian Lenihan, Fianna Fáil Minister for Justice; the censorship of films went the same way. Popular social and political attitudes became markedly more relaxed following – sometimes pre-empting – the greater accessibility of outside ideas and influences. The dance hall has been seen as the central symbol of the new Ireland of the 1960s: an expression of perceptibly greater social freedom, greater affluence and leisure time, as well as the agency for a whole range of new American and British cultural influences. There is certainly a pleasing irony in the fact that de Valera, following the guidance of the hierarchy, should have legislated against dance halls in the early 1930s; while in the 1960s Albert Reynolds, following the advice of his accountants, should have found a fortune in these same 'dens' – and that he should have thereby launched a political career which took him to the leadership of Fianna Fáil and, indeed, of the nation itself.

If the diversity of social and political change is impressive, what is its significance? It is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that these years saw a turnaround in certain fundamental aspects of national life. For virtually the first time since the Famine the decline of the Irish population was halted. The broader importance of this is easy to overlook: while emigration remained a deeply ingrained and sometimes tragic feature of Irish life, the modest growth of the Irish population registered in the 1960s and 1970s began to undermine the lurking fears of national extinction, and may indeed have contributed to the perceptibly more relaxed nationalism of the Republic of Ireland in these years and after. John Horgan has identified an upsurge in national self-confidence, the weakening of 'the old slave spirit', as one of the principal legacies of the Lemass years.[95] This broaches the issue of ideological change: mainstream Irish nationalism shifted remarkably in this era, both in terms of its social agenda and its constitutional expression. Paul Bew and Henry Patterson have gone so far as to suggest that 'the social ideal of Irish nationalism, which sustained it through many great struggles, has disintegrated and has been replaced by something new'.[96] While the shift away from the old nationalist shibboleths of the small farm and local, tariff-protected industry had long been prefigured, it was only in the late 1950s and 1960s that the new ideals became coherently enshrined in economic policy and in legislation: foreign investment, a free market, efficient enterprise. The spiritual nationalism of the revolutionary era was replaced by a more materialist ideology, still assertively Irish but promising tangible comforts rather than an empty stomach and an ascetic conviction of moral superiority.

This was an era of internationalization, therefore, whether culturally, economically or ideologically. In the 1920s and 1930s Ireland had been bound into the British Commonwealth and the League of Nations, playing a prominent role in each. Wartime neutrality, the rejection of the Commonwealth in 1948–9 and the initial failure to gain admission to the new United Nations all tended to heighten Ireland's isolation, and also – arguably – to focus attention on the suffocating Anglo-Irish relationship. The Irish entry into the UN in 1955, and the elaboration of the Irish role in New York through the efforts of Aiken and Lemass, helped to restore the country's international prestige and to divert national energies from counter-productive quarrels with the British and over partition. The increasingly sharp focus on Europe,

prefigured under Seán MacBride and the first Inter-Party government, fulfilled much the same function within Irish nationalism, softening asperities and quietening any defensiveness. The prospect of entry to the EC, first mooted in 1961, created real hopes of economic support as well as the further development of national dignity.

But, if the significance of these changes is impressive, to what extent was Seán Lemass the architect of this modern Ireland, and to what extent was it created by a broader globalization of markets and mores? This is an extension of a question posed earlier concerning the relationship between planning and economic growth: on the whole, the answers are the same, too. Just as the upturn in the international economy would in all probability have percolated through the tariff walls of the Irish economy regardless of the Programme for Economic Expansion, so some of the broader social and political consequences of growth might well have occurred without ministerial intervention. Still, it is unquestionable that, just as Lemass and Whitaker facilitated the expansion of the Irish economy, so Lemass took decisions – and sometimes politically courageous decisions – which eased the modernization processes in Irish politics and society. The decision to scale down tariff protection might seem inevitable, and was probably inevitable, given the state of the Irish economy in the 1950s: but even if one accepts the socialist argument that Lemass was merely rejigging his party's defence of native capitalism, then it is equally true that the Programme for Economic Expansion looked very much like the abandonment of a key area of Fianna Fáil support as well as the repudiation of a policy which had its roots in Sinn Féin dogma. Enacting the Programme was therefore a politically risky enterprise, requiring some considerable tactical subtlety.

Television was gently subversive of many traditional Irish attitudes and convictions: but then (as Rob Savage has demonstrated), the form of state-run commercial service that emerged in the early 1960s owed much to the vision of the Lemass government (which might well have felt compelled to accept the proposal, sponsored by the cultural body Gael-Linn, for a predominantly Irish-language service).[97] Equally, Lemass might well have chosen politically expedient but short-term strategies with regard to constitutional change and partition: instead he pioneered constitutional reform proposals which were spiked with difficulty in terms of nationalist politics, but which demonstrated magnanimity in relation to the southern Protestant minority and to Ulster Unionists. Moreover, he overrode the opposition or (at best) prevarication of some of his colleagues in journeying to Belfast to meet Terence O'Neill, and thereby to bestow informal recognition on what for Fianna Fáil had been the unrecognizable horror of the partition settlement.

If experimenting with ideas ahead of their time is the definition of a visionary, then Lemass had vision. If taking calculated risks in the broader interests of social justice is a definition of statesmanship, then Lemass was a statesman without being anything other than an effective patriot. If the combination of vision, statesmanship and survival skills is the hallmark of political greatness, then Lemass was a great politician and a great executive. Lemass had the imagination to generate ideas, and the intelligence to know when they had failed; he had the physical courage to fight the enemies of his youth, and the moral courage to embrace some apparent

enemies in later life. He was never tested by the Northern Ireland crisis, or by the economic collapse of the early and mid-1970s; but then he had the judgement and the confidence to retire when he was on a high. This gruff Stakhanovite helped to pull de Valera's comely maidens and athletic youths out of the emigrant boats; and he helped to convert the cold comfort of small farms into the greater consolation supplied by a stronger mixed economy. He failed in much: his vision of a social partnership vanished with the acceleration of industrial unrest in the 1960s; his confidence in economic planning was perhaps misplaced; and his overture towards the North, while brave, proved largely futile. Nevertheless, it is arguable that even here, in the debris of his northern policy, there were suggestive clues for those who were prepared to look. For if partition were to be peacefully refined or overturned, then it was not through outrageous hyperbole, mock indignation, lavish condescension or offensive rebukes. Lemass set out to woo Unionists by persuasion, and to kill Unionism by kindness: and who is to say that, given a more favourable climate, he and his political heirs might not have succeeded?

7

Northern Ireland, 1920–72: Specials, Peelers and Provos

the battle here is for some sort of ascendancy . . . somebody has got to capture ascendancy here, and each one gains support by coming forward as the champion of some sort of ascendancy. I am not very happy about the future.

Lord Londonderry, 1928[1]

The history of Northern Ireland since 1920 reads like a compressed version of the story of Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and indeed there are those who gain comfort from a seemingly inevitable dénouement. The ascendancy parliament which served the interests of the Anglican elite until 1800 was reborn as a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people in 1921: the exclusivism and obtuseness of College Green, Dublin, became the exclusivism and obtuseness of College Square, Belfast. The popular Catholic mobilization of 1798 became the popular Catholic mobilization of 1968: each was tinctured by cautious liberal Protestant endorsement, and each brought fears of collapse and the imposition of a form of direct rule from London. Terence O'Neill has played Earl Fitzwilliam, thrusting cosmetic change onto a distrustful ruling elite and raising expectations among the excluded. The history of the Union, from 1800 to 1921, may be seen in miniature through the story of the government of Northern Ireland from 1972: initially sporadic efforts to defuse Catholic nationalism have gathered pace until the whole form of government has acquired, certainly in the judgement of one commentator, a 'green tinge'.[2] The elaborate challenge of killing Home Rule by kindness in the 1890s has given way to the task of killing revolutionary nationalism by kindness in the 1990s, a self-evidently more ambitious undertaking.

Northern Ireland was established between 1920 and 1925, a technical achievement of some distinction (as Bryan Follis has argued); but the new state was founded on the defeat of the IRA in the North, and not on the firmer clay of political consensus.[3] This might well have proved difficult, if not impossible, to locate, but the effort was not made until the late 1960s, when the evidence of constitutional