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Gender, ritual and power : the Blueshirts and Irish political culture, 1932-1936

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Gender, Ritual and Power: The Blueshirts and Irish Political Culture, 1932-1936

by

Dale Robert Montgomery B.A., M.A.

Dissertation offered for doctoral of philosophy in History
School of History and Anthropology
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Introduction

In the 1932 general election, fewer than ten years after independence, Ireland underwent a peaceful and democratic transfer of power, a process that has occurred all too infrequently in post-colonial societies. Within a year, though, the Irish state faced a serious and violent extra-parliamentary threat to its authority by the fascistic group the Blueshirts. This group was more than just a political association; it constituted a distinct community within Irish society that was disputing the evolving nature of the Irish national collective. The Blueshirt movement represented the last populist opposition to the presumed naturalness of republicanism as synonymous with Irish nationalism. Through its construction of gender relations and ritualistic use of symbols and public spectacle, the Blueshirt organisation unsuccessfully challenged the state’s discursive and material power in fashioning a cohesive yet restrictive Irish national identity. Understanding the group’s failure illustrates the processes of nation building at an important moment in Ireland’s post-colonial history.

Prevailing histories of the organisation, most of which have focused on Blueshirt politics, have provided an insufficient examination of this process. Neither structural explanations for the rise of the organisation nor assessments of individual motivations for joining address the reasons why this movement took the form it did. Why did Irish men and women feel the need to express their political discontent through such a mass movement? Why did women in such large numbers join such an expressly masculine organisation? What were the reasons for adopting the blue shirt? Beyond corporatism, what were Blueshirt politics, and how did they relate to a constructed Irish historical tradition? And, ultimately, what were the implications of the organisation’s demise? These questions revolve around issues of gender, ritual and power that are best analysed by conceptualising the movement as representing a distinct Irish community.

In the last chapter of his book, Irish Freedom: the history of nationalism in Ireland, Richard English discusses various elements that constitute communally based identities. He contends that, usually, identities form around notions of territory, people, descent, culture, history, ethics and/or the exclusion of another group. Communities can also form due to materialist reasons, such as economic
deprivation or competition over resources.¹ For instance, shifts in economic forces can lead to the marginalisation of formerly preeminent classes resulting in communally based resistance.² In general, however, English’s analysis downplays the impact social relations have on the composition of group dynamics, especially as they relate to power and authority, in favour of emphasising the imagined component. His discussion of power primarily concerns relations between the community and the state; he argues that communities often struggle against governmental authority because they seek to legitimate their cultural and ethnic bonds through the institutional power of the state.³ He also does not discuss in detail the material processes of community formation, only mentioning how a struggle against authority can help bind community members together.⁴

John C. Walsh and Steven High have proposed a more effective analytical paradigm. They use a tripartite understanding of communities based on their social relations, formative processes and imagined reality.⁵ This paradigm historicises community by reflecting the historical specificity of the cultural meanings given to these three components. Culture, as used here, does not just refer to artistic creation or legacy but rather as a means of interpreting and reacting to events and identities within and without the community. Historians need to unravel the cultural meanings members ascribe to communal relationships and processes by analysing how communities are discursively represented.⁶ This often involves socially constructed notions of inclusion and exclusion that can form part of larger processes within the nation-state.⁷ At the same time, though, this paradigm transcends purely discursive considerations by incorporating into its analysis the material reality in which communities are formed and interact with each other. Communities, culturally and materially, engage with each other and the state through the use of public and social spaces, the ascription of identities, and the formation of community boundaries, which involves the exercise of power.⁸

² Ibid., pp 460-461.
³ Ibid., pp 465-471.
⁴ Ibid., pp 454-459.
⁵ John C. Walsh and Steven High, ‘Rethinking the concept of community’ in Histoire Sociale, 32, no. 64 (1999), p. 257.
⁶ Ibid., pp 269-271.
⁷ Ibid., pp 272-273; English, Irish freedom, pp 454-459.
⁸ Walsh and High, ‘Rethinking the concept of community’, p. 270.
My application of this tripartite analysis to the Blueshirts focuses on the intersections of gender, ritual and power as representative of its social relations, formative processes and imagined reality. Although the Blueshirts’ social relationships were based on both the members’ class and gender-based identities, I have chosen to focus principally on Blueshirt constructions of gender because several historians have already examined Blueshirt social class in detail. Paul Bew, Ellen Hazelkorn and Henry Patterson have made the strongest argument that the Blueshirts were composed primarily of cattle farmers who constituted the agricultural bourgeoisie in inter-war Ireland. Mike Cronin, who has argued that agricultural workers with small plots of land also joined the movement, has partially disputed this contention. Consequently, Cronin believes that class-based alliances were not as important to Blueshirt politics as was their opposition to Fianna Fáil, and Éamon de Valera in particular. Yet, despite this class variation in Blueshirt membership, Cronin still believes that in many ways the cattle ranchers and their interests dominated the organisation’s policies. John Regan agrees with Cronin that class was subordinated to Treatyite politics within the Blueshirts, but has argued that there was an element of class-based identity that extended past materialist considerations. Blueshirts were also responding to attacks on political morality evinced by the increasing lack of deference shown to the respectable classes. According to this line of reasoning, members associated their communal identity with the agricultural bourgeoisie not just because the economic war threatened their material situation but also because the war, along with other Fianna Fáil policies, threatened their position within Irish society. Fianna Fáil was simultaneously attempting to create an indigenous class of industrial bourgeoisie, through its autarkic policies, and an expanded peasant proprietor class through its emphasis on tillage agriculture. As much as it remains debatable whether these policies were successful, they did represent an assault on the agricultural bourgeoisie’s social status. Thus, joining the Blueshirts was a means of communally resisting this alteration of the social reality. As these historians have shown, therefore, within the

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11 Ibid., pp 112-113.
12 Ibid., pp 123-124.
Blueshirts, class operated as a determinant of material interests as well as a means of maintaining social and cultural hierarchies within Ireland.

Whereas there remains little new to add to this analysis of the Blueshirts' class identity, the group's construction of gender relationships remains a fruitful topic for historical inquiry. Blueshirt social relationships constructed collective identities that simultaneously maintained and subverted inter-war Irish gender stereotypes, especially after the formation of the women's auxiliary, colloquially known as the Blue Blouses. The historical experience and significance of the Blue Blouses remains neglected within the historiography of the movement, despite the fact that, at its peak, the Blue Blouses was the largest women's political organisation in Ireland. These women were directly involved in every aspect of Blueshirt activity and assumed roles critical to the functioning of the organisation. It was the women who were the Blueshirt movement's public face to the uninitiated and who brought in badly needed funds. They dressed in military uniforms, marched alongside men at parades and during mass meetings, and, occasionally, joined the men in violent altercations with opponents. It is necessary, therefore, to include these women's activities in any history of the movement.

At the same time though, I am not only intent on recovering these women's historical experience, but also intend to analyse how constructions of femininity and masculinity worked to structure power dynamics within the Blueshirts. As with women in other shirted movements, the Blue Blouses were able to demarcate spaces of power and agency within patriarchally determined structures of authority. Blue Blouses used their material deprivation, based on their class-based interests as the agricultural bourgeoisie, to articulate a new public role for women that subverted gender stereotypes. Paradoxically though, the Blue Blouses articulated this public role as a defence of traditionally gendered positions, and they voluntarily conformed to the patriarchal systems of authority within the organisation. For Blueshirt men, gender served to reinforce their power and control of the public sphere. Blueshirts conformed to notions of Irish masculinity, particularly in respect to the cultural association between militarism, manliness and citizenship, which were predominant within Irish political culture at this time. By perpetuating the link between martial values and masculinity, the Blueshirts reiterated that men were the natural leaders of

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the movement and, through the movement, the Irish nation. But within this broad conceptualisation, they were able to delineate a distinctive idea of Irish male identity that reinforced their political goals and distinguished themselves from their republican opponents.

These gender-based identities manifested themselves in numerous ways, but most especially through the group’s use of public space. It was through their participation in parades, political rallies and athletics that women challenged masculine control of public space. At the same time, however, it was through the conflicts that often accompanied these public exhibitions that Blueshirt men constructed their notions of masculinity and reinforced their authority.

Blueshirt control of public space had greater implications than merely the construction of gender relations; it was through these public activities that the organisation extended its communal identity through time and space in Ireland. Benedict Anderson has argued that communities have been primarily formed through the use of print-media. For the Blueshirts, though, it was fundamentally through ritualistic processions, such as commemorations and parades, and the use of symbolic iconography, such as flags and uniforms, that a communal identity was formed and communicated. Through these rituals and symbols the organisation used space and time to situate its members within a constructed nationalist tradition. The Blueshirts were not unique in this regard, as most societies and communities use a presumed historical continuity in the construction of collective identities and nationalisms. All ‘invented traditions’ are based on ‘a process of formalization and ritualization’. Historians need to decode the nature of these traditions and processes, in order to assess the impact they have had on the wider society. This necessitates incorporation of anthropological understandings of rituals.

There is scholarly disagreement as to whether rituals should be viewed as purely symbolic and representational or as functional and practical. Blueshirt political aesthetics combined both symbolism and functionality. It was through its rituals that the organisation reinforced the authority of its leaders, and it was through participation in these rituals that members identified themselves with the movement.

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17 Ibid., p. 4.
and its goals. Furthermore, it was through ritualistic public spectacle that Blueshirts sought to affect political and cultural change. Mass political rallies are the most effective means of demonstrating popular support during struggles over power, and they provide participants with a sense that they are influencing and affecting the dominant social order. The power of the rites is dependent on the potency and social context of the symbols being used. The Blueshirt movement’s adherence to a pro-Treaty historical continuity alongside the incorporation of iconography from continental fascist movements, while strengthening internal communal bonds, placed it in direct opposition to prevailing norms within Irish political culture, and led to a power struggle with the state.

The nature of this power struggle was not, however, as straightforward as it might appear due to the complicated nature of power relations in independent Ireland. Power is not a totalising or irresistible entity, but is dependent on the specific relations between different social groups or between these groups and the state. The power relations between the Blueshirts and the Irish state centred on the group’s use of symbols and rituals. Rituals are generally viewed as employing symbolic power operating through influence. This is especially the case with localised rituals organised by communally based social groups. By contrast, states have access to institutional power that operates through the use of force. The Irish state used the police and judicial institutions to materially control and limit the Blueshirt movement’s expression of a distinctive identity. The Garda Síochána policed Blueshirt illegality resulting from the anti-annuities campaign and maintained peace during the group’s public events. The Irish judiciary, composing both the district courts and the military tribunal, focused on reintegrating the individual back into the community through the limited usage of penal punishment. The convergence of these disconnected policies effectively constrained Blueshirt activities.

But the exercise of power cannot be completely equated with the exercise of force, because this would require absolute physical constraint of individual action,

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19 David I. Kertzer, Ritual, politics and power (New Haven, 1988), p. 119; Bell, Ritual theory, ritual practice, pp 208-211.
20 Kertzer, Ritual, politics and power, p. 179.
21 My understanding of power has been influenced by the works of Michel Foucault. See in particular, Michel Foucault, ‘Interview with Michel Foucault’ in James D. Faubion (ed.), Power: essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984 vol. 3 (London, 1994), p. 294.
22 Bell, Ritual theory, ritual practice, pp 197-199.
unacceptable in democratic societies. State power must, therefore, constrain and direct individual activity by also building popular consensus through more indirect means. In Ireland, the material processes of judicial power operated dialogically with the discursive construction of the group as removed from Irish nationalist tradition. Using a variety of political and cultural idioms, the Fianna Fáil government associated Irish national identity indelibly with republicanism, thus marginalising any social group professing alternate political identities. Although all state institutions are fundamentally homogenising and predicated on discourses that seek to reorder and manage diversity, the Irish government’s success needs to be contextualised within the historic specificity of Ireland’s post-colonial moment.

The integration of post-colonial analyses within Irish historiography has remained controversial, especially as concerns independent Ireland. The historiographical opposition has manifested a certain disciplinary parochialism, as many historians summarily reject post-colonial histories formulated by literary scholars such as Declan Kiberd, Luke Gibbons and Seamus Deane. But the fundamental epistemological divide between historians, who rely on empirically quantifiable materialist data, and literary scholars, who rely on theoretically based cultural models, does not have to be unbridgeable.

In discounting the application of post-colonial analysis to Ireland, historians such as Liam Kennedy, Stephen Howe, James Livesey and Stuart Murray, focus on structural definitions of imperialism and purely materialist issues. They criticise post-colonial theory for presenting a totalising and ubiquitous definition of imperialism that is ahistorical. Because Ireland was constituted as part of the United Kingdom and had representation at Westminster, these scholars contend, it cannot be compared with other colonies. Kiberd and Gibbons are also criticised for attributing all historical and cultural manifestations to post-colonialism without an

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24 David Theo Goldberg, ‘Heterogeneity and hybridity: colonial legacy, postcolonial heresy’ in Henry Schwartz and Sangeeta Ray (eds), A companion to postcolonial studies (Massachusetts, 2000), pp 77-81.
adequate structural definition or praxis. In addition, Kennedy dismisses cultural implications of imperialism as non-existent without a materialist basis. Both he and Howe use statistics, such as infant mortality, per capita G.D.P., literacy, and indigenous control of productive assets, press and education, to demonstrate that, after independence, Ireland was quantifiably better off than post-colonial societies in Asia and Africa. This claim ignores the geographical and temporal differences between these countries, and when they gained independence from Great Britain.

Both historians are also quick to dismiss the apparent neo-colonial aspects of Ireland’s relationship with Great Britain during the 1930s as occurring either during a period of authoritarianism and protectionism, or a period of Irish resistance to British influences through the economic war and 1938 Treaty. Kennedy claims neo-colonialism involves domination of the former colony through diplomatic and economic means. This domination is supported by an indigenous comprador class and frequently involves foreign ownership of national resources, industrial or otherwise. Production and trading relationships between the metropole and periphery display indications of monopoly production. According to Franz Fanon, however, imperial control of native resources is not necessary as long as there is an indigenous bourgeoisie willing to continue the economic subjugation of the post-colonial economy thus maintaining its class interests and status.

Both analyses from Kennedy and Fanon can be criticised as overly structuralist, and ultimately they do not address the most important aspect of the economics of the Blueshirt period. The economic war that was impinging on the material interests of the agricultural bourgeoisie was not conceptualised primarily in terms of economics. Rather, it was viewed as a nationalist struggle against the former imperial power, Great Britain, and, as such, it was a further means of emphasising Irish national identity. Consequently, it is necessary to understand the discursive constructions of identity that were being formed due to the economic war. It is in this sense that post-colonial theory offers a useful paradigm for incorporating materialist elements with identity formation.

26 Livesey and Murray, 'Post-colonial theory', pp 460-461.
27 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland', pp 113-114.
28 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland', pp 108-114; Howe, Ireland and empire, pp 149-151.
29 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland', pp 113-114; Howe, Ireland and empire, pp 147-148.
30 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland' pp 113-114.
Although such literary scholars as Kiberd and Gibbons can be criticised as overly dismissive of material elements, other scholars like Terry Eagleton, Joe Cleary and David Lloyd are cognisant of the ability of post-colonial analysis to bridge the gap between non-materialist constructions of culture and the ‘given culture’ of economic resources, political institutions and law enforcement.\footnote{Clare Carroll, ‘Introduction: the nation and postcolonial theory’ in Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds), Ireland and postcolonial theory (Cork, 2003), pp 10-11.} Eagleton argues that post-colonialism should focus on mankind’s universal attachment to material goods rather than just culturally constructed differences, while Cleary calls for a synthesis of representational and materialist paradigms.\footnote{Terry Eagleton, ‘Postcolonialism: the case of Ireland’ in David Bennett (ed.), Multicultural states: rethinking difference and identity (London, 1998), pp 125-126; Joe Cleary, ”Misplaced ideas?” Colonialism, location and dislocation in Irish studies’ in Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds), Ireland and postcolonial theory (Cork, 2003), pp 29-31.} Lloyd believes that imperialism is predicated upon ‘materially embedded political and cultural struggles’ in their historic specificity.\footnote{David Lloyd, ‘After history: historicism and Irish postcolonial studies’ in Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds), Ireland and postcolonial theory (Cork, 2003), pp 51, 59.} It is this historic specificity that negates a universal definition of imperialism, which operates at the interstices of global structures and local reactions.\footnote{Cleary, ‘Misplaced ideas?’, pp 22-25.} As such, Irish uniqueness should not prevent the use of a post-colonial paradigm.

As regards the Blueshirts, post-colonialism offers a means of examining the empowering and disempowering discourses between the group, the state and other nationalist organisations, such as the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.), while including an analysis of the material processes of suppression. The emergence of the Blueshirt community, with all of its paradoxes and tensions, was a reaction to the materialist and cultural construction of a post-independent Irish national identity. In many ways the Blueshirt community represented a communal fragment of the post-imperial society that was alienated from the emerging national consensus, and were willing to incorporate continental European ideas in pursuit of their post-colonial identity. The Blueshirts manifested a form of Irish nationalism that reflected a cultural hybridity, reinforced by the material connections to the British metropole through the cattle trade. The historical specificity of their emergence can be seen as
a reaction against the attempts to create a restrictive monoculture by the state and the
I.R.A.\textsuperscript{36}

This dissertation will, therefore, provide not only an analysis of neglected
aspects of the Blueshirt movement's historical experience, especially in relation to
the women's auxiliary and the organisation's use of ritual, but also provide insight
into the formative processes of nation building just as a republican national identity
was becoming hegemonic. Conceptualising the organisation as a community allows
for an inter-disciplinary approach to the subject as a means of addressing larger
issues within inter-war Irish political culture. My tripartite analytical paradigm
allows me to examine the complicated relationships between competing
communities and dominant power structures that resulted in a totalising cultural
homogeneity of republicanism. The ineffectiveness of the Blueshirts in using their
popular mobilisation to successfully challenge republican nationalism has left an
enduring legacy for the country's national identity. By being theoretically informed,
my dissertation will, therefore, challenge the parochialism of Irish historiography
while also presenting a new case study to test prevailing theories of female political
participation, ritualised public events and the assertion of state power.

\textsuperscript{36} Mono-culturalism is achieved through cultural and political repression, which is enacted under the
cover of the naturalness of ethnoracial homogeneity. Goldberg, 'Heterogeneity and hybridity', pp 72-73.
This chapter provides, in narrative form, the context for the thematic issues to be examined in the rest of the dissertation. It is not intended as a comprehensive account since the general history of the movement has been covered in several other works. Particular attention will be paid to the Blueshirts’ multi-faceted political ideology, as well as the group’s organisational changes as it evolved from a veterans’ group to a populist political movement. This chapter will conclude by assessing whether the organisation can be considered a fascist party. While this question is not central to my dissertation, it has been fundamental to previous histories of the group and, thus, must be addressed here as well.

The Army Comrades Association

The Blueshirts emerged from the Army Comrades Association (A.C.A.), which was officially formed on 9 February 1932 following the election of Colonel Austin Brennan and Commandant Ned Cronin as president and honorary secretary respectively. Membership was initially restricted to army veterans. The A.C.A. was essentially a lobbying association to maintain the preference given to ex-National Army veterans for civil service jobs. As T. F. O’Higgins, a future leader of the A.C.A., claimed, ‘We feel that we are not asking for anything unreasonable, as in all countries there is a very definite preference in employment extended to all ex-soldiers who served their state in time of danger.’ In addition to advocating for the employment of veterans, the A.C.A. also pledged to uphold the state and honour Irish volunteers who had died in the Anglo-Irish war by raising a monument to them. Although it professed to be non-political, it is apparent from the outset that there were informal connections between the A.C.A. and the Cumann na nGaedheal party. Before the association’s official formation in February, members had sought William Cosgrave, Cumann na nGaedheal party leader and president of the

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1 Maurice Manning, The Blueshirts (Dublin, 1971) remains the best general overview of the organisation. Mike Cronin, The Blueshirts and Irish politics, Fearghal McGarry, Eoin O’Duffy: a self-made man (Oxford, 2005) and John Regan, The Irish counter-revolution, provide greater detail on certain issues, such as individual motivations for participation, local organisation and the 1934 split, but do not substantially alter Manning’s narrative.
2 Irish Independent, 18 March 1932.
3 Irish Independent, 9 February 1932.
Executive Council, as patron. They also stated their opposition to the Fianna Fáil and Labour parties because they were presumed to be unsympathetic to the needs of National Army veterans.\textsuperscript{4}

One week after the A.C.A.’s formation, on 16 February 1932, Fianna Fáil, albeit dependent on the support of the Labour party, was elected to power. This election was a pivotal moment in Irish history. Not only did some of the most prominent anti-Treaty figures from the Irish civil war accept the existing political machinery and legitimacy of the state, but they were allowed to form a government by the political faction they had once violently opposed. This has been, justifiably, regarded as a momentous event in entrenching Irish democracy and preventing a return to violent disorder\textsuperscript{5}:

What seemed to the Irish natural, normal, even inevitable, has occurred in few other places. Within ten years time Ireland had established out of civil war what has been described as a ‘rare’ and ‘exotic’ form of government, one acknowledging ‘the right to participate in governmental decisions by casting a vote, the right to be represented, and the right of an organized opposition to appeal for votes against the government in elections and in parliament.’\textsuperscript{6}

This election also brought about a drastic shift in Irish political culture that was to have direct repercussions on the evolution of the A.C.A. The outgoing Cumann na nGaedheal government had based its political legitimacy on the state institutions created by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which was ratified in 1922. It had also maintained amiable political and economic relations with Great Britain. By contrast, Fianna Fáil, with Éamon de Valera as president of the Executive Council, was much more antagonistic towards the British government. De Valera began removing the more arduous, as he saw it, restrictions placed on the Irish Free State by the Treaty.\textsuperscript{7} He repealed the oath of allegiance to the British monarch, forced the replacement of the Governor General with a more agreeable appointee, and discontinued the transfer of land annuity payments to Great Britain. These annuities

\textsuperscript{4} Irish Independent, 28 January 1932.
\textsuperscript{7} Alvin Jackson, Ireland, 1798-1998: politics and war (Oxford, 1999), pp 293-295.
had been paid to the British government as reimbursement for its turn of the century policy of purchasing and redistributing land held by large landowners to Irish peasants. After independence, the Cumann na nGaedheal government had agreed, in 1923 and 1926, to continue collecting and transferring these payments to the British government. Once he had come to power, de Vala declared the 1923 and 1926 agreements invalid, since neither had been ratified by the Dáil, and discontinued transferring the payments to Great Britain. He did however, continue to collect the annuities for domestic fiscal purposes. Unsurprisingly, the British government did not agree with de Valera’s contention and instituted drastic tariffs on Irish agricultural products exported to Great Britain, most notably cattle. The Fianna Fáil ministry retaliated by imposing its own tariffs on British products, most notably coal, thus initiating what has been termed the ‘economiewar’.8

As Fianna Fáil wanted to decrease Ireland’s economic reliance on Great Britain, the economic war actually facilitated some of its policies. For instance, the government hoped the imposition of tariffs on the importation of coal would encourage the domestic production of peat as Ireland’s primary source of fuel. Fianna Fáil also hoped that finding alternate markets, especially in Germany, would offset the loss of the British market for the export of cattle. The government was, however, notably unsuccessful in broaching other markets that were increasingly protectionist during the Great Depression.9 The economic war also encouraged the shift from cattle ranching to the more labour intensive tillage farming, which the government hoped would alleviate rural unemployment.

A corollary to this economic programme was the decline of the cattle farmers’ prosperity. Not only did these ranchers lose their primary export market in Britain, but they were also obligated to continue paying the land annuities to the Irish government. Consequently, most cattle farmers were hostile to the Fianna Fáil party.

Politically, the economic war provided the backdrop for the increasing republicanisation of Irish politics and culture ushered in by Fianna Fáil’s electoral victory.10 As mentioned, the government began a systematic dismantling of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, but it was the government’s relationship with the Irish

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8 Ibid., pp 291-293.
9 Ibid.
Republican Army (I.R.A.) that was to have the most immediate impact on Irish politics. Before coming to power Fianna Fáil had maintained cordial relations with the I.R.A. and this continued during the first few months after its election. In March 1932, the Public Safety Act was suspended, and dozens of I.R.A. prisoners, many only recently incarcerated by Cumann na nGaedheal, were released. The government also, initially, tolerated open recruiting and training by the I.R.A., and during the 1932 Easter commemorations kept the army in barracks allowing the I.R.A. to take the lead in festivities. Many international observers believed the I.R.A. was now in open alliance with the government. In reality, however, Fianna Fáil, and de Valera in particular, were endeavouring, through moderation, to entice the I.R.A. into joining constitutional politics.

The government’s toleration of I.R.A. activities, along with the class differentiated economic hardship caused by the tariff war with Great Britain, provided the political and economic context to the rapid rise of the A.C.A. Immediately after its formation in February, the A.C.A. began an active recruitment drive, and by the time of the national convention in March 1932 the association claimed to have formed 87 branches across the Irish Free State. For the next four months the A.C.A. continued to increase its membership but remained relatively obscure until, in August 1932, Dr. T. F. O’Higgins replaced Austin Brennan as president. The election of O’Higgins gave the association an increased national profile since he was a Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. and brother of Kevin O’Higgins, former vice-president of the Executive Council, who had been assassinated by the I.R.A. in 1927. O’Higgins led the A.C.A. on a much more ambitious recruitment drive and opened up membership to all men irrespective of military service. By September 1932, 29,000 membership cards had been sent to the local branches. He also expanded the organisation’s goals beyond a concern for veterans’ issues. The new A.C.A. constitution had nine specific objectives:

A) To promote Irish re-union by peaceful and persuasive means.

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13 Diarmaid Ferriter, Judging Dev: a reassessment of the life and legacy of Eamon de Valera (Dublin, 2007), pp 187-188.
14 Irish Independent, 18 March 1932.
15 Irish Independent, 16 September 1932.
B) To oppose Communism and to check the spread of communist doctrines amongst our people.
C) To preserve the Irish language and all that is best in the national tradition.
D) To foster patriotic idealism by honouring the memory of all the heroic dead who worked and suffered for Ireland and especially of [Arthur] Griffith, [Michael] Collins and [Kevin] O’Higgins under whose leadership a sovereign state controlled by the common people of Ireland was, for the first time in history, brought into being.
E) To safeguard the right of free speech; to stop electoral abuses and to expose and prevent corruption and victimisation in national and local administration.
F) To make organised and disciplined voluntary public service a permanent and accepted feature of our national life and to lead the youth of Ireland in a campaign of constructive national action.
G) To oppose sectionalism in public affairs and to ensure first consideration for the national interest.
H) To advance social justice and to assist those in need.
I) To offer combined resistance to persecution or attack.16

The influence of events in Europe is hard to ignore. Considering the relative weakness and unpopularity of Irish communist groups, the inclusion of Article B more accurately reflects international fears of the rise of communism. Alongside the A.C.A.’s advocacy of disciplined public service, the article’s inclusion led the group to be compared, by both the domestic and international press, with continental European fascist movements.17 These comparisons would only increase as the movement evolved.

International influences should not, however, be exaggerated. The primary purpose of the constitution was to demonstrate the A.C.A.’s new role in the political and cultural fabric of Irish national life. Irish unity was its first objective, but, in contradistinction to I.R.A. tactics, it was to be achieved only through peaceful means. Preserving the Irish language and honouring heroic figures from the pro-Treaty side of the national divide were also prominent objectives. The first major event for the reconstituted A.C.A. was the August commemoration for Griffith,

Collins and O'Higgins at Leinster House. A few days later 1,000 A.C.A. men commemorated Collins at Beal-na-Blath, where he had been killed in an ambush in 1922.\textsuperscript{18}

The A.C.A. was also to take a more direct role in the political divide that continued to define Irish politics during this period. Four articles, E, G, H and I, relate to protecting individuals and their democratic rights from extra-parliamentary assault. This was an unambiguous challenge to the I.R.A. and other anti-Treaty republicans. Governmental toleration for I.R.A. activities had galvanised the republican section of the Irish population that had been opposed to the previous Cumann na nGaedheal government for its support of the 1922 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which was seen by many republicans as a betrayal of the Easter 1916 Proclamation. Considering the former government ministers traitors to the republican cause, these anti-Treaty republicans began violently disrupting their public meetings. This in turn led to A.C.A. members being invited to protect these meetings resulting in direct conflict between the association and anti-Treaty republicans.

Inevitably, the A.C.A.‘s involvement in this inter-communal strife strengthened formal connections between the association and the Cumann na nGaedheal party. The first mention of the A.C.A. in Cumann na nGaedheal’s party newspaper, \textit{United Irishman}, came on 20 August 1932 with an article commending these men’s bravery and congratulating O’Higgins on his assumption of the leadership.\textsuperscript{19} Subsequently, there were only infrequent articles on A.C.A. activities and policies until a Cumann na nGaedheal rally was attacked in Kilmallock, County Limerick, on Sunday 9 October 1932. Cumann na nGaedheal had been holding a political rally in the town centre, which was then assaulted by three hundred Fianna Fáil supporters. The small contingent of gardai sent to police the event was overwhelmed, and A.C.A. members were forced to intervene to protect the Cumann na nGaedheal speakers and restore order. Several windows were smashed and there was even limited gunfire.\textsuperscript{20} From this point onwards Cumann na nGaedheal considered the A.C.A. an important ally in its political work, and the \textit{United Irishman} newspaper began printing regular articles on the formation of branches and organising drives. By March 1933, a full page was routinely dedicated towards

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Irish Independent}, 22 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{United Irishman}, 20 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Irish Independent}, 10 October 1932.
A.C.A. news, and contained articles by Onlooker, the pen name for Ernest Blythe, the former Cumann na nGaedheal finance minister. For the A.C.A., the fight in Kilmallock, and subsequent battles in Mallow on 12 and 30 October, were viewed as pivotal moments in the organisation’s fight to preserve freedom of assembly and speech. These freedoms were to come under renewed assault during the January 1933 general election.

Recognising the popularity of his opposition to Great Britain and no longer wanting to rely on Labour support, de Valera called a snap election for 24 January. The election campaign witnessed numerous incidents of street violence as Cumann na nGaedheal public meetings continued to be disrupted by their republican opponents. The A.C.A. was increasingly relied upon to provide protection, as the Garda was largely impotent to stop the violence. The conflict between the A.C.A. and anti-Treaty republicans grew in violence and animosity as both sides remained entrenched in their opposition. It was at this time that the pre-Truce I.R.A. officially declared that membership in the A.C.A. would be inimical to membership in its own organisation. Despite the A.C.A.’s vigorous defence of Cumann na nGaedheal meetings, Fianna Fáil increased its number of T.D.s and was able to form a majority government.

In February 1933, following the election, the A.C.A. further expanded its organisational goals. Benevolent work was now included as part of members’ duties, and the association was to increase its efforts to preserve the Gaelic language since, it was claimed, the Gaelic League had failed to do so. It was also going to organise its own sporting events because the movement viewed the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.) as being intolerably partisan in its political support for Fianna Fáil. National commemorations continued to form a major part of the organisation’s activities but now, in addition to commemorating veterans of the Anglo-Irish war and the pro-Treaty side of the Civil War, the A.C.A. wanted to include republicans from the Fenian uprising and the 1916 Easter rising.

It was also at this time that the organisation authorised a distinctive uniform for parades and other formal occasions. In March 1933, the A.C.A. adopted the blue

21 United Irishman, 25 March 1933.
22 Leitrim Observer, 15 October 1932.
24 Irish Independent, 20 February 1933.
25 United Irishman, 29 April 1933.
26 Irish Independent, 15 February 1933.
shirt and black beret as a uniform for its members in an attempt to increase solidarity and help identify compatriots during the ongoing chaotic street battles with the I.R.A. and other anti-Treaty republicans.\textsuperscript{27} Blue was chosen because of its association with Saint Patrick and from this point onwards the organisation was generally referred to as the Blueshirts. The shirt became the most enduring symbol of the organisation and there were frequent struggles over its use. The Irish government focused on it as a means of suppressing the organisation, while anti-Treaty republicans would often take shirts and burn them as a means of intimidading members. The adoption of the shirt, directly influenced by continental fascist aesthetics, is indicative of the organisation’s willingness to experiment with foreign political ideas and symbols as a means of demarcating a distinct political identity within Ireland.

**The National Guard**

On 20 July 1933, the movement underwent another significant organisational transition, as O’Higgins voluntarily stepped aside as president thus allowing Eoin O’Duffy, the recently dismissed Garda Commissioner, to assume the leadership. O’Duffy was already a national figure due to his ten year tenure as police commissioner, and his appointment dramatically increased the movement’s national profile. Several domestic and foreign newspapers saw him as a new dynamic force in Irish politics, with some labelling him the second most influential politician in Ireland after de Valera.\textsuperscript{28} He renamed the organisation the National Guard, although it remained popularly referred to as the Blueshirts. He also broadened its support base by opening up membership to all Irish citizens of Christian faith, which meant that for the first time women were officially invited to join. Despite contending that the National Guard would remain removed from party politics, O’Duffy took the organisation in a much more political direction, as indicated by its new constitution, which now had eleven objectives:

1. To promote the reunion of Ireland.

\textsuperscript{27} Manning, *The Blueshirts*, pp 52-54.

\textsuperscript{28} *New York Times*, 3 September 1933; *London Times*, 2 August 1933; *Irish Times*, 9 September 1933.
2-To oppose Communism and alien control and influence in National affairs and to uphold Christian principles in every sphere of public activity.
3-To promote and maintain social order.
4-To make organised and disciplined voluntary public service a permanent and accepted feature of our National life and to lead the youth of Ireland in a movement of constructive National action.
5-To promote the formation of co-ordinated National organisations of employers and employed which, with the aid of judicial tribunals, will effectively prevent strikes and lock-outs and harmoniously compose industrial differences.
6-To co-operate with the official agencies of the State for the solution of such pressing problems as the provision of useful and economic public employment for those whom private enterprise cannot absorb.
7-To secure the creation of a representative national statutory organisation of farmers, with rights and status sufficient to ensure the safeguarding of agricultural interests in all revision of economic and political policy.
8-To expose and prevent corruption and victimisation in National and Local administration.
9-To awaken throughout the country a spirit of combination, discipline, zeal and patriotic realism which will put the State in a position to serve the people efficiently in the economic and social sphere.
10-To preserve the Irish language and all that is best in the National tradition.
11-To encourage athletics and other forms of sport calculated to promote the physical fitness of our people.²⁹

The preservation of individual rights and public order were not given as much prominence in this constitution, as O'Duffy was reorienting the group away from its previous role as defender of Cumann na nGaedheal public meetings. Whereas in the A.C.A.'s constitution four clauses dealt with these issues, only one such clause, number 3, appears in this constitution. Political concerns were now emphasised. The constitution directly addressed the endemic unemployment issue as well as proposing a national organisation dedicated to alleviating farmers' economic

woes. This reflected the importance of agriculture to the Irish economy as well as the participation of cattle farmers within the movement.

The Blueshirt movement was also the first Irish political organisation to adopt corporatism as its political ideology. Throughout his political career, O’Duffy consistently supported the establishment of a corporatist system for the Irish economy. Corporations would be established for both labour and employers to regulate prices and wages for all industrial goods. A labour court would be instituted to adjudicate on labour disputes, and strikes and lockouts would be illegal. There would be no trade unions but working hours and holiday time would be enshrined in law. O’Duffy was often ambiguous about his attitude towards parliamentary democracy, on occasion telling the Irish public not to ‘make an idol of Parliament’. But in general he believed corporations would be focused on economic matters while parliament would be retained to manage political affairs. He also believed that corporatism would bring about the unity of the Irish people, and overcome selfish individualism, thereby preventing what he saw as a drift towards atheistic communism.

O’Duffy’s ideas on corporatism were influenced by his trips to fascist Italy and the views of two Irish scholars, James Hogan and Michael Tierney. Both these intellectuals claimed their ideas on corporatism came from the papal encyclical Quadragesimo Anno and wrote extensively on the subject in Catholic journals and the party newspaper. There were, however, two major difficulties with applying the encyclical’s ideas to Ireland. Firstly, Quadragesimo Anno barely mentioned agriculture since it was almost exclusively focused on industrial development. Considering agriculture remained the primary source of economic activity in Ireland during this period, this was a potential weakness to the widespread appeal of Blueshirt corporatism. Consequently, Blueshirt leaders and ideologues generally

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31 Irish Press, 9 February 1934.
32 An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (United Ireland), 8 February 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/629).
33 Ibid.
34 There are numerous articles to reference but see in particular Michael Tierney, ‘Ireland and the reform of democracy’ in Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review, xxiii, no. 91 (September 1934), pp 369-382; and United Ireland, 24 March, 2 June 1934.
evaded mentioning agricultural corporations in their discussions of corporatism.\textsuperscript{36} Secondly, there was also a major divide between the encyclical and the movement regarding the establishment of a corporatist society versus a corporatist state. The encyclical advocated the establishment of a corporatist civil society by Catholic social and economic groups; this was not to be a state led venture. Furthermore, Pope Pius XI had an explicitly religious and spiritual goal, as these corporations were intended to reform public morals through Catholic social action under the Church’s guidance.\textsuperscript{37} The Blueshirt movement’s adoption of corporatism was much more politically oriented, and the movement believed it could only be achieved through state institutions under their control. Blueshirt writings on corporatism also lacked an overt religious purpose, and were much more focused on the material repercussions for Irish politics and economy.\textsuperscript{38}

Notwithstanding these significant organisational and political changes, there were continuities between the National Guard and the A.C.A. Political commemorations continued to be a very important part of the movement’s activities. Immediately after assuming the leadership, O’Duffy announced that the National Guard’s first national event was to be the commemoration of Griffith, Collins and O’Higgins in Dublin on 13 August 1933. The Irish government did not greet this announcement favourably. The use of the blue shirt, the adoption of corporatism and the announced parade made the movement appear too akin to continental fascist movements. Fearing a ‘March on Dublin’ in imitation of Benito Mussolini’s ‘March on Rome’, the government began a series of measures effectively criminalising the organisation. First, the homes of prominent Blueshirts were searched for weapons, which were then confiscated. Then the parade was officially banned leading O’Duffy, wanting to keep the organisation legal, to call it off. His proposed alternative, the holding of church parades a week later, also had to be cancelled after church officials informed him that he could not use ecclesiastical premises for

\textsuperscript{36} For instance, in \textit{An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (United Ireland)} the party’s agricultural policy does not advocate the use of corporations beyond the establishment of a marketing board. In another pamphlet, Tierney argues agricultural corporations would only be used for rural education. Michael Tierney, \textit{Some aspects of the social structure of a corporative state} (Dublin, 1934), pp 14-15.


\textsuperscript{38} \textit{An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (United Ireland)}, 8 February 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/629); Tierney, \textit{Some aspects of the social structure of a corporative state}, pp 10-18.
political purposes. In the end, in order to save face, O'Duffy organised local parades in various locations across the Free State. The Irish government threatened to take direct action to stop these parades but this time O'Duffy would not back down. In response, the government officially banned the organisation and reconstituted the military tribunal to prosecute members.\textsuperscript{39}

To date there remains no evidence of a Blueshirt plot to assume power through a coup d’
état connected to the 13 August Dublin parade. Nevertheless, there was a definite possibility of violence occurring. Even after O’Duffy had agreed to cancel it, the government feared the worse and mobilised the state security apparatus to ensure public peace was maintained. All the streets leading to the cenotaph and government buildings were blockaded, and no one without authorisation was allowed to pass. Soldiers were stationed inside Leinster House and three hundred unarmed gardai patrolled the surrounding streets accompanied by an armoured car. Another two hundred gardai patrolled Glasnevin Cemetery in case an alternate commemoration occurred there. This mobilisation of gardai required the transfer of officers from other counties to Dublin and the rapid induction of close to a hundred new officers, generally referred to as the Broy Harriers. In retrospect, it can be argued that these precautions were excessive as there were only minor disturbances, and only two women showed up at the cenotaph for the commemoration.\textsuperscript{40} But the government’s caution needs to be understood in an international context. Adolf Hitler had come to power less than eight months before the emergence of the National Guard, while the ‘March on Rome’ had already been mythologized as the means by which Mussolini had assumed power.\textsuperscript{41} In addition, the shift from the A.C.A. to the National Guard with O’Duffy as head, the assumption of corporatism as its political ideology and the widespread enthusiasm of its members had unsettled the political situation. For the first time there was a nationwide, disciplined and populist extra-parliamentary organisation opposing the I.R.A. It is understandable, if not justifiable, therefore, that the government’s first reaction was to ban the new organisation in order to maintain the political equilibrium.

\textbf{Membership, organisation structure and activities}

\textsuperscript{39} Manning, \textit{The Blueshirts}, pp 86-87.
\textsuperscript{40} Anglo-Celt, 19 August 1933.
\textsuperscript{41} Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, \textit{Fascist spectacle: the aesthetics of power in Mussolini’s Italy} (Los Angeles, 1997), pp 2-3.
With the National Guard proscribed and the police and judicial institutions mobilised against them, the Blueshirts were forced into a political alliance with Cumann na nGaedheal and the Centre Party on 8 September. This led to the formation of Fine Gael, also known as the United Ireland Party, with O’Duffy as its first party president. William Cosgrave was to remain the Fine Gael leader within the Dáil, since O’Duffy was not a T.D. A new party newspaper, *United Ireland*, was launched to celebrate the merger. It was reported that the National Guard had ‘more doubts and more heart-searching’ than either of the other political parties regarding the merger since they had previously disdained party politics. The Blueshirts reformed as the Young Ireland Association, which was to maintain its autonomy within the larger Fine Gael party. The Young Ireland Association was fundamentally the same organisation as the National Guard and had the same constitution except for the omission of clauses seven and eight concerning the establishment of a national farmers’ association and the prevention of corruption.

The alliance with Fine Gael provided the Blueshirts with an opportunity to increase its membership and formalise its organisational structure. O’Duffy, always recognised as an energetic and effective organiser, immediately set about a major recruitment drive. He initially wanted three to four full time salaried inspection officers whose only duty was to travel throughout the Free State organising new companies. These men were expected to have increased membership in their respective counties by fifty percent by the time of their final report. The success of these recruitment officers is difficult to gauge since it is notoriously difficult to establish reliable membership figures for the organisation. The leadership frequently made bold claims as to the total number of members. It was once reported in the party newspaper that the group had 100,000 members with another possible 20,000 unaccounted for. The only reliable sources are two membership ledgers contained in Ernest Blythe’s personal papers and a later one in Mike Cronin’s personal possession. The first one, dated March 1934, listed 26,322 men, 8,392 women and

42 *United Ireland*, 16 September 1933.
44 Circular from headquarters to all inspection officers, 29 November 1933, letter from Ned Cronin to Brian O’Higgins, 23 November 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
45 *The Blueshirt*, 20 October 1934.
46 Strength returns, March, April 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe’s papers P24/671); League of Youth register, n.d. (in the possession of Mike Cronin, Boston College, Dublin).
1,989 youth as members for a grand total of 36,703. Every county except for Limerick, Louth and north Kerry was recorded as having branches. The second ledger, dated 26 April 1934 listed 33,081 men, 12,423 women and 2,314 youth for a total membership of 47,818. Every county except Longford and Louth submitted membership totals for this ledger. This was a remarkably high geographical spread of membership and represents the peak of the group's popularity. Numbers declined significantly in 1935 and 1936 after the organisation split and the leadership declared that members would now have to pay one shilling for membership. The ledger in Mike Cronin's possession, compiled sometime in 1936, lists only 3,135 men and 890 women remained for a total of 4,025 members. Monaghan was the only county listed as having no members in this ledger.

The Blueshirts were organised hierarchically with O'Duffy as Director-General presiding over a central council that met in Dublin and provided the leadership for the organisation. Authority extended downwards from the central council to county directors and then to district directors before finally residing in branch captains. It was only these Blueshirt officers that could issue orders, which had to be obeyed by the rank and file. Appointment of officers, including the branch captains, was centrally controlled, although it was recommended that the membership's views should be consulted. 'When a Unit Captain is being appointed it is the duty of the District Director making the appointment to consult the members of the Unit with a view to selecting the most suitable man available from the point of view of patriotism, courage, ability, character and popularity.' The Director-General was elected at the yearly Ard Fheis but only the central council, county directors, district directors and unit captains were eligible to vote. In 1935, after O'Duffy's departure, the selection of officers was democratised. They were no longer appointed but were now elected by the membership, subject to the approval of the central council. The Blueshirts also had a strict discipline code. Penalties, for offences such as treachery, cowardice, conviction of a crime or opposition towards official policy, ranged from fines to suspension to expulsion from the organisation.

47 Circular from Ned Cronin to all county and district directors, 13 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
49 Ibid.
51 Young Ireland Association disciplinary code, November 1933 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/667).
The hierarchical authority structure, military titles and strict discipline code were more indicative of a militia than political party, and reflected a certain ambiguity to Blueshirt political identity. This ambiguity was reinforced by Blueshirt public activity. The majority of Blueshirt activity continued to be devoted to participation in political rallies, parades and commemorations. In order to present a disciplined and imposing spectacle during these events, Blueshirts were encouraged to practice drilling and marching in formation. Opponents of the Blueshirts used this focus on drilling to accuse the organisation as being militaristic in ethos. The Garda reported ‘Young Ireland (National Guard) Association... is still being maintained as a separate unit of the United Ireland Party on a semi military basis.’ The Blueshirts constantly refuted these claims and argued drilling was only used to instil discipline in members for service to the state. However, internal documents reveal that the Blueshirt organisation was more militant than they maintained. Local branches were entreated to establish an intelligence apparatus to keep informed of agents that sought to overthrow the State or were detrimental to the organisation. Postmasters and postmen were also recruited to provide intelligence on their opponents.

There were meant to be monthly meetings organised at the local, district and county levels but these were very informal affairs. Former members claimed these meetings had very little structure. They rarely discussed specific politics or ideology, and mainly met to arrange transportation and preparation before the aforementioned public events. Meetings were locally driven with few instructions coming from the central staff and even fewer minutes taken. The central council repeatedly criticised the reporting secretaries for the lack of documentation produced during local meetings.

Local issues, particularly regarding employment, remained important for the membership during the Blueshirt movement's existence. Considering council jobs

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52 Garda report from Detective Branch Headquarters, Kilmainham, 30 November 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/18).
53 United Irishman, 29 April 1933.
54 Memorandum to all divisional officers, Tipperary, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice files 93/3/17).
55 Leitrim Observer, 16 December 1933.
56 Interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991.
57 Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991; Andrew Forrest, Worse could have happened (Dublin, 1999), pp 194-195.
58 Circular from Ned Cronin to each district commander, 24 May 1933, Circular from Ned Cronin to all divisional and district commanders, 18 October 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19); United Ireland, 15 September 1934.
were a significant source of employment during this period, patronage was an important factor in local politics. Blueshirt and Fine Gael members made repeated allegations that I.R.A. and Fianna Fáil members were intimidating employers and work crews not to hire Blueshirts. All road improvements from the Sligo county council had to be suspended for a year because of accusations of impropriety in how the contracts were allocated after four Blueshirts were summarily dismissed. Business at the Clare county council also came to a halt after the Fianna Fáil council was criticised for giving inspector jobs to its own members. In their reminiscences of the movement, several former Blueshirts made particular mention of the economic discrimination they faced. But it should be noted that Blueshirt and Fine Gael councillors were also accused of giving work to their own party members. After being accused of political nepotism in Clare, a Fianna Fáil councillor replied, ‘Why did ye not get the Cork Blueshirt county council to do what ye want us to do?’ In their party organ, the Blueshirts called on employers not to employ opposition members and even passed a motion to this effect at the August 1934 Blueshirt Ard Fheis. Members in North Dublin were encouraged to boycott businesses owned by ‘Reds’.

Blueshirt leaders also attempted to use their organisational connections to secure employment for members. In October 1933, Ned Cronin sent out forms to the branches so that captains could record who was unemployed for the use of employers seeking workers. In December, he sent out a notice regarding an open competition for employment clerks in the Department of Industry and Commerce. Dublin units were particularly focused on employment concerns and held a congress in March 1935 to establish an employment bureau for members. It was to make

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59 Irish Independent, 7 January 1934.
60 Irish Independent, 17 September 1935.
61 Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 13 June 1991; interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991.
62 Anglo-Celt, 8 September 1934.
63 Nenagh Guardian, 6 February 1934.
64 United Ireland, 4, 25 August 1934.
65 United Ireland, 12 October 1935.
66 Circular from Ned Cronin to all district commanders, 31 October 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
67 Circular from Ned Cronin to each district secretary, 21 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
68 United Ireland, 30 March 1935.
Dublin employers aware of unemployed Blueshirts and what skills they could offer.69

Social and cultural activities were also important to local branches. These primarily took the form of dances, day trips and athletic competitions. The Blueshirt Athletic Association was formed on 21 June 1934. Events were restricted to members but it was to work in conjunction with the G.A.A.70 Activities that were not restricted to members introduced the movement to the wider Irish public that was starved for entertainment in inter-war Ireland, especially in rural areas. They also brought in much-needed funds to local branches and the national executive.

Yet, as important as these activities and business connections were to the membership, they should not obscure that the Blueshirts’ primary purpose was political:

The view…that Blueshirts should not be interested in politics is not only wrong but absurdly wrong. Our objects are political and national objects from first to last. The youth who wants to wear a uniform and do a bit of marching, but avoid politics should drop out of the Blueshirts and try to associate himself with the activities of the Boy Scouts, which are of course exceedingly useful activities in their own sphere.71

With the formation of the new party in September 1933, there was an attempt within the Blueshirts to bring new men into the party leadership and initiate a new direction in Irish politics. Cronin wrote to O’Duffy in November 1933: ‘The suggestion by Mr. Cosgrave at today’s meeting that ex-Minsters should be made more use of, instead of being pushed into the background, is likely to create a serious situation if acted upon…we must endeavour to please the public and it would be detrimental to our cause if we were to force on our people speakers whom they do not want and whom they have not asked for.’72 His suggestion was not acted upon, however, and the Fine Gael leadership continued to be dominated by the former politicians of Cumann na nGaedheal and the Centre Party.

70 Irish Independent, 23 June 1934.
71 United Ireland, 9 February 1935.
Political ideology

Fine Gael was an alliance of political expedience with little to unite the different factions other than a desire to defeat Fianna Fáil and come to power. As such it had difficulty articulating a defined political programme during this period. Richard Mulcahy succinctly encapsulated the prevalent public opinion regarding Fine Gael: ‘Many object to us because they say we are the old Cumann na nGaedheal party with a new name but without a new policy. Others object because they think we are a new Imperialist grouping to defend England’s interest in the Treaty...Some timid and ignorant people...fear a Blueshirt dictatorship and many thinking, educated people say that we are an organisation formed behind persons with divergent views, rather than an organisation with a common aim and clear cut policy.’\(^7\) Despite this ideological heterogeneity, however, there were several policy areas that remained consistently significant to the party’s programme at this time.

The first one concerned corporatism. As one of the conditions to its participation in the merger, the Blueshirts had secured Fine Gael’s agreement to establish a corporatist economic system if it came to power. Eugene Broderick has argued that few of the Fine Gael leadership, aside from O’Duffy, evinced any enthusiasm for this goal.\(^7^4\) He argues that the Blueshirts’ failure to convince the majority of Irish voters to support them was due to the alien and foreign nature of corporatism, and its possible threat to democracy and liberty.\(^7^5\) This is a difficult argument to conclusively prove. It is also possible that corporatism never became popular because of the leaders’ antipathy towards it, or, as previously indicated, due to the difficulties in accurately adapting the ideas of the Quadragesimo Anno to Irish politics and economy. In any event, after O’Duffy left the party in September 1934, corporatism was rarely mentioned publicly by any Fine Gael leader, including the new director-general Ned Cronin.

A much more prominent aspect of Fine Gael’s political programme was the national question, specifically in relation to Ireland’s Commonwealth membership

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\(^7^5\) Ibid.
and partition. The Fine Gael leadership, emerging as it did from the pro-Treaty republican tradition, derived its legitimacy from the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which obligated Ireland to remain a member of the Commonwealth. But the leadership also saw material advantages to membership:

Commonwealth membership will allow Ireland to play a large role in international affairs and is an economic asset. It will also help solve partition by facilitating cordial relations between the two parts of Ireland. Most importantly it does not represent an abdication of national sovereignty or form a barrier to internal economic or political reconstruction.76

The leaders of the former Centre Party, Frank MacDermot and James Dillon, were personally favourable towards Commonwealth membership for Ireland and exerted a great deal of influence on swaying the party to their views.77 It has been contended that there were disagreements between them and O’Duffy over this issue. Writing years later, O’Duffy’s personal secretary Liam Walsh, not an unbiased source, contended that MacDermot and Dillon were too wedded to the Commonwealth to work effectively with O’Duffy. They ‘had no stomach for advanced nationalism’.78 Yet at the Fine Gael Ard Fheis in February 1934, O’Duffy claimed ‘I look upon Ireland’s partnership in the Commonwealth not as a question of so-called loyalty or fidelity to forms or symbols, but as a matter of good business.’79 It was hoped that Commonwealth membership would facilitate Irish access to the British market for its agricultural products, once the economic war had ended.80

Commonwealth membership was also envisioned as the means by which partition could be ended. National unity was always mentioned as the primary goal of both the Blueshirts and Fine Gael. At the Blueshirt congress in August 1934, O’Duffy claimed ‘Our first job is to promote the reunion of North and South, to work and strive for the ultimate independence of the whole of Ireland under a central Government in the Nation’s capital.’81 MacDermot believed that taking a definite

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76 Fine Gael draft policy programme, September 1933 (U.C.D.A., Michael Tierney papers LA30/343).
77 Anglo-Celt, 22 July 1933.
79 United Ireland, 17 February 1934.
80 An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (United Ireland), 8 February 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/629).
81 Copy of Eoin O’Duffy’s opening address, 18 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/276).
position on Commonwealth membership in relation to partition would allow the party to challenge republican intentions to use arms to restore unity.\textsuperscript{82} Commonwealth membership was envisioned as facilitating the creation of favourable public opinions in the North and in Great Britain necessary to the peaceful reunification of Ireland.\textsuperscript{83} Not all Fine Gael leaders, however, agreed with MacDermot's optimistic views. Mulcahy did not believe the creation of favourable opinion would be sufficient to end partition, and he wanted a more proactive policy: 'It is not a policy to deplore partition. It is merely cheap sunburstry to talk about our aim and our hope of a 32 County State if we have not proposals towards its achievement. To talk of achieving it by making our 26 County State so comparatively attractive as to induce the Orangemen to flock in is merely a pious hope, if not an actual evasion.'\textsuperscript{84}

Preservation of the Gaelic language, culture and traditions were prioritised alongside nation reunion. 'The Blueshirt who is indifferent to the restoration of the Irish language and is indifferent to national reunion will not in the long run help us very much.'\textsuperscript{85} Fine Gael advocated the appointment of a special commissioner to oversee the development of the Gaeltacht in order to limit emigration from the region.\textsuperscript{86} Members were to wear badges if they spoke the Irish language.\textsuperscript{87} Two companies of Blueshirts were formed in Donegal, with 500 members between them, made up completely of Irish speakers.\textsuperscript{88} At the same time though the group remained primarily English speaking. The party newspaper, \textit{United Ireland}, included only one article per issue written in Irish. Moreover, the leadership, especially O'Duffy, commonly referred to the party as the United Ireland Party, rather than by its Gaelic name, Fine Gael. Only one of the Blueshirts' many organisational manifestations was given an Irish name; the Young Ireland

\textsuperscript{82} Letter from Frank MacDermot to Michael Tierney, 12 August 1934 (U.C.D.A., Michael Tierney papers LA30/367).
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{United Ireland}, 5 October 1935.
\textsuperscript{85} An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (\textit{United Ireland}), 8 February 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/629).
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{United Ireland}, 5 October 1935.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{United Ireland}, 10 March 1934.
Association was also named Oig Éireann.\textsuperscript{89} There was also a Gaelic translation to the Young Ireland Association pledge of allegiance.

Although agriculture was largely absent from the group’s policy statements on corporatism, it remained central to the Blueshirt movement’s economic programme. O’Duffy was keen to broaden the support for the Blueshirts and Fine Gael beyond the interests of large farmers. While admitting that many of that class supported the party, he claimed that the Blueshirt organisation was and always had been the party of poor men, labourers and farmers’ sons, many of whom were unemployed.\textsuperscript{90} Nonetheless, the party’s economic programme emphasised the role of the graziers and dairy farmers to the Irish economy. O’Duffy claimed that the purchasing power of all Irish citizenry depended on their success.\textsuperscript{91} Fine Gael also contended that for the agricultural sector to fully flourish Ireland required an export market, which necessitated a rapid end to the economic war and renewed access to the British market.\textsuperscript{92}

**The League of Youth**

The formation of Fine Gael further destabilised Irish political culture and led to a dramatic escalation of inter-communal violence. There were serious riots in Limerick and Kilrush in September, while during a Fine Gael convention in Tralee on Friday 6 October 1933, O’Duffy and other delegates were attacked by hundreds of republican opponents. O’Duffy was hit on the head and had his car set on fire. The situation quickly became out of control and tear gas had to be used to disperse the mob. Military reinforcements were called in and escorted the Fine Gael and Blueshirt delegates out of town with fixed bayonets.\textsuperscript{93} The next day two bombs were found in the vicinity of the convention hall and thirty to forty shots were fired at the gardai barracks.\textsuperscript{94} In December, the first Blueshirt was killed as a result of inter-

\textsuperscript{89} Young Ireland Association disciplinary code, November 1933 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/667).
\textsuperscript{90} The labour policy of Fine Gael, Fine Gael policy series pamphlet no. 2, (Dublin, 1934), pp 8-9.
\textsuperscript{91} Transcript of Eoin O’Duffy’s speech, 31 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/155).
\textsuperscript{92} An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (United Ireland), 8 February 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/629).
\textsuperscript{93} Irish Independent, 7 October 1933.
\textsuperscript{94} Irish Independent, 8 October 1933.
communal violence. Hugh O’Reilly was dragged out of his home, beaten and later died of his injuries.95

In addition to conflict with their republican opponents, Blueshirts were also involved in the anti-annuity campaign against the government. As mentioned, the cattle farmers were still obligated to pay the annuities despite the loss in revenue resulting from the economic war. Many cattle farmers, especially in southeast Ireland, refused to pay the annuities until the war ended or some form of economic relief was provided. The government responded by seizing and auctioning cattle from large farmers to compensate for lost revenue. To prevent this, cattle ranchers began disrupting the communication and transport networks by cutting telegraph wires, blocking roads and disrupting rail traffic. Occasionally, as will be described later, they would also directly confront state forces during the auctions of these seized cattle.

With the situation in rural Ireland becoming increasingly unstable and still fearing a fascist coup d’état, the Irish government banned the Young Ireland Association on 8 December 1933. The Fine Gael leadership quickly reformed the group as the League of Youth on 14 December and made it an integral part of Fine Gael. They also forestalled another government ban by instituting High Court proceedings on the legality of the organisation. Consequently, de Valera could not ban the Blueshirt movement’s fourth manifestation without also banning Fine Gael and, thus, creating a one party state antithetical to democracy.96

The League of Youth’s new constitution had 10 clauses:

A) To promote voluntary reunion of the Irish Nation
B) To educate and interest youth in the responsibilities of citizenship
C) To develop in the minds of young people an understanding and appreciation of democratic rights and responsibilities
D) To promote Social order
E) To encourage voluntary public service
F) To preserve the Irish language
G) To oppose Communism and alien control and influence in national affairs
H) To uphold Christian principles

95 Irish Independent, 6 January 1934.
96 In 1935 the High Court ruled that membership in the League of Youth was not unconstitutional.
I) To encourage athletics and all legitimate forms of sport
J) To adopt all other lawful means of furthering and promoting the best interests of the Nation. ⁹⁷

Aside from the now standard articles concerning national unity, opposition towards communism and defence of the state, there were no clauses outlining Blueshirt policies. Rather there were four articles, B, C, E, and H, concerned with inculcating public morals and values. The Blueshirts remained political but now subordinated the formulation and articulation of political and economic policies to Fine Gael.

The emergence of the League of Youth ushered in a brief period of setbacks for the Fianna Fáil government in its attempts to repress the organisation. On 17 December 1933, O’Duffy was arrested in Westport, County Mayo, on charges of membership of an unlawful association and inciting people to join an unlawful association. ⁹⁸ In January 1933, the High Court dismissed the charges claiming that they were based solely on the wearing of a blue shirt, which was not illegal. There were celebrations across Ireland following O’Duffy’s release and the Bishop of Achonry sent his congratulations. ⁹⁹ O’Duffy was eventually awarded £200 in damages for the false arrest. ¹⁰⁰ The government was then defeated in its efforts to make the wearing of the blue shirt illegal. In March 1934, the Wearing of Uniforms (Restriction) Bill was defeated in the Seanad, the Irish senate, which meant that it would take three years to become law. The Seanad’s defiance of the government over this bill would lead the Fianna Fáil government to abolish it and reconstitute a second chamber partially based on vocational representation.

These relatively minor legal and political successes did not last beyond the first electoral test for Fine Gael and the Blueshirts, which came with the local elections of June 1934. There was a great deal of excitement, agitation and violence leading up to these elections. A second Blueshirt, Patrick Kenny, was killed in June as a result of communal violence with republican opponents. ¹⁰¹ Four councils, Waterford, Tipperary, Leix and Kilkenny, where Blueshirts and Fine Gael were prominent, were suspended due to their support for the anti-annuity campaign.

⁹⁸ Irish Independent, 18 December 1933.
⁹⁹ Sunday Independent, 24 December 1933.
¹⁰⁰ Irish Press, 28 May 1935.
¹⁰¹ Nenagh Guardian, 13 October 1934.
O'Duffy contended that they were suspended because the government believed Fine Gael would achieve a majority on them in the forthcoming elections. He also predicted significant electoral success for Fine Gael, but in the end Fianna Fáil secured a majority on fourteen councils, while Fine Gael ended up with a majority on only six. Neither party had a majority on three other county councils. In total Fianna Fáil won 728 seats to Fine Gael's 596. This was a respectable result for Fine Gael but after O'Duffy's overly optimistic predictions it was viewed as a disappointment.

The Blueshirt split

This election was a pivotal moment for the organisation. Local Blueshirt radicalism increased dramatically following the setback. On 13 August a group of Blueshirts drove a lorry through the gates of Marsh's Yard in Cork in an effort to stop the auction of seized cattle. The gardaí protecting the auction opened fire injuring several people and killing one Blueshirt, Michael Lynch. The use of force against the unarmed men was deemed excessive by the Blueshirt organisation, and many members became increasingly antagonistic towards the Fianna Fáil government leading to an increase in anti-annuity agitation. This was locally driven and at no point did the central leadership of either the Blueshirts or Fine Gael formally condone violence against the state. During the Blueshirt Ard Fheis of 18-19 August 1934, the tensions between radical local branches and the more moderate leadership came to a head.

Two resolutions passed at the Ard Fheis encapsulated the increasing radicalisation of local branches. The first called upon the Blueshirts to establish a commissioner for the North, authorised to organise units in Northern Ireland. As the Northern Ireland government had already banned the organisation, the passage of this resolution resulted in Sir Dawson Bates, Northern Minister for Home Affairs, passing an exclusion order against O'Duffy under the Civil Authority (Special Powers) Act. A similar exclusion order had already been passed against de Valera. The second resolution, composed of three parts, was also passed concerning the collection of land annuities. It called, firstly, for Fine Gael to

102 Transcript of Eoin O'Duffy's speech, 31 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/155).
103 Leitrim Observer, 1 September 1934.
demand a cessation of the collection of annuities by the Irish government. If it refused, then Fine Gael was to demand the convening of an impartial tribunal to adjudicate on the justice of continuing to seize cattle. Finally, and only if the government refused to convene the tribunal, farmers were authorised to cease paying annuities. This last part, openly advocating defiance of the government, was too radical for some of the leadership, especially T. F. O'Higgins. When the resolution passed against his wishes, he immediately requested to be removed from the central council. The Garda officer reporting on the Ard Fheis claimed that O'Duffy was also not in favour of the proposal but did not vote against it.

The passage of these two resolutions led to a flurry of activity as the Fine Gael leadership sought to exert further control over the Blueshirt movement. For the more moderate nationalists within Fine Gael, the proposal to organise in the North, after already being banned, was akin to declaring war on the statelet. Maurice Manning has claimed, most recently in the R.T.E. special ‘Patriots to a Man: the Blueshirts and their times’ broadcast in January 2000, that O'Duffy actually did declare that he would invade the North. This is inaccurate, as it was only the Fine Gael leadership that claimed his actions were equivalent to a declaration of war. Rather than indicating O'Duffy’s foolhardiness, this episode attests to Fine Gael’s conservative nationalism.

The second resolution was much more radical in nature and encouraged open defiance against the state that many in the Fine Gael leadership had worked hard to establish and legitimise. In the first week of September an emergency meeting of Fine Gael and Blueshirt delegates was convened to discuss what action to take in regard to the resolution. The Blueshirts believed that rescinding the resolution would represent a direct criticism of O'Duffy’s leadership and the movement in its entirety. Blueshirt radicalism on these issues should not be underestimated. One delegate even advocated derailing trains in an effort to stop the collection of land annuities. The discussion lasted for two days until James Hogan made a speech

104 United Ireland, 25 August 1934.
105 Letter from Michael Tierney to Frank MacDermot, 29 August 1934 (N.A.I., Frank MacDermot papers ACC/1065/4/1).
106 Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to Garda Commissioner, 30 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/276).
107 Meath Chronicle, 8 September 1934.
108 Letter from Michael Tierney to Frank MacDermot, 4 September 1934 (N.A.I., Frank MacDermot papers ACC/1065/4/2).
commending several Blueshirt leaders but conspicuously failing to mention O’Duffy. This was perceived as an insult, and O’Duffy immediately started verbally abusing Hogan, compelling him to resign from the party.\(^{109}\) Hogan’s resignation led O’Duffy to back down in his support for the resolutions, and Fine Gael was able to extend its authority over the movement. It was decided that the president and vice-presidents of Fine Gael were to meet once a week to review all decisions, circulars and correspondence for the League of Youth. In addition, Fine Gael T.D.s were to be invited to the monthly League of Youth county meetings and there was to be direct supervision of O’Duffy’s speeches.\(^{110}\)

At this point it appeared that the differences had been resolved, and the leaders of Fine Gael and the Blueshirts issued a joint statement declaring their united purpose. But O’Duffy then embarked upon a game of political brinkmanship with the Fine Gael leadership in an effort to reassert his position. He offered his resignation, anticipating it would be refused. To his surprise it was accepted and Ned Cronin was appointed Director-General of the Blueshirts.\(^{111}\) The four vice-presidents of Fine Gael, Cosgrave, MacDermot, Dillon and Cronin, agreed to share the leadership until the Fine Gael Ard Fheis in February 1935 when William Cosgrave was re-elected president. Yet even after the split and assertion of Fine Gael authority, there remained tensions between the two groups. Before the Fine Gael Ard Fheis, Cronin secretly canvassed support for a Blueshirt, presumably himself, as the next leader of Fine Gael in order to shift the balance of power back to the Blueshirts.\(^{112}\) Apparently, there was limited support for this motion as Cosgrave, not Cronin, became leader.

**N.C.P. and dissolution**

O’Duffy was not content to fade into the political background and claimed he had only resigned from Fine Gael, not the Blueshirts. He immediately set out upon a national tour to rally local support, leading to a split within the movement as some

\(^{109}\) Ibid.
\(^{110}\) Letter from James Dillon to Frank MacDermot, 15 September 1934 (N.A.I., Frank MacDermot papers EFP/1065/2/2).
\(^{111}\) McGarry’s *Eoin O’Duffy*, pp 260-269 has provided the best description of the individual personalities and their machinations during these political negotiations.
\(^{112}\) Confidential memo from Ned Cronin to Timothy Linehan, Jerry Ryan et al., 14 January 1935 (U.C.D.A., Richard Mulcahy papers P7c/47).
branches followed him while the majority remained with Cronin and Fine Gael. Without the Fine Gael leadership’s restraining influence, the O’Duffy wing of the Blueshirts became more radical. He started making direct appeals for farmers to obstruct the state’s collection of annuities. His admiration of fascism also became more pronounced. O’Duffy attended several international fascist conferences in Europe and was given a tour of Germany by Nazi officials. He also repeatedly and publicly voiced support for Mussolini’s policies in Italy. He was not the only committed fascist in the Blueshirts. T. P. Gunning, who was in charge of Blueshirt propaganda, combined a showing of the film *Blackshirts*, about the Blackshirts in Italy, with a central council meeting on 1 December 1934.

O’Duffy’s attitude towards the national question also underwent a dramatic change as he became more overtly republican in his public pronouncements. While still appealing to the memory of Griffith and Collins (Kevin O’Higgins was no longer mentioned), he claimed that they had only supported the Treaty as a means to securing more freedom rather than as a final settlement. He also became more favourable towards the anti-Treaty republican opposition, claiming ‘I want to cast no reflection on the I.R.A. We have as good men as they have’. He also asserted ‘I have more respect for the I.R.A. than I have for the political parties.’ On 8 June 1935 he formed a new political organisation, the National Corporate Party (N.C.P.), which, while still advocating corporatism, used the 1916 Proclamation as the basis for its political programme. ‘We take our stand where the men of 1916 stood, and their goal will be our goal...[to] establish a Republic de jure for 32 counties and de facto for 26.’ The N.C.P. also supported the nationalist abstentionist candidates in the six counties. On several occasions he verbally attacked what he considered to be Fine Gael’s toleration of British imperialism: ‘The Imperial British programme of the opposition to our present Government will scarcely get the majority of the

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113 Statements by Amos Reidy and Daniel Ahern, 7 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/104).
114 *Irish Independent*, 1 April 1935; *Southern Star*, 21 September 1935.
115 *Meath Chronicle*, 10 August 1935.
116 Invitation from T. P. Gunning to all county directors, 23 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
117 *Meath Chronicle*, 10 August 1935.
118 N.C.P. bulletin no. 5, December 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/296).
119 *Southern Star*, 15 June 1935.
120 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 17 December 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/296).
Electors at the next General Election to support it.\textsuperscript{121} Although never becoming a significant political force in Ireland, even after close to two years following the Blueshirt split the N.C.P. was able to rally 400 delegates to its July 1936 national conference at Rathmines town hall.\textsuperscript{122} O’Duffy’s brief but notorious political career ended after he led 600 of his supporters on the ill-fated intervention in the Spanish Civil War.

The Cronin wing continued as part of Fine Gael and remained able to rally impressive numbers at many of its events right up to its final demise. Even by 1936, 1,000 Blueshirts attended its Ard Fheis. But this time it was held in Cork not Dublin, reflecting the regional concentration in Blueshirt numbers.\textsuperscript{123} Fine Gael was also taking little notice of the organisation by this point and limited publicity was given to the Ard Fheis in the party newspaper.\textsuperscript{124} As mentioned, membership figures also declined after November 1935 when the organisation began charging one shilling for membership.\textsuperscript{125} In an effort to re-energise the movement, Cronin began focusing his political speeches on resisting communism. This had always been a prominent part of the group’s identity; James Hogan had written a series of articles detailing the presumed links between the I.R.A. and international communism in \textit{United Ireland}.\textsuperscript{126} However, it had never featured so conspicuously in the organisation’s public pronouncements. Now, Cronin was referencing the fight against communism during all public events such as the Ard Fheis and the Beal-na-Blath commemoration for Collins.\textsuperscript{127} This increased attention reflected the necessity for the Blueshirt movement to regain political momentum by situating itself within the international fight against communism best demonstrated by the Spanish Civil War. The Blueshirt organisation also needed to demonstrate its relevance to the Irish public since Fine Gael had begun winding down the group, beginning in the nation’s capital in 1936.

At a League of Youth staff meeting in Dublin in January 1936, without Cronin in attendance, O’Higgins, Mulcahy and Gerald Sweetman were given the authority to reorganise the Dublin branches by dissolving any units and removing

\textsuperscript{121} N.C.P. bulletin no. 1, August 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/296).
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Irish Press}, 20 July 1936.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Southern Star}, 30 May 1936.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{United Ireland}, 6 June 1936.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{United Ireland}, 9 November 1935.
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{United Ireland}, 16 September 1933-27 January 1934.
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Southern Star}, 30 May, 19 September 1936.
any officers they deemed unsuitable for membership. In September 1936 they moved against the entire organisation. The leadership, centred on the same three men, first circulated an announcement that Cronin had resigned, which he strenuously denied. Then they demoted him to deputy Director General while claiming that this was of his own initiative for personal reasons. In October 1936, T. F. O'Higgins formally dissolved the League of Youth central council. From now on central decisions would be made from the Fine Gael national executive and local captains would have independent control over their own branches. This was viewed as a necessary action to ameliorate continuing tensions between the two organisations even though it was projected to lead to a dramatic decline in Blueshirt membership. Cronin attempted to continue the movement independent of Fine Gael but after being locked out of the party's headquarters, he lost his national profile and influence. Fine Gael had effectively disbanded the Blueshirts on its own terms.

Yet right up into 1937 local Blueshirts still engaged in public activities. In July 1937, several Blueshirts disrupted a Fianna Fáil public meeting after the speaker made disparaging remarks about the organisation. In August 1937 a Blueshirt carnival was held in Kanturk. Three hundred members in uniform attended a Blueshirt sports meeting in Drimoleague, County Cork, on 12 August 1937, while the Beal-na-Blath commemoration brought out even more members displaying the Blueshirt flag and upraised arm salute. During the general election in 1937 a poem was written on several ballot papers in Cavan:

Oh Dev, oh Dev, 'tis sad to see
Our lads and lassies go over the sea
To slave in pits and fields and mines
While you and the 400 dines.
But soon we hope to see the day

128 Memorandum from League of Youth staff meeting, 2 January 1936 (U.C.D.A., Richard Mulcahy papers P7c/47).
129 Irish Press, 14 September 1936.
130 Irish Independent, 10 October 1936.
131 Irish Press, 9, 16 October 1936.
132 Irish Independent, 1 July 1937.
133 Irish Independent, 9 August 1937.
134 Southern Star, 25 September 1937.
When Irishmen will make you pay,
For Blueshirts will be ever true
To God and Spain and O’Duffy’s blue.
Up Duffy. Down Dev.\textsuperscript{135}

\textbf{Historiography}

Ideology alone does not explain the continued enthusiasm for the movement, yet the preponderance of the historiography of the Blueshirts remains focused on its political doctrine. This is especially the case in relation to the organisation’s adherence to fascist ideology. Maurice Manning’s \textit{Blueshirts}, still considered the seminal work on the organisation even though it is now forty years old, established this precedent. He has provided an expansive and detailed narrative of the movement’s origins, transformations and demise, but his analysis of the group’s adherence to fascism is understandably dated. He recognised and listed diverse influences on Blueshirt ideology but did not prioritise them.\textsuperscript{136} He concluded by asserting that the Blueshirts arose from post-Civil War political divisions and tensions rather than an adherence to fascist ideology.\textsuperscript{137} Since ideological precepts such as irredentism, a mythologized past and glorification of rural life, typical components of fascist philosophy, were already pervasive within Irish politics, Manning concluded that fascism was never a politically viable option within Ireland.\textsuperscript{138} This conclusion effectively established a dichotomy between uniquely Irish political developments and an ideal-type fascist ideology that has remained consistent throughout much of the historiography of the Blueshirts.\textsuperscript{139}

Between 1971-1997 the Blueshirts as a historical subject appeared only in journal articles or general surveys of Irish history. Richard Finegan challenged, to some degree, Manning’s conclusions. Also using an ideal-type definition of fascism, Finegan concluded that Blueshirt aesthetics and political agitation warranted the

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Meath Chronicle}, 10 July 1937.
\textsuperscript{136} Manning, \textit{The Blueshirts}, pp 213-214.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., pp 247-248.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., pp 240-241.
group being labelled fascist. But he believed that the organisation inverted fascism because they used these aesthetics and agitation to defend liberal democracy against perceived Fianna Fáil authoritarianism. Paul Bew, Ellen Hazelkorn and Henry Patterson have also argued that the group was fascist in nature. They argued against a dichotomy between the situation in Ireland and the rise of fascism. They drew parallels between uniquely Irish political language, such as late nineteenth-century land-war rhetoric, and Blueshirt oratory, such as O’Duffy’s anti-annuity campaign. The split with Fine Gael in September 1934 was also characterised as resulting from O’Duffy’s reckless and erratic leadership style rather than an inherent Irish rejection of fascism. These scholars, however, concentrated on the group’s material identity, and argued that the Blueshirts’ support never extended beyond the rich cattle farmers whose livelihood relied on the export trade to Great Britain. Consequently, the organisation was susceptible to being labelled unpatriotic and had limited popular support.

Mike Cronin has written several works on the Blueshirts, most notably The Blueshirts and Irish politics published in 1997. Unlike Manning, Cronin took a thematic approach to the subject, and integrated personal accounts by former Blueshirts. The test sample was small, thirteen respondents, and included only men as Cronin missed an opportunity to interview some of their wives who had been in the Blue Blouses. In his interviews, Cronin was focused on ascertaining the degree of attachment to fascist ideology by the membership. The former Blueshirts consistently credited the defence of free speech, the economic war and family political allegiances rather than personal adherence to fascist or corporatist ideology for their membership in the organisation. Several respondents did admit, though, that they thought the leadership was fascist.

140 Richard Finegan, ‘The Blueshirts of Ireland during the 1930s: fascism inverted’ in Éire-Ireland, 24, no. 2 (Summer 1989), pp 88-90.
141 Ibid., pp 97-99.
143 Ibid., pp 62-65.
144 Ibid., pp 62-67.
145 Ibid., pp 67-72.
147 Interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991; interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991; interview with Thomas Kelly, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991; interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991.
Despite these assertions, Cronin attributed foreign influences to the Blueshirt movement’s cultural identity. He argued that Blueshirt political rallies were of a different nature than mainstream Irish mass meetings, which had remained a common feature within Ireland’s political culture since at least the time of Daniel O’Connell in the early nineteenth century. He also believed that Blueshirt violence was of a different nature than the physical force tradition that has been integral to Irish nationalism since Wolf Tone’s rebellion in 1798. Consequently, he concluded that the Blueshirts had sufficient attachment to fascism to be labelled as a potential para-fascist party had it come to power. The term para-fascist was derived from Roger Griffin’s work on fascism. Griffin argued that para-fascist regimes, like Francisco Franco’s in Spain, co-opts the mass appeal of fascism while preserving traditional conservative institutions, like the Catholic Church.

Writing two years later, however, Cronin is much more critical of ‘O’Duffy’s poor attempts to imitate Mussolini or Salazar. He perpetuates Manning’s dichotomy between the uniquely Irish situation and any pre-conditions that superficially appeared suitable for the rise of fascism:

This did not necessarily mean that the Free State was ripe for fascism. Such a comparison with Europe is simplistic without reference to the specifically Irish context. If the key pre-conditions for fascism are reviewed from an Irish perspective the situation looks altogether different.

Three more recent works, by John Regan, Fearghal McGarry and Richard English, have provided new perspectives on the organisation, but, as none of their works are focused exclusively on the Blueshirts, their analyses of these issues are somewhat limited in breadth. John Regan situates the movement within his examination of post-Civil War, pro-Treaty politics, and has characterised the movement as presenting a distinct cultural identity, one that was neither monolithic nor consistent during its brief existence. He sees a rural-urban divide compounded by regional factions that were more radical in their opposition to the state over the

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148 Cronin, The Blueshirts and Irish politics, pp 53-56.
151 Ibid., p. 94.
collection of annuity payments. He has effectively demonstrated the necessity to analyse the Blueshirts over time and space in order to appreciate the tensions within the group. In his biography of Eoin O’Duffy, Fearghal McGarry addresses other topics besides Blueshirt political ideology. He briefly analyses the movement’s incorporation of women and youth as an apparent contradiction to the group’s predominantly masculine discourse. This discourse was especially evident in O’Duffy’s advocacy of Blueshirt athletics, and his conceptualisation of the movement as revitalising Ireland’s destiny. McGarry also identifies several aspects of the Blueshirt movement’s cultural impact within Irish society, including the liturgical and processional elements that led to a contestation of public space. Richard English briefly examines the Blueshirts in his previously mentioned work on the history of nationalism in Ireland. He has been the only historian to analyse the movement as a community, but he does so only in relation to its political ideology. English characterises the group as representing a marginalised strain of Irish nationalism through its discourse on sovereignty, material benefits and cultural status, which were characterised by the Blueshirts as the politics of freedom.

As these three works indicate there remains an opportunity to analyse the movement from different perspectives than one solely focused on its ideology. Yet in each of these works the question as to whether the Blueshirts were fascist is posed, making it necessary to address this topic here, however briefly. This will not detract from my overall objectives because I will integrate my analysis of the Blueshirt movement’s adherence to fascism within my overall discussion of Blueshirt gender, rituals and power.

The Blueshirts as fascists?

Fascism has proved to be an elusive term for historians, political scientists and philosophers to define. The complex and often contradictory nature of this political ideology has confounded most attempts to arrive at a concise yet comprehensive definition, or, in other words, an ideal-type fascism. By prioritising fascist theory over fascist practice, scholars have postulated numerous definitions

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152 Regan, The Irish counter-revolution, pp 358-362.
154 Ibid., pp 244-251.
155 English, Irish freedom, pp 336-341.
ranging from a Marxist interpretation of fascism as the last stage of capitalism to analyses of fascism as merely another derivation of twentieth century totalitarian regimes. \[156\]

Stanley Payne has written extensively on fascism in an attempt to establish an ideal-type definition for it. Despite recognising national variations, Payne identifies several components that remain consistent to fascist parties and distinguishes them from traditional right-wing political ideologies. \[157\] Fascist ideology must consist of anti-liberalism, anti-communism and selective anti-conservatism, along with the desire to restructure social relations nationally through an authoritarian regime. Other fundamental components include the aesthetic use of parades and uniforms along with the positive evaluation of violence and the exaltation of youth. \[158\] Payne also asserts that a complete synthetic definition of fascism is impossible without more empirical and comparative analysis. \[159\]

Roger Griffin has also attempted a definition of fascism's ideological core, but rather than establish an ideal-type, he has attempted to identify a fascist minimum. This includes a secular myth based upon the promise of rebirth after a period of decadence: a 'palingenetic' myth that generates an ultra-popular nationalism. \[160\] Due to its contentious and complex nature, this palingenetic mythic core requires a charismatic leader to publicly justify it and rally mass support. \[161\] Although deriving its influence from an appeal to a mythologized past, this palingenetic core also contains a modernist component regarding the use of technology and industry. \[162\] Notably, Griffin does not regard anti-Semitism or imperialism as central to this fascist minimum. \[163\]

Griffin argues that fascist parties do not need widespread adherence to the ideological core in order to be considered fascist. He contends that for a party to be fascist it only requires a dedicated leadership and compliant membership. As

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156 Bernt Hagtvet and Reinhold Kuhnl, ‘Contemporary approaches to fascism: a survey of paradigms’ in Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet and Jan Peter Myklebust (eds), *Who were the fascists? Social roots of European fascism* (New York, 1980), pp 28-44.


158 Ibid., pp 20-21.

159 Ibid., p. 24.


161 Ibid., p. 37.

162 Ibid., p. 47.

163 Ibid., pp 48-49.
ideological adherence is usually motivated by self-interest, it is common within fascist parties for the majority of members to be motivated by only specific issues relevant to them rather than the holistic fascist ideology. In addition, the utopian fascist ideological paradigm is inevitably adapted and marginalised through the attainment and maintenance of power resulting in a variety of fascist regimes. Griffin also devotes attention to the reasons fascist parties fail to attain power, such as marginalisation without public support or prohibition and suppression by the ruling government.

Robert Paxton has provided the most concise and erudite analysis of fascism to date. Whereas Griffin emphasises the ideological and cultural preconditions for fascism’s rise, Paxton prioritises the actual material processes of seizing power. He does outline some general social and political preconditions necessary to the rise of fascism, such as an electorate demoralised by the societal transition into industrialisation and modernity, a mass media-influenced loss of traditional culture, and the loss of a monopoly on discontent by the political left. In general, however, Paxton believes that, although the ideology creates the political space within which fascism can operate, the actions and choices of key participants are what allow fascist parties to achieve power. This is indicated through the political stages fascist parties must pass through as they attempt to form a government.

The most important of these stages is the establishment of fascism as a viable political party. Many fascist parties do not reach this stage because it requires them to be ideologically flexible in order to integrate themselves within the existing political system and gain popular support. Paxton shows how both the Italian Fascists and German Nazis had to continually adapt their ideologies to maintain support, resulting in their transformation into catchall political parties. As there exists no ‘Fascist Manifesto’ or explicitly defined philosophical parameters, many fascist parties do not feel beholden to a restrictive ideological paradigm. Moreover, all fascist parties need to co-opt pre-existing national traditions in order to

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164 Ibid., pp 184-185.  
165 Ibid., pp 26-27.  
166 Ibid., pp 116-117.  
168 Ibid., pp 38-39.  
169 Ibid., pp 78-81.  
170 Ibid., pp 56-58.  
171 Ibid., pp 52-54.
legitimate their political ideology and integrate themselves within the pre-existing political space.¹⁷² Fascist parties cannot achieve power on their own, and must make political alliances with conservative elements within their respective societies. These conservative forces, sometimes unable to adapt to the advent of mass politics and believing themselves strong enough to control these lower class demagogues, often require the fascist ability to generate public support in order to maintain their political hegemony.¹⁷³ Fascists also required a national crisis or parliamentary paralysis in order to legitimate their radical national and political policies. The severity of this crisis and degree of paralysis is contingent upon the stability of national institutions and the competence of government leaders:

Fascism, too, has historically been a phenomenon of weak or failed liberal states and belated or damaged capitalist systems rather than of triumphant ones. The frequent assertion that fascism stems from a crisis of liberalism might well be amended to specify crises in weak or failed liberalisms.¹⁷⁴

These new approaches to fascism, which emphasise the national variations and dynamism inherent to fascist movements, provide new insight into the question as to whether the Blueshirts were a fascist movement. Establishing a dichotomy between uniquely Irish events and an ideal-type fascism is unhelpful, because no ideal-type fascism exists and all fascist movements must adapt to national conditions. The socio-economic and political situation in Italy was not exactly the same as in Germany, just as the Italian Fascists were not exactly the same as the Nazis. Furthermore, the historical attempts to construct this dichotomy seem to be influenced more by a desire to reinforce the democratic credentials of Irish political parties rather than provide insights into the political situation at the time.

Mike Cronin’s claim that the rank and file were not fascist does not conclusively prove that the Blueshirts was not a fascist movement. Griffin has indicated that individual members of fascist parties were often motivated in their support by individual material reasons not directly related to fascist ideology. Thus a desire to end the economic war or to prevent attacks on public meetings could be

¹⁷³ Paxton, The anatomy of fascism, p. 102.
¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 81.
the precipitate cause for the rise of an Irish fascist party. Many fascist parties only have a leadership that is truly fascist. It is without question that O’Duffy was a committed fascist and there are strong indications that other Blueshirt leaders, such as Ernest Blythe, were willing to experiment with authoritarian governmental forms. In addition, as indicated by the members themselves, Blueshirts joined the party knowing the leadership had fascist tendencies, knowing that corporatism was the primary political ideology and knowing that continental precedents influenced Blueshirt political aesthetics. Implicitly, therefore, they were supporting these tendencies. Cronin’s methodology for determining the degree of support for fascism amongst the membership is also suspect. Questioning anyone as to whether they were fascist decades after the atrocities of the Second World War and the Holocaust had become widespread knowledge is not likely to lead to an affirmative answer.

Even if one is inclined to disagree with this assessment, the rise and fall of the Blueshirts demonstrated many similarities with Paxton’s analysis of fascist movements’ progressions to power. The Blueshirts did try to present the movement as a catch-all party with their defence of agricultural interests as well as proposing a corporatist economic model designed to appeal to both business and labour. The Blueshirts did co-opt nationalist traditions in an attempt to legitimate themselves within Irish political culture. The Blueshirts did make an alliance with conservative forces that needed the Blueshirts’ ability to mobilise populist support. In the Blueshirts’ case though, the conservative forces were able to exert control during the September 1934 split. And, finally, the Blueshirts emerged at a time of strong state institutions and government under Fianna Fáil, making it very unlikely that they would have been able to destabilise Irish society, economy or politics.

It is not, however, sufficient to merely state these facts: it is also necessary to analyse how these processes came about. By what means did the Blueshirts attempt to situate themselves within Irish political culture and appeal to the conservative forces within Irish politics? And how specifically did Fianna Fáil suppress the organisation? To answer these questions we must first examine the Blueshirt movement’s use of gender relations in its political activities and programme.

Chapter Two: Space, power and the discourse of domesticity: The Blue Blouses in Ireland, 1933-1936

In early July 1933, twenty women came together in Toames, County Cork, to form the first branch of the women’s section of the Blueshirts. They had decided to join the movement in order to ‘help their brothers...establish peace and goodwill amongst our people.’ Less than three weeks later, on 20 July, Eoin O’Duffy officially opened the membership of the National Guard to women. Overshadowed by his announcement of the 13 August Dublin parade, the inclusion of women in the movement received little attention in the Irish press. But this event was fundamental to O’Duffy’s reconstitution of the former A.C.A. as an inclusive political organisation open to all Irish citizens of Christian faith. Women greeted the offer of membership with remarkable enthusiasm, and within a year the Blue Blouses had formed branches in every county across the Irish Free State, boasting more members than any other Irish women’s political organisation of the period. They constituted an integral, if subordinate, part of the Blueshirt movement. They were actively engaged in the dissemination of Blueshirt ideology and identity through their manifold activities. In many ways, the Blue Blouses were the primary intermediaries between the movement and the wider Irish public until the organisation’s demise in 1936. Yet these women’s historical experience has remained excluded from the historiography of the Blueshirts and of women in interwar Ireland, due in no small part to the ambiguous nature of Blue Blouse politics.

Blue Blouse political participation simultaneously maintained and subverted many of the gendered conventions prevalent within Irish political culture during this period. This was especially apparent in the divergence between Blue Blouse political rhetoric and activity. Ideologically, membership provided an outlet for conservative women to engage with Irish politics outside of mainstream political movements and without challenging the theory of separate spheres. Blue Blouses were dismissive of female suffragists, and argued that women should conform to gender specific roles rather than challenge inequalities between the sexes. Yet, at the

1 Southern Star, 8 July 1934.
2 The women’s section of the Blueshirts was not always referred to as the Blue Blouses. Some members continued to refer to these women as ‘Blueshirt girls’. For ease of comprehension, however, the term Blue Blouses will be used throughout this chapter when referring to the female members of the movement.
same time, these women materially challenged male control of public space through their mobilisation in parades, political rallies and athletic competitions. While the majority of Irish women remained politically, socially and economically confined within the home, the Blueshirt movement provided an opportunity for women to publicly demarcate spheres of autonomy and agency.

The involvement of women in a shirted movement was not an Irish phenomenon. All across Europe, women were mobilised by the hundreds and thousands in shirted movements as a means of demonstrating public support for these parties and legitimating their popular appeal. As the Blue Blouses, these women’s political activity demonstrated many of the same apparent contradictions. Women joined in large numbers despite being restricted to subordinate roles with no involvement in the male dominated leadership. They were relegated to gender specific duties, such as catering, political canvassing and fundraising, but were also mobilised outside the home during political rallies and parades. Nonetheless, although delegated these duties by men, these women’s control over these gender-specific jobs allowed them to delineate areas of influence and independence.

In attempting to comprehend the contradictory nature of these women’s political activity, historians of women in shirted movements have addressed many of the same interpretative issues as will be addressed in this chapter. The dichotomy between rhetoric and action presents conceptual difficulties in understanding Blue Blouse politics. Were they truly challenging traditional notions of femininity and masculine control of the public sphere? Or were they conforming to patriarchal constraints? Is it appropriate to study these women’s political activity through a feminist analytical paradigm? Trying to assess the wider impact and influence these women had on Irish politics and society further compounds these questions. At no point did the Blue Blouses effect meaningful or lasting change to the patriarchal political culture in Ireland. This is best demonstrated by the fact that, while dramatic in its specific historic moment, these women’s actions, unlike those of the male Blueshirts, have been almost completely lost from Irish collective memory.

This chapter, therefore, is not limited to recovering these women’s historical experience from obscurity. It also seeks to situate the paradoxical interaction between the group’s discursive constructions of identity and its material use of space

within a larger discussion of patriarchal power dynamics within Ireland. The disparity between action and rhetoric demonstrates the difficulties in uncritically utilising feminist analytical paradigms to recover these women’s historical experience. Analysing Blue Blouse political involvement on its own terms is integral to understanding the totality of Blueshirt politics, as well as illustrating the opportunities and constraints on female political participation in Ireland’s immediate post-independence period.

Women in inter-war Ireland

In many ways the inter-war period was an inauspicious time for the emergence of a new Irish women’s political organisation, even one auxiliary to a male driven movement. Successive Irish governments had passed a series of legislation, buttressed by Catholic social theory, limiting women’s involvement within the public sphere. In 1927, Irish women were no longer automatically included on jury rolls, but had to request permission from the local government to exercise this right. The 1936 Conditions of Employment Bill gave the Minister of Industry and Commerce the power to limit the number of women working in any industry in Ireland in order to protect jobs for men. And, the 1937 constitution identified all women with motherhood and domesticity. Article 41.2 officially declared that the government should ensure that women did not have to enter the workforce due to economic pressure since ‘by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”

Prevailing Catholic social theories also conceptualised national harmony and stability as reliant upon a stable family life, which in turn was dependent on a wife and mother remaining in the home. Only virtuous women were permitted in this social construction, leading the Irish Catholic hierarchy to work with several inter-war Irish governments seeking to control female morals through dance hall legislation, censorship and the criminal code.

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4 Bunreacht na hÉireann, 29 December 1937

5 Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, ‘Virtuous mothers and dutiful wives: the politics of sexuality in the Irish Free State’ in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (ed.), Gender and power in Irish history (Dublin, 2009), pp 100-104.

Irish feminist historians have argued that these limitations on women’s involvement with the public sphere constructed Irish women as subordinate citizens. As such, several histories of inter-war Irish women have focused on those feminist organisations, such as the Irish Women’s Citizens’ and Local Government Association, the National Council of Women, and the National University Women Graduates’ Association, which actively challenged this marginalisation of women from Irish public life. Yet it is questionable whether these associations truly represented Irish women’s popular attitudes towards female politicisation, considering they were composed almost exclusively of Dublin-based middle class women.

These histories have explored only one aspect of female political participation during this period. Inter-war Irish women’s politics had a much broader basis than solely demanding equal citizenship rights. Cumann na mBan, the I.R.A.’s women’s auxiliary, was one of the most prominent women’s political organisations of the period and never actively campaigned for women’s rights. Rather, members were focused on a strictly republican political agenda and devoted their time to publicly advocating a united Ireland through rallies and demonstrations. Irish women were also involved with the trade union movement through the Irish Women Workers’ Union (I.W.W.U.). The I.W.W.U. was active in organising women and defending their job opportunities, but, aside from its protest against the Conditions of Employment Bill, the I.W.W.U. remained isolated from other feminist organisations or causes. For instance, it refused to campaign against the 1937 constitution because it saw its role in strictly economic terms.


9 Ibid.


11 Louise Ryan, ‘In the line of fire: representations of women and war (1919-1923) through the writings of republican men’ in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds), Irish women and nationalism: soldiers, new women and old hags (Dublin, 2004), pp 45-48.


One of the common features of these groups’ political activity was the use of public space. All of these women’s organisations mobilised members through political rallies and parades. This emphasis on extra-parliamentary agitation was partly due to the fact that Irish women had limited impact on institutional politics during this period. Since 1922, Irish women could vote and sit in either house of the Oireachtas, but in the 1930s it was really only in the Seanad that women made any impact on Irish politics. Several female senators had vociferously objected to the passage of the previously mentioned litany of patriarchal legislation. But considering the Seanad only had indirect power to affect legislation, it could only delay the passage of bills for two years, even these women had minimal institutional power.

Another organisation that offered women an opportunity to participate in Irish society outside the home was the Irish Countrywomen’s Association (I.C.A.). The I.C.A. emphasised women’s domestic role as the avenue through which they could improve their position within Irish society. The I.C.A. led classes on domestic science, agricultural methods and handicrafts as a possible means for women to supplement the family’s income distinct from their husbands. Despite being avowedly non-political, the I.C.A. encouraged women to get involved in local government, and offered public speaking classes to encourage women to take a public stance on current policies. Diarmaid Ferriter has argued that through its emphasis on the importance of female home workers to national development and its encouragement of female political participation, the I.C.A. elevated the public and national stature of Irish women. This is an optimistic appraisal of I.C.A. intentions since this position was never explicitly articulated through the association’s discourse or activities in the 1930s. It also never engaged in overt political activity in pursuit of this ideal. There remained an opportunity for an Irish women’s organisation to synthesise the discourse of domesticity with overt political activity in an effort to mobilise nationalist Irish women.

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16 Ibid., pp 12-16.
17 Ibid., pp 9-10.
The Blue Blouses: organisation and membership

It was within this political context that Irish women responded to O’Duffy’s invitation, and they did so with enthusiasm. By August 1934, just over a year after O’Duffy’s speech, 628 Blue Blouse branches had been formed across the Irish Free State.\(^{19}\) The March 1934 ledger lists 8,392 female members out of a total membership of 36,703 or 23% of the total. The April 1934 ledger lists 12,423 women out of a total membership of 47,818 or 26% of the total.\(^{20}\) The discrepancy in figures between the two ledgers can be explained, in part, because more districts had provided figures for the April one. County Cork consistently had the highest number of female members with 1,608 in March and 3,250 in April. Women also composed over 30% of the total membership in Cork, as compared to County Sligo where women only composed 9% of the membership. As a mobilising organisation of women, therefore, the Blue Blouses had a greater geographical spread than either Cumann na mBan or the prominent feminist organisations, all of which were based almost exclusively in Dublin.\(^{21}\) Even the I.C.A., which did have branches in the Irish countryside, had only 2,000 members at its peak during this period.\(^{22}\) These dramatic membership numbers did not last for long. The third ledger compiled sometime in 1936 records a precipitous drop in membership. There remained only 890 female members out of a total membership of 4,025. This was still a high proportion of the total membership, at 28%. The geographical spread of Blue Blouses was also reduced as only seventeen of the twenty-six counties in the Irish Free State were now reported as having Blue Blouse branches.\(^{23}\) As with the men, this drop in membership was most probably due to the organisational chaos following the September 1934 split, as well as the institution of a membership fee of one shilling at the end of 1935.

Although its membership numbers outstripped other contemporary women’s organisations, the Blue Blouses was never an independent women’s group. Throughout its existence, it remained organisationally subordinate to the men’s

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\(^{19}\) Anglo-Celt, 25 August 1934.


\(^{22}\) Heverin, The Irish Countrywomen's Association, pp 76-79.

\(^{23}\) League of Youth register, n.d., (in the possession of Mike Cronin, Boston College, Dublin).
section. Blue Blouse branches were composed of generally 20-30 members with their own leaders and vice-leaders who, in turn, were under the supervision of a district executive, overseeing a maximum of sixteen branches. Unlike the men, however, women could not advance past the district executive to sit on any of the county executives, which oversaw the districts in each specific county, or sit on the central council, which met in Dublin and was the central authority for the organisation. To help co-ordinate the activities of the women’s sections, a women’s director was appointed, but she did not sit on the central council or have any input into the overall direction of the movement. In a circular sent out to all branches soon after the women’s section was formed, Ned Cronin emphasised this organisational subordination. He wrote ‘It should be distinctly understood that the Ladies Branches will function under the direction of the Young Ireland Association and only those who are members of such will be permitted to wear our Uniform.’

Ernest Blythe also did not want these women to have an independent identity. Writing as Onlooker, he protested against calling the women’s section the Blue Blouses. He argued the title Blue Blouses would suggest that they were an independent group and thus require all official discourse to refer to the organisation as the Blueshirts and Blue Blouses. He wanted only the term Blueshirts to be used, which would then refer to both men and women.

The Blue Blouses were not unhappy with this arrangement and, in fact, rejected attempts to include them in the Blueshirt leadership. During the Blueshirt general meeting of August 1934, O’Duffy asked the Blue Blouse delegates if they wanted membership of the county executives or the central council. The delegates voted unanimously to maintain the status quo. It was reported in the party newspaper that, ‘One very clever woman delegate to whom I was talking explained perhaps the point of view of the meeting by saying that what she feared if higher women officers were appointed at present was that they might not be normal women but might be cranky and unduly self-assertive people of the suffragette type.’

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24 Fine Gael election handbook, 1934, (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers, P24/634); United Ireland, 10 November 1934.
26 Circular from Ned Cronin to all district and divisional commanders, 21 October 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
27 United Ireland, 21 September 1935.
28 United Ireland, 1 September 1934.
It is notoriously difficult to uncover personal information regarding individual women in the movement. Unfortunately the membership ledgers only provide aggregate numbers without specific details on individual members. Due to the paucity of other sources, it is, therefore, only possible to speculate as to these women’s social and economic backgrounds. As mentioned, historians have generally accepted that the male membership of the Blueshirts was primarily composed of the agricultural bourgeoisie suffering from the ongoing economic war with Great Britain.\(^2\)\(^9\) It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that many of the female supporters also came from this class. Sources refer to Blue Blouses owning cars in their own right, which would have been a great luxury in 1930s Ireland.\(^3\)\(^0\) In addition, middle class women would have had the leisure time to devote towards the meetings, social activities, and parading that occupied the majority of members’ time.

There are also indications that the female membership was composed of primarily young and single women. As with the men, the Blueshirt leadership sought to recruit young women in the ranks. Several of the former Blueshirts interviewed by Mike Cronin claimed that they primarily met young, single women in the membership.\(^3\)\(^1\) The party newspaper stated:

The women’s side of the League of Youth is called the Girls’ Section. This name was chosen because it was desired to emphasise the fact that while there is no age limit, membership should be confined to those who are young and active, and consequently certain of being in sympathy with the rising generation. It is not intended, of course, that units of the Girls’ Section should be confined to unmarried women. A member, for instance, of 25 who gets married is not hereby in any way disqualified.\(^3\)\(^2\)

**Blue Blouse politics**


\(^3\)\(^0\) Superintendent, Carlow, to the Garda Commissioner, 7 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/2); Superintendent, Killarney, to Chief Superintendent, Kerry, 10 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/326).

\(^3\)\(^1\) Interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991; interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991; interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991.

\(^3\)\(^2\) *United Ireland*, 20 January 1934.
Ascertaining the motivations for these women’s involvement in the organisation has also proved elusive. Those few historians that have addressed the Blue Blouses have disagreed as to these women’s motivation for joining. Mike Cronin has contended that the majority of Blue Blouses were only interested in the recreational side of membership: ‘The role of the Blue blouses in the 1930s was largely restricted to catering and activities in social events, and politics was not on their agenda.’ Fearghal McGarry has challenged this contention by arguing that these women were politicised to a certain extent due to their involvement in the public sphere through parading and wearing the uniform. But, since he was writing a biography of O’Duffy, he did not go into detail regarding Blue Blouse politics. Several former Blueshirts interviewed by Mike Cronin claimed that women primarily joined because of familial links with male members. Irish women commonly joined political organisations due to familial links with other members. Most prominent Blue Blouse leaders, such as Annie Blythe, Biddy Cronin and Mamie O’Neill, were the wives of Blueshirt leaders.

Nevertheless, without discounting the importance of family ties or social activity, I would argue that political ideology was integral to individual motivations in joining the organisation. The Blue Blouses was primarily a political organisation, and members espoused a variety of political beliefs. With few exceptions, however, it is only possible to recover these women’s ideals through their contributions to the party newspapers, United Ireland, The Blueshirt and The Nation. These served as the primary mediums by which members articulated their political identity but are not unproblematic sources. Most of the women submitting articles used pseudonyms, making it impossible to ascertain their true identities. It can, therefore, be contended that these writers were not in fact women, but men writing to propagate a certain discourse on the participation of women within the movement. However, as there is no evidence to support this contention, it is assumed here that the writers were female members of the organisation. It could also be contended that

33 Cronin, The Blueshirts and Irish politics, p. 194.
34 McGarry, Eoin O’Duffy, p. 250.
35 Interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991; interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991; interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991.
36 Cumann na mBan is a prime example, see Sheehan, ‘Cumann na mBan policies and activities’, pp 89-90.
the use of pseudonyms was meant to disguise the fact that the submissions were only by a few or even one person. This is also unsubstantiated and, although these submissions were thematically similar, the difference in writing styles indicates that different women were writing articles.

Another difficulty in uncovering Blue Blouse politics is the lack of major personalities around which to build an analysis; there was no equivalent to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington or Mary McSwiney within the organisation. Only one Blue Blouse, Senator Kathleen Browne, was in public office. The only time she took direct action of specific relation to the Blueshirt organisation was when she successfully challenged the exclusion order issued by the Fianna Fáil Minister for Defence Frank Aiken against spectators wearing the blue shirt during sessions of the Oireachtas. At the same time, though, this lack of prominent personalities is a benefit to this study since the views under analysis came from the rank and file and are, therefore, a more accurate reflection of general Blue Blouse political views.

The political participation of some of these women was a continuation of previous political activity. There is evidence that some Blue Blouses were active during the independence struggle with Great Britain. Kitty Reidy, Blue Blouse unit leader in Rathkeale County Limerick, had been a member of the West Limerick Brigade during the Anglo-Irish War. Miss Burke, secretary of the Loughmore branch, had also been an active member of Cumann na mBan during the conflict. Once in the Blue Blouses, these women’s politics were generally in line with pro-Treaty politics.

For more conservative, nationalist women, membership provided an opportunity to contest the republicanism of Fianna Fáil. The Blue Blouses in the Athlacca branch intended to unite all sections of the country under the Blueshirts and Fine Gael to save Ireland from the material and spiritual decline that was occurring while Fianna Fáil was in power. They wanted to return ‘the reins of government in the hands of those whose actions will be dictated by the counsels of rectitude and [who] will face fearlessly the sinister forces of chaos and anarchy.’ Senator Kathleen Browne used the organisation to support the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and

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37 Irish Independent, 18 May 1934.  
38 The Blueshirt, 19 August 1933.  
40 Address of welcome from the Athlacca ladies branch to Mrs. Annie Blythe, 6 May 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/2244).
propagate her anti-republicanism. She once declared ‘the idea that complete freedom and nationality cannot be achieved except through a Republic is the greatest political fraud ever perpetrated in this or any other country.’

Nonetheless, there were some Blue Blouses, especially those who left with O’Duffy following the 1934 split, who espoused more radical and republican views. Some were just as fervent in their anti-communism as the men: ‘Yes, we, under a true and steadfast Irish leader, are sweeping to a glorious victory for Faith and Fatherland, under the banner of St. Patrick, against communism and the tyranny of would-be dictators.’ Mary King, a frequent contributor to The Nation, believed corporatism was the means by which domestic objectives, such as maintaining the Gaelic language and supporting the Gaeltacht, could be achieved. Esther Meehan, another contributor, viewed corporatism as the means by which Irish political parties could be united and Ireland achieve complete political and economic independence from Great Britain. She also criticised those members who remained allied with Fine Gael for endangering the nation’s future by supporting Ireland’s membership in the British Commonwealth.

Irrespective of Treatyite politics, Blue Blouses advocated female political agency through a conservative discourse that was influenced by prevailing patriarchal attitudes towards Irish politics. Blue Blouses saw their involvement as important, but in a supportive rather than leading role. As one Blue Blouse wrote, ‘very few Blueshirt girls are themselves local electors, but they can well see that no local elector of their acquaintance is allowed to forget his or her responsibility.’ The women’s sections were credited with educating Irish political opinion and ‘bringing about a reawakening of political consciousness among the women of Ireland unprecedented in recent times.’

Although not charged with taking on leadership roles, Blue Blouses were encouraged to seek out specific ‘reforms of interest to women which might appeal to them, so that they may be prepared when the time comes to contribute their quota to

41 Mary McAuliffe, Senator Kathleen Browne, 1876-1943: patriot, politician and practical farmer (Roscrea, 2008), pp 106-108.
42 Irish Times, 12 April 1935.
43 United Ireland, 21 April 1934.
44 The Nation, 22 June, 13 July 1935.
45 The Nation, 29 June, 3 August 1935.
46 The Nation, 3 August 1935.
47 United Ireland, 16 June 1934.
48 United Ireland, 16 December 1933.
the shaping of the policies of Fine Gael, and thus ultimately guiding the destinies of
the nation.\textsuperscript{49} Several members wrote on issues specific to Irish women, such as the
role of education and employment in ameliorating women’s social and economic
position. As with their views on female politicisation, these writings were
conditioned by patriarchal considerations of women’s public role in inter-war Irish
society. For instance, one Blue Blouse quoted from an article in \textit{Irish Monthly}
entitled ‘The Place of Social Services in Education’ to argue for a specific form of
education for women:

\begin{quote}
In effect the womanly arts have been relegated to the background of incidentals,
while higher mathematics and languages figure among the ‘obligatories’. Since
nature ordained that a woman’s sphere is the home, it seems strange that ‘an up to
date’ educational system should not make a greater endeavour to assist women to
fulfil that calling.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

Education was not seen as a liberating means of opening up new careers or
opportunities, but rather as a means of helping women excel at their gender specific
duties.

One of the most frequent contributors to \textit{United Ireland}, writing under the
pseudonym Unit Leader, made this connection even more specific in her discussions
of the types of work to be given women:

\begin{quote}
I would say that a girl’s adoption of a career should be given every bit as much
attention as a boy’s, and that except in very rare circumstances she should not be
encouraged to take a job merely for the sake of the pay and to give her occupation.
It seems to me that the important thing underlying the choice of her occupation
should be that she would get benefit from it all her life long...At the same time it
would be well if a more natural attitude towards the ultimate job of home-building
which awaits most women were to influence the choice of girls’ occupations. If
instead of tapping typewriters, feeding machines and standing behind counters, girls
could, in the interval between school and marriage, follow pursuits in which such
things as housewifery, cooking, sewing and home-crafts, gardening, social work,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{United Ireland}, 19 January 1935.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{United Ireland}, 19 January 1934.
etc., were made interesting and gave them some return surely it would be much better.\textsuperscript{51}

At the same time though, Unit Leader claimed male workers and political leaders should not blame women for appropriating jobs from men since it was really the typewriter and new factories that were leading to shifts in employment practices. She also defended women’s right to work by arguing that wives were the primary wage earners in the Dublin slums.\textsuperscript{52} But these remarks were deemed too progressive for the general membership, and Unit Leader was forced to clarify them one week later: ‘I hope that I have made it clear that the plea for greater importance than ever to be attached to women’s occupations is made not from a selfish feminist point of view but for the sake of the welfare of the whole nation.’\textsuperscript{53}

More specific employment concerns were also addressed. One writer wanted study clubs to examine the appalling condition of women working in Irish factories.\textsuperscript{54} Several articles were written concerning the position of female domestic servants within Irish society. Considering 24.4\% of women gainfully employed worked in domestic service in Ireland in 1936, this was of particular interest to a significant section of employed women.\textsuperscript{55} Blue Blouses were intent on elevating the relative social status of female domestic workers in order to increase the value attributed to their labour. ‘In Blue Shirt circles domestic service is, at present, and without waiting for the reforms of the corporative system, regarded as a dignified occupation and the girls employed in it are respected as very valuable citizens.’\textsuperscript{56}

As these submissions demonstrate, the Blue Blouses sought to claim areas of discussion and authority within the constraints of the prevailing social and political culture. While they were not challenging male control of the movement’s overall political ideology, these women were demarcating areas of interest in which they presumed to have specific knowledge. They also argued for a valued and important place for Irish women in Ireland’s national progress. Rather than discussing the political or judicial status of women, Blue Blouses were focused on the material

\textsuperscript{51} United Ireland, 14 April 1934.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} United Ireland, 21 April 1934.
\textsuperscript{54} United Ireland, 30 June 1934.
\textsuperscript{56} United Ireland, 19 May 1934.
contributions women could make to Irish society, culture and economy, through their expertise in domestic industries and handicrafts. The Blue Blouses conceptualised these ideas as ‘practical patriotism’, for instance in the establishment of a communal class in Dublin to teach Blue Blouses how to sew:

The first ‘Social Sewing Class’...is a wonderful boon to girls living away from home and unable to find facilities for mending and remaking their clothes. But more than that, it signifies the practical patriotism of the women who initiated it and of those who support it, for an organisation that encourages the womanly arts is doing something really constructive towards the ideal of better homes and happier, more industrious people.57

Women were also instructed to use a portion of the family budget, brought in by the husband but dispensed by the wife, to buy only Irish products. They were encouraged to send out their Christmas cards written in Irish and ensure only Irish music was played in the home over the holidays.58 ‘The fostering of such hobbies on a large scale within the movement would do much to encourage a revival of the arts and crafts that were a distinguished feature of the national culture in by-gone times...If the Blueshirts are to be in the vanguard of the new Ireland they must now begin to establish a tradition of useful service, of constructive national work, and of serious purpose.59 It was through these means that the Blue Blouses were to contribute to Ireland’s national progress. ‘So now for a real earnest effort to encourage a nation-wide campaign of practical patriotism in the field of language, art, music, literature and industry. Forward, Blueshirt women, along this path to the brave new Ireland of to-morrow and its golden promise!’60

At no point, though, did they associate these ideas with feminism or female equality. Blue Blouses did not model their movement on modern progressive figures, but on an idealised image of Saint Brigid. ‘Her monasteries were the great models of home industry and self-sufficiency...What sorry figures the shrieking suffragettes, the hot gospellers—and the more modern revolutionary female warriors

57 United Ireland, 24 November 1934.
58 United Ireland, 15 December 1934.
59 United Ireland, 9 March 1935.
60 United Ireland, 15 December 1934.
cut beside this stately, dignified, queenly woman.'61 Separate spheres for men and women were considered axiomatic. ‘But [men’s] work lies primarily in the reconstruction of public and economic life and ours in influencing social life and habits...of course, it is a good and necessary thing for men and women to co-operate in both spheres of activity, but this need not hide the fact that primarily their work is best done on different lines.’62 Ernest Blythe gave a concise description of the women attending the Blueshirt Congress in August 1934 in United Ireland:

This is the first time in this country that women have been so represented. It may even be unique for the world...it is not a new thing for women to take part in public affairs, but usually they are exceptional women and quite unrepresentative of normal women. The great thing about the Blueshirt girls is that they are very typical and charming representatives of Irish womanhood...they are proud of their own way and it never occurs to them that the men’s way is more desirable than theirs. As one observer said afterwards, there is no suggestion of suffragettism among Blueshirt girls.63

There were also practical reasons for advocating such traditional gender views within Irish politics. By doing so, the Blue Blouses were able to operate without challenging the prevailing patriarchal political culture that continued to restrict Irish women’s engagement with the public sphere. As will be described in greater detail in the next chapter, the Blueshirt leadership was a direct product of this masculinised culture, and conceptualised women through their domestic role. During a speech at Skibbereen in February 1934, O’Duffy referred to women only through their relationship to men and function in the home: ‘But keep your hearts up, ladies, we will see that you get your tea as usual, and we menfolk will continue to enjoy the hospitality of the cup that cheers, made as only Irish mothers and wives can.’64 James Dillon expressed equally patriarchal sentiments. He advocated the creation of an allowance that would be paid by the state to women in order to encourage them to leave the workforce and remain at home. ‘If you choose not to work and prefer leisure and attending to domestic duties you will be entitled-every

61 United Ireland, 7 July 1934.
62 United Ireland, 1 April 1934.
63 United Ireland, 25 August 1934.
64 Southern Star, 3 February 1934.
woman in the state-to an allowance of 10s a week.\textsuperscript{65} He supported this measure because ‘instead of these young women being in work and the State paying doles to men out of work, would it not be better if inducements were offered to young girls not to enter these jobs, but to enjoy the ease to which they were entitled?’\textsuperscript{66} Ernest Blythe also contended that while the organisation ‘does not stand for the antiquated notion of closing every career by matrimony to women...neither does it stand for an economic system which would rule out the prospect of matrimony and of normal adequately provided family life from an unnecessarily large number of women.’\textsuperscript{67}

By articulating their political identity through the discourse of domesticity, the Blue Blouses were able to demarcate a specific role for themselves within the wider movement. It was not the first Irish women’s organisation to use the discourse of domesticity. As mentioned, the I.C.A. also used this discourse to articulate a particular role for women in Ireland. The Blue Blouses differed from the I.C.A. by articulating this discourse alongside political activity.

**Blue Blouse political activity**

There is now greater scholarly emphasis on historicising political activity, especially local political activity. Recent trends in political history focus on ‘the way in which the relationship between political language and practice and the wider society is constantly renegotiated.’\textsuperscript{68} Political activity, and the political culture in which it occurs, is now analysed alongside rhetoric and ideology. Most political historians are using this new analytical model for mainstream political parties and groups, but it is even more effective for those groups that did not generate significant written records of their motivations, ideals or beliefs. Scholars of subaltern groups have argued that it is possible to posit an external consciousness to these groups by examining their actual practices and activities.\textsuperscript{69} Applying these analytical paradigms to Blue Blouse political activity provides new insights into the manner in which Irish women engaged with the Blueshirt movement and Irish political culture.

\textsuperscript{65} *Irish Press*, 8 January 1935.
\textsuperscript{66} *United Ireland*, 26 January 1934.
\textsuperscript{67} *United Ireland*, 14 April 1934.
\textsuperscript{69} Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘A small history of subaltern studies’ in Henry Schwartz and Sangeeta Ray (eds), *A companion to postcolonial studies* (Massachusetts, 2000), pp 478-479.
Much Blue Blouse political activity reflected their acceptance of the constraints imposed on women by the inter-war Irish patriarchal political culture; their engagement with the public sphere reflected prevailing conceptualisations of female domesticity. Even though the majority of Blue Blouses were young and single, they were still viewed as potential mothers. They were frequently consulted for advice regarding the structure and activities of the Blueshirt youth wing. During the August 1934 Blueshirt Ard Fheis, the women units were consulted on who should be the national leader of the youth wing, while district directors were advised to consult with Blue Blouse branches about local leaders and activities.70

Due to the very fact of being women, the Blue Blouses were also put in charge of organising social events, canvassing political support and fundraising. Blue Blouses organised and catered almost all Blueshirt social functions, including dances, athletic competitions and outdoor excursions. The Blueshirt leadership explicitly linked the Blue Blouses to the social aspect of political activity: ‘The Executive should make a special effort to interest women in the social and recreative [sic] work of the Branch and to organise Women’s Committees in every parish, particularly in the towns. Women should be actively identified with the organisation of every social function, great or small.’71

Blue Blouses performed various duties during elections as well. Although they were delegated the tedious work of mailing out notices to prospective voters, they also took the lead in house to house canvassing. In particular, the last canvass, which definitively ascertained people’s preferences, was to be done by women.72 No reason was given for why women were particularly suited for this job, but it can be speculated that the Blueshirt leadership believed women would be more non-confrontational and persuasive than men. Women were also assigned as personating agents at the polling stations to stop people from voting more than once.73 The Blueshirt leadership claimed: ‘A woman is always most sincere and thorough, and when she believes in a cause, she is prepared to make any sacrifice to secure its success...as canvassers, personation agents, propagandists they cannot be beaten.

70 United Ireland, 17 November 1934.
71 United Ireland, 23 September 1933.
73 Meath Chronicle, 3 February 1934.
Accordingly, I say to everybody, get the women busy and watch the enthusiasm grow.\(^74\)

These women’s most important job was fundraising. Annie Blythe was president of the Farmers and Blueshirts Prisoner Fund with Biddy Cronin as treasurer. They raised funds to buy tobacco, books and food to supplement the prisoners’ diet.\(^75\) They also ensured that the prisoners retained the right to receive visitors.\(^76\) The most important fundraising effort for the Blue Blouses was the Victory Fund inaugurated at the conference of women’s units in August 1934. This was to be the sole fundraising effort for the entire Blueshirt organisation, and was to be managed exclusively by the Blue Blouses.\(^77\) All proceeds were to go only to the Blueshirt organisation rather than Fine Gael.\(^78\) Blueshirt leaders believed the success of the Victory Fund would be the organisation’s most outstanding achievement and help them reach electoral victory.\(^79\) Each branch was to raise at least £10 with the hope of achieving £12,000 in total by the time of the 1935 Ard Fheis. The women were to decide how to raise funds, such as through whist drives, dances, or collections at markets, fairs or outside church gates, without interference from the central council.\(^80\) Unfortunately for the organisation, though, the Victory Fund ended in animosity and chaos following the 1934 split, as the separate wings of the Blueshirts argued over ownership of the money.\(^81\) The women in the O’Duffy wing lost control over the fund after men’s units were brought in to help with the local fundraising initiatives.\(^82\) In the Cronin wing, Annie Blythe replaced O’Duffy as joint treasurer, but there were still difficulties in raising sufficient funds.\(^83\) By May 1935, Ernest Blythe recognised that the target was not going to be reached in the ensuing three months and the Victory Fund was not mentioned during the August Ard Fheis.\(^84\)

\(^74\) United Ireland, 16 June 1934.
\(^75\) Irish Independent, 24 October 1934.
\(^76\) United Ireland, 16 June 1934.
\(^77\) United Ireland, 16 June, 27 October 1934; The Blueshirt, 13 October 1934.
\(^78\) United Ireland, 16 June, 27 October, 1934.
\(^79\) Memorandum from Eoin O’Duffy and Ned Cronin to all leaders of the women’s units, 12 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
\(^80\) The Blueshirt, 13 October 1934.
\(^81\) The Blueshirt, 20 October 1934.
\(^82\) Circular from Thomas Gunning to each Blueshirt officer, 21 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
\(^83\) United Ireland, 29 September 1934.
\(^84\) United Ireland, 19 January 1934, 11 May 1935.
Autonomy and agency

Due to the gender-specific nature of these roles, there are interpretative issues in analysing their significance for Blue Blouse political agency. In her study of Hungarian dissidents, Susan Gal has argued that the dichotomy between public and private spheres can be replicated in the public sphere by confining women to gender specific duties. As such, even though they were engaged in the public sphere, by being restricted to certain functions and under male management, Blue Blouses were not truly politically involved on their own terms. They were only engaging through their domestic role. However, such a view contains an inherent, if implicit, dismissal of these roles. Although gender specific, they were of crucial importance to the Blueshirt movement. Control over social activities ensured that the politicisation of Blueshirt entertainment was under Blue Blouse control. Social events sustained members’ interest in the local branches, while also facilitating recruitment drives. In addition, the entrance fees generally charged at these events augmented Blueshirt funds. As the main fundraisers for the organisation, Blue Blouses were responsible for bringing in money without which the organisation could not have functioned. Moreover, more so than the men, these women represented the group and its policies to the non-initiated on a day-to-day basis in every Irish locality. Blueshirt social events were attended by non-members starved of entertainment, especially in rural Ireland, while canvassing and fund-raising required personal contact and interaction with people in the wider community. The Blueshirt leadership did not underestimate the importance of the Blue Blouses for the group’s public relations. Almost immediately following O’Duffy’s official invitation to women to join the movement, the central council alerted the men’s divisions that their success relied upon the formation of women’s units. These were deemed ‘of infinite value for the growth of our organisation. In no area should a men’s unit exist without a corresponding women’s unit.’

Women in other European shirted movements also performed similar duties, leading historians of these movements to disagree as to whether this political

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85 Susan Gal, ‘The semiotics of the public/private distinction’ in Joan Scott and Debra Keates (eds), Going public: feminism and the shifting boundaries of the private sphere (Chicago, 2004), pp 263-269.

86 Circular from Ned Cronin to all county and district directors, 13 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
participation was fundamentally liberating for women or not. Several scholars have argued that shirted women were primarily objects not subjects because they were not involved in the decision making process and were assigned duties by a male leadership.\textsuperscript{87} Other historians have challenged this contention by arguing that women were not passive recipients of dictates from a male leadership but exercised agency in their actions.\textsuperscript{88} Although they were assigned gender-specific duties from a male leadership, they demarcated spheres of autonomy through their exclusive control of these duties.\textsuperscript{89} By working through their own means within these spheres of influence, shirted women were presenting an image of female self-reliance.\textsuperscript{90} It has also been contended that the deference to male authority displayed by these shirted women was necessary in the patriarchal societies of inter-war Europe, and did not necessarily reflect individual acquiescence to male control.\textsuperscript{91}

These latter historians have formulated their arguments by examining women's actual performance of these duties in the local units, since it was here that women demonstrated individual independence. This was the same with the Blue Blouses. As a collective, they were intent on maintaining local autonomy. As mentioned, the Blue Blouses accepted their continued exclusion from the county executives and central council. But they defended their right to maintain authority over individual branches. In 1934, they successfully defeated attempts by the Blueshirt leadership to place local Blue Blouse units under the direct authority of male captains, arguing that to do so would create confusion and impede recruitment.\textsuperscript{92} Their contention that control by male leaders would impede recruitment is particularly notable because this makes it apparent that women were joining the Blue Blouses due to female leadership of local branches and their concomitant independence.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., pp 125-126.  
\textsuperscript{92} Heads of policy and resolutions for the Fine Gael Ard Fheis, February 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/628).
Blue Blouses were able to use this local autonomy to initiate actions in defiance of central authority. It was through local initiatives that Blue Blouses were able to assert their own design for their uniforms against the wishes of Blueshirt leaders. The central council had initially wanted women to wear a one-piece blue dress as their uniform, one that evoked a more rustic and traditional conceptualisation of women. However, local Blue Blouse branches designed and manufactured an alternate uniform consisting of a blue blouse and black skirt that proved much more popular. By October 1933, the Blueshirt leadership was forced to concede defeat and declared the alternate uniform as standard.93 Considering the importance placed upon the uniform by shirted parties, this was a considerable victory for these women. As will be shown in greater detail in chapter four, the blue shirt was a major symbol of contention between the organisation and its opponents. Republicans would frequently attack Blueshirts and Blue Blouses in an effort to strip them of their uniforms, which were then burned.94 The Fianna Fáil government also focused on the shirt as a means of suppressing the organisation. This effort culminated in the failed Wearing of Uniform Bill. By asserting control over the nature of the uniform, therefore, these women presented an image of independence, and asserted control over their membership in the organisation in the face of republican assaults and government repression.95

The autonomy of local Blue Blouses as exercised through these duties should not, however, be overemphasised. The controversy over the Victory Fund demonstrates how this local autonomy could be revoked at will by the central leadership. It was through participation in Blueshirt public processions and athletics that the Blue Blouses presented the strongest challenge to Irish patriarchy.

Control of public space

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93 United Ireland, 30 September, 25 November 1933.
94 Several of the more notable and violent instances can be found in Irish Press, 30 April 1934; Garda report of outrage, 1 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/96); Inspector report to the Garda Commissioner, 10 August 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/97); Garda report of outrage, 22 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/100); Garda report of outrage, 4 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/178).
95 For instance, Blue Blouses defied police instructions to remove the blue shirt during demonstrations in Donegal in December 1933 and defended their right to wear the shirt during parliamentary sessions, Irish Independent, 9 December 1933, 18 May 1934.
The power of mass demonstrations has been well established. Through involvement in such public events, participants gain a sense of being able to engage and affect the hegemonic order. In her examination of metropolitan Irish feminists, Carol Coulter has argued that women were challenging their exclusion from the public sphere through mass demonstrations. The occupation of public space was a liberating moment and presented an image of femininity in contra-distinction to that constructed by prevailing patriarchal assumptions.

Blue Blouse participation in Blueshirt public demonstrations was an implicit challenge to notions of masculine control of public space, which were hegemonic in inter-war Irish political culture. Their challenge was even greater than that of Coulter’s feminists, considering the Blue Blouses marched in greater numbers and in more regions than just Dublin. For instance, at a rally in Letterkenny, County Donegal, on 31 May 1934, 300 Blue Blouses and 1,500 Blueshirts preceded the politicians’ entry into the city. 300 Blue Blouses attended the funeral for Hugh O'Reilly in Cork on the same day that another 500 marched during a Fine Gael meeting in Wexford. 500 Blue Blouses marched in Ballinrobe, County Mayo, in May 1934, while 900 attended the monster meeting in Newcastlewest, County Limerick, in June 1934. A remarkable 1,000 Blue Blouses marched alongside 2,500 Blueshirts during the mass rally in Skibbereen on 2 February 1934. For national events, such as commemorations, even more Blue Blouses could be assembled. On 2 September 1934, 3,000 Blue Blouses marched at Beal-na-Blath in memory of Michael Collins.

By publicly marching in military formation and uniform, the Blue Blouses were presenting an image of politically mobilised and active participants rather than an image of Irish women based on domesticity. This was reinforced by their participation in the violence that often accompanied Blueshirt public processions. Blue Blouses did not shirk from marching alongside men even though they were also attacked. During a parade to Newlands Cross in Clondalkin on 10 June 1934, the

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96 Bell, *Ritual theory, ritual practice*, pp 208-211.
97 Carol Coulter, ‘Ireland’s metropolitan feminists and colonial women’ in *Éire-Ireland*, 35 (Fall/Winter 2000), pp 53-56.
98 *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1934.
99 *Anglo-Celt*, 6 January 1934.
100 *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1934; Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to the Garda Commissioner, 26 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/103).
101 *Southern Star*, 3 February 1934.
102 *Connaught Tribune*, 8 September 1934; *United Ireland*, 8 September 1934.
gardaí had to restrain four I.R.A. men from physically assaulting a Blue Blouse.\textsuperscript{103} During a day of flag selling in Dublin on 21 October 1934, anti-Blueshirt mobs chased several Blue Blouses into a chemist shop, seriously injuring one.\textsuperscript{104} On a couple of occasions shots were fired at Blue Blouses.\textsuperscript{105} Violence also occurred between Blue Blouses and Cumann na mBan women. During political rallies in Drogheda and Bandon in May and June 1934, Cumann na mBan women attempted to steal the Blue Blouses’ berets leading to several scuffles.\textsuperscript{106}

Blue Blouse willingness to participate in these public events despite the threat of violence demonstrates their strong adherence to the movement and its goals. This is particularly notable considering Blue Blouses could often rely on little help during these assaults outside of the ranks of their own organisation. For example, it was reported in the \textit{United Ireland} newspaper:

On Sunday evening, 20\textsuperscript{th}, a girl Blueshirt was attacked at Ballinalack by a young man. She bore marks of a severe beating, especially on her arms and legs, and had her blue shirt practically torn off her. The cowardly attack might have been more serious but that another girl Blueshirt went to her aid. Some people standing by, instead of stopping the assault, advocated it by their jeering and cheering.\textsuperscript{107}

Admittedly this was the party’s own newspaper so this incident may have been exaggerated or even fabricated for propaganda purposes, but the Garda also displayed a callous disregard towards these women’s safety. After two Blue Blouses were assaulted by women from the Women’s Prisoners’ Defence League, a republican organisation, on 29 April 1934, the reporting Garda claimed they were deserving of little sympathy because they should not have been in the area at that time.\textsuperscript{108} On a separate occasion, a Blue Blouse had her coat torn off by a man trying to remove her uniform. The investigating officer dismissed this incident as ‘very

\textsuperscript{103} Garda report to Superintendent, Bray, 25 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/66).
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Irish Independent}, 22 October 1934.
\textsuperscript{105} Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Donegal, 5 October 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/55); \textit{United Irishman}, 17 November 1934.
\textsuperscript{106} Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 7 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/20); \textit{Irish Times}, 28 May 1934.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{United Ireland}, 9 June 1934.
\textsuperscript{108} Chief Superintendent, Dublin Metropolitan Division, to the Garda Commissioner, 30 April 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/298).
rough horseplay’, and justified the assault by claiming that the woman had ‘incurred a certain amount of odium recently by wearing a blue blouse in public.’

In the contentious political climate of the period, Blue Blouses were on occasion forced to use violence to defend their interests. At a rally in Cork City on 21 June 1934, Blue Blouses used their shawls to launch rocks at jeering onlookers. Women also chased off attackers during an assault on the Blueshirt headquarters in Waterford in April 1934. Two of the most dramatic incidents of Blue Blouse violence occurred in County Cork in the summer of 1935. On 12 July, two hundred Blue Blouses held a rally protesting the seizure and sale of cattle in respect of non-payment of land annuities in Fermoy. As the protest escalated, the Blue Blouses attempted to force their way into the auction yard leading to a physical confrontation with the gardai protecting the yard. Several missiles were thrown injuring one Blue Blouse and two Garda officers. Eight women were arrested but released once their names and addresses had been recorded. They walked out of the police headquarters singing the Blueshirt anthem and giving the fascist salute. Only three days later more Blue Blouses were involved in a riot in Macroom. Large numbers of Blueshirts and Blue Blouses from the O’Duffy faction had come into town with the intention of marching to protest another seizure and sale of farm stock. Homeowners had been asked to close their doors in solidarity with the protesters but at least six had refused. The women began shouting ‘close the door’ and, when that did not work, physically tried to force the offending doors shut. After the gardai, who were monitoring the protest, deterred them from this course of action, the women sparked a brief riot with bystanders by throwing rocks and gravel at the windows of the other houses. The road then had to be cordoned off so these women could not continue to the house of Daniel Corkery, the local Fianna Fáil T.D., whose door was not closed. Three women were arrested, charged with intimidation, fined and released on their own recognisance. What is most notable is that on this

109 Garda report to the Garda Commissioner, 28 April 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/301).
110 Cork Examiner, 22 June 1934.
111 Irish Independent, 30 April 1934; Munster Express, 4 May 1934.
112 List of outrages committed by the Blueshirt organisation for July 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/483); United Ireland, 20 July 1935.
occasion it was only the women who engaged in violence, while the Blueshirt men remained passively disengaged.113

Applying an external consciousness to these two incidents of violence in Cork illustrates the particular focus of this political activity. Both incidents were regionally concentrated and focused on the seizure and sale of cattle due to the economic war. The Blue Blouse challenge of patriarchal control of space and violence resulted from materialist issues. The violence in Macroom was also due to homeowners not showing communal solidarity with the Blue Blouse demonstration. These women were acting as the communal defenders of material interests.

Participation in Blueshirt athletics offered the Blue Blouses another avenue to challenge male dominance of public space. In many societies athletics have long been associated with masculinity. Even within Blueshirt discourse, athletics were often seen as fundamental to the development of male bodies to achieve the ‘100% man’.114 Yet, at the same time, the organisation encouraged women to participate equally, albeit separately: ‘The girls will find that, apart from the health viewpoint, these exercises will improve the carriage and give them a feeling of self-confidence and well being.’115 Some women argued that Blue Blouses would not be able to participate in the same events as men: ‘Though they do not intend to enter for the more arduous and manly forms of sport, such as sprinting, jumping, weight-throwing, etc., some of the livelier spirits will be sure to enter with zest into the “ladies race” and the various comic events, which always prove so popular, such as the egg and spoon, the sack race, etc.’.116 This patronising attitude was not reflected in the actual athletic participation of Blue Blouses. Camogie was one of the more popular sports and highly contested matches often led to inter-branch rivalries.117 Cycling was also popular and particularly encouraged for female participants.118 Blue Blouses even participated in the overtly masculinised sport of boxing.119

113 Superintendent, Macroom, to the Garda Commissioner, 16 July 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/187).
114 United Ireland, 28 April 1934.
115 United Ireland, 27 October 1934.
116 United Ireland, 9 March 1934.
118 United Ireland, 3 March, 9 June 1934; Blueshirt athletic programme reprinted in Southern Star, 19 May 1934.
119 United Ireland, 18 May 1935.
Moreover, the organisation was not reticent about publicising these women’s athletic participation. The results of Blue Blouse athletic competitions were frequently published in several local and party newspapers.\textsuperscript{120}

This was done despite ecclesiastical opposition to female participation in athletics. During this period, Reverend Charles McQuaid, the President of Blackrock College and future Archbishop of Dublin, issued a strong protest against the inclusion of women in the National Athletic and Cycling Association (N.A.C.A.). He disapproved of women participating in athletics since these had been the preserve of men, claiming such participation was un-Catholic and un-Irish.\textsuperscript{121} Accordingly, the N.A.C.A. banned women from participating in its events, until 1936 when it again reversed its position and allowed women to participate. Consequently, from 1933-1936, the Blue Blouses was the only organisation offering Irish women the opportunity to participate in athletics and cycling.\textsuperscript{122} Even if they were participating separately, women were, therefore, participating equally and publicly in every sport regardless of gender biases or ecclesiastical disapproval.

On the face of it, therefore, the challenge these women were presenting to masculine control of Irish public space appears dramatic. Without personal accounts from individual members it is impossible to assess the impact such involvement in Blueshirt public events, concomitant violence and athletics had on individual attitudes towards inter-war Irish political culture. This is not, however, an impediment to ascertaining the impact these challenges to masculine control of public sphere had on the wider Irish society’s reception to this female political participation. Coulter’s contention as to the liberating influence of mass female mobilisation needs to take into account the reaction of the public. The use of fascist aesthetics, the street battles with republicans and the frequent inflammatory public pronouncements of O’Duffy, had given the Blueshirts a significant, if notorious, public profile. Considering the numbers of women involved and the geographical spread of their branches it is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the Blue Blouses would also have had a noteworthy public profile but this was decidedly not the case.

\textsuperscript{120} Southern Star, 9 June 1934; United Ireland, 18 May 1935.
\textsuperscript{121} Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, ‘Neither feminist nor flapper: the ecclesiastical construction of the ideal Irish woman’ in Mary O’Dowd and Sabine Wichert (eds), Chattel, servant or citizen: women’s status in church, state, and society (Belfast, 1995), pp 174-175.
\textsuperscript{122} The G.A.A. still permitted women to participate in team sports such as camogie.
The image of Blue Blouses marching in military uniform and formation elicited responses mainly from local newspapers. The expressive rhetoric used in these newspapers to describe these women’s public appearances makes it clear that the Blue Blouses did have a local impact. Nationally, however, the press generally reported on the Blue Blouses only if violence had occurred. For example, all three main daily newspapers, the *Irish Independent*, the *Irish Times*, and the *Irish Press*, reported the incident in Macroom. Yet there was no indignation at these women being involved in this or other violence. After a riot during a Blueshirt rally in County Mayo, an *Irish Independent* reporter praised the women for their courage in remaining steadfast during the violence. In addition, despite the organisation’s overt masculine identity, the Blueshirt press also praised rather than criticised these incidents of female violence. Following a dramatic incident of communal violence in Kilkenny, one party supporter wrote in the *United Ireland* newspaper: ‘the stand made by the girls was reminiscent of the heroic women of Limerick. I saw one thug squealing in the hands of a hefty lass who belaboured him without mercy. The girls acquitted themselves with the greatest credit.’ Another *United Ireland* writer reported with barely concealed glee that during the conflict with Cumann na mBan in Drogheda, the Blue Blouses were quick to recover their berets by vigorously shaking the offending women until they gave them back. Furthermore, there was no ecclesiastical disapproval towards the movement’s inclusion of women in athletics or for publicising their achievements. McQuaid was quick to criticise the N.A.C.A. but made no public condemnation of the Blue Blouses. Their contemporaries, therefore, did not view Blue Blouse participation in these public events, associated violence or athletics as a significant challenge to the prevailing patriarchal political culture.

**Conclusion**

123 See particularly, *Southern Star*, 2 September, 7 October 1933; *Nenagh Guardian*, 9 June 1934; *Anglo-Celt*, 14 July 1934.
125 *Irish Independent*, 2 July 1934.
126 *United Ireland*, 24 February 1934.
127 *United Ireland*, 7 July 1934.
128 *United Ireland*, 2 June 1934.
How then can women’s participation in the Blue Blouses be interpreted? Were they challenging gender stereotypes by their political activity, public demonstrations and violence? Or by remaining in gender specific roles assigned to them by the male leadership were they conforming to the patriarchal culture of the period? The dichotomy between Blue Blouse conservative discourse and political activity presents difficulties in analysing the organisation from a feminist analytical paradigm. While maintaining local autonomy in their individual branches, they remained organisationally subordinate and had no control on the overall direction of the movement. They exerted independence through their control of certain activities, but these remained gender specific and allocated to them by the male leadership. They challenged the political marginalisation of Irish women by marching publicly in political rallies and parades, but dismissed feminism and advocated that women remain politically active only in separate roles.

These women’s antipathy towards feminism militated against the Blue Blouses’ potential challenge to male control of the public sphere through violence. Blue Blouse violence resulted from localised purposes and was not intended to break down gendered paradigms; it was used in defence of specific issues that had to do with their material prosperity. By questioning the material deprivation their families faced, women often challenge the politics of power and the symbolic divide between public and private.\(^{129}\) The two previously mentioned Blue Blouse riots provide one example. They were directed against the seizure and sale of cattle but neither was intended to challenge the larger structure of patriarchal power dynamics within Ireland.

Considering the Blue Blouses never intended their political activity to lead to gender equality, it would be ahistorical to analyse it through such a paradigm. Rather Blue Blouse politics need to be considered on their own terms and in their own historic moment. This does not negate the use of feminist scholarship in analysing the movement’s gender constructions, as long as it is not used according to a narrative focused on female liberation.

Joan Scott, one of the foremost theoreticians of women’s history, has examined how gender has influenced hierarchies of power situated within their historic specificity. She has argued historians need to analyse the variable meanings

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given to gender, the political processes contributing to the formation of gender
to gender, the political processes contributing to the formation of gender identities, the malleability of gender categories and how gender constructs are positioned, not necessarily consistently, in opposition.\textsuperscript{130} Such an approach necessarily emphasises the subordination of women within the Blueshirt movement. Men were viewed as active members formulating and propagating the group’s political direction, while women were restricted to supporting this initiative without actively contributing to policy or ideology. Blue Blouse control of certain roles was based on a patriarchal assessment of their political value and nature. The Blue Blouses’ use of the discourse of domesticity was, therefore, a direct result of the gendered nature of their political participation.

Judith Butler, another feminist scholar, has analysed the actual performance of gender roles as conditioned by social, political and cultural determinants. She believes it is through the performance of these roles that identities are formed. ‘In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well.’\textsuperscript{131} Such an argument would suggest that Blue Blouse identity and participation in the movement was more dialogical than suggested by Scott. Rather than it being culturally determined perspectives on gender that resulted in these women being segregated into domestic occupations, it was their participation in these functions that influenced Blue Blouse and Blueshirt ideas of gender. Discourses of domesticity and ‘practical patriotism’ were corollaries of the activities these women were performing for the organisation. Yet, an assessment of these women’s ‘performance’ of marching in military formation, engaging in public violence and participating in masculine sports, complicates Butler’s theory on the performance of identity. Blue Blouses were using public space to challenge their political marginalisation, while at the same time implicitly disputing established gender norms that were seeking to construct an image of women based on the home.

Patriarchy, whether political, social or economical, should not be constructed as a totalising power subordinating all instances of female agency. Michel Foucault has argued that power is most often diffuse and multidirectional in nature, rather than totalising. Individuals can resist and transform power relations, thus ceasing to

\textsuperscript{130} Joan Scott, \textit{Gender and the politics of history} (New York, 1988), pp 10-11.

Women, such as Senator Browne, Mary King and Esther Meehan, transcended their marginalisation by publicly espousing articulate political opinions on the pressing issues of the day. Even those women who employed the discourse of domesticity in their public writings did so in an effort to establish areas of authority for women, not only in the Blueshirt movement but also in wider Irish society and politics. The Blue Blouses' rejection of representation on the central council did not prevent them from exercising power and delineating places of importance for women in the movement. Despite being relegated to gender specific activities by a patriarchal structure, the Blue Blouses were able to use these activities to demarcate spaces of agency and autonomy; they remained the primary agents representing the Blueshirt movement and its goals to the wider Irish public. In addition, they were asserting power through public space by their participation in public processions and athletics.

The Blue Blouses provided an opportunity for Irish women to engage with the public sphere in ways that might not normally be possible within patriarchal power dynamics. Yet at no point did they try to alter these dynamics. Blue Blouse political activity demonstrated the opportunities available to Irish women to engage in the public sphere. To minimise Blue Blouse activism due to its subordination to the male leadership or to castigate Blue Blouses for not advocating more progressive feminist goals would deny these women any agency in their actions; female politicisation does not need to be associated with the pursuit of gender equality.

This is only part of the story, however. As Joan Scott has indicated, gender constructs are positioned relative to one another. Notions of masculinity within Irish political culture and the Blueshirt movement also conditioned Blue Blouse political participation. The next chapter will explore the constructed nature of Blueshirt masculinity and its implications for not only women's political participation but also that of men.

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132 Foucault, 'Interview with Michel Foucault', p. 294.
Chapter Three: 'They were the men who licked the IRA': Blueshirt masculine identity, 1932-1936

In early December 1932, during an A.C.A. general meeting, Ned Cronin spoke out against the ongoing assaults on Cumann na nGaedheal public meetings:

The representatives of the people, and the people themselves, accepted the treaty by majorities [sic]. We defended the right of the people to accept and work the Treaty. We are now called traitors...And to-day we are engaged in a similar task-namely, defending the right of the inoffensive people to attend public meetings, to listen to opinions on questions of great National importance, to think for themselves and to decide, as free men, what they are going to do about things...I would ask them to consider whether it is manly on their part so to taunt brother Irishmen who have served their country...We are men, not white-livered curs, accommodating enough to cower before the antics of every Wrap-the-Green-Flag-round-me-type-of warrior who, perhaps, was wetting his cradle in the days and nights when many of our members were fighting the BRITISH OCCUPATION...Entrusting to the guidance of God, and inspired by the unconquerable spirit of Michael Collins, we hope to continue to be of service to our people.1

This was not just an exercise in robust rhetoric; Cronin was presenting, however unconsciously, an encapsulation of Blueshirt masculinity. It was constructed in opposition to the actions of anti-Treaty republicans; it was militaristic in identity; it was indelibly bound up with Irish patriotism; and it used specific icons from Ireland’s nationalist past as models of male virtues. This constructed sense of manliness did not just pervade Blueshirt discourse but had implications for the group’s political activities, organisational hierarchy and internal power dynamics. Consequently, a gendered analysis of the movement is integral to understanding the social relations within the organisation, and between the organisation and the wider Irish society. It also facilitates a micro-historical examination of notions of masculinity that were hegemonic within inter-war Irish political culture

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1 Printout of Ned Cronin’s speech, 6 December 1932 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/17).
Blueshirt men understood their participation in the movement through a culturally determined perspective on the public role of men. In part, this conceptualisation was influenced by the violence that had accompanied Irish independence, which gave a martial character to conceptions of Irish citizenship and public participation that favoured men. This cultural association between militarism, manliness and citizenship directly influenced Blueshirt masculinity, but within this broad conceptualisation they were able to delineate a distinctive idea of Irish male identity. Blueshirt militarism was based on the defence of state institutions and individual rights, such as freedom of speech, which the group then contrasted with the anti-state militarism of the anti-Treaty republican opposition. As such, Blueshirt masculinity was conceptualised in direct opposition to a constructed conceptualisation of I.R.A. masculinity. Nonetheless, by perpetuating the link between martial values and masculinity, the Blueshirts reiterated that men were the natural leaders of the movement, and through the movement, the Irish nation.

This concept was to be reinforced after women joined the Blueshirts, as the group re-imagined and reconstituted itself as an inclusive national movement. This organisational transition provided another conceptualised ideal, this time of Irish femininity, against which the Blueshirts juxtaposed their vision of masculinity. The Blueshirts’ sense of themselves as men, constructed in opposition to these two ideals, was pervasively influential on the organisation’s abstract notions of collective identity, and had tangible repercussions on the group’s gendered hierarchies of authority.

Yet, as with the Blue Blouses, there are striking discrepancies between the Blueshirts’ discursive construction of masculinity and the organisation’s material actions. Much of the prevailing scholarship on masculinity contends that discursively based identity constructions need to be studied alongside the actual performance of these identities. Consequently, this chapter takes a holistic approach, and will focus not only on the movement’s discursive constructions, but also the organisation’s physical manifestations of masculinity. Public rhetoric and literary works will be analysed alongside the group’s organisational structure, conflicts with their opponents and athletics in order to address the disparity between discourse and activity. Understanding the implications of Blueshirt masculinity also reveals the specific nature and power of hegemonic masculinity within Irish political culture.
Hegemonic masculinity

The term hegemonic masculinity describes the process by which male virtues and characteristics become normative and even common sense within a collective, national or otherwise. In patriarchal societies, such as post-independence Ireland, men generally monopolise positions of economic and political power. Accordingly, in such societies, men require a culturally determined code of manliness to ensure widespread voluntary acceptance of appropriate behaviour. This code of manliness, which can also be considered an ideology of male power, is most often expressed through the discursive and material subjugation of women and marginal masculinities. The collective is then organised in accordance with these characteristics through the division of labour, systems of control and the mobilisation of pleasure and consent.

Scholars have identified the exclusionary and associative societies of men, like the Blueshirts, as being integral to this process. John Horne has even argued that public life and civil society have been structured by this associative lifestyle. Male associative life incorporates the representation of identities, material social relations and experiences that are integral to the formation of masculine identity. Furthermore, these associations facilitated the integration of cultural ideas of masculinity with institutional power. For even though this male associative life excluded women and marginal men, these associations were formed primarily for their impact on the material well being of members and not their exclusionary potential. The synthesis of cultural ideas of masculinity with institutional power

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2 John Tosh, ‘Hegemonic masculinity and the history of gender’ in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds), Masculinities in politics and war: gendering modern history (Manchester, 2004), pp 41-43.
3 David Gilmore, Manhood in the making: cultural concepts of masculinity (New Haven, 1990), p. 221.
5 Connell, Masculinities, pp 70-73.
7 Tosh, ‘Hegemonic masculinities’, pp 52-56.
8 Connell, Masculinities, p. 77.
ensured the continued pre-eminent social position of men, and made masculine values hegemonic within a given society.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite the presumed universality of this construction of hegemonic masculinity, it is still necessary to situate individual constructions of manliness within their historic and cultural specificity.\textsuperscript{11} As such, even though Blueshirt masculinity reflected many of these universal attributes, it was still a direct product of 1930s Irish and European developments. Culturally, the movement emerged at a time when Irish politics were still influenced by the militarisation of society that had occurred during the revolutionary period, 1913-1923. Joe Cleary has argued that British imperialism emasculated the colonised male, which then produced an insecure and aggressive assertion of masculinity within Irish nationalist movements.\textsuperscript{12} In the immediate post-independence narrative of Irish independence, women’s roles were marginalised and the warrior qualities of men in the struggle against Great Britain were emphasised.\textsuperscript{13} This had important repercussions on Irish political culture because it led to the prioritisation of martial values in relation to political participation, which in turn resulted in a pervasive male-centric notion of Irish citizenship.\textsuperscript{14} As an associative society initially formed only for male army veterans, Blueshirt political activity and concomitant masculine identity reflected this association between masculinity, militarism, and citizenship.

**Blueshirt masculinity: militarism and citizenship**

Throughout the Blueshirts’ many organisational permutations, there remained an enduring association between members’ notions of masculinity and defence of the Free State. As described in chapter one, the A.C.A. was formed to ensure the continuation of social and economic preference for ex-National Army veterans. After assuming the presidency in August 1932, T. F. O’Higgins took the organisation in a new direction. Veterans’ past sacrifices were now explicitly

\textsuperscript{10}Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{13}Sarah Benton, ‘Women disarmed: the militarization of politics in Ireland, 1913-1923’ in Feminist Review, 50 (Summer, 1995), pp 149-150.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 157.
connected to the A.C.A.'s future role in Irish society. 'The A.C.A. was founded by men who brought order out of anarchy and security out of terror during the Civil War...The A.C.A. will, in every emergency, defend the rule of law, the freedom of the individual, the democratic constitution of the State and the legitimate rights of property as well as the just claims of the workers.'\(^{15}\) Before establishing a formal constitution, O'Higgins proposed six primary A.C.A. principles to govern the organisation. Four of them were concerned with defending free speech, protecting fellow members from assault, maintaining law and order, and supporting state institutions, such as the judiciary and the Garda Síochána.\(^{16}\) As indicated, the National Guard and Young Ireland Association constitutions did not place as much emphasis on these objectives as the movement sought to define a more explicit political identity. Nevertheless, these ideas remained ever present. They re-emerged in the Blueshirts' final constitution in 1935, one half of whose primary objectives were concerned with maintaining social order, protecting national interests and developing a widespread consciousness of citizenship rights.\(^{17}\)

The Blueshirt organisation's focus on the defence of the state was also a reaction to the assaults on Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael public meetings by anti-Treaty republicans. As will be described in chapter five, a few of these assaults did lead to major violence. For the most part, however, they were mainly street brawls resulting in few injuries and minor property damage. Yet, to the Blueshirt membership, these incidents of violence were not merely limited conflicts between opposing political groups; they were considered assaults on citizenship rights and the very nature of the Irish state. All of the former members interviewed by Mike Cronin claimed that defence of free speech was the primary reason they joined the group. Several of them took great pride in the group's resistance to anti-Treaty republicans. They contended that it was the Blueshirts who had preserved free speech and prevented the intimidation of opposing political views in Ireland during this period.\(^{18}\) A few of them also equated preserving these rights with preserving the

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\(^{16}\) *Irish Times*, 12 August 1932. The other two points of their programme sought to restore the preference given to veterans for civil service jobs and opposition to communism.

\(^{17}\) League of Youth constitution, 1935 (U.C.D.A., Richard Mulcahy papers P7e/45).

\(^{18}\) Interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991; interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 Dec. 1991; interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 Dec. 1991; interview with Timothy O'Connell by Mike Cronin, Buttevant, 7 December 1991; interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991.
state. Fine Gael leaders believed likewise. James Dillon, although never a member of the Blueshirts, claimed that the organisation was performing a service to the entire Irish nation: 'The question of whether this country is going to show itself capable of self-government or not is largely, if not entirely, in [Blueshirt] hands.\textsuperscript{20}

Inevitably, these somewhat overstated contestations resulted in an explicitly militaristic rhetoric, as evinced by the movement's attempts to delineate a collective identity distinct from other political movements:

But its idealism and tolerance are not the only things that differentiate it from a political party. It differs to methods. Established to meet a dastardly attack it relies not on persuasion but on combat. It is organised for combat and it wants members who will not shrink from combat if the sight of preparedness fails to fight off attack.\textsuperscript{21}

Blueshirt militarism, however, was depicted as purely defensive, and members were never to initiate a fight. Violence was only to be used in order to protect themselves, free speech or the state. This did not mean Blueshirts were not encouraged to defend themselves and their rights vigorously. 'The A.C.A. is a peaceloving [sic] and law-abiding association but it is also a fighting one when attacked. Its members are not too gentlemanly to dirty their hands on an opponent.'\textsuperscript{22} During a particularly vicious street battle in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, in April 1934, Ned Cronin, Blueshirt general secretary and deputy director-general, was recorded as exclaiming from the platform, 'If they dare to infringe on your rights, for every blow they give, give them back ten.'\textsuperscript{23} Although cautioned never to give offence or carry a lethal weapon, members were encouraged to carry truncheons or batons if they were going into areas where there was the possibility of being attacked.\textsuperscript{24} District judges on occasion even sanctioned the carrying of weapons by Blueshirts in certain areas.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{19} Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991; interview with Dennis Reynolds by Mike Cronin, Coote Hill, 28 May 1991; interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Irish Independent}, 9 July 1934.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{United Irishman}, 10 June 1933.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{United Irishman}, 24 June 1933.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Irish Press}, 30 April 1934.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{United Irishman}, 8 July 1933.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Irish Independent}, 16 June 1934.
Despite being defensive in nature, this violence was still viewed in masculine terms. O’Duffy instructed Blueshirts ‘Don’t look for a fight; don’t be aggressive, but if hooligans attempt to interfere with you defend yourselves as become brave manly Irishmen, and if the necessity arises administer a proper and effective chastisement.’

By resisting attacks on public meetings, the Blueshirts considered themselves patriots. O’Duffy explicitly associated these communal struggles, viewed as ‘battles’, with Blueshirt patriotism: ‘They took the hard knocks (and there were plenty of them) and they bore the heat and burden of battle like the good patriots they were.’ The Blueshirt national anthem, The March of Youth, which was to be sung as the Blueshirts marched in public, also encapsulated this amalgam of battle and patriotism:

*The March of Youth*

*Air: O’Donnell Abu*

Bugles are sounding o’er mountain and valley,
pealing a message to man and to maid.

Bugles are speaking, they’re sounding the Rally.
Rise, Youth of Erin, and lead the crusade.
Chaste as the midnight skies,
Deathless our Standard flies, etched with the Sign of our historied Faith.
Guard we that Standard well,
sternly each foe repel.

Up, Youth of Erin; the Blueshirts Abu!

Ireland! we’re speeding from mountain and valley.
eager to serve thee, befall us what may.

Ireland! we’re hosting, we answer the Rally:
shoulder to shoulder we march to the fray.

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26 Eoin O’Duffy, *The function of the Blueshirts in a corporative state* (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/296) Italics mine.

27 *Irish Press*, 30 April 1934.
Comrades in duty high,
Service our battlecry,
seeking no guerdon, bespeaking no praise.
Daring the open fight,
braving the fiends of night.
On, Youth of Erin; the Blueshirts Abu!²⁸

Using the air of O’Donnell Abu allowed the Blueshirts to situate their anthem within an established Irish cultural and nationalist tradition, but with the anti-Treaty republicans, rather than the English, as opponents. The patriotic appeal for others to join the Blueshirts in their ‘national’ struggle was, in this version, directed towards defending the state and citizenship rights. As this song was to be sung while the Blueshirts were marching in public, which frequently led to violence, the poetic appeal to battle effectively matched their physical actions in a compelling synthesis of discursive representation and material reality.

Masculine icons

Blueshirt patriotism, and associated masculinity, was also bound up in pro-Treaty nationalism. Blueshirt men equated themselves with those nationalists who had fought the British in the Anglo-Irish war and the I.R.A. in the Civil War.²⁹ ‘Thank God, we have in our organisation the best Irishmen of our generation, men who proved their worth against the Black and Tans and the wreckers of 1922.’³⁰ The movement’s identification of this strain of Irish nationalism with masculine values is best illustrated by its commemoration of certain figures from Ireland’s nationalist struggle against Great Britain.

The Blueshirts used specific historical figures as icons to symbolise the interrelationship between citizenship, militarism and masculinity. The organisation commemorated military patriots from Ireland’s nationalist past in order to effectively encapsulate the values and identities male members were meant to emulate. The primary figures commemorated by the Blueshirts were the state builders Michael

²⁹ *Southern Star*, 27 April 1935.
³⁰ *Irish Independent*, 31 October 1932.
Collins, Arthur Griffith and Kevin O’Higgins. The next chapter will explore in
greater detail a number of aspects relating to Blueshirt commemoration of these
three men; this section solely focuses on how these men were used by the Blueshirts
to encapsulate specific masculine attributes. As with other masculine political
movements, these patriots, considered the equivalent of secular saints, were
presented as representing heroism, valour, self-sacrifice and martyrdom.31
Blueshirts were called upon to imitate these men’s virtues, patriotism and courage in
order to preserve and perfect what they had built. Through membership in the
Blueshirts and participation in Blueshirt activities, members were to consider
themselves ‘as one in labour and spirit’ with these men.32

In commemorating Griffith, Collins and O’Higgins, the Blueshirts
emphasised the non-military aspects of their legacy. Of the three, only Collins was a
military man, but even in his case the Blueshirts would emphasise his political skills
alongside his military prowess. For instance, it was claimed, ‘He had no rival in
history as a military leader or as a statesman.’33 The emphasis on the political skills
of these men may appear counterintuitive considering the militaristic identity of
Blueshirt masculinity, but it served specific purposes for the organisation. During
the August 1932 commemoration for the three men at Leinster House, Richard
Mulcahy commended these men’s work in establishing the state. While Collins’
participation in the Anglo-Irish war was mentioned, the emphasis was on his and
Griffith’s statesmanship in signing the Treaty, which ended the conflict. Mulcahy
then criticised the efforts by militant republicans in restricting the freedoms that had
been enshrined in the Treaty established by these men.34 During the annual Beal-na-
Blath commemorations for Collins, the Blueshirts would regularly emphasise how
Collins had fashioned the state by focusing on the future rather than harking back to
the past, unlike the anti-Treaty republicans.35 By emphasising the constructive
aspects to these men’s legacy, the Blueshirts were distinguishing themselves from
the I.R.A., which commemorated only military figures and was identified with
violence and destruction.

31 Ibid.
32 Irish Independent, 9 September 1935.
33 Ibid.
34 Irish Independent, 22 August 1932.
35 Irish Independent, 12 August 1935.
Although several former members remembered the importance Blueshirt leaders placed on association with all three men, unquestionably Michael Collins was the primary figure for emulation. Individual units inserted Collins' name into their official titles, such as the Michael Collins Blueshirt Band. Profiles of Collins were published in the party newspaper. It was even claimed that there was a picture or photo of Collins in every branch. The following poem aptly describes Collins' inspiration for the movement in messianic terms:

_Hymn of the Blue Shirts_

Blue Shirts, vict'ry waits on daring:
Ruthless like the tempest sweep.
Think of Collins, mighty doer—
Oh! that God would break his sleep!
Ireland needs another Collins…
March! and know that, come the hour,
God will raise from out amongst us
One whom men will follow far!

Chorus (saluting)

Right hand high, beloved Comrades!
Stern in combat may we be—
Pledged to guard the Faith of Patrick,
Sworn to stand for Liberty!40

Both Ned Cronin and Eoin O'Duffy would, on occasion, present themselves as personifying the return of Michael Collins in a similarly messianic fashion. Before a parade at Cootehill in June 1934, Cronin was introduced as a second

36 Interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991; interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991; interview with Timothy O'Connell by Mike Cronin, Buttevant, 7 December 1991; interview with Walter Tery by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991; interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991.
37 Munster Express, 5 October 1934.
38 United Ireland, 27 January 1934.
39 Interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991.
Michael Collins. O’Duffy jealously guarded the use of Collins’s memory and frequently used the quote attributed to Collins before he was killed, ‘When I am gone you will have O’Duffy’, to reinforce his political credentials and authority as the successor to Collins’ mission and work.

Having leaders that represent overt masculine virtues is important to political movements, especially during times of crisis. Note the attribution of values to O’Duffy and Cronin in these two poems:

**O’Duffy**

*The Chief of the “National Guard”*

O’Duffy the patriot! O’Duffy the brave!
O’Duffy the hero! The aged and the youth,
The sage, and the scholar; the gay and the grave,
To you raise the hand in a loyal salute.
O’Duffy, true men ‘neath your banner shall throng,
And yet shall the pen of historian and bard
Recount the brave deeds, both in story and song,
Of the Leader and Chief of the “National Guard”
L.O.
10 August, 1933.

**Cronin, Boys, Hurrah!**

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41 *Anglo-Celt*, 7 July 1934.
42 *Meath Chronicle*, 20 April 1935; *Southern Star*, 17 August 1935.
He’s a hundred per cent, loyal,
   He’s an Irishman and true,
Sure some day he’ll have all Ireland
   'Neath St. Patrick’s flag of Blue.
But until our ideal’s won, boys,
   We must back him night and day,
So here’s to Cronin, brave Ned Cronin,
   Cronin, Boys, Hurrah!\(^{45}\)

Both poems connect the leaders to the movement’s national goals in realising Ireland’s destiny. As with the idealisation of Griffith, Collins and O’Higgins, both poems describe the men as courageous and patriotic. The first one more explicitly emphasises O’Duffy’s authority as the ‘Leader and Chief of the National Guard’, while the second stresses Cronin’s loyalty to the movement following O’Duffy’s departure. In addition, neither poem is explicitly militaristic. As with the commemoration of the state builders, the Blueshirts were emphasising the non-military aspect of these men’s work in contradistinction to the I.R.A. This was an integral part of Blueshirt attempts in depicting republican masculinity as a marginal form of masculinity within post-independent Irish political culture.

**Blueshirt discursive constructions of I.R.A. masculinity**

A collective sense of manliness is often counterposed against alternate masculinities.\(^{46}\) Anti-Treaty republicans provided this counterpoint for the Blueshirts who attacked I.R.A. masculinity through a variety of methods. Not only were the previously mentioned historical icons used, but the Blueshirts also publicly questioned republican manhood along three broad themes.

Firstly, Blueshirts dismissed their opponents as miscreant lawbreakers representing the fringe elements of legitimate society. It was asserted that the I.R.A. could not claim to speak for the aspirations of the entire Irish people because it was a composite of the enterprising and progressive elements as well as the thriftless, lazy and law hating segments. ‘It is the organized few of irresponsible and youthful

\(^{45}\) *United Ireland*, 13 October 1934.

have-nots who attacked in brutal fashion isolated blue shirts and unarmed and unsuspecting respectable citizens attending a social dance!' Blueshirts believed they had stood up to the cowardly terrorism of men who had never done anything ‘manly’. At times, though, as if describing their opponents’ actions as terrorism appeared to give them too much credit, Blueshirts would use the term ‘corner boy’ to disparage and marginalise them. The term corner boy has an established pedigree in Irish discourse, and generally refers to unemployed youths who spend their free time disrupting Irish society with petty crimes. The Blueshirts adapted the use of this term for a specific purpose. According to O’Duffy, the Blueshirts had ‘lined up against...the blackguards and corner boys who on every possible occasion shouted “Up the Republic.”’ Blueshirt leaders questioned their opponents’ courage and complained that the ‘corner boys’ were only able to disrupt their meetings because they had the gardai protecting them.

Secondly, the Blueshirts questioned their opponents’ courage, which, in such a militarised political culture, was particularly effective. Alluding to the Civil War, Ernest Blythe, the prominent Blueshirt leader and ideologue, once claimed ‘The Army Comrades’ Association contained men ten times better than the I.R.A. They were the men who licked the I.R.A. until they squealed before, and, if necessary, they would lick them until they squealed again...Nobody need fear them, because if things ever got hot, the I.R.A. would be under a bed.’ Another A.C.A. leader claimed that ‘These bullies were the very fellows who would be under the bed, like they were in the Black-and-Tan days, if the rattle of machine-gun fire were heard.

Thirdly, the Blueshirts disparaged republicans’ social standing in Ireland. Class is often intermixed with gender in such rhetoric, and the Blueshirts were no exception. The organisation included in its ranks large farmers, lawyers and other professionals. These were people who saw themselves as the leaders and respectable members of Irish society. One former member remembered the kind of people he associated with at Blueshirt functions: ‘If you were going to a dance, a Blueshirt dance, you knew you were going to meet people like yourself. People with the same

47 The Blue Flag, 26 August 1933.
48 Anglo-Celt, 5 May 1934.
49 Munster Express, 29 March 1935.
50 Irish Independent, 18 June 1934; Anglo-Celt, 7 July 1934.
51 Connaught Sentinel, 30 August 1932.
52 Irish Independent, 3 September 1932.
53 Connell, Masculinities, pp 75-76.
outlook... a responsible outlook. And people, to put it crudely, who were not brought up on free beef.\textsuperscript{54} Ned Cronin also claimed that the hooligans who were yelling ‘Up Dev’ were doing so only to get free milk the next day.\textsuperscript{55} After one of their many conflicts in Mallow, County Cork, Blueshirts yelled: ‘Mallow is the property of the Blueshirts tonight. Where are the Free Beefers?’\textsuperscript{56}

Blueshirt opponents, therefore, were being discursively marginalised as dangerous miscreants, delinquent corner boys, cowards or free loading paupers. Considering masculine identity is often constructed in an oppositional framework that identifies men more by what they are not rather than what they are, this discursive construction was used to establish that the Blueshirts were law-abiding and respectable members of Irish society.\textsuperscript{57} The Blueshirts stood ‘for good citizenship, not for the rule of the gun-bully or the malefactor.’\textsuperscript{58} During a political rally in April 1934, O’Duffy claimed Blueshirts would not disrupt railway lines because they were respectable and decent.\textsuperscript{59} ‘They have not fired into dance halls; they have not bombed women and children; they have not made any attempt at mass murder by the derailing of trains. They have kept within the law.’\textsuperscript{60} This usage of negative connotations was also apparent in the description of what type of member they wanted in the Blueshirts. O’Duffy claimed they would not accept those youth that indulged in drink, did not uphold the Christian faith, were not respectable to their parents and had ‘the bad tongue’. In all their actions they were to uphold the organisation’s honour and would not accept the looter or robber in the group.\textsuperscript{61}

Former members remembered the Blueshirt organisation and leadership being composed of ‘the best men in the country’.\textsuperscript{62} Jerry Ryan asserted that any man who broke the law would be expelled from the organisation.\textsuperscript{63} As will be described in greater detail in chapter five, not all Blueshirt members were respectable law-abiding citizens. Nonetheless, this construction was a fundamental component of Blueshirt discursive identity.

\textsuperscript{54} Interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{55} Anglo-Celt, 5 May 1934.
\textsuperscript{56} Sunday Independent, 17 November 1935.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., pp 56-57.
\textsuperscript{58} United Irishman, 7 January 1933.
\textsuperscript{59} Irish Independent, 9 April 1934.
\textsuperscript{60} Anglo-Celt, 28 April 1934.
\textsuperscript{61} Meath Chronicle, 2 June 1934.
\textsuperscript{62} Interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{63} United Irishman, 7 January 1933.
The Blueshirt construction of masculinity was significant in how it challenged certain hegemonic attitudes towards manliness during this period. Firstly, Blueshirts were implicitly disputing the predominant ideology of masculinity espoused by many continental shirted movements. Fascism promoted images of masculinity that glorified irrationality and the unrestrained violence of the frontline soldier.\(^\text{64}\) Blueshirt masculinity by contrast was rational, respectable and based on the restrained and defensive violence in support of citizenship rights and the state. Secondly, these men challenged predominant images of masculinity within Ireland. The Blueshirts were attempting to reorient Irish masculinity away from being based on the prevalent image of the Irish patriotic fighter derived from the anti-state violence and conspiratorial nature of the I.R.A. and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.).\(^\text{65}\) Blueshirt violence was open and intended to support state institutions, public peace and individual rights. However, Blueshirt masculinity still reflected certain aspects of Irish hegemonic masculinity. By associating militarism with masculinity the organisation kept their construction of manliness firmly rooted within Irish political culture. This necessitated the organisational, conceptual and discursive subjugation of the Blueshirt female members.

**Blueshirt masculinity and the Blue Blouses**

It was not only against the alternate masculinity of the anti-Treaty republicans that Blueshirts sought to define themselves as men. With the admission of women in the Blue Blouses, Blueshirts also constructed their image of manliness in contradistinction to an idealised image of Irish femininity. This opposition of gendered constructs structured the social relations between the male and female sections in a rigid hierarchy. From the outset women were only able to join the movement in a subordinate position. Whereas men were classified as ‘Active members’, women could only join as ‘Associate members’ whose duties were, ‘To assist and support the National Guard in all its work, to defend its policy, to strengthen its finances, to get it recruits and to secure the return of its candidates in

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Local Government and Parliamentary elections. As such, women were confined to supporting the work of Blueshirt men; they were not to take the initiative or have leading roles within the movement.

As has also been mentioned, however, the women themselves did not challenge this organisational subordination. Part of the reason for this acquiescence was due to the ability of Blueshirt men to make normative the view that men were the natural leaders of the movement. They accomplished this by discursively and materially denying women access to the military ethos that was crucial to prevailing conceptions of Irish political participation.

Blueshirt political discourse continually reiterated that men were the natural leaders of the movement and, through the movement, Irish society. Before the 1934 local elections, Fine Gael and Blueshirt leaders naturally assumed that electoral candidates would be male: 'While we want to retain on our Councils the good services of men of experience, men who steered the ship creditably through troubled waters, we want in addition a flavouring of new blood-blue-blood; young men of grit and determination who will fearlessly carry out the policy of the National Executive of United Ireland.' Furthermore, in their economic programme, men were put forward as the standard citizen. 'All Irishmen, not merely in their capacity as citizens, but also in their capacity as businessmen, labourers, farmers and professional men, must be brought to co-operate with each other under conditions of equity and mutual fair play, and to build up the economic life of the nation.'

The Blueshirts were not unique in this regard as generally Irish political movements were pervasively patriarchal. As previously mentioned, successive governments’ legislation restricted women’s access to the public sphere, thus explicitly reinforcing that it was a male preserve. The Blueshirts were noteworthy, however, by the methods through which they achieved this gendered inequality. Through its representational iconography, the Blueshirts denied women access to the group’s militarised identity and employed an idealised construction of female dependency to reinforce their position as protectors.

66 Provisional constitution for the National Guard, July 1933 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/659).
67 Anglo-Celt, 28 April 1934.
It has been contended that symbolic constructions are integral to the establishment of hierarchical power relations between the genders. Blueshirt men used several symbolic constructions to reinforce the organisation’s gendered hierarchy. Reflecting the militarised collective identity of the group, the Blueshirts called the male leaders of local branches Captains and Vice-Captains. By contrast, female leaders were not given military titles and were called Leaders and Vice-Leaders. By denying the Blue Blouses military titles, the organisation was asserting that they were not a part of the violent struggle against anti-Treaty republicans, which was so vital to Blueshirt constructions of masculinity. This representational distinction was also apparent in the use of the blue shirt. Although women were permitted to wear the uniform, the blue shirt, as seen in this poem, was conceptualised as a masculine prerogative:

Who Fears to Wear his Shirt of Blue?

Who fears to wear his shirt of blue?
Who cloaks that shirt with shame?
Although they say its colour’s banned
We’ll wear it just the same.
No coward knave, or recreant slave
Is asked to put it on,
But true men, like you men,
Till Ireland’s fight is won.

And if our martyred dead who sleep
Beneath our country’s soil,
Could rise again and take their place
In Ireland’s cause to toil;
Would they not stand amid that band
Of loyal men and true,
Who march beneath our colours grand

70 League of Youth scheme of organisation (U.C.D.A., Richard Mulcahy papers P7e/45).
And wear their shirts of Blue?

And when youth's dream is over, boys,
And we are old and grey,
We'll teach our sons the road to go
In Erin's cause always,
We'll urge them on, and bid them don
For Freedom's sake anew!
To strive like men as we have done
And wear their shirts of Blue!71

Through the use of such phrases as 'wear his shirt of blue' and 'true men, like you men' the poem demonstrates how the uniform was viewed in essentially masculine terms. It was also tied to the Blueshirts' militaristic identity through claims that 'no coward knave or recreant slave' would wear it and references to 'our martyred dead'. The ballad also links wearing the shirt with the national cause and duty to the state. As such, it was succinctly associating the blue shirt with all of the components of Blueshirt masculinity deriving from their public struggles with republicans.

Blueshirt leaders also explicitly connected the blue shirt to masculinity. The United Ireland newspaper stated that the blue shirt 'has become the recognised symbol of manly patriotism and unselfish service to Ireland.'72 During a rally in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, in December 1933, in a moment of public theatre, O'Duffy revealed he was wearing a blue shirt on stage despite the prohibitions of the watching gardai. While doing so he claimed, 'Any man not prepared to wear a Blue Shirt is unworthy of being an Irishman.'73 The Blueshirts were not the only European shirted party to link the uniform with masculinity. Italian women were initially barred from wearing the black shirt because it was associated with virile masculinity.74

72 United Ireland, 23 September 1933. Italics mine.
73 Statement of B. Meehan, 13 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/732).
74 Wilson, 'Italy', pp 17-18.
The corollary of this symbolic association between masculinity and militarism was that Blueshirt men viewed women as dependents, needing their protection from assault. Blueshirts impinged republican masculinity for attacking women. 'Even young girls have been beaten by men who have forgotten their manhood.'75 The Blueshirt press lamented the lack of chivalry in these 'new republicans', and criticised the I.R.A. and communists for attacking cars with women inside.76 By contrast, Blueshirts were presented as willing to suffer excessive violence from women without retaliating:

One Blueshirt in particular, a big husky fellow, took his admiration. He was standing against a wall opposite my informant’s vantage point when a farridan of the Cumann na mBan commenced to kick and scratch him, using the most filthy language and shrieking like a she-devil. The Blueshirt, said my informant, tried to keep her at arm’s length and, in spite of the violence of her attack, made no effort to use counter-violence. (Both my informant and I agreed that this was carrying chivalry a bit too far!)77

Blueshirt athletics

Considering the extent to which Blueshirt masculinity was connected to the physical defence of citizenship rights and of women, the training of fit individuals was essential to Blueshirt constructions of manliness. Throughout its existence, athletics remained an important part of Blueshirt social activities, and the Blueshirt Athletics Association (B.A.A.) was formed on 21 June 1934. Its organisational structure mirrored that of the larger organisation, with a central athletic body in Dublin, county executives, district executives and individual clubs where the majority of activity would occur. Athletic events were to be restricted to members, but it was envisioned that the participation of the estimated 1,400 Blueshirt branches across Ireland would give an overall impetus to athletic participation.78 The B.A.A. covered a wide spectrum of activities:

75 Irish Independent, 19 June 1934.
76 Irish Independent, 19 June 1934; The Blueshirt, 12 August 1933.
77 United Ireland, 2 June 1934.
78 Irish Independent, 23 June 1934.
The new Association will cater for: hurling, football, handball, boxing, gymnastics, athletics, field and track; cycling, cross-country running, tug-of-war, swimming, rowing, clay bird shooting, bowling, golf, tennis, badminton, basketball, fishing, equitation, and will be responsible for the organisation of feiseanna, aerideachta, ceilidhthe, concerts, dances, whist drives, debates, lectures, camera clubs, picnics, excursions to places of historic and scenic interest... The aim of the new organisation is to develop a love for manly outdoor sport and indoor recreation among the Blueshirts themselves.  

Although they wanted to work in conjunction with other sporting clubs and did not want to rival the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.), it was recognised that due to the G.A.A.'s partisan politics Blueshirt members might be forced to form their own branches. In certain areas of the country, the Blueshirts infiltrated rival branches of athletic associations for their own purposes. For instance, Blueshirts took over the organisation of the National Athletic and Cycling Association in Bunninadden, County Sligo.

Blueshirt athletics were associated with the movement’s national goals, such as the public defence of free speech. They were to be performed in the ‘interest of health and character, and for the purpose of inculcating discipline and to ensure proper deportment in public.’ As this defence was viewed as a male preserve, athletics were most often discursively associated with the development of male bodies.

The Blueshirts were similar in this regard to many fascist movements that concentrated on developing the ideal-type, virile and disciplined, fascist man through athletics. Fearghal McGarry has argued that Eoin O’Duffy incorporated many of these views from continental fascist movements in his advocacy of Blueshirt athletics. At the same time though, O’Duffy operated within an established Irish athletic tradition that linked individual and national moral reclamation to the

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79 United Ireland, 30 June 1934. Italics mine.
80 United Ireland, 12 May 1934.
81 Chief Superintendent, Sligo, to the Garda Commissioner, 14 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/101).
84 McGarry, Eoin O’Duffy, pp 251-252.
physical development of men. The G.A.A. took the lead in this effort. Part of the G.A.A.'s mission was to revitalise the nation after the national trauma of the Great Famine through athletics, specifically male athletics as female sports, such as camogie, were marginalised.

Blueshirt discourse also primarily associated athletics with men. Blueshirts were intent on developing the 100% man according to a four-part classification of male body types:

First: The well set-up individual who appreciates the value of a fit body and takes good care of it. Second: The weak and under-developed man with flabby muscles, stooped head and shoulders, flat chest and relaxed prominent abdomen. This is the type we generally see in our cities to-day. Many of them plod along on a plane of 40 per cent or 50 per cent efficiency of health, while it is well with their grasp to be on a 70 per cent or 80 per cent plane. Third: The thin, nervous individual, often mentally endowed and ambitious, but lacking in physical stamina. This man expects his body to last. Can it? The answer is an emphatic negative; he is like a small frail boat equipped with a high-powered engine; the engine wears itself out and shakes the hull to pieces because there is not enough weight or strength in the boat to give stability and endurance. Fourth: The familiar fat, overfed, often jolly and "Is eumaliom" individual; he loves a good dinner, loathes physical exertion and usually pays the penalty for his over-indulgence and neglect by inefficiency and a short life.

As is apparent, this article displays a definite preoccupation with the male body. This preoccupation continued with a series of articles detailing the exercises to achieve the perfect masculine form.

Blueshirt masculinity, therefore, was discursively constructed through various means. It was positioned in opposition to the marginal masculinity of the anti-Treaty republicans as well as the idealised femininity of the Blue Blouses. It was based on physical contestation over citizenship rights, which led to an explicit connection between militarism, masculinity and citizenship. It viewed athletics as

86 Patrick F. McDevitt, ‘Muscular Catholicism: nationalism, masculinity and Gaelic team sports, 1884-1916’ in Gender and History, 9 (August 1997), pp 266-274.
87 United Ireland, 28 April 1934.
88 United Ireland, 19, 26 May, 2 June 1934.
the means of developing male bodies necessary to survive such contestations. Yet, what were the material repercussions of such discursively based systems of thought?

**Blueshirt masculinity in reality**

Scott Fabius Kiesling has argued that it is expressly through language that men assume archetypical roles, construct their identities and then have the power to modify individual action. In such a conceptualisation, Blueshirt rhetoric would provide sufficient evidence to analyses of the group’s masculine identity. Yet such a theory appears to postulate masculinity in a vacuum without reference to social relations or activity. David Gutterman has argued that there are other factors than discourse alone that determine one’s masculinity. Gutterman emphasises the performance of identity within a regulatory semiotic and material operation. Blueshirt masculinity, therefore, needs to be understood in reference not only to the militaristic and patriotic rhetoric of the leadership and members, but also to the performance of this masculinity through the Blueshirts’ material actions, such as the physical defence of citizenship rights and of Blue Blouses.

Blueshirt public meetings were not just discursively constructed as battles; members approached them as military confrontations. Blueshirt political rallies were often organised in anticipation of a physical struggle and members would position themselves in military formation around the platform or stage and at key entrances to public spaces, as in Kilmallock in October 1932 and Eyre Square in Galway City in February 1934. The position of members congregated around the stage also demonstrated the perceived masculine nature of this struggle. Children and women were placed closer to the stage with the men surrounding them on the outside ready to lead a charge against their opponents. In certain cases, the Blueshirts would initiate conflict in order to protect women from assault. In June 1934 in Clondalkin, County Dublin, a group of Blueshirts attacked a mob of opponents that had assaulted

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91 Ibid.
92 *Irish Independent*, 10 October 1932; Chief Superintendent, Galway, to the Garda Commissioner, 24 February 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
93 *Irish Independent*, 30 April 1934.
a Blue Blouse.94 A brawl in Tynagh, County Galway in July 1934 was also sparked after a Blue Blouse was tripped during a political meeting.95

Individual Blueshirt members took pride in these battles, as is apparent in the accounts by former members recorded by Mike Cronin. A former Blueshirt recounted to Cronin a story of forcing their opponents and the Broy Harriers back into their barracks with only batons as weapons.96 Another one recounted, laughing, how he and some fellow Blueshirts had chased their opponents away from a meeting and dealt with them in a ‘brisk manner’.97 The Blueshirt leadership recognised the publicity value of these clashes and published accounts of Blueshirts opposing republican violence in the party newspapers, emphasising how these conflicts involved Blueshirt victories against overwhelming odds. In December 1933, a story was published describing how one Blueshirt fought off thirty opponents.98 Six months later, another article carried the headline ‘Twenty Blueshirts Rout Fianna Fáil Mob of Three Hundred’. This occurred when the Blueshirts were returning from an event and found themselves under assault at the railway station in Ceanannus Mor. It was reported that ‘In this, the first clash between the Blueshirts and the mob in Ceanannus Mor, the boys in blue taught their opponents a very useful lesson and in a way too that is most effective when dealing with the thick-sculled.’99 Two months later another article described how six Blueshirts fought off sixty hurlers in Tullamore.100 These stories were all published in the party newspaper so it is possible they were fabricated for publicity purposes, but they do indicate the collective identity the organisation wanted to project.

At the same time though, many Blueshirt actions did not correspond to the high ideals of Blueshirt rhetoric. Members were not above attacking en masse lone republicans. In Dublin in May 1934, groups of Blueshirts had organised themselves into gangs patrolling the city at night looking for solitary I.R.A. men to attack.101 Twenty Blueshirts attacked three opponents as they returned from a commemoration
Blueshirts, seeking to inflict violence on their opponents, started several conflicts. The Garda Commissioner was unequivocal about who was to blame for the riot that occurred on Saint Patrick’s day 1935 in Kilmallock: ‘The general disorder created at Kilmallock on this occasion was brought about altogether by the indiscipline, aggressiveness, and disgraceful conduct of the Blueshirts who were obviously bent on wrecking the town.’ Blueshirt members also frequently contravened the law during the anti-annuities campaign.

The discursive construction of female members as removed from the militaristic identity was also not entirely effective. While the uniform was conceived as a masculine prerogative, Blue Blouses wore their blouses and skirts with pride and had even designed them themselves. In fact, during the previously mentioned Ballyshannon rally, more Blue Blouses than Blueshirts were publicly wearing the uniform. Senator Browne also took successful action against the Minister for Defence, Frank Aiken, after he tried to prevent spectators from wearing the blue shirt during Oireachtas proceedings. Moreover, as has been demonstrated, women were frequent participants in public violence and Blueshirt athletics. How can this divergence between rhetoric and reality be reconciled?

Conclusion

The answer to this question lies in understanding the processes by which the Blueshirts made their ideology of male power hegemonic through the organisation. Almost immediately after its formation, the Blueshirts prioritised the defence of citizenship rights, such as freedom of speech, as integral to the organisation’s collective identity. As the defence of these rights was discursively and materially constructed in militaristic terms, the Blueshirts ensured that their collective identity would be indelibly linked to masculine virtues, which would then be extended throughout the group. This militaristic identity was also culturally specific, since it conformed to the continuing militarisation of Irish politics following independence. Internal consent and control was then maintained by the ensuing emphasis on this

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102 Superintendent, Mallow, to the Garda Commissioner, 29 March 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/563).
103 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 19 March 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/374).
104 Irish Independent, 9 December 1933.
105 Irish Independent, 18 May 1934.
militaristic struggle and concomitant marginalisation of their opponents. The corollary of this process was the subordination of Blueshirt female members. Due to the prioritisation given to martial values, men were deemed the natural leaders of the movement and women were subsequently segregated into gender specific roles. This was given institutional power through the rigid organisational hierarchy. Masculine power was firmly entrenched in the movement and was not threatened by incidents of female initiative, which occurred only on the local level. Men continued to be normalised as the natural leaders of the movement and Irish society. The discrepancies between Blueshirt discourse and material actions were not fundamental enough to challenge masculine hegemony, and women continued to be viewed as auxiliary to the movement and reliant upon male leadership. This is not intended to disregard those instances of Blue Blouse autonomy described in the previous chapter but to illustrate why they only occurred at the local level.

Blueshirt notions of manliness, reflecting as they did hegemonic notions of masculinity, determined the organisation’s leadership structure and political ideology. While it was predicated upon the conflict with the anti-Treaty republicans, it was also a direct product of Irish masculinity. Understanding Blueshirt masculinity, therefore, provides a micro-historical analysis of the cultural processes influencing Irish masculinity in the immediate post-independence period. As the Blueshirts demonstrated masculine power through the movement’s symbols, representational iconography and public processions, understanding this process also illustrates the power of symbols and rituals within the organisation and the wider Irish political culture.
Chapter Four: ‘A Blue Shirt is as much a provocation in Mallow as an Orange Lilly is in Cavan’: Blueshirt political aesthetics and rituals

At 10 pm on Sunday 24 June 1934, 500 Blueshirts and 90 Blue Blouses, resplendent in full uniform, congregated in the centre of Tipperary town. The crowd assembled in military formation and proceeded to march, in orderly step, a half mile outside of town to the Bohercrow bridge where they met Eoin O’Duffy, Director General of the League of Youth and President of Fine Gael. O’Duffy then led the procession, still in military formation, back into town. Accompanied by the Cashel Blueshirt band, the Blueshirts paraded down the main street, which was lined with both supporters and opponents filling the air with cheers and catcalls. The procession returned to the centre of town where the memorial to Charles Kickham, member of the abortive 1848 Young Ireland uprising and later Fenian movement, was situated. O’Duffy took the stage next to the memorial and proceeded to rail against Fianna Fáil policies while the assembled crowd gave him the upraised arm salute in encouragement. At the same time, an opposition crowd, numbering several thousand, amassed nearby, separated from the Blueshirts by only a thin cordon of gardai. As the meeting progressed the opposition crowd’s attitude became more hostile, and the catcalls and shouts degenerated into petty violence. As stones and bottles were thrown at them, the Blueshirts attempted to break ranks from the platform and reach the opposition but were prevented from doing so by the gardai. The situation escalated into a minor riot leaving several houses damaged and a few gardai and Blueshirts injured before the police were able to restore order with a baton charge. The opposition crowd dispersed and the Blueshirts concluded their meeting as best they could before returning to their own homes.1

This parade, political rally and subsequent riot succinctly encapsulated the localised significance of Blueshirt political aesthetics. By prominently wearing the uniform and marching in military formation, members were creating a visually impressive, and imposing, spectacle. They congregated en masse to present an image of strength that was tested by the ensuing violent confrontation with republicans. In effect, the confluence of Blueshirt symbolic iconography with the group’s public procession was challenging inter-communal power relations within

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1 Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, 2 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/125).
Tipperary town. Simultaneously, by congregating near the Wickham memorial, Blueshirts were using urban space ritualistically to situate their collective identity within Irish nationalist history.

This process was not, of course, confined to only one rural town. Across the Free State, the Blueshirt organisation made frequent use of symbols and rituals in its construction and articulation of a specific political and communal identity. Iconography, such as the uniform, was used to build collective solidarity while also serving as sites of contestation between the organisation, the state and extra-parliamentary republicans. Ritualised public events, such as political rallies and commemorations, mobilised and empowered supporters to challenge their political marginalisation. These political aesthetics were also used to ascribe historical legitimacy to the movement, which was crucially important to attaining popular support in the immediate post-independent Irish political culture.

Nevertheless, the group's use of symbols and rituals has been largely absent from histories of the movement. As Anne Dolan has commented, this is somewhat puzzling considering the most controversial Blueshirt event was the abortive commemoration of Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins in August 1933.2 Maurice Manning provides a narrative of Blueshirt public events but little analysis. Mike Cronin has provided greater detail regarding the specifics of Blueshirt political iconography and rituals, but focuses his analysis on categorising them as either fascist or indigenous. He does not go into detail regarding the function they served for the movement.3 John Regan barely addresses this subject and does not consider Blueshirt rites unique. He views them as a continuation of the Irish tradition of voluntary state service designed to instil virtues in the youth.4 Fearghal McGarry recognises the emotive effect of Blueshirt commemorations and the contestation of territory integral to the movement's political rallies, but does not address the wider implications of the symbolic meanings or material effects of Blueshirt political aesthetics.5 He claims that O'Duffy was willing to exacerbate Civil War tensions by appealing to that section of the Irish population underrepresented by Cumann na nGaedheal's aversion to stoking up pro-Treaty Irish

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3 Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics*, pp 47-49.
nationalism. Nonetheless, McGarry argues, as does Cronin, that Blueshirt appeals to nationalist mythology was more influenced by fascist precedents.

This chapter seeks to address this historiographical lacuna. The focus is not on whether these cultural forms of political involvement were fascist or Irish in derivation. The Blueshirts incorporated both influences. The focus is rather on the actual representational and functional uses of these symbols and rituals by the organisation. Blueshirts deployed iconography and public processions to simultaneously challenge their political marginalisation while also situating their communal identity within a constructed Irish nationalist tradition. More so than ideology or socio-economic status, the use of these cultural idioms defined the individual experience of participation in the movement. They also operated at the conjunction of tradition and modernity, as it was through the use of modern technology that the Blueshirts maximised the power of their political rites. But most importantly, studying these rites provides an illuminating look at an oft-ignored element of Irish political culture. Even though they were using foreign symbols to fashion a communal identity, the Blueshirt movement was operating within an established tradition of Irish politics, which, during the 1930s, were public politics.

Rituals in theory and practice

Agreeing upon a universally acceptable definition of rituals has proven challenging for scholars, due to the difficulty in distinguishing ritualistic activities, which are attended by wider political, cultural and social influences, from everyday activities that make up the minutaie of normal life and are important only on an individual level. For the purposes of this chapter, rituals will be defined by their planned nature, delineated periodicity and temporality, and intention to effect identity transformation in participants and observers. In more specific terms rituals will be defined as ‘strategies of differentiation through formalization and periodicity, the centrality of the body, the orchestration of schemes by which the body defines an

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6 Ibid., pp 234-240.
7 Ibid, pp 248-249; Cronin, The Blueshirts and Irish politics, pp 47-49.
8 Kertzer, Ritual, politics and power, pp 8-11.
environment and is defined in turn by it, ritual mastery, and the negotiation of power to define and appropriate the hegemonic order.⁹

Rituals are generally viewed as either symbols with solely representational meaning, or as more functionalist operations with definite utilitarian and practical repercussions.¹⁰ This dichotomy is artificial however, since the representational qualities of rituals cannot be divorced from their practical effects. Rituals’ social and political significance lies in the totality of individual experience. Through their functional ability to foster a collective identity, accompanied by the visual and emotive repetition of the traditional in symbolic form, rituals are a paradigmatic means of socio-cultural integration, appropriation and/or transformation of the individual.¹¹ The relationship between individuals and these wider socio-cultural effects is based on the power dynamics inherent to the construction and popular reception of these rituals.

Rituals do not exercise absolute power in subordinating individual identity or independence through a sense of integrated totality or holistic security. Participants use their involvement in rituals to access the hegemonic order, thus gaining a sense of individual empowerment by engaging and affecting that order.¹² Rituals are a construction of a limited and limiting power that must negotiate between authority, the individual and, in the Blueshirts’ case, the wider political culture.¹³ Part of this limiting power lies in the necessity for rituals to sustain their vitality and relevance through the regularly constituted ‘re-creation of tradition’.¹⁴ In the inter-war period, all Irish political movements based their legitimacy on presumed traditional or historical integrity.

Eric Hobsbawm has drawn direct connection between ritual and the invention of tradition. ‘Invented traditions...are essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterised by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition.’¹⁵ He contends that there are three overlapping purposes to inventing traditions:

⁹ Bell, Ritual theory, ritual practice, p. 220.
¹⁰ Ibid., pp 53-54.
¹¹ Ibid., pp 16-17.
¹² Ibid., pp 204-211.
¹³ Ibid., pp 8-9.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 213.
a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, values systems and conventions of behaviour.\textsuperscript{16}

This chapter will demonstrate how Blueshirt invented traditions, as manifest in their rituals, conformed to the first and third points of Hobsbawm's taxonomy, while the next chapter will describe how they challenged relations of authority in Ireland during this period.

Much of this theoretical research has now infused historical studies of fascism. While early studies of the rise and appeal of fascism focused on political and economic factors, historians are now researching the ideology's cultural influences. It is now often contended that it was through the visual representation of power and strength that fascists broadened their appeal.\textsuperscript{17} 'Symbolic forms were supposed to convey the values and principles of the fascist movement, and through their communicative function they aimed to solicit and channel popular participation in political life.'\textsuperscript{18} The use of emotive political aesthetics sought to harmonise the ambivalent and often contradictory aspects of fascist political ideology.\textsuperscript{19} For the Blueshirt movement, the two most obvious symbolic influences from continental fascist movements were the salute and the shirted uniform.

**The salute and the blue shirt**

The salute was a potent visual expression of participation in the Blueshirts. Members would give the salute during political rallies as a means of showing support and respect to their leaders, thus physically subordinating individual action to collective action, and creating a powerful image of mass uniformity and cohesion. Members were also required to keep their right arm raised when taking the oath of membership, thus reinforcing individual conformity to the movement.\textsuperscript{20} Although the organisation went through several official titles, the pledge remained similar:

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{17} Mosse, 'Fascist aesthetics and society', pp 245-246.
\textsuperscript{18} Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist spectacle*, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp 186-189.
I...promise that I will serve my country to the best of my ability as a member of the League of Youth, and will constantly, by all lawful means, endeavour by word and act to increase its strength and influence, to maintain its integrity, and to promote its objects, and to work under the direction of the National Executive of Fine Gael and the Officers of the League of Youth. I further promise that while I am a member of the League I will not become or remain a member of any secret society whatsoever.21

Obliging prospective members to take a pledge was intended to create a more disciplined and ideologically cohesive membership. This was achieved by associating the verbal submission inherent to the pledge with the physical conformity of the salute. Blueshirt bodies were being used to indicate support of the movement in a ritualistic fashion.

It should be noted though that the salute was not merely an expression of group conformity. Individual Blueshirts and Blue Bouses would often give the salute in defiant response to opponents' verbal abuse.22 No other response was deemed necessary to indicate support for the Blueshirt movement.

Interestingly, the Blueshirt leadership claimed that the salute was Irish, rather than fascist, in derivation. Writing in *United Ireland*, Blythe claimed that the salute was used in ancient Ireland as a sign of greeting, recognition and respect.23 He was attempting to integrate the salute into a presumed Irish historical tradition. This attempted fusion of continental symbols with indigenous traditions, while not always convincing, remained a consistent feature of Blueshirt political aesthetics. It was even more conspicuous with the most important of a Blueshirt political icons: the blue shirt.

For all fascist movements, the shirt was the most important marker of identity and, universally, denoted classlessness and militarism. In Italy, the black shirt remained a compelling symbol for the regime even after the early squadristis, which had started the tradition of wearing the shirt, had been dismantled. It represented the pure fascist spirit in opposition to bourgeois values, and sacrifice to

22 United Irishman, 25 March 1933.
23 Irish Independent, 11 June 1934; United Ireland, 30 December 1933.
24 United Ireland, 23 September 1933.
the nation and to Mussolini. In countries where fascist parties never came to power, the shirt had a much more contested history since it was not enshrined as a national icon. In Great Britain, while the black shirt was central to the British Union of Fascists’ identity of classlessness and dynamism, its use also resulted in the group being declared foreign and un-British. For members, wearing the shirt was viewed as an act of bravery since it often resulted in violence.

Unquestionably, the blue shirt was the most important identity marker for the Blueshirt movement as well. It made its first appearance during a political meeting in Kilkenny on 8 April 1933, and quickly became the primary symbol representing membership in the movement. Only individuals who had taken the oath of allegiance to the organisation were permitted the privilege of wearing the shirt. Members who were suspended lost that privilege. During every meeting, whether local or national, members were expected to wear their shirts, and refrain from wearing jackets over them unless the weather was particularly inclement. Yet what was the meaning of the shirt to the organisation?

This is not an easy question to answer and there remains historiographical disagreement over the reasons for its use. Maurie Manning prevaricates by suggesting that it could have been used to increase solidarity, or that it may have been used to prevent Blueshirts from mistaking one another during the chaotic street battles, or that it may have represented genuine admiration and emulation of continental fascism. Mike Cronin also suggests that the shirt was initially adopted to help identify members during the street battles, but he argues that by October 1933 the shirt had come to represent and symbolise the very essence of the movement: action in politics, and the end of laissez-faire and the shibboleths of liberalism. John Regan has argued that while the shirt provided a sense of

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25 Falasca-Zamponi, Fascist spectacle, pp 100-103.
26 Philip M. Coupland, ‘The black shirt in Britain: the meanings and functions of political uniform’ in Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan (eds), The culture of fascism: visions of the far right in Britain (London, 2004), pp 112-115.
27 General memorandum on policy, 27 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
29 Interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991; interview with Joe Walsh by Mike Cronin, Stillorgan, 2 December 1991; United Ireland, 8 July 1933.
30 Manning, The Blueshirts, pp 52-54.
31 Cronin, The Blueshirts and Irish politics, pp 47-49.
camaraderie, it was symbolic of not only fascism but also the Garda and concomitant civil service.32

The Blueshirt leadership gave the most coherent and explicit justification for the use of the shirited uniform in the *United Ireland* spaper in October 1933. The leadership conceded that the shirt, as a symbol, was imbued with a long history. It denoted patriotism, and Christianity through its link with Saint Patrick the national apostle whose official colour was and remains blue. It stood for decency, justice and Christian standards in public life. It also represented public service, classlessness, egalitarianism, discipline and willingness to follow orders. Because wearing it often resulted in attacks on members, it was claimed that the shirt served to strengthen members' willingness to resist such intimidation. Finally, it bound people together for a common purpose and kept the shirt movement in the public eye.33

This definition succinctly encapsulated the pertinent points regarding the symbolism of the shirt. As it did not have a long history in Ireland, the colour blue was chosen to link the shirt with a primary national orical figure to give it legitimacy. At the same time, the association with St Patrick further integrated the shirt, and hence the organisation, into the Irish Catholic tradition. The shirt was also meant to reflect equality between members within the group while at the same time, due to its exclusivity, elevate those members as elite within the wider Irish society. The shirt enhanced cohesiveness and solidarity due not only to its association with the goals of the organisation, but because it left members open to attacks from their opponents. And, finally, the shirt was designed as a propaganda and advertising tool for the movement.

The representational symbolism of the shirt, however, is only one aspect of its history. As a physical symbol of the organisation, the shirt was also a tangible site of contestation between the Blueshirts and the state. Both the Garda and the Fianna Fáil government focused on preventing members from wearing the blue shirt as a means of containing and suppressing the organisation. Garda reports from August to December 1933 make it clear that the police force remained uncertain as to the Blueshirt movement's overall objectives, especially during mass political rallies. In preparing for the Blueshirt rally in Limerick on 23 September 1933,

33 *United Ireland*, 21 October 1933.
gardaí officers were instructed to prevent, by force if necessary, the overt display of any Blueshirt insignia or symbol. This included preventing Blueshirts from wearing the shirt openly. Only those wearing a jacket over the shirt were to be allowed to march. In December 1933, the Garda Commissioner took an even stronger stance on the shirt, and instructed the gardaí to arrest anyone wearing a blue shirt, even under a jacket. The Blueshirts successfully challenged this stricter policy during a series of public meetings in County Donegal over the weekend of 8-11 December. At the smaller meetings, the gardaí were able to convince the Blueshirts to cover up their shirts with jackets and to stop marching in military formation. But, during the large meetings in Donegal Town on 8 December and Ballyshannon on 9 December, the gardaí admitted that there was too many Blueshirts to effectively police the wearing of the shirt. The Blueshirts, by assembling en masse in public, had effectively resisted the assertion of police authority over their primary political symbol. By the end of December, the Attorney General Conor Maguire informed the Justice Minister P. J. Ruttledge that it would be unwise for the Garda to stop people from wearing blue shirts unless it was deemed absolutely necessary for the maintenance of public order.

Since the assertion of state power through local gardaí had failed, the Fianna Fáil government attempted to take action by legislatively suppressing the shirt through the Wearing of Uniforms (Restriction) Bill. As has been mentioned, this bill passed in the Dáil but was defeated in the Seanad. The Oireachtas debates revolved around the symbolism of the shirt and its impact on communal peace. For the government and its supporters, the shirt was the precipitate source of disorder in the country. Ruttledge believed that banning the shirt would ‘remove the source of incitement to trouble and the cause of disorder, and will allow the forces of the State to maintain order in their own way and in their own best judgment.’ He further argued that ‘The organised exhibition of blue shirts and berets will doubtlessly continue to compromise the public peace and security and further embitter the

34 Garda Commissioner to Chief Superintendent, Limerick, 19 September 1933, 25 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
35 Garda Commissioner to Minister for Justice, 8 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/732).
36 Chief Superintendent, Letterkenny, to Garda Commissioner, 14 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/732).
37 Memorandum from the Attorney General to the Minister for Justice, 29 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/419).
already strained relations between the association and other groups. The shirt was also attacked for being foreign in derivation, and representing dictatorship and militarism. During a speech in Thurles, de Valera said, "In ordinary circumstances we could afford to laugh at these people, but when... [O’Duffy] tries to organise ex-soldiers, gives them a uniform, and adopts the symbols and methods associated with the dictatorships in other countries, then the government decided it was time to cry halt. The shirt was criticised as a uniform whose object was 'to attract more men into this brigade, to give them a spirit of cohesion, to give them greater confidence, to let them see their strength on all occasions, to constitute them, in one word, an army.'

Fine Gael T.D.s vigorously defended the Blueshirts' right to wear the shirt. John A. Costello protested that, since the I.R.A. was not to be covered by the bill, extra-parliamentary republicans would still be able to wear their uniforms despite the organisation's explicit hostility towards the state and involvement in armed conflict. Frank MacDermot claimed the militarisation of Irish politics was due to the I.R.A., not the Blueshirts. Fianna Fáil T.D.s responded by defending the I.R.A. as a legitimate organisation since it had its roots within Ireland's nationalist past.

The blue shirt on the other hand had no historical legitimacy within Irish political culture. William Cosgrave, who did not approve of Fine Gael politicians wearing the blue shirt, attempted to situate it within Irish cultural politics by emphasising its association with the historical figure of Saint Patrick. The shirt was 'in perfect, traditional, national accord with our history and in close association with the most revered and venerated memory of our patron Saint—St. Patrick's blue.' The Blueshirts commemorated the government's attempts to suppress the shirt with the poem *The Wearing of the Blue*:

The ghost of Napper Tandy came  
And took me by the hand,  
Saying 'How is dear old Ireland  
Or how does she stand?'

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38 *Dáil Éireann debates*, l, 2231 (28 February 1934).  
39 *Irish Independent*, 21 August 1933.  
40 *Seánad Éireann debates*, xvii, 817 (21 March 1934).  
41 *Dáil Éireann debates*, l, 2239 (28 February 1934).  
42 *Dáil Éireann debates*, li, 546 (13 March 1934).  
43 *Dáil Éireann debates*, l, 2122 (23 February 1934).
‘She’s the most distressful country
From here to Timbuctoo
For they’re jailing men in dozens
For the wearing of the blue

And Tandy, now go back to Heaven,
   And tell our martyred Tone,
And likewise Robert Emmet,
   Red Hugh and gallant Owen
That all they died for has been won-
   The greens above the red,
But now a Spaniard comes along
   And bans the blue instead.\(^4^4\)

This poem, an adaptation of the *Wearing of the Green*, posited de Valera (the Spaniard mentioned at the end) and Fianna Fáil rather than the British as the oppressors. It also ascribed historical legitimacy to the shirt by discursively associating it with figures from Ireland’s nationalist past. As with the salute, Blueshirt leaders were trying to integrate the shirt into an indigenous historical tradition as a means of legitimising it. But as former Blueshirts have contended, the use of the shirt continued to be associated with continental fascism.\(^4^5\) The Fianna Fáil government and its supporters were unwilling to allow the Blueshirts, through the symbol of the shirt, to be integrated into Ireland’s militarised culture and symbolic politics.

The struggle over the shirt was not confined to parliamentary business but extended throughout Irish society. While the organisation and the Fianna Fáil government struggled over the uniform in the Dáil and the Seanad, the politics of the shirt became multi-generational as it entered the Irish school system. Between February and May 1934, Blueshirt youths began wearing the uniform to school resulting in a series of student strikes and concomitant local disruption. The first strike occurred on 21 February at the Clonakilty National School after twenty

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\(^4^4\) United Ireland, 6 January 1934.

\(^4^5\) Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991; interview with Timothy O’Connell by Mike Cronin, Butevant, 7 December 1991.
Blueshirt youths wore their uniforms to class. Thirty other boys protested by leaving school and parading around town shouting Fianna Fáil slogans. This strike only ended on 8 March when the Blueshirt students agreed to stop wearing their shirts in school. A week after the Clonakilty strike had started, students in Cobh also went on strike against the wearing of blue shirts. This strike ended on 6 March following the intervention of League of Youth officials. While these strikes were being resolved, a series of similar school strikes began in County Limerick. On 5 March, fourteen boys went on strike in Kilfane to be followed by another twenty-four in Drumcollogher the next day. One day later another nineteen students in Bruff joined them on strike. The advent of student strikes attributed to the blue shirt quickly spread to schools in counties Wexford, Waterford, Tipperary and Galway. In Loughrea, County Galway, on 2 March, thirty-five boys left school and marched through town with a banner proclaiming, ‘We want Education not Blue Shirts’. This strike was only resolved when the local parish priest, Father Murphy, intervened. The final school strike occurred on 17 May 1934 when twenty-eight boys walked out of the Fethard Christian Brothers School in Clonmel, County Tipperary.

There are four striking characteristics regarding these school strikes. Firstly, it is apparent that the later strikes were influenced by the actions of the initial strikes in County Cork. A communal identity that crossed space and time was being formed and expressed through wearing the shirt, since it is most likely that these students and their families had no personal connection with each other. Secondly, the community identity expressed through these strikes occurred within a limited temporal period and spatial location. The strikes lasted only four months and only happened in counties in the southeast. Thirdly, these children were not acting on their own initiative. The reporting gardai repeatedly claimed that the parents were directing not only the students wearing the shirts but also those students going on strike. The first strike at Clonakilty had happened through the connivance and

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46 Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 15 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/258).
47 Superintendent, Cobh, to the Garda Commissioner, 8 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/258).
48 Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to the Garda Commissioner, 12 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/258).
49 Chief Superintendent, Galway, to the Garda Commissioner, 3 March and 13 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/258).
50 Superintendent, Clonmel, to the Garda Commissioner, 28 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/258).
approval of the parents, while the large strike in Loughrea was attributed to the actions of one Blue Blouse who had incited the children to wear their blue shirts to school. Right up to the final strike in Clonmel, the gardai blamed the adults for influencing their children.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, these strikes were all expressions of local political animosity and autonomy. After the strikes in Clonakilty and Cobh, O'Duffy sent a circular to all Blueshirt branches imploring members to stop sending their children to school wearing uniforms, as he did not want politics in the schools.\textsuperscript{52} The fact that the strikes continued showed the lack of control he had over the actions of the membership in individual branches, as well as the local desire to use the shirted children as expressions of Blueshirt identity.

Although these school disruptions were relatively innocuous, there were other more violent incidents of communal resistance to the wearing of the shirt. During the Blueshirt movement's ascendancy, there were frequent night time home invasions by groups of republicans seeking blue shirts to be destroyed. Sligo was particularly hit during July and August 1934, when a gang of republicans targeted a series of houses across the county. On 31 July, a half dozen masked men visited five houses in Achonry and took a blue shirt from each. At two of the houses shots were fired at the occupants. The victims were too intimidated to provide assistance to the investigating gardai.\textsuperscript{53} Another raid on 8 August lead to two houses being invaded and more shots fired.\textsuperscript{54} The final series of assaults occurred in Ballymote on 22 August when four masked and armed men raided three houses and seized three shirts.\textsuperscript{55} While Sligo was particularly hit, the seizure of blue shirts occurred across Ireland. In Cavan on 29 May 1934, three masked and armed men awoke a Blueshirt in the middle of the night and threatened to shoot him unless he turned over his shirt, which was then burned.\textsuperscript{56} After a meeting in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, on 29 April 1934, several Blueshirts were attacked and had their shirts seized and burned.\textsuperscript{57} No arrests were made in any of these cases.

\textsuperscript{51} Chief Superintendent, Galway, to the Garda Commissioner, 3 March 1934; Superintendent, Clonmel, to the Garda Commissioner 28 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/258).
\textsuperscript{52} Memorandum from the Director General to all units, 28 February 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
\textsuperscript{53} Garda report of outrage, 1 August 1934 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/96).
\textsuperscript{54} Inspector report to the Garda Commissioner, 10 August 1933 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/97).
\textsuperscript{55} Garda report of outrage, 22 August 1934 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/100).
\textsuperscript{56} Garda report of outrage, 4 June 1934 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/178).
\textsuperscript{57} Irish Press, 30 April 1934.
These assaults were generally reflective of localised communal tensions, as the demarcated temporality and spatiality of the home invasions in Sligo best demonstrates. The reporting gardai officers believed the violence in Sligo was due to the recent wounding of an I.R.A. man by a Blueshirt, and political divisions at the Achonry Creamery Committee meetings. But at the same time, the violence of these republican attacks on the shirt was indicative of the contentious nature of symbols in inter-war Irish political culture. The extra-parliamentary opposition was demonstrating its power within Irish society. By seizing and ritualistically burning blue shirt uniforms, republicans were asserting dominance over the movement’s symbolic expression of collective identity. The I.R.A. also maintained a steady campaign against the residual symbols of British culture by burning Union Jack flags, protesting Armistice Day services and intimidating or attacking poppy sellers. Brian Hanley has argued that these assaults represented an opportunity for public action that was popular and risk free for the I.R.A. They were also, however, assertions of control over the representation of non-republican communal identity. ‘Here the Poppy is the emblem of ascendancy, not the symbol of sorrow. It may represent something different, elsewhere, but in Ireland its meaning and mission are nothing more nor less than homage of loyalty to England’s King.’

The immediate post-independent Irish political culture was infused with contestations over symbols of national identity and associated divergent interpretations of the historical legacy of the nationalist struggle for independence. In 1935, Fianna Fáil attempted to replace the Easter lily with a new emblem, a torch, for Easter week. Cumann na mBan fiercely resisted this, claiming that they had first introduced the Easter lily as a republican symbol in 1925. The group accused Fianna Fáil of attempting to sabotage republican unity, which was probably an accurate accusation. The lily was now presented as a symbol of uncompromising (i.e. anti-state) republicanism in contrast to Fianna Fáil’s ‘sham republicanism’. During the 1934 Bodenstown commemoration, fisticuffs erupted between republican groups over the display of political symbols associated with more socialist republican organisations. The flags and banners belonging to the Republican Congress and

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58 Garda report of outrage, 1 August 1934 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/96); Inspector report to the Commissioner, 10 August 1933 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/97).
60 An Phoblacht, 11 November 1933.
61 Irish Independent, 15 March 1935.
62 Cumann na mBan publicity poster, April 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/326).
other communist organisations were torn down in protest against these groups’ more radical ideology. After the ensuing violence had been controlled, these socialist groups protested by holding a separate commemoration at the assembly field rather than at Wolf Tone’s grave. Hanley has downplayed this incident, but it does demonstrate the importance of symbols for delineating the ideological contours of republican organisations during this period.\footnote{Irish Independent, 18 June 1934; Hanley, The IRA, pp 50-53.}

Emerging within this political and cultural context, it is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the blue shirt occasioned such vitriolic opposition. Considering there was no unity over republican symbols, the use of non-indigenous cultural idioms, such as the shirted uniform, was sure to occasion fierce resistance. The Blueshirts were intent on using the shirt as the primary means of distinguishing their movement and associated communal identity within Irish political culture. The struggle over the wearing of the shirt, whether on the streets in the Irish localities, in the Oireachtas or in the schools, was a struggle over the representation of the shirt and the Blueshirts’ power to express their identity. That Blueshirts continued to prominently wear the shirt in public during this period demonstrates its importance to the organisation. These themes of power, identity and tradition are also apparent in the structure, exercise of, and reception to Blueshirt public processions.

**Public processions**

As the Blueshirts never had independent representation in the Oireachtas, the vast majority of Blueshirt political activity remained extra-parliamentary. There were Fine Gael T.D.s that were members of the Blueshirts, some of whom even wore their uniform in the Dáil, but even these men recognised that they needed to challenge their political marginality through activity outside parliamentary business. ‘In the Dáil we must criticise Government proposals. This means that if we have Dáil activity without political activity in the country the ordinary person believes that we will rescind any laws criticised by us or opposed by us in the Dáil. That idea is very prevalent and very injurious.’\footnote{Letter from Richard Mulcahy to William Cosgrave, 12 September 1935 (U.C.D.A., John A. Costello papers P190/333).} It should be noted as well that Fine Gael T.D.’s attendance and quality of work in the Dáil was often criticised. At one point
O’Duffy wanted to go directly to the constituency offices to get them to ensure elected deputies were committed to the required parliamentary work. No disciplinary action was ever taken though.65

There was also an element within Blueshirt political discourse that disparaged parliamentarianism in favour of more direct political activity. The party newspaper claimed that ‘higher officers of the [Blueshirt] organisation ought to show their faith in its future and in its policy by displaying no particular anxiety to enter the Dáil.’66 O’Duffy was quoted as claiming:

There is no reason why we should make an idol of Parliament...the Parliamentary system does not exhaust the content of political democracy. I am a firm believer in Parliament. I believe with equal firmness in the necessity for supplementing Parliament for economic purposes, and supplementing it—and this is the important point—in such a way as to prevent the State from growing into that monster which people call the totalitarian State.67

O’Duffy was not calling for the abolition of the Dáil; he was emphasising that political and economic activity need not be confined to parliament. He was a firm supporter of grass-roots political activity, primarily through the form of parades, mass rallies and commemorations.

Former Blueshirt members remembered parading as being the group’s major organisational activity.68 In some localities, there was a parade every week after branch meetings.69 Yet, in general, parades were used only for enhancing the public spectacle of mass demonstrations and commemorations. Consequently, they will only be analysed in association with these other public events.

The majority of local Blueshirt political activity centred on mass rallies. Over the course of the organisation’s four-year existence, rallies of various size and grandeur were held in every county in the Free State. In each case, however, they were intended to demonstrate the organisation’s communal power, support and

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66 United Ireland, 31 March 1934.
67 United Ireland, 24 February 1934.
68 Interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991.
69 Interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991; United Ireland, 7 October 1933.
identity. David Kertzer has provided an erudite description of the power of mass rallies:

In the struggle for power, mass rallies are one of the most effective means to demonstrate popular support. Such demonstrations are effective both in dramatically exhibiting a group's political strength and in fostering certain images regarding the nature of the group and its goals. In addition to their value in communicating directly to the public and to the opposition forces, such mass rites also have powerful effects on the participants, increasing their identification with the group and reinforcing their opposition to the foes that are symbolically represented in the demonstration. Such mass demonstrations gain their force through the careful manipulation of symbols, combined with the emotional impact of having so many people together for a common cause.70

The Blueshirt movement was attempting to impress and overwhelm participants and observers by creating an imposing visual spectacle. It was intended to present an image of unity and discipline that would impress and even intimidate onlookers and opponents. The Blueshirt leadership instructed local branches to hold monthly drills in order to train members how to march in military formation and step.71 They were also to maintain a strict deportment while in public. 'Besides being able to get into formation and to march in step, members should be taught the necessity of maintaining a disciplined appearance, of refraining from smoking and talking when marching to attention, and of refraining from conducting any conversation or exchanging boisterous salutations with the people whom they may pass on the roadside.'72 Processions were also structured to maximise their visual impact. Horsemen were placed at the head of the procession, followed by the accompanying musical bands, then members bearing the organisational colours, then the speakers and leaders, to be finally followed by the individual units.73

As indicated, the presentation of units in military formation and procession was to be accompanied by striking visual accoutrements. Two flags were to be carried by each unit, the Blueshirt flag and the Tricolour, with the former flown

70 Kertzer, Ritual, politics and power, p. 119.
71 General order no. 3, 27 April 1933 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe’s papers P24/648.)
72 United Ireland, 2 February 1935.
73 Anglo-Celt, 7 July 1934.
lower than the latter. The Blueshirt flag was blue with a red cross inscribed diagonally to represent Saint Patrick. Together, these flags reinforced the organisation’s association with Saint Patrick and Irish nationalism. Flags and banners were also used to demonstrate popular support and assert ownership of public space. At the Kilkenny convention, held to formalise the merger that resulted in the formation of Fine Gael, O’Duffy and the Blueshirts marched to Kilkenny town hall, which was covered with Blueshirt flags and banners. During a public meeting in Athlone, County Westmeath, on Sunday 21 September 1934, the procession of Blueshirts and Blue Blouses carried tricolour flags and a huge banner claiming, ‘Athlone Welcomes General O’Duffy.’ During a parade in Ballyconnell, County Cavan, in June 1934 conflict erupted between Blueshirts and republicans over party banners. The Blueshirts took down an opposition streamer, and erected a banner in its place declaring ‘Welcome Fine Gael Leaders’. Local republicans retaliated by attempting to cut down the Blueshirt banner with a scythe. Gardai officers had to intervene to stop the situation escalating into a street brawl.

Blueshirt events were also intended to be acoustically impressive. There was always at least one band in attendance, and for very large gatherings several bands would be employed. These bands were predominantly fife and drum bands but on occasion full brass bands would also attend. In general, only nationalist tunes would be played in order to reinforce the Blueshirt movement’s nationalist credentials.

A key element to the impressive impact of large political gatherings is their ability to project an image of mass and magnitude through the assemblage of great numbers of people. The Blueshirts were no exception. Ernest Blythe asserted ‘A unit in ordinary cases is too small to make any show which would have a satisfactory propagandist effect.’ As will be described in greater detail below, the Blueshirts made extensive use of the transport network to bring members together from across the country to major events. While necessary to project an image of communal strength and popular support, bringing supporters together also served to build a

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74 Ibid.
75 United Ireland, 7 October 1933.
76 Chief Superintendent, Longford and Westmeath, to the Garda Commissioner, 24 January 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01.).
77 Chief Superintendent, Monaghan, to the Garda Commissioner, 16 June 1934 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/180).
collective identity that crossed regional boundaries. In the same article, Blythe also claimed: 'the members of each unit meet constantly and one of the advantages of a district parade is that it brings all Blueshirts from over a fairly wide area together.' They were attempting to foster not only intra-company spirit but also spread inter-divisional solidarity. Major public meetings often brought branches together that usually would not have had any other interaction. One former member claimed that it was only during these public gatherings that members associated with each other to any significant degree. Political rallies also served to reinforce the communal link between the organisation’s peripheries and the centre. It was during political rallies that a consistent ideology was propagated through the leaders’ speeches.

The Blueshirts were not the only Irish political movement to make use of mass rallies. Fianna Fáil ministers also brought in supporters from surrounding areas to increase their displays of magnitude and support. Government processions were also choreographed events designed to evoke awe in the localities through the public display of spectacle and strength. During a Fianna Fáil rally in Galway City on 1 October 1933, de Valera entered the town preceded by several bands and dozens of horsemen bearing torches and flags. The old I.R.A. formed an honour guard around him. On Sunday 25 November 1934, the Minister for Justice P. J. Ruttledge, who regularly protested against Blueshirts massing in strength, marched at the head of a procession of hundreds of supporters into Thurles. The Fianna Fáil Pipers band and local Fianna Fáil leaders met him on the outskirts of the town before marching to Liberty Square. Along the way the procession stopped twice to recite the rosary in commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs. Once at Liberty Square, Ruttledge then gave an oration on government policy.

There are several important similarities between these Fianna Fáil demonstrations and those of the Blueshirts. Both de Valera and Ruttledge were using space in a ritualistic fashion. By taking a specific route to Liberty Square,

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79 United Ireland, 2 February 1935.
80 United Ireland, 19 August 1933; Memorandum from Thomas Gunning to all divisional and district directors, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/296).
81 Interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991.
82 Interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991.
83 Irish Press, 16 October 1933.
84 Irish Press, 2 October 1933.
85 Superintendent to the Chief Superintendent, Thurles, 27 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/343).
Ruttledge was able to make symbolic references to past nationalist figures, and thus reinforce Fianna Fáil’s association with the nationalist tradition. The Blueshirts would also organise their rallies around historically significant locations. Public squares containing nationalist monuments, such as the Wickham memorial in Tipperary town, were a favoured spot for meetings. In December 1935, the Blueshirts congregated several times in front of the Carrickshock monument commemorating the struggle by Catholic peasants against attempts to collect tithes in 1831.86

Blueshirt mass meetings used the same ritualistic formula for approaching the scene of a rally. Both de Valera and Ruttledge were met on the outskirts of town before leading the processions to the appropriate meeting sites. In Cork City on 1 October 1933, 3,000 Blueshirts congregated at St. Patrick’s Church before marching to Glanmire Railway Station to meet and then accompany the leaders to the Grand Parade for the meeting.87 At the public meeting on 29 April 1934 in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, 1,000 Blueshirts and Blue Blouses congregated at Abbey Square then marched in procession to the Golf Links outside of town where they met Ned Cronin, Ernest Blythe and Senator Kathleen Browne. Then, with the leaders in front, and accompanied by several bands, the entire procession marched to Market Square where a stage had been erected and the leaders spoke to the congregated masses.88 This formalised pattern of marching represented the symbolic capturing of urban space.89 Marching in military formation and step increased the visual representation of an army appropriating urban area. By having the leaders marching in positions of distinction, these processions were also intended to reinforce their authority within the movement.

Restrictions were placed on who could lead Blueshirt parades: ‘The practice which exists in some parts of the country of allowing members who are not officers to march at the head of parades and processions is to be severely discouraged, even when such members are public representatives. No member of the League of Youth, no matter what his position outside it may be, should be allowed to take priority over

86 Munster Express, 7 December 1934, 20 December 1935.
87 Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 2 October 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
88 Superintendent to the Chief Superintendent, Wexford, 30 April 1934 (N.A.I. Department of Justice 2008/117/157).
89 Kertzer, Ritual, politics and power, pp 120-121.
an officer of the League.'90 This was intended to prevent Fine Gael politicians from usurping positions of prominence from local Blueshirt officers during demonstrations. Blythe argued that county directors and members of the Blueshirt central executive held the same rank and prestige as T.D.s.91 The collective use of the upraised arm salute by the membership during rallies was also meant as a sign of respect and loyalty to the leaders.

There remains scholarly disagreement as to the nature and effectiveness of these ritualistic demonstrations of authority. Joe Lee has dismissed them, and argued that the pantheon of the hero did not figure in the group’s identity or leadership.92 Mike Cronin on the other hand has concluded that O’Duffy did conform to the cult of the hero since his followers saw him as a saviour to the nation.93 Fearghal McGarry has argued that it is not a question of his intentions but rather of his effectiveness, and has concluded that O’Duffy did not have the personality to effectively enforce his authority.94

The scholarly dismissal of O’Duffy’s leadership reflects the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of his eventual ignominious political demise. During the Blueshirt ascendancy O’Duffy was viewed as a prominent, if controversial, figure in Irish politics. According to Garda reports written in 1933 and 1934, he was considered an inflammatory person whose very presence in public would lead to violence, and there were several requests for permission to arrest him before Blueshirt meetings in order to prevent disturbances.95 Several former Blueshirts remembered the leadership fondly, claiming they were the best men in the country: one even claimed, ‘we nearly genuflected in front of them.’96

Through the ritualistic use of processions and the salute, O’Duffy and other Blueshirt leaders were constructing a cult of leadership to facilitate their authority over the membership. That this authority was still reflected in former members’ reminiscences sixty years later testifies to its enduring power. Moreover, as the

90 United Ireland, 18 August 1934.
91 United Ireland, 23 June 1934.
93 Cronin, The Blueshirts and Irish politics, pp 47-49.
94 McGarry, Eoin O’Duffy, pp 248-249.
95 Chief Superintendent, Ennis, to the Garda Commissioner, 4 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/722); Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to the Garda Commissioner, 25 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/125).
96 Interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991; interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991.
Garda reports indicate, the public demonstrations of O'Duffy’s authority were obviously provocative within Irish political culture and caused some disquiet within state forces. O'Duffy’s failure of leadership was due more to his inability to assert his authority over the other leaders during the August-September 1934 crisis, than the ineffectiveness of the cult of the hero.

**Territory**

More important than the assertion of authority, these ritualistic processions were also designed to symbolise political control over contested territory. In this regard, the Blueshirts demonstrated a greater affinity with continental fascist movements, although, as will be shown, Fianna Fáil also used demonstrations to assert power over certain areas. Fascist mass rallies were designed to reinforce a sense of identity and power by demonstrating their strength through terrorising their opponents and the ritualistic conquering of public space.  

Many Blueshirt political rallies and parades were intended as invasions of Irish territory perceived to be under the control of their opponents. One *United Ireland* article, entitled ‘Opposition Stronghold Invaded’, described a Blueshirt cycling patrol’s excursion to Mohill. The article writer contended that no one had the courage to shout ‘Up Dev’ after the cyclists had left. Two months later, another article describing a Mohill meeting of two thousand Blueshirts, assembled from Leitrim, Roscommon and Longford, had the title ‘The Lost County Regained’. Listowel in north Kerry was also regarded as an opposition stronghold. The formation of a Blueshirt branch there was described as, ‘The Black Spot goes Blue’. Blueshirt recruitment advances in Glencar were described as ‘An I.R.A. Stronghold Transformed’. An article entitled ‘Blueshirts Defence of Cobh,’ described the street brawls that ensued after a number of Blueshirts were brought into the town after being threatened against holding meetings there. According to one gardai the local leader proclaimed, ‘Our parade here tonight is an answer to the mob who attacked a handful of Blue shirts here on the night of the local Government elections, we are not going to be coerced by a

98 *United Ireland*, 17 March 1934.
99 *United Ireland*, 5 May 1934.
100 *United Ireland*, 23 June 1934.
101 *United Ireland*, 19 May 1934.
102 *United Ireland*, 7 July 1934.
gunman who shot down defenceless citizens at Queenstown. We will show them
that we will hold our meetings where we like, how we like and when we like.\footnote{103}

During this period, however, it was Kilmallock and Mallow that experienced
the most sustained contestation over territory between Blueshirts and republicans.
As noted in chapter one, the first major conflict with anti-Treaty republicans came in
October 1932 in Kilmallock. This first battle, deemed a success, became a point of
pride for the organisation and shouts of ‘Up Kilmallock’ could be heard at later
Blueshirt meetings.\footnote{104} The first Blueshirt poem was composed in honour of this
fight:

The A.C.A. in Kilmallock
By Cornelius O’Neill

From early morn’ the crowds poured in to old
Kilmallock town.
With hurleys, sticks and faces grim, they
marched both up and down.
With streamers and with banners too, that
made a great array.
Prepared, both one and all, to smash the men
of the A.C.A.

And as they watched our men come on, with
many a hearty cheer.
That rebel horde turned tail and ran with
hearts that froze in fear.
Hurleys clashed and windows crashed as
stones in flight went through.
While Hayes and Bennett watched the fight,
O’Connell and Mulcahy too.

\footnote{103} Superintendent, Mallow, to Chief Superintendent, Cork, 2 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of
Justice 8/30).
\footnote{104} Connaught Tribune, 10 December 1932.
Here’s to Captain Scanlan who fought right well that day.
Here’s to all the brave Comrades that helped us in the fray.
Here’s to Quish and Cronin always in the lead.
Here’s to our supporters of every class and creed.
We’ll always look with pride upon Kilmallock on that day.
When friends so loyal and true fought on, for honour and fair play.\(^{105}\)

Interestingly, the I.R.A. also considered this battle a success and composed their own little ditty commemorating it:

The King’s assets-
Mulcahy’s men
They marched it to Kilmallock
But they didn’t come again\(^{106}\)

From this point onwards, Kilmallock became contested territory for the Blueshirts, as members continued to return to physically assert their political dominance and challenge their opponents. On St. Patrick’s Day 1935, the organisation returned to Kilmallock for a political meeting. The Garda were under no illusions as to why they returned. ‘This meeting was only a guise to bring to Kilmallock a large number of the Blue Shirt sympathisers in order to have revenge on their opponents for the incidents at Kilmallock on the occasion of a Blue Shirt Meeting on the 9/10/1932.’\(^{107}\) The meeting quickly degenerated into a riot as Blueshirts attempted to attack republicans opposing the meeting. When that failed,

\(^{105}\) *United Irishman*, 3 December 1932.
\(^{106}\) Forrest, *Worse could have happened*, p. 228.
\(^{107}\) Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to the Garda Commissioner, 19 March 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/374).
they then assaulted the gardai keeping the two sides apart. General Sean MacEoin attempted to control the Blueshirts from the stage, but in the end several houses and shops were vandalised and the Garda had to call in more reinforcements to restore order.

Mallow was also under considerable pressure from inter-communal strife, and members regarded it as opposition territory: ‘a right Bolshoi town full of I.R.A. men.’ From the beginning, Blueshirts had difficulties organising and establishing branches in Mallow. ‘This Branch was started under the greatest difficulty as its area includes the stronghold of the I.R.A....as I have repeatedly related not a man in this district have “protection” of any description.’ The first A.C.A. meeting held in the town on 12 October 1932 had to be abandoned because of violent disruptions. A fortnight later the A.C.A. returned with greater numbers to hold the meeting uninterrupted. From this point onwards Mallow became contested urban space. On Sunday 25 February 1934, twenty Blueshirts came into Mallow to protect fellow members who had been attacked the previous week as they had been going to the cinema. In August 1935, Blueshirts returning from a commemorative service were advised by the gardai to go around Mallow. The Blueshirts refused. When they entered the town they were attacked by opponents throwing stones and bottles, and returned the violence in kind. Even the Irish judiciary recognised the ongoing territorial struggle in Mallow; one district judge claimed, ‘A Blue Shirt is as much a provocation in Mallow as an Orange Lilly is in Cavan.’

The I.R.A. also saw the riots in Kilmallock and Mallow in terms of territory. The I.R.A. newspaper An Phoblacht reported that the initial A.C.A. meetings in these towns were invasions that had been resisted by the people. Note the subtle inference that the I.R.A. represented the Irish people.

It was not only Blueshirts that used mass gatherings as a means of exerting political control over space. On the night of 7 July 1934, a Fianna Fáil procession of 150 people, accompanied by a band and horsemen, marched through Aglish, County

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108 Forrest, Worse could have happened, p. 229.
109 Letter from M. J. Doolan to Ned Cronin, 21 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/18).
110 United Ireland, 3 March 1934.
111 Interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991; Sunday Independent, 1 December 1935.
112 Sunday Independent, 1 December 1935.
113 An Phoblacht, 15 October, 5 November 1932.
Waterford. They came upon a Blueshirt public meeting in a brief but violent street battle. The Fianna Fáil horsemen chased blueshirts, forcing them into confined spaces between the buildings while the horses responded by hitting the horses with batons. The gardai stopped the battle and arrested several of the Fianna Fáil agitators. The Fianna Fáil procession had the intended purpose of attempting to intimidate the Blueshirts. The procession was only called off through the intervention of Fianna Fáil ofuring the ensuing trial, the agitators protested their innocence, claiming that they merely celebrating the recent local election victory. The district judge ng the case resolutely rejected this defence, claiming Aglish was well known as a blueshirt town.¹¹⁴

These incidents bring to light a heretofore ignored aspect of inter-war Irish politics. Political communities defined their identity not only in terms of ideology and socio-economic status but also through the ritualistic use of violence, these groups were attempting political dominance without completely destabilising the state. While often significant property damage and personal injury, opponents mere in combat without killing one another. To date I have found only one k recorded as having occurred during a Blueshirt public procession. In A Sean McNamara, a district director of the League of Youth, accidentally killed Glynn when he fired his gun in the air and the bullet ricocheted and . Unlike continental fascist organisations, the Blueshirts were not engaged in an organised and systematic campaign of violence with the intention of using Irish society to facilitate a fascist assumption of power. Rather these incidents served to release political tension within acceptable limits. Additionaolescence remained localised and reflective of local grievances and tensed by the political division. The majority of incidents occurred in the lherey with few disturbances in Dublin that might have threatened theent. The congregation of mass numbers of supporters was being used to challenge local power dynamics. Although, as demonstrated bember 1933 rallies in Donegal, the Blueshirts could defy state policy through demonstrations, in general, the organisation’s rallies were used to chalk local republican

¹¹⁴ Superintendent, Lismore, to Chief Superintendent, Waterfor934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/172).
groups had over various Irish communities. Whether this challenge was ultimately successful is debatable, as is indicated below.

**Militarism and Catholicism**

As much as the contestation of territory reflected similarities with continental fascist movements, the Blueshirts' synthesis of militaristic and Catholic forms of representation was a direct product of Irish political culture. It has been argued that the ideas and methods of the revolutionary period resulted in an inhibiting legacy in Ireland, as warfare remained an important delineation of national culture and identity. Consequently, the assertion of communal political identity during this period was infused with militaristic rhetoric and violence. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, Blueshirt discourse and physical positioning during public meetings reflected and facilitated the construction of these events as battles. Due to the violence accompanying the assertion of communal identity, amassing in large numbers was a necessary demonstration of strength and security. Gardaí reports attest that the most serious violence occurred when individual Blueshirts got separated from the majority or after meetings when Blueshirts were returning to their homes in small numbers. After the Blueshirts’ demise, certain Fine Gael members admitted to being intimidated from active political participation. One member wrote, in 1937, ‘In my district the Fine Gael people are trampled upon by the Fianna Fáil Party and as a matter of fact the Fine Gael people are afraid to speak a word. There is such a thing going on as mob law, but I hope to see the day I will get my own back on them.’

The Blueshirts were also intent on associating their processions with public professions of Catholicism. Blueshirts refused to disobey the ordinances of the Irish Catholic hierarchy in August 1933 when they cancelled the church parades after the hierarchy informed them they would be in contravention of the synod of Maynooth statutes. Attending Mass was an important element of all Blueshirt processions, although they would not always wear their shirts in church if the officiating priest

116 Garda Commissioner to the Chief Superintendent, Limerick, 25 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
did not want political uniforms worn. Bluestirht St. Pats’s day parades were scheduled to coincide with Mass so members could receive Communion.

The movement sought propaganda value by identifying itself with Catholicism. In 1935, Bishop Kinane of Waterford spoke out against the I.R.A., Republican Congress and Irish Citizen Army, claiming they were threatening private property and domestic peace. This occasioned a sharp response from the republicans but was applauded by the Blueshirts. The Irish Citizen Army claimed that Kinane had denigrated his office and insulted the memory of the men of 1916. The I.R.A. claimed that Kinane was supporting imperialists and Blueshirts. By contrast the Blueshirts commended Kinane’s stance. They were the only organization to publicly support the Bishop’s views.

The county Tipperary Leaue of Youth put it on record that they appreciated the Bishop’s declaration and tendered to him ‘their loyal support in any steps his Lordship may take in the future.’

Some members of the Catholic hierarchy publicly supported the movement and were involved in Blueshirt public demonstrations. Bishop Fogarty of Killaloe invited O’Duffy to Ennis on 4 September 1933 to help overcome local Blueshirt resistance to the proposed formation of Fine Gael. Lod parish priests would often open Blueshirt political rallies by offering a benediction or reciting a decade of the rosary. Father Clancy in Toomevara was particularly active in this regard. In Roscrea, County Tipperary, two local priests became directly involved with the Blueshirts. During a political gathering on 15 March 193, Father Cosgrave actually engaged in a physical struggle with republicans, sustaining a minor injury after hitting himself with his own stick. Father Houlihan blamed the Garda for not protecting Father Cosgrave during the fracas, and for not taking stronger action.

118 Irish Independent, 9 June 1934; Munster Express, 31 August 1934
119 Memorandum from Ned Cronin to all districts, 7 March 1933 (U.O.A., Ernest Blythe papers P24/648).
120 Circular from Irish Citizen Army headquarters, 16 January 1935 (I.I., Eoin O’Duffy’s papers MS 48,290/2).
121 Irish Independent, 22 January 1935.
122 Munster Express, 5 April 1935.
123 Nenagh Guardian, 16 February 1935.
124 Chief Superintendent, Clare, to the Garda Commissioner, 3 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/722).
125 Nenagh Guardian, 5 May 1934.
against the republicans. O’Duffy used this incident for propaganda purposes, and claimed that the Garda, and thus the state, was not adequately protecting priests.  

In general, though, Church support varied from locality to locality. The majority of former members remembered parish priests as having divergent political affiliations. Some would be supportive of Fine Gael and the Blueshirts while others were viewed as ‘Fianna Fáil men’. North Cork and Waterford were mentioned as two areas with strong Church support for the Blueshirts. Many parish priests allowed Blueshirts to fundraise outside church gates where members were sure to reach a substantial number of people. Others were not as accommodating. In Drumboylan on Sunday 25 March 1934, Father Whitney, after finishing Mass, lost his temper and shouted at several Blueshirts who had congregated outside the chapel gates to hold a meeting. With the apparent blessing of the priest, a group of opponents attempted to forcibly remove the Blueshirts leading to a minor brawl before the gardaí could intervene. Although subsequently apologetic, Father Whitney defended his actions by claiming he had the authority, stemming from the Pope, to remove anyone he wanted from consecrated grounds.  

The conjunction of militarism and Catholicism within Blueshirt public rituals was consistent with Irish political tradition, as best illustrated by the government celebrations of the two major state holidays, Easter and St. Patrick’s Day. During the 1934 Easter celebrations, for example, two open air Masses were said at the Portobello and Collins army barracks. The majority of government ministers and army headquarter staff attended the Mass at Portobello and then led the military parade to the General Post Office (G.P.O.) where they met up with the second group coming from Collins barracks. At the G.P.O. both sections of the armed forces merged for the official, state led services. On St. Patrick’s Day 1936, the

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126 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 10 April 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/142).
127 Interview with Dennis Reynolds by Mike Cronin, Coote Hill, 28 May 1991; interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991; interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991; interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991; interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991; interview with Timothy O’Connell by Mike Cronin, Buttevant, 7 December 1991; interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991; interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991.
128 Sergeant Report to Superintendent, Boyle, 26 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/92).
129 Irish Press, 12 June 1934.
130 Irish Press, 20 April 1934.
government ministers were preceded by a military parade as they made their way to Mass at the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin.\textsuperscript{131}

Similarly, although still frequently condemned by the Catholic hierarchy, the I.R.A. sought to integrate Catholic values and ritualistic actions into its public functions. Members would salute as they passed Catholic Churches during parades, and the rosary was always recited at commemorations for the dead.\textsuperscript{132} Such commemorations, both republican and Blueshirt, best demonstrated this synthesis of militarism and Catholicism.

\textbf{Blueshirt commemorations and the cult of martyrs}

Irish political culture, both north and south of the border, remains infused with commemorative services. It is through these events that a collective historical memory, tied to a pantheon of heroes and shared heritage of triumph and suffering, is constructed.\textsuperscript{133} Within Ireland, as in other countries, these commemorations also serve contemporary political interests:

The commemoration of dead heroes or saints, and the events by which they left their mark, is an essential element of Irish political, religious and social organisation. By invoking past triumphs or struggles, current organisers seek not only to authorise and justify their aims and actions, but also to mobilise supporters in public affirmations of solidarity.\textsuperscript{134}

The formalised procession ritual associated with public funerals and official commemorations was only established in Ireland at the end of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{135} A ritualistic and rhetorical framework was constructed through a series of public funerals for nationalist figures alongside the 1898 commemoration of the United Irishmen rebellion. Organisers sought to remind observers of a particular version of Irish history constructed around the struggle with Great Britain, and to provide

\textsuperscript{131} Garda report to C District Superintendent, Dublin, 18 March 1936 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/404).
\textsuperscript{132} Hanley, \textit{The I.R.A.}, pp 67-70.
\textsuperscript{135} McBride, ‘Memory and national identity’, pp 27-29.
inspiration to continue that struggle. In the immediate post-independence period, however, difficulties arose in unifying Irish communities around an agreed historical tradition.

David Fitzpatrick and Anne Dolan have extensively researched commemoration in independent Ireland. Both have argued that that the legacy of the revolutionary period, especially the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the Civil War, prevented any unity over commemorating Ireland’s independence from Great Britain. It could be argued that pro- and anti-Treatyites were forced to construct communities within community; to define themselves against each other; to take the grand opposition of great nations at war and inflict it on a small and particularly organic society. For instance, Cumann na nGaedheal’s attempts to commemorate the memory of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins as the founders of independent Ireland were inevitably viewed as celebrating the pro-Treaty victory in the Civil War, and were, thus, boycotted by Fianna Fáil and other republican groups. Both Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil governments became wary of overtly associating themselves with one historical tradition for fear of exacerbating tensions and providing a rallying point for the disenchanted. By 1927, for example, Cumann na nGaedheal politicians had seriously considered ending the annual commemoration for Griffith and Collins. It was left to the Blueshirts to galvanise the pro-Treaty historical and political tradition through its public commemorations.

To date, only Dolan has provided the most sustained analysis of Blueshirt commemorations, but her analysis is marred by an explicit disdain and even hostility towards the movement. She argues that the Blueshirts were merely following a tradition established by Cumann na nGaedheal in commemorating the progenitors of the Irish Free State. She does not consider the Blueshirts sincere in their commemorations and is critical of their ulterior motives. ‘The dead were an excuse...[and] were enslaved to ... “present day politics”.’ She considers the

136 Ibid., pp 31-32; Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, pp 7, 11, 37.
137 Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, p. 3.
138 Ibid., pp 15-25.
141 Ibid., p. 177.
142 Ibid., p. 174.
commemoration of Griffith, Collins and O’Higgins as denigrating these men’s memory:

This association with this pathetic caricature of the March on Rome left Collins’ memory battered and dejected, at the mercy of a movement that used the memory of civil war to score cheap points in what was largely an economic game. There was too much training and drilling, too many songs of ‘marching to the fray’ to truly commemorate Collins.¹⁴³

She concludes with her most damning statement: ‘The politicisation, the abuse of memory by the Blueshirts, by Cumann na nGaedheal who abetted them, did more to dishonour these men than anything the supposedly demonic de Valera could have conceived.’¹⁴⁴

Dolan is correct in asserting that the Blueshirts were operating within an established tradition of political rituals and commemoration. At the same time, however, in their repeated and populist identification with these state builders as a means of building a communal identity, the Blueshirts were operating in a different and novel manner from the more conservative and elitist Cumann na nGaedheal politicians. The Blueshirt movement demonstrated a greater affinity with the emotive and spectacular commemorations of continental fascist movements. These groups used the roll call of the fallen to connect members with the sacrifice of past national heroes in order to inspire progress in the future destiny of the nation. The blood of the martyr was seen to feed the rebirth of the nation-state.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, given that all commemorations serve contemporary political purposes it is unclear why Dolan takes umbrage with the Blueshirts. It is unquestionable that the movement used commemorations for political purposes, but the I.R.A.’s Bodenstown commemoration and Fianna Fáil’s Easter services were also political. The politicisation of these services does not negate their emotive quality. To question the Blueshirts’ sincerity is inaccurate. Under the Blueshirt constitution, commemorations were to be one of the primary activities occupying

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 79.
¹⁴² Ibid., p. 191.
local branches’ time and attention. The numbers of members that assembled to commemorate the fallen demonstrates the reverence in which they were held. What is necessary is to understand the significance and power of these commemorations rather than to criticise them for their opportunistic aspects.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the major figures commemorated by the Blueshirts were Arthur Griffith, Kevin O’Higgins and Michael Collins. Every subsequent August after the failed attempt to hold the massive commemoration in Dublin in 1933, the organisation scheduled commemorations to be celebrated simultaneously across the Irish Free State. These were significant organisational successes for the group. For instance, on Sunday 26 August 1934, five hundred Blueshirts and Blue Blouses marched at four locations in Dublin. In County Cork, 1,937 men and women marched in ten different locations while in County Limerick 1,074 men and women marched at five locations. County Tipperary witnessed 1,735 men and women marching between nine locations. In the western counties of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim 1,302 Blueshirts and Blue Blouses marched in fourteen locations. In each case, two minutes of silence was held and an address from the director-general read out. While the specific content changed year on year the general message remained consistent. The previous chapter demonstrated how these commemorations exemplified masculine qualities to be emulated by the male membership, but the commemorative messages also contained much broader symbolism. Compare these two addresses from 1934 and 1935, composed by O’Duffy and Cronin respectively:

We have followed well in the footsteps of our Illustrious dead and we have prevented their work from being destroyed by the hands of enemies who could not vanquish them in life but who have never ceased to assail their memory...While we hold the ideals of those great leaders we remain, under God, the only true custodians of Ireland’s historic cause... If we die, it will be as guardians of the cause of which Collins was a martyr.
Comrades, you pay a tribute to the founders of the State by marching to-day in your shirts of blue under the Flag of St. Patrick; but in order that your tribute may be complete you must endeavour to imitate their virtues, their courage, their steadfastness, their unselfishness. It is only if we have the high patriotism of Griffith, Collins and O’Higgins that we will be able not merely to preserve what they have built but add to it and perfect it and be entitled here-after to regard ourselves as one with them in labour and spirit.¹⁴⁹

Both addresses use the idealisation of these men and their virtues to assert a historical continuity to Blueshirt activity. These men’s sacrifices in establishing a free and independent Ireland were used to inspire and unify members in continuing their political activity, which was tied to Ireland’s national destiny. The message of unity emphasised by the director-general’s addresses was reinforced by the simultaneity of its reading and the minutes of silence at all of the separate parades. Blueshirts were united across time and space through a sense of community and national purpose. Saint Patrick’s day celebrations were also built on notions of simultaneity and unity across Ireland through the holding of minutes of silence and recitation of messages from the director-general concurrently.

Although Griffith, Collins and O’Higgins were the primary figures commemorated, the Blueshirts also held services for other figures from Ireland’s nationalist past. In September 1935, a ceremony was held for Captain Jim Walsh who had been a 1916 Volunteer, National Army veteran, and prominent Blueshirt.¹⁵⁰

In October 1933, three hundred Blueshirts and Blue Blouses marched to commemorate Volunteer Sean Doyle who had been killed in September 1920 by British soldiers.¹⁵¹ The movement even commemorated figures with no attachment to the republican tradition of Irish nationalism. In April 1934, a large procession of 1,000 Blueshirts and 200 Blue Blouses marched in Wexford to commemorate the death of Captain William Redmond, a World War One veteran and one of only two Irish Parliamentary Party M.P.s elected in the south of Ireland in 1918.¹⁵²

Unlike the other political organisations of the period, the Blueshirt movement also publicly commemorated those killed by anti-Treaty republicans during the Civil

¹⁴⁹ United Ireland, 14 September 1935.
¹⁵¹ United Ireland, 7 October 1933.
¹⁵² Irish Independent, 23 April 1934.
War. On 12 August 1934, commemorative services were held for Robert Barry who had been shot by republicans in 1922. In October 1933 Blueshirts commemorated Commandant Peter Doyle who had been killed on 11 October 1922. The gardai present at the commemoration stopped the speaker from detailing the circumstances of his death, presumably because it was considered too inflammatory. The service was quickly concluded with wreaths laid, the rosary said in Irish and, a photograph and article of the commemoration were later prominently displayed in the *United Ireland* newspaper.

The choice of location contributed to the emotional significance of these commemorations. Fallen soldiers were usually commemorated at their gravesites to reinforce the meaning of their death. Historical sites of conflict were also used to reinforce the Blueshirt movement's presumed historical continuity with previous nationalist parties. In 1934, at Kilclooney wood, Ernest Blythe claimed the Blueshirts were the inheritors of the Fenian tradition at a commemoration ceremony for the Fenian Peter O’Neill Crowley who had been killed there in the nineteenth century. The most sacred of locations for the movement was Beal-na-Blath, where Michael Collins had been killed.

While the commemoration of all three state builders took place in various sites across the Free State, Blueshirts used Beal-na-Blath as a pilgrimage site for the commemoration of Collins on his own. From the organisation's beginnings as the A.C.A., members by the thousands would assemble to commemorate Collins every August or September. In 1932, two thousand A.C.A. members attended. By 1934, the number of members attending had grown to 5,000 Blueshirts and 3,000 Blue Blouses. Even after the formal demise of the organisation in 1936, Blueshirts continued to assemble at Beal-na-Blath to remember Collins. These commemorations followed a ritualistic pattern that was consistently followed year after year. Members marched with military precision to the accompaniment of military music played by several Irish bands. The procession would slow by the platform situated next to the cross, which had been erected to remember Collins, as members gave the leaders the salute. Wreaths would be laid and then a decade of the

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153 *Cork Evening Echo*, 13 August 1934.
154 *United Ireland*, 14 October 1933.
155 *United Ireland*, 7 April 1934.
156 *Connaught Tribune*, 8 September 1934.
157 *Southern Star*, 25 September 1937.
The bands would then play the Last Post and the flags would be dipped in silence. Finally, the leaders would make speeches commemorating Collins' sacrifice to inspire the movement's future destiny before the procession moved off.158

The pilgrimage to Beal-na-Blath was the leading Blueshirt event year after year. Preparations for travel and organising the order of procession began weeks in advance. After the 1934 split, both wings of the Blueshirts continued to hold commemoration services there, although on different dates. Members' emotional accounts of their participation speak to the power of the procession and its importance to the organisation's identity. One member's account of the 1935 commemoration recounted how the ceremony was replete with professions of Catholicism. Participants first headed to Mass before travelling to Beal-na-Blath. Once they reached the site, they engaged in the usual ritualistic procession. Then an unnamed friend of Collins came onto the platform, made the sign of the Cross and slowly recited the rosary in Irish, which was answered, in Irish, by the thousands of Blueshirts in attendance. The assembled mass of people was described as united in their earnest fervour in praying for the soul of Michael Collins. The Last Post was sounded as the companies gave the salute, and then they all slowly made their way home.159

By August 1934, the commemoration of Michael Collins and other nationalists was supplemented by the movement's own cult of martyrs. Between December 1933 and August 1934, three Blueshirts died as the result of communal violence or resistance to state authority. Hugh O'Reilly was the first Blueshirt killed. He was abducted from his home in the middle of the night, beaten by a mob and died from his injuries in December 1933. At his funeral, held in Cork in January 1934, 450 Blueshirts and Blue Blouses marched in procession to the cemetery. O'Duffy gave the eulogy:

Here, to day, we renew our vows to stand steadfast by the ideal for which Hugh O'Reilly gave his life. His ideal was, our ideal is, the freedom of our people, North and South, from tyranny and coercion, whether foreign or domestic...Hugh O'Reilly

158 *Southern Star*, 24 September 1932; Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 4 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/38).
is our first martyr. While we mourn his death, struck down as he was in the pride of his young manhood, we are strengthened by the example he set. Let us try to emulate his noble qualities, let this churchyard henceforth be a place of pilgrimage when his anniversary comes along each year.\textsuperscript{160}

In a poem commemorating O'Reilly, his death is explicitly associated with Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith:

\textit{In Memoriam}

These Verses are Dedicated to the Memory of the late Hugh O'Reilly (Bandon)—our First Martyr
(Air—"Londonderry Air" "Danny Boy")

O'Reilly Brave! the League of Youth
\hspace{1em} is standing by
To carry on the cause you loved so well;
We'll never cease, but stand together side by side;
We realise how gallantly you fell.
Our spirit won't be crushed by gory murderers
Or by foul deed committed 'gainst our cause
And we will prove to everyone in Ireland
That we're the men who will not break God's laws.

Would you had lived to see the dawn of unity
Which we are sure will break o'er

\textsuperscript{160} Superintendent, Bandon, to Chief Superintendent, Cork, 6 January 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/242).
Ireland soon;
But you were taken like our great
Mick Collins
Away from us, when you were in
your bloom
We know that you are now with
Michael Collins
And Arthur Griffith—both gone long
ago;
Tell them that we are now the same as
they were then
And that we all must fight the same
bad foe.

"Carlow."\(^{161}\)

Patrick Kenny was the second Blueshirt killed. He was attacked by a republican mob as he was returning from the Toomevara races and died of his injuries in June 1934. At his funeral there was a six-man honour guard and the coffin was draped with Blueshirt and Tricolour flags. 350 Blueshirts, accompanied by a large contingent of Blue Blouses and a fife and drum band, marched alongside the coffin through the streets to the graveside. Blinds were drawn and businesses were closed as a gesture of respect. Wreaths were sent from Blueshirt and Blue Blouse branches across Ireland. In his graveside oration, O'Duffy identified Kenny's death with Blueshirt patriotism and national sacrifice in much the same way as at O'Reilly's funeral.\(^{162}\) Kenny's grave was consecrated as a pilgrimage site with the erection of a memorial a year later. Two hundred Blueshirts drawn from surrounding units participated at the unveiling. Once again wreaths were laid and a decade of the rosary recited. The graveside oration, this time delivered by Ned Cronin, claimed Kenny as a martyr for the Blueshirt movement's struggle for freedom against Fianna Fáil's oppression. Reverend Clancy, the Toomevara parish priest, provided the benediction and concluded by claiming that those assembled had

\(^{161}\) *United Ireland*, 13 January 1934.

\(^{162}\) *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 July 1934.
done a good day’s work for Ireland and that ‘the spirit of the League of Youth would 
sweep all before it.’ The bands played the national anthem as the procession 
reformed and marched back into town. The inscription on the memorial read, 
‘Erected by his comrades of the League of Youth, to the memory of Paddy Kenny, 
Grenanstown, who gave his life for Ireland, June 29, 1934.’

The largest commemoration ceremony was reserved for Michael Lynch. As 
described in chapter one, Lynch was killed by gardaí protecting the sale of seized 
cattle at Marsh’s Yard in Cork. His funeral was a major exercise in public spectacle 
and followed the pattern established in the previous two funerals. It was estimated 
that 30,000 people attended, over 5,000 of whom were Blueshirts. Traffic was 
blocked as the procession followed the coffin to the graveyard. Midleton urban 
council adjourned in respect and in protest against the manner of Lynch’s death. 
Shops were also closed in solidarity. The coffin, carried by Blueshirt pallbearers, 
was covered with the flag of Saint Patrick. The Last Post was sounded, a decade of 
the rosary recited and O’Duffy gave another emotive oration. The following year, 
two thousand Blueshirts, accompanied by three bands, assembled and marched to his 
gravesite. The procession was festooned with banners and flags, which were dipped 
as they approached the graveyard, while the bands played dead marches. Cronin laid 
a wreath for the central council and then gave the salute. The assembled members 
did likewise while the Last Post was played. An aeroplane from the Blueshirt Aero 
Unit hovered overhead and dipped in salute while those below waved banners and 
handkerchiefs. Cronin, who gave the oration, claimed that in all of Irish history 
there had not been a parallel for what happened in Marsh’s Yard when honest and 
industrious farmers had gathered for a lawful protest. Lynch died ‘as Pearse and 
Collins died, and his spirit comingling with theirs calls you to-day to stand firm, 
however fraud or force assails.’ He compared Lynch’s shooting to the killing of 
umarmed people in Bachelor’s Walk in 1914 following the Howth landing of 
weapons for the Irish volunteers. Dr. O’Higgins also spoke: ‘In the minds of 
Corkmen and others the memory of the martyrs of Manchester and the Mitchelstown 
martyrs will be coupled with the memory of this young martyr of Marsh’s Yard.’

163 Nenagh Guardian, 6 July 1935. 
164 United Ireland, 25 August 1934. 
165 Southern Star, 24 August 1935.
As with the commemoration of the three state builders, the commemoration of the Blueshirt martyrs was identified with the Blueshirt movement’s national cause. Just as with continental fascist movements, the Blueshirts saw their political purpose in terms of national destiny and rebirth, and the emotive use of a cult of martyrs was intended to inspire followers. These commemorations also represented a synthesis of militarism and Catholicism. Most of the figures commemorated were military figures. Each of the Blueshirt martyrs’ deaths was constructed as forming part of a struggle being waged by the movement. During the commemorations, Catholic rites, such as the recitation of the rosary and prayers for the dead, were used to reinforce the movement’s association with Catholicism. Most significantly, however, the commemoration of the three fallen Blueshirt men was explicitly linked to past nationalist heroes in an effort to construct a historical continuity between their deaths and those of previous patriots. This process was integral to the construction of a distinct historical tradition and legitimacy fundamental to the movement’s attempts at situating itself within Irish political culture.

**Historical legitimacy**

As has been mentioned, the assertion of a historical continuity was central to Blueshirt activism. The organisation sought to establish a link to ancient Irish history to demonstrate that Irish nationalism extended past the modern republican tradition that began with Wolf Tone. The movement often referred to Tara as the nation’s spiritual capital, and it was proposed, after they came to power, that a palace of victory be built there.\(^{166}\) In general, however, the Blueshirt organisation associated itself with more recent nationalist movements:

The Blueshirts can look to the future with confidence, because our movement is the successor of the great movements of the past which lifted the Irish people up from semi-slavery to sovereign independence. Its aim is to complete and to crown the work of the national leaders and heroes whose memory we honour. The Blueshirts are the present day successors of the young men of the Land League, of the pioneers

\(^{166}\) *United Ireland*, 17 February, 28 April 1934.
of the Gaelic League, and of the Irish Volunteers, who are simply marching further forward along the same road.¹⁶⁷

As this quote demonstrates, the movement attempted to associate itself with a wide variety of political movements articulating different forms of Irish nationalism. The economic nationalism of the Land League was cited alongside the cultural nationalism of the Gaelic League. Predominantly, though, the movement associated itself with the pro-Treaty nationalist tradition. As has been indicated, the majority of the group’s commemorations centred on figures from this tradition. The accounts of former members interviewed by Mike Cronin also associated their collective identity with pro-Treaty nationalism. Members were intent on proving they were patriots in the face of republican taunts that they were traitors and imperialists for supporting the Anglo-Irish Treaty.¹⁶⁸ One member asserted that the republicans’ claim to be super patriots by opposing the Treaty was false, because it was the people who had supported the Treaty that had conducted 90% of the fighting during the war.¹⁶⁹ Another former member directly challenged the physical force tradition of Irish nationalism. He claimed the Irish truly wanted independence through legislative means as had been espoused by Charles Parnell, but the ‘hit men’ had taken over and it was they who were now writing Irish history and making heroes out of these men. He claimed that the leaders of Irish society should have been World War I veterans, who had shown their worth defending the rights of small nations. Instead that role was given to the men who had deserted the Volunteers and stayed at home.¹⁷⁰

It is apparent, however, that the leadership of the movement recognised the power of the republican historical tradition within Irish political culture, especially regarding the commemoration of the 1916 Easter rising. While members of the Blueshirts and Fine Gael had participated in the rising, it was Éamon de Valera, as the highest-ranking survivor, that most effectively appropriated the event’s historical significance for political purposes. This was a gradual process. Following Fianna Fáil’s ascension to power in 1932, the I.R.A. was permitted to hold national parades and commemorations without government hindrance or participation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ *United Ireland*, 3 August 1935.
¹⁶⁸ Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991.
¹⁶⁹ Interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991.
¹⁷⁰ Interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991.
Sunday, only the I.R.A. marched through Dublin and gave public speeches; government ministers remained conspicuously absent. But in every subsequent year, perhaps after realising the propaganda value accrued by the I.R.A., de Valera and other Fianna Fáil ministers participated in Easter parades and commemorations.

Joe Lee has claimed that, although a dedicated democrat, de Valera demonstrated many cultural affinities with fascism. His use of the 1916 martyrs displayed many similarities to fascist and Blueshirt use of a cult of martyrs, especially in terms of appealing to the past to inspire future national progress and the sacralisation of fallen patriots:

No words can fittingly commemorate the sacrifice of these men [the Easter rebels], except, indeed, the words of a new proclamation restoring the Republic they proclaimed and gave their lives to defend. But the time has not come for that, and we must content ourselves today with the declaration that it is for that goal we strive and that we shall not rest until we have reached it. So I ask you all, as we stand on this hallowed ground, to resolve in your hearts to do your part to complete the task of the men of Easter Week.

Fianna Fáil, however, failed to monopolise the commemoration of the rising. The I.R.A. refused to join the official commemorations at Arbour Hill Prison and held rival ceremonies at Glasnevin Cemetery. Furthermore, the official commemorations were often marred by disputes over who was invited. Fine Gael and Blueshirt leaders also protested against the political use of the holiday by republican organisations. Recognising the political capital de Valera and others were reaping from it, numerous articles in *United Ireland* challenged the appropriation of Easter 1916:

What should have been a time of national remembrance, an occasion for paying a worthy tribute to the heroes who gave their lives so gallantly for Irish freedom, was

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turned into a discreditable tussle for the possession of the dead by two organisations, neither of which can claim to hold any special spiritual heritage from the men of 1916...with characteristic effrontery the spokesmen, whether of Fianna Fáil or the I.R.A. took it for granted that they and they alone were qualified to be heard as the legitimate successors of the dead leaders and the custodians of the principles for which they died.¹⁷⁷

These objections appear somewhat disingenuous when compared with their own partisan use of commemorations. But they do indicate Blueshirt concerns about the increasingly hegemonic extension of a particular form of republican nationalism, which will be further explored in chapter five.

**Technology**

Blueshirt public rituals operated at the conjunction of tradition and modernity. While attempting to present an image of historical continuity, the Blueshirts made extensive use of recent technological advances, particularly in transport. The frequency and scale of Blueshirt public events was predicated on the expansion and modernisation of the Irish transport network. Whereas Daniel O'Connell had organised only fifty monster meetings between 1843 and 1845, the Blueshirts were able to do so weekly.¹⁷⁸ The territory of the entire Free State had now become readily accessible to Blueshirt leaders making political tours. In the space of a few weeks, O’Duffy was able to attend a series of meetings beginning in Waterford before moving to Navan then to Macroom before ending up in Donegal.¹⁷⁹ By March 1934, he had spoken in twenty-three of the twenty-six counties.¹⁸⁰ O’Duffy’s private secretary, Liam Walsh, has provided an indication of a typical weekend for the leader:

Leaving Dublin, he drove about 170 miles to Bandon, Co. Cork, to attend the funeral of a murdered Blueshirt, where he marched the four miles to the Cemetery to deliver

¹⁷⁷ United Ireland, 7 April 1934.
¹⁷⁹ List of meetings, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
an oration. From Bandon he drove to Fethard, Co. Tipperary, arriving during the early hours of Sunday morning, and after a couple of hours rest he rose at 6 A.M. to prepare his speech for a meeting in Clonmel. Following the meeting he attended a public dinner, and later he visited six different functions in various parts of County Tipperary, ending up with a dance in Cashel where he arrived early on Monday morning. With Monday’s dawn he was on the road driving back to Dublin to his office to there prepare answers to charges against him before the Military Tribunal.  

By using trains, buses, lorries and cars, the organisation was able to present an image of strength and popular support by bringing together Blueshirts from across the Free State. As has been indicated, the ability to assemble large numbers of Blueshirts was used to challenge state control of the organisation. In September 1933, O’Duffy was able to use this technology to facilitate his own individual defiance. Following the proscription of the National Guard, the Garda had been instructed to prevent O’Duffy from attending the Beal-na-Blath commemoration, but he was able to elude capture after a dramatic car chase through the Irish countryside.

The Blueshirts’ opponents also realised the importance of the transport network to the movement, and frequently occupied themselves in sabotaging it to prevent the mass assemblage of Blueshirts. Before the Blueshirt meeting in Kanturk in February 1934, lines were cut and bolts removed from the Cork section of the railway by disaffected Kerry footballers. Before a large meeting in republican-dominated Mohill, republicans felled trees on the roads to prevent the organisation’s buses from arriving. Blueshirts used saws to clear the road. The cutting of railway lines also forced Blueshirts to travel to meetings in Cork and Tullamore by bus rather than train.

One of the more bizarre Blueshirt uses of motor transportation occurred in August 1934. Several Blueshirts commandeered a bus to take members to Michael Lynch’s funeral, claiming they were following orders from their officers. They took

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181 Walsh, General O’Duffy, (N.L.I., p. 6539).
182 Southern Star, 2 September 1933.
183 Superintendent, Tralee, to Garda Commissioner, 12 February 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/79).
184 Anglo-Celt, 5 May 1934.
185 Southern Star, 7 October 1933; Irish Independent, 9 April 1934.
the bus to a farm where the ‘kidnapped’ bus driver was served tea. A party of
Blueshirts and Blue Blouses then boarded the bus for transport to the cemetery. The
driver was commanded to wait, which he did, until the members re-boarded the bus
following the service. Then, Blueshirts and driver headed to a pub for refreshments.
The Blueshirts paid for all the petrol. Despite the somewhat surreal circumstances,
the driver thought they would have inflicted violence on him had he refused.\textsuperscript{186}

The Blueshirt leadership recognised that technology could be used for more
than just amassing followers at political rallies. Motor vehicles were also used to
help transport voters to polling booths. The Galway by-election loss in 1935 was
partly attributed to the lack of cars being used by Fine Gael candidates and workers
in comparison to Fianna Fáil.\textsuperscript{187} During public meetings, Blueshirt and Fine Gael
leaders used technology to enhance the spectacle. Gramophones occasionally played
jazz tunes before meetings began.\textsuperscript{188} Motor lorries were used as platforms for
speeches, while broadcast vans allowed the entire assembly to hear the leaders’
words.\textsuperscript{189} A ‘talkie van’ was also used before the February 1933 elections.\textsuperscript{190}

The Blueshirts were also enthusiastic supporters of aviation. The first
meeting of the Blueshirt Aero Club was held on 12 September 1934 under the
leadership of Commandant Stack, director of the Dublin division.\textsuperscript{191} A limited
number of spaces were even held open for women. The Aero Club held lectures on
the latest technology and flying techniques as well as regular training sessions.
Members received twelve hours of flight instruction a week.\textsuperscript{192} At the
commemoration for P. J. Traynor in Dublin, the 1935 Saint Patrick’s Day
celebrations and the commemoration for Michael Lynch, Blueshirts flew planes
overhead in support.\textsuperscript{193} It was rumoured that the Fianna Fáil government, worried
about the possibility of flying Blueshirts, contemplated restricting who could own or
fly a plane.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{186} Statement by Michael Riordan, 16 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/34).
\textsuperscript{187} \textit{United Ireland}, 29 June 1935.
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Meath Chronicle}, 10 September 1932.
\textsuperscript{189} Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Dublin Metropolitan Division, 27 June 1936 (N.A.I.,
Department of Justice 8/245).
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{United Irishman}, 4 February 1933.
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{United Ireland}, 8 September 1934.
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{United Ireland}, 30 March 1935.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Irish Independent}, 9 November 1934; \textit{United Ireland}, 23 March 1935.
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Meath Chronicle}, 29 September 1934.
The one technological advance of which the Blueshirts did not make extensive use, was the radio. The only recorded instance of Blueshirts using the radio occurred in September 1934, when four Blueshirts attempted to take over a broadcast coming from Messrs Roberts Café in Dublin. They had intended to declare ‘Blueshirts of Dublin protest against the holding of Communist Congress in Rathmines Town Hall under Government protection. God Bless our Pope.' But before they could broadcast the message, the engineer disconnected the microphone. This failure to exploit the radio was not, however, necessarily a hindrance to the organisation. Broadcasting in Ireland had begun on 1 January 1926, yet by 1935 only 2.5% of the population had a licence for a radio.

The extensive use of technology, particularly trains and buses, placed a significant financial burden on the movement. Between 31 March 1932 and 31 March 1935 Fine Gael local branches’ debt, a large part of which was attributed to Blueshirt activities, increased by £613,706. In October 1933, Fine Gael’s financial report showed a surplus of £373 in their expenditures. By April 1934, however, staff members at the party headquarters and constituency organisers had to be let go. Party leaders were forced to plead to bank executives to ensure that their cheques continued to be honoured. By June 1934, the bank refused to authorise a further increase in the party’s overdraft, and the members of the executive had to each put forward £200 to cover it. By August, it was finally decided that large meetings had to be abandoned in preference for smaller ones attended only by local members. After the 1934 split, Ernest Blythe, writing as Onlooker, blamed O’Duffy’s preference for mass rallies for leaving the movement in financial difficulties. Blythe entreated members to, henceforth, travel only by foot or bicycle to parades and meetings.

Conclusion

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195 Garda report to Special Branch, Dublin, 8 October 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/293).
198 Minutes from the General Purpose Committee, 26 October 1933, 26 April 1934, 28 June 1934, 12 July 1934, 2 August 1934 (U.C.D.A., Fine Gael minute books P39/MIN/2).
199 United Ireland, 24 November 1934.
The importance of Blueshirt symbolic iconography and ritualistic processions to the movement’s collective identity cannot be overestimated. In his oft-quoted conceptualisation, Benedict Anderson has argued that communities are imagined because, although the majority of community members will never directly interact with each other, they feel a unifying bond. These communities are limited, as they exist alongside other communities and it has been argued that it is this co-existence between communities, often leading to inter-communal struggle and exclusion, which provides identity parameters. Inter-communal struggle is often bound up with the assertion of sovereignty, which relates to the exercise of freedom and independent action. Richard English has argued that communities require a shared cultural form of communication to facilitate communal solidarity, status and self-respect. For Anderson, print media created this shared communication for various national communities. There is no denying that the Blueshirts valued the role of their party newspapers in disseminating party propaganda and constructing a collective identity. The proceedings of meetings and political speeches were sent to the papers for print. Members were urged to feel a sense of pride in the United Ireland and entreat newspaper agents to carry it. The use of the party press was deemed especially important to the Blueshirts because it was alleged that the national newspapers were hostile to the organisation. Nonetheless, I would argue that public processions were even more important to the formation of the movement’s collective identity.

The recent literature on crowd behaviour stemming from social psychological theory has argued that mass demonstrations have a tremendous influence on the formation of collective identity. According to these theorists, social identity is not a list of attributes but is rather formed through interactions and relations with other groups and their actions. In other words ‘identity is defined in positional terms and in terms of the moral and practical implications of that position.’ Rather than taking the view, advocated by the nineteenth century commentator of crowds

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202 English, Irish freedom, pp 441-444.
203 Staff memorandum from Eoin O’Duffy, 18 October 1933, Circular from Eoin O’Duffy to company commanders, 8 November 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
204 Circular from T. P. Gunning to all county and district directors, 21 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/257).
Gustave Le Bon, that crowds are irrational and emotional, and therefore to be feared, these new theorists see positive action stemming from crowd participation. It is through this involvement that individuals gain a sense of empowerment and feel like they can alter social reality.

The accounts by former Blueshirts recorded by Mike Cronin make it clear that it was through participation in mass demonstrations that members felt the strongest positive feelings regarding their membership in the movement. One member claimed it was while standing among the mass of Blueshirts that he felt the most attachment to the movement. Another member remembered feeling a great sense of pride standing in a group of thousands of Blueshirts in uniform. A verifiable sense of empowerment is also apparent. The Blueshirts asserted that only through collective action were the noblest possibilities of the organisation realised.

Two former members contended they felt like they could really accomplish something when assembled in a group. One member was at the July 1934 annual general meeting that led to the formation of the National Guard. He remembered being chased by a mob before the meeting began, but once he got inside he remembered feeling that together they could ‘take care of the rabble outside’.

There was also the sense of positional identity as the members defined their public participation in relation to the actions of their republican opponents. One former Blueshirt claimed local parading began in response to Fianna Fáil members parading though town. Another member mentioned that it was the increased intimidation in the country that brought them together in the Blueshirts. Members took pride in resisting this intimidation. In September 1933, a Blueshirt claimed: ‘I wish every place I go I get a blow in the face as long as I get new members. Twenty of us are going to Ruan on Sunday in Shirts as one of the men who attacked me defied us to go there again. So I am going there on Sunday.’

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207 Ibid., pp 714-175.
208 Interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991.
209 Interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991.
210 *The Blueshirt*, 5 August 1933.
211 Interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991.
212 Interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Grádácaim, 5 December 1991.
213 Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991.
214 Interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991.
215 Letter from Sean MacNamara to central council, 12 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/16).
remembered being hit with rocks while standing as a guard of honour for the
speakers. The Blueshirts chased the attackers down an alley and dealt with them in a
‘brisk manner’.216 It was by marching in public that members believed the necessary
discipline to overcome the terror they faced was instilled.217

There have been several studies of how collective action becomes politicised.
This has been described as ‘the constrained use of power by people over other
people.’218 Politicisation comes from a sense of shared grievances followed by the
attribution of blame on an external enemy. This is then followed by an appeal to a
third group, often the government or public opinion.219 The feeling of shared
grievances is bi-directional since membership of the group is predicated upon such
feelings but membership in the group also homogenises these feelings.220

Blueshirt communal identity was primarily formed through a sense of being
under siege reinforced by the contestation over the movement’s symbols and rituals.
Wearing of the uniform occasioned sharp resistance from across the Irish political
spectrum. Blueshirt political rallies were often sites of inter-communal strife. At the
same time, the movement felt besieged not just due to the physical contestations.
The Blueshirt movement’s use of commemorations was intended to articulate a
particular political and nationalist identity that was predicated upon a defined
historical tradition. This nationalist identity was coming under increasing threat as a
particular form of republicanism was becoming hegemonic and increasingly
synonymous with Irish nationalism. Blueshirt political activity was, in many ways,
shaped by this struggle over competing national visions for Ireland.

As such, these struggles were reflective of the power dynamics between
distinct political communities in inter-war Ireland. It was through collective action
that the organisation realised the potential of its power. It has been argued that
through collective action individuals feel they can disrupt and recalibrate unequal
power dynamics.221 The most unequal power dynamic facing the movement
involved the institutional force of the state. Only through mass demonstrations
could the movement assert itself against such power. It was during the rallies in

216 Interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991.
217 Interview with Dennis Reynolds by Mike Cronin, Coote Hill, 28 May 1991.
218 Bert Klandermans and Bernd Simon, ‘Politicized collective identity: a social psychological
219 Ibid., p. 324
220 Ibid., p. 325.
221 Drury and Reicher, ‘Collective empowerment as a model of social change’, p. 718.
Donegal in December 1933 that the movement defeated the Garda’s attempts to restrict the wearing of the uniform. That was not the only instance when Blueshirts, assembled en masse, felt they were more powerful than the police force. One former member realised ‘the power of the mob’ when a group of Blueshirts forced some Broy Harriers back into their barracks with only batons as weapons. The Blueshirts backed off only after being instructed to do so by their local captain. The former member claimed they were now reversing the power of the mob that had been besieging their political platforms.222

Yet the Blueshirt challenge to the state was more complex. Power, as an analytical concept, has been conceptualised in an economical sense as a commodity that is subject to the vagaries of state control. More contemporary works, influenced by Michel Foucault, regard power as something that is exercised and exists only in action.223 Power does not exist in a substantive sense but only through relations and always based on an inequality in the assertion of power but not always in a negative sense.224 Foucault has also extended the discussion of power beyond focusing exclusively at the institutional centre of state authority. He has focused on the capillaries of power, as he terms it, by which he means local exercise of power.225 He examines the institutions, tactics and procedures that lead the state to target a certain population resulting in a particular type of power that supersedes sovereignty. The essential technical means of doing this is through apparatuses of security, which is the topic of the next chapter.226

222 Interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991.
225 Foucault, ‘Two lectures’, pp 96-98.
Chapter five: The state response to the Blueshirts

The rise of the Blueshirts constituted one of the most serious domestic threats to Irish democracy following the Civil War. As outlined in the previous chapter, Blueshirt public processions exacerbated inter-communal strife as opposing communities competed for territory and political supremacy in the localities. At the same time, the Blueshirt campaign against the payment of land annuities challenged state authority by threatening the Irish economy and disrupting transport and communication networks. The cumulative effect of these outrages maintained a constant threat of destabilisation in the nascent state, and forced the Fianna Fáil government to mobilise the security apparatus to confront the organisation. Deploying the police and judicial institutions, the government restricted and contained Blueshirt activities, while also asserting governmental authority throughout the Free State. This chapter will analyse the specific tactics used in confronting the organisation, and their implications for the assertion of state power at a particular moment in Ireland’s post-colonial history.

The Fianna Fáil government viewed the Blueshirts first and foremost as a law and order, rather than political, issue. Consequently, it was the Garda Síochána and the Irish judiciary, comprising both the district courts and the military tribunal, which directly confronted the movement. These two branches of the security apparatus worked effectively, if not harmoniously, in constraining and controlling the organisation. The Garda maintained regular surveillance of the organisation, policed Blueshirt illegality arising from the anti-annuities campaign, and preserved public peace during Blueshirt political rallies. By doing so, they delegitimized the organisation’s activities and prevented localised disturbances from escalating to the point where the nation-state could have been significantly destabilised. The Irish judiciary practiced a form of social justice through the application of a specific form of judicial punishment designed to reintegrate the individual within the community. This meant focusing not on the individual propensity to commit crime but on the necessity for community peace. This conception of social justice brought the Irish judiciary into conflict with the gardai who were focused on eliminating individual criminality in the communities they served. Yet the convergence of these disconnected policies was remarkably effective in confronting the Blueshirt threat to the state. The gardaí maintained a firm presence in the localities while the judiciary
prevented the further radicalisation of the movement through the limited usage of penal punishment.

This is not to say that policing in independent Ireland was an exercise in monolithic state power imposed on the Irish citizenry. As Michel Foucault has argued, analysing police and judicial tactics reveals the specific configurations and mechanisms integral to the exercise of disciplinary power, and demonstrates the manifest limits to the assertion of state authority over social groups. The Garda was never able to fully assert its authority over the organisation, especially during Blueshirt public demonstrations. Moreover, the judicial concept of social justice, particularly as practiced by the military tribunal, did not always achieve the desired effect and had to be modified in 1935. Nevertheless, the power asserted through the police and judicial institutions was integral to the extension and legitimisation of state authority throughout the Irish Free State.

This assertion of state power also led to a restrictive Irish national identity. The creation of a homogenous identity is almost always achieved through tactics of repression. This process was not purely institutional, but was abetted by the discursive marginalisation of the Blueshirts. Institutional power is often supported by discourses focused on reordering or managing diversity. During the Blueshirt period, the security apparatuses’ power was aided by the discursive construction of the movement as anathema to Irish nationalism. While the Blueshirts were often criticised as being fascist, they were more often discredited as exemplifying the continuation of British imperialism within Ireland. The pejorative power of labelling the movement imperialist is best understood by addressing the specificity of Ireland’s post-colonial moment.

Emerging from the pro-Treaty side of the Civil War, the Blueshirts, while in alliance with Fine Gael, espoused a more moderate and less Anglophobic nationalism, especially in regard to partition, than anti-Treaty republicans. This form of nationalism was also predicated upon the material benefits accruing to the agricultural bourgeoisie through its economic links with the British metropole. But since the Blueshirts emerged fewer than ten years after independence, there was little room for diverse nationalisms within Irish political culture. Through institutional

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1 Foucault, ‘Interview with Michel Foucault’, p. 294.
2 Goldberg, ‘Heterogeneity and hybridity’, pp 72-73.
3 Ibid., p. 81.
and discursive repression, the Fianna Fáil government was able to restrict and contain the only mass mobilisation of a more conservative Irish nationalism. Consequently, the demise of the Blueshirts presents an important juncture in the creation of a homogenous Irish national identity.

The Garda Síochána

Unquestionably among all state institutions, it was the Garda Síochána that had the greatest interaction and influence on Blueshirt movement. The force was well established within the Irish Free State by the time of the organisation’s emergence. It was given statutory provision 1923 with the passage of the Garda Síochána (Temporary Provisions) Bill, although it had effectively been in operation since 1922. The Minister for Justice official had direct authority over the force but in practice he had limited influence on policy and generally deferred to the commissioner regarding specific tactics.4 The deferment of responsibility was to be of crucial importance during the Blueshirt period. Unlike the Royal Irish Constabulary, the Garda was predominantly an unarmed force established in order to ‘develop as a civil police service which seeks to discharge its policing function by consent.’5 This required divisions in every locality, and the maintenance of amiable relations between the force and the communes it served. This policy of policing through consent was to come under its greatest strain during the Blueshirt period, as these years were the most volatile in the force’s history.6

Yet there remains limited analysis of Blueshirt anti-state activities or the resultant police response in the historiography of the group. Maurice Manning and Fearghal McGarry only make brief reference to Blueshirt criminality and the reaction of the gardai in their works.7 Other historians have recognised the importance of the gardai in the movement’s story but have provided few details. For instance, without supplying any examples for evidence, John Regan has claimed:

5 Ibid., p. 10.
7 Manning, The Blueshirts, p. 87; McGarry, Eoin O’Dfy, p. 269, 277.
When gardai were used against the Blueshirts they held their line with impunity and did their duty...De Valera’s policy of delegitimisation of the Blueshirts was in this respect won on the floor of the police barracks at Carrick-on-Suir and other such places and not in the Dáil or in the courts of justice. The performance of the ordinary gardai...was crucial. They dispensed justice and blows with equanimity in 1934 and Irish democracy, and for that matter de Valera’s ascendancy, were all the safer for that.⁸

Eunan O’Halpin has also made bold claims regarding the policing of the organisation without sufficient evidence.⁹ For instance, he has contended that the government’s security strategy towards the Blueshirts established a precedent for Fianna Fáil’s later prohibition of the I.R.A.¹⁰ This contention is problematic because it obscures the differences between policing a mass movement like the Blueshirts and a conspiratorial organisation like the I.R.A. While not ignoring certain parallels, it is necessary to analyse the policing of the Blueshirt movement in its own right.

Historians of the Garda Síochána, with one notable exception, have provided little more information. Liam McNiffe only examines Garda investigative techniques, and not the force’s tactics in preserving the public peace.*¹¹ Gregory Allen’s intentionalist and descriptive work focuses almost exclusively on ministerial reactions to the force’s operations. He only makes one reference to the police tactics used against the Blueshirts:

Caught in the middle, without clear policy direction from Commissioner Broy, the overstretched police adopted pragmatic tactics, creating buffer zones between the warring sides to contain the violence. When that failed, batons were drawn, as much in self-defence as to clear the streets.¹²

The only historian to have devoted substantial attention to the policing of the movement is Conor Brady. Despite being published over thirty-five years ago, his work, Guardians of the peace, remains the most detailed history of the Garda during

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⁸ Regan, The Irish counter-revolution, p. 361.
¹⁰ Ibid., pp 112-115.
this period. Brady’s history is nuanced in that he does not present policing the Blueshirts as monolithically consistent but reflective of the waxing and waning strength of the movement and Fianna Fáil’s shifting political objectives. There were also shifts and adaptations as the force accustomed itself to the novelty of policing a mass political movement. This chapter seeks to expand on Brady’s work by incorporating new evidence from the recent release of Department of Justice files while also analysing the judicial response to the movement, which is largely absent from *Guardians of the peace*. The limited amount of research on the police response to the organisation may be due to the influence of prevailing Blueshirt discourse, which asserted that the group had never been involved in illegal activities. The Blueshirts considered themselves part of a movement dedicated to law and order. After he had assumed leadership of the A.C.A., T. F. O’Higgins asserted that ‘members are pledged to respect the law as it exists in the country, and maintain order, and, in regard to the latter, to co-operate and assist the services of the State...Far from distrusting the services of the state, we showed our trust and confidence in them by our call to all members to assist in and co-operate with the services of the State in carrying out their duties.’ In 1934, the party newspaper claimed ‘The proudest boast of the Blueshirts is that they have never broken the law.’

Blueshirt members also considered themselves victims rather than perpetrators of outrages. Members were encouraged to send to the central council details of attacks on persons or property so that Fine Gael T.D.s could raise them in the Dáil. A list of outrages against the organisation, with a particular focus on assaults on Blueshirt property and members, appeared on the front page of the *United Ireland* newspaper from February until August 1934. The Blueshirts explicitly attributed the frequency of these outrages to the partial application of the law. The gardaí were accused of reacting slowly and providing insufficient aid when Blueshirt public functions were under assault. It was alleged that out of 57

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13 Brady, *Guardians of the peace*, pp 201-203.
14 Ibid., pp 184-185, 208-209, 216.
15 *Irish Times*, 23 August 1932.
16 *United Ireland*, 24 February 1934.
17 Circular from Ned Cronin to each district commander, 24 November 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
18 *United Ireland*, 10 February 1934.
19 *United Irishman*, 8 July 1933.
outrages on dance halls or equipment, 15 of which involved the use of firearms, only one conviction had been secured.\textsuperscript{20} Garda statistics, however, do not entirely support the Blueshirts' argument.

**Blueshirt criminality**

Garda statistics demonstrate a sharp increase in violent crime following the rise of the movement. The number of incidents of riot and unlawful assembly rose from 6 in 1932 to 18 in 1933 to 65 in 1934. The number of houses fired upon by firearms rose from 23 in 1932 to 27 in 1933 to 33 in 1934, while incidents of malicious damage to property rose from 424 in 1932 to 538 in 1933 to 903 in 1934.\textsuperscript{21} Not all of these incidents can be attributed solely to Blueshirt members and other factors, such as the economic dislocation resulting from the tariff war with Great Britain, may have influenced the rise in disturbances. Nevertheless, the Garda remained convinced that the increase in criminality was due to the emergence of the organisation, and the force remained concerned about Blueshirt activities right up to the group's demise in November 1936.\textsuperscript{22} Garda statistics also reveal that Blueshirt outrages were not committed uniformly across the Irish Free State but were regionally concentrated. In 1934 76\% of Blueshirt incidents occurred in only four counties: Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. From 1 July 1934 until 31 May 1935 there were 718 incidents of violence attributed to the Blueshirts, 77\% of which occurred in the same four counties.\textsuperscript{23} It is no coincidence that these four counties, especially Cork, had some of the highest membership levels in the organisation.\textsuperscript{24} The more notorious incidents of Blueshirt violence, as recorded by the Garda, included the accidental shooting and killing of James Glynn, an I.R.A. member, by Sean McNamara in April 1934, the attempted arson of the home of Patrick Murphy, a Fianna Fáil T.D., in Mitchelstown in May 1935, and the consecutive attacks on the

\textsuperscript{20} United Ireland, 2 March 1935.
\textsuperscript{21} Brief review of crime conditions, 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/355).
\textsuperscript{22} Collection of Blueshirt press cuttings regarding the land annuities, November 1936 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/4/5).
\textsuperscript{23} Brief review of crime conditions, 1934; Summary of outrages, 1934; Return of outrages from 1 July 1934 to 31 May 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/355).
\textsuperscript{24} Blueshirt strength returns, March 1934, April 1934 (U.C.D.A., Ernest Blythe’s papers P24/671).
Garda barracks in Kildorrey, County Cork, in June 1935. The majority of Blueshirt criminal activity, however, involved disrupting the communication and transport networks. Of 494 Blueshirt offences brought before the military tribunal from 1933 until 1935, 353 (or 72%) of cases involved cutting telegraph wires or blocking roads and rail tracks.

These assaults on the transport and communication infrastructure were directly related to the economic war and anti-annuities campaign. As was earlier mentioned, the economic war particularly affected cattle farmers. Not only were cattle exports to Britain, the primary market, subjected to high tariffs, farmers were expected to pay the land annuities that the Fianna Fáil government continued to collect. As a result, many cattle farmers refused to pay the annuities until they received economic relief. The Irish government retaliated by seizing and auctioning cattle in compensation for lost revenue. The situation escalated throughout 1934 and 1935, and many Blueshirts, especially in the previously mentioned four counties, attempted to disrupt cattle seizures and sales. The Blueshirt movement was not the only organisation involved in the anti-annuities campaign. As Raymond Ryan has demonstrated, other organisations, such as the Cork Land Annuities Defence Association, were involved in these protests. Ryan also claims that while the Blueshirt leadership never had formal links with any of these groups, at the local level where much of this criminality occurred, there was some membership overlap and co-operation.

As much as the economic war provided the overall context for this anti-state activity, it does not in itself explain the targets of Blueshirt illegality. There are obvious parallels to the previously described I.R.A. attacks on the transport and communication network, but now it was the Blueshirts who were cutting telegraph wires, felling trees on roads or vandalising railway tracks. For both organisations, these incidents were designed to impede individual mobility and the transmission of information. The I.R.A. had conducted these assaults in order to obstruct Blueshirt activities, while the Blueshirts did so in an effort to prevent the transmission of

25 Principal outrages attributed to Blueshirts and allies 1934, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/396); Confidential departmental notes of events from the office of the Minister for Justice, 29 January 1941 (U.C.D.A., Sean MacEntee papers P67/534).
26 Table 3L in Seosamh Ó Longaigh, Emergency law in independent Ireland, 1922-1948 (Dublin, 2006), p. 299.
information regarding the seizure and sale of cattle among state officials, and to impede the transportation of gardai sent to enforce seizures and sales. The major difference being that the I.R.A. assaults were directed against a political organisation while the Blueshirt assaults were directed against state power and challenged Fianna Fáil’s political economy.\textsuperscript{28}

The Irish government used the economic war and subsequent anti-annuities campaign as a form of political economy since they furthered Fianna Fáil’s political as well as economic goals. The economic war provided an opportunity for the government to attack British actions, which always resonated well with Irish nationalists. It also allowed the government to promote tillage as an agricultural alternative since tillage employed more people than cattle farming. The seizure of cattle resulting from the anti-annuities campaign allowed the government to provide free beef to the poor, which increased its support among the lower classes. Finally, the sale of seized cattle also allowed the government to appropriate the surplus capital from the cattle trade for its own purposes. Blueshirt attacks on the communication and transport networks, therefore, need to be viewed not only as examples of criminality but also as direct attacks on state authority in the Irish periphery. Garda policing tactics were not merely a response to rural defiance but a means of asserting governmental power over a social group posing a significant threat to the workings of a modern state.

\textbf{Policing the Blueshirts}

How did the Garda combat Blueshirt criminality? Technological advances, such as plaster impressions of tire tracks and fingerprinting, were available to the gardai but were in their infancy at this time. I have yet to uncover a single incident where use of this technology led to an arrest. Instead, the Garda relied more upon its human resources to apprehend offenders. Due to the nature of the anti-annuity campaign and the geographical range of the Blueshirt membership, this required a rapid expansion in the number of gardai officers. Fortunately for the Fianna Fáil government, the Blueshirt movement’s proposed commemoration march in Dublin

\textsuperscript{28} The term political economy has shifted in meaning numerous times since it was first coined in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. In this chapter it is used to refer to Fianna Fáil’s synthesis of political and economic goals during the economic war.
in August 1933 provided a suitable pretext to increase recruitment to the police force.

Due to the force’s loyalty to the former Cumann na nGaedheal government, Fianna Fáil did not completely trust the Garda’s loyalty in policing the movement, and feared the gardaí would not effectively control Blueshirt events, especially the proposed Dublin march. Consequently, de Valera sought to recruit Fianna Fáil supporters in the force to ensure its loyalty. Seventy-nine men, many of whom had just been released from prison, were immediately brought into the force in August and September, given a ten-minute instruction of the law, armed and sent to protect government buildings. After August 1933, the force was assigned to various Garda divisions throughout the Free State, and took the lead in policing efforts to collect annuities. Officers were expected to patrol and protect telegraph lines, railway tracks and roads before any controversial seizure or sale of cattle. They also assembled en masse to present an overwhelming show of force to intimidate Blueshirt opposition. By the end of 1934, a further three hundred and ten men had joined the force, to be followed by another one hundred and seventy in the first three months of 1935. Almost immediately, this new force, collectively referred to as the Broy Harriers, gained a reputation for being ruthless in the execution of its duties.

Irrespective of this reputation, however, historians have generally concluded that the creation of the force was a positive step in policing Ireland during this period. Liam McNiffe argues that they eventually became well assimilated into the force. Since it was composed almost exclusively of Fianna Fáil and I.R.A. supporters, McNiffe believes the Broy Harriers helped reconcile anti-Treaty republicans to the police and the state. Gregory Allen also praises the formation and eventual assimilation of the Broy Harriers. They were ‘a tribute to common sense in the well-disciplined force bequeathed by O’Duffy and to the self-respect and resourcefulness of the new guards, a republican leavening in a largely Cumann

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30 Ibid., p. 181.
na nGaedheal lump. The "Broy Harriers" stand in history as an exercise in adroit politics by a master tactician.\textsuperscript{35}

Blueshirts, on the other hand, had a different opinion. Most members were already suspicious of the new police force due to the partisan nature of its creation and the overt republican sympathies of the newly armed officers, but this suspicion turned into overt hostility after Michael Lynch was shot and killed in Marsh's Yard in August 1934. A lorry carrying several Blueshirts had crashed through the gates of the Yard in an attempt to stop the sale of seized cattle. In response, several Harriers opened fire and killed Lynch, one of the Blueshirts riding in the lorry, and injuring several others. At the subsequent coroner's inquest, it was determined that there had been no order given to fire and only Broy Harriers had discharged their weapons.\textsuperscript{36} Yet no one was charged or disciplined.\textsuperscript{37} Michael Lynch's father then brought a civil suit against the state and was awarded £300. Justice Hanna, who presided, was unequivocal in blaming the Broy Harriers for firing indiscriminately and bringing the entire Garda force into disrepute.\textsuperscript{38}

This tragedy left an indelible mark on Blueshirt historical memory. While several of the former members interviewed by Mike Cronin commended the regular gardai for performing their duties admirably and keeping the peace during trying times, they also claimed that the Blueshirts never received justice from the Broy Harriers.\textsuperscript{39} Almost half of Cronin's respondents contended that the Harriers were a partisan political force created from former I.R.A. men or Fianna Fáil supporters. Some interviewees continued to blame the Harriers for Michael Lynch's death, while others recounted further stories of reckless violence by the Harriers.\textsuperscript{40}

After Lynch's death, the Blueshirts became more radical in their attitudes towards the state. At the Blueshirt Ard Fheis in August 1934, resolutions were

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\textsuperscript{35} Allen, \textit{The Garda Síochána}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Cork Examiner}, 28 August 1934.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{United Ireland}, 1 September 1934.
\textsuperscript{38} Confidential departmental notes of events from the office of the Minister for Justice, 29 January 1941 (U.C.D.A., Sean MacEntee papers P67/534).
\textsuperscript{39} Interview with Patrick Lindsay by Mike Cronin, Bealadangan, 23 May 1991; interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991; interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991; interview with Timothy O'Connell by Mike Cronin, Buttevant, 7 December 1991; interview with Walter Terry by Mike Cronin, Aglish, 9 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Don Purcell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991; interview with Andrew Forrest by Mike Cronin, Ballitore, 2 December 1991; interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991; interview with Timothy O'Connell by Mike Cronin, Buttevant, 7 December 1991; interview with Jimmy Quinlan by Mike Cronin, Waterford, 9 December 1991;
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passed demanding that the Harriers, referred to as ‘Fianna Fáil gunmen’, be disbanded and an impartial special inquiry established to investigate the incident at Marsh’s Yard.\textsuperscript{41} Blueshirts were also entreated to no longer co-operate with the Garda and a majority of delegates voted in favour of obstructing police investigations into Blueshirt activities.\textsuperscript{42} During the Beal-na-Blath commemoration a few weeks later a group of Blueshirts became extremely aggressive towards the gardaí on duty, shouting: ‘Ye gave it to us in Copley Street’ and ‘Where were you when Lynch was shot.’\textsuperscript{43} Rumours began to spread that the Blueshirts were arming to prevent the seizure of cattle.\textsuperscript{44} It was alleged that T. F. O’Higgins’s brother, Brian O’Higgins, had brought ammunition to O’Duffy in Stradbally in September 1934.\textsuperscript{45} The Dundrum Blueshirt district staff even agreed to the use of landmines to stop the seizure of cattle although there is no evidence that this was ever put into practice.\textsuperscript{46}

The Garda were well aware of this increase in Blueshirt radicalism. The Garda Chief Superintendent in Leix reported ‘It appears to be the policy of the Blueshirts to get all the arms and ammunition they can and it is also understood that it is their intention to use force whenever necessary’.\textsuperscript{47} Commissioner Ned Broy commented ‘The attitude of the Blueshirts is becoming progressively more aggressive as far as opposition to the collection of annuities is concerned.’\textsuperscript{48} He believed that O’Duffy’s eulogy at Lynch’s funeral would likely enflame tensions and lead to the continuation of organised resistance in Cork for some time. He was sufficiently concerned to recommend that the military be requisitioned for cattle sales and the Garda be supplied with gas bombs. The Minister for Justice P. J. Ruttledge disagreed with the first request but agreed to the second.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{United Ireland}, 25 August 1934.
\textsuperscript{42} Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to Garda Commissioner, 30 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/276).
\textsuperscript{43} Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 4 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/38).
\textsuperscript{44} Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 18 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/511).
\textsuperscript{45} Chief Superintendent, Leix and Offaly, to Garda Commissioner, 11 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/480).
\textsuperscript{46} Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, 1 October 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/144).
\textsuperscript{47} Chief Superintendent, Leix and Offaly, to Garda Commissioner, 11 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/480).
\textsuperscript{48} Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 2 October 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/144).
\textsuperscript{49} Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 20 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/511).
The increasing radicalism of the Blueshirts and their concomitant criminality cannot, therefore, be attributed solely to the worsening economic situation. State actions were also provocative, although Lynch was the only Blueshirt member killed by state forces. At the same time though, the creation of the Broy Harriers was integral to the successful assertion of police power over the group. Policing a mass movement like the Blueshirts required sufficient numbers of police forces to protect the transport and communication network. Furthermore, the death of Lynch, tragic as it was, while radicalising some members, also demonstrated the force’s determination to protect state authority. Consequently, these attacks never grew to sufficient proportions to threaten the state’s infrastructure or power. The increase in Garda numbers was also necessary for the pervasive surveillance of the organisation throughout this period.

**Surveillance**

Fundamental to solving Blueshirt crimes was the accumulation of intelligence on local agitators and members. Remarkably, the gardaí often knew not only all of the local members of the Blueshirts but also of other organisations such as the I.R.A. The quantity and quality of this intelligence is testament to the communal relations the force had built up throughout the Free State. This intelligence allowed local gardaí to focus on specific individuals after a crime was committed. Although this did not always result in arrests or convictions, it did allow the gardaí to keep these individuals under surveillance, which influenced their subsequent behaviour.

Surveillance as a disciplinary mechanism was a particularly effective policing tool, especially for a public organisation such as the Blueshirts. Even a cursory examination of the Department of Justice files reveals the incredible extent of the Garda’s knowledge of every aspect of the organisation. There are over a thousand Garda reports in the National Archives of Ireland pertaining to all manner of Blueshirt events surveyed by officers. These ranged from community dances attended by a dozen Blueshirts to commemorations involving thousands. The Garda considered all Blueshirt events, including social functions, as political. On occasion the Blueshirts would accuse the gardaí of attending their events as a means of intimidating prospective members but it is apparent the force was using its
surveillance for other purposes. The gardai wanted intelligence on the number of people, members and non-members, attending these functions in order to assess the growth of the movement and its popular support in various counties. Prominent Blueshirts involved in recruitment, such as Jerry Ryan, Daniel Reeves and Jack Walsh, were monitored as they travelled across the Free State seeking new members. The Garda also frequently listed the names of Blueshirt officers leading the meetings, and the names of any army pensioners, reservists and peace commissioners that were in attendance. These lists centralised knowledge of prominent Blueshirts, and reflected governmental concerns regarding any possible connections between the organisation and Irish security forces.

By keeping constant track of Blueshirt events and speeches, the gardai were able to identify the most prominent and radical members. During the height of the anti-annuities campaign the gardai would make frequent sweeps on prominent Blueshirts and incarcerate them for several nights. Even though oftentimes these Blueshirts were released without charge, these tactics had the effect of keeping members aware of Garda supervision of their movements and operated as disciplinary mechanisms in altering members’ behaviour. The Garda also used this tactic with republicans during periods of increased I.R.A. activity. Where intelligence was insufficient and direct evidence for prosecution unavailable, the gardai would focus on locating witnesses to these crimes. This was not an easy task. Blueshirt criminal activity was most often committed at night and in isolated areas with few people to witness it. In addition, the nature of the communal strife during this period made securing witnesses even more difficult. Many people were wary of coming forward and co-operating with the gardai for fear of retribution from their neighbours. As one Fianna Fáil supporter claimed, after some Blueshirts had invaded his home, ‘Look here, Superintendent, these people are

50 United Ireland, 10 February 1934.
51 Chief Superintendent, Mayo, to the Garda Commissioner, 23 February 1934, Chief Superintendent, Galway, to the Garda Commissioner, 18 January 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
52 See for instance, Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 7 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/20); Chief Superintendent, Letterkenny, to Garda Commissioner, 1 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/50); Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to Garda Commissioner, 26 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/103).
53 Irish Independent, 24 October, 25 October, 31 October, 10 November 1934.
54 Brady, Guardians of the peace, p. 145.
55 Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 14 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/20); Superintendent, Killarney, to the Garda Commissioner, 7 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/629).
neighbours of mine and they will be here when you are far away.'\textsuperscript{56} Reliance on witness identification also left the Garda open to accusations of abuse. John O’Sullivan, a prominent Cork Blueshirt and future T.D., was convicted of the arson of Deputy Murphy’s house in May 1935, but fifty-two years later he continued to claim that the gardaí had intimidated the witness against him. O’Sullivan claimed he had helped Murphy’s wife and children out of the burning house but was then picked up at the scene by the gardaí. Murphy’s wife refused to identify him as the culprit on the first identification parade but did so on the second attempt after the gardaí had said something to her in private.\textsuperscript{57}

This was not the only accusation of malfeasance levelled against the force during this period. In several cases the gardaí relied upon confessions to achieve convictions, and suspicions remain as to how some of these were obtained. William McCarthy argued in front of the military tribunal that his confession had been extracted under duress.\textsuperscript{58} The Blueshirts that went on trial for shooting at the Garda barracks in Kildorrey, County Cork, in July 1935 claimed that their convictions were only secured because the gardaí had coerced them through assault. The gardaí in question rejected these allegations but were sufficiently worried about negative press publicity to appeal to senior counsel to remove these defendants from public scrutiny by prosecuting their cases in the military tribunal.\textsuperscript{59} Although there is no definitive evidence to support the accusations in this case, there is evidence that gardaí did occasionally mistreat Blueshirts in custody. One Garda officer extracted revenge by assaulting a Blueshirt in jail who had hit him on the head with a baton during a public disturbance earlier that day. Garda officers took these incidents very seriously because they believed they created bitterness between the people and the police force thus adversely affecting police operations.\textsuperscript{60} The force was leery of alienating the public during this period of inter-communal strife, especially considering the Garda already had a reputation for using ‘counter-intimidation’ policies on republicans during police interrogations.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{56} Superintendent to the Chief Superintendent, Cork, 6 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/34).
\textsuperscript{57} Southern Star, 25 April 1987.
\textsuperscript{58} O Longaigh, \textit{Emergency law in independent Ireland}, pp 166-169.
\textsuperscript{59} Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 20 July 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/188).
\textsuperscript{60} Superintendent, Middleton, to Chief Superintendent, Cork, 7 July 1934, Detective Headquarters to the Minister for Justice, 9 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/249)
\textsuperscript{61} Brady, \textit{Guardians of the peace}, p. 145.
Garda policing of these crimes reveals the extent to which the force was reliant upon the co-operation of the communities in which they served. The Garda had to maintain a highly visible and interactive presence. As witnesses and confessions were not always sufficient for prosecution, the force relied upon surveillance and intelligence on activities occurring within their districts. For all that, the force did an effective job in constraining the spread of Blueshirt criminality; for the most part the disturbances remained confined to four counties, and even within these, the situation never radically destabilised society. The Garda protected the communication and transport networks and thus Fianna Fáil’s political economy. By doing so they also defeated Blueshirt attempts to maintain local autonomy over the cattle trade. Blueshirts were not able to dictate the sale of cattle or withhold their revenue from the state. Yet, policing these outrages was only one part of the Garda response to the movement.

**Public peace**

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the Blueshirts represented a significant force in Irish politics due to their ability to regularly mobilise a large number of people in each county. The movement made efficient, if costly, use of expanded communication and transport networks to assemble more people in more places than had been previously possible. The Blueshirts used these rallies to demarcate territory and demonstrate their political strength. Consequently, they often constituted a populist challenge to their opponents and were flashpoints of conflict. It was up to the gardai to attempt to control these conflicts, and ensure that they remained localised without threatening national stability.

The novelty of the Blueshirts as a mass political movement also meant that the Garda was initially unsure about how to police the organisation. The 1922 Constitution was notoriously vague regarding the use of public space for political gatherings. While there were only explicit prohibitions on stationary meetings impeding the legitimate rights of transportation or advocating the committal of an unlawful act, the Constitution did not unequivocally guarantee the right of assembly:

The law which does not prohibit open-air meetings does not, generally speaking, provide that there shall be spaces where the public can meet in the open air, either
for political discussion or for amusement. There may be, of course, and indeed there are, special localities which by statute, by custom or otherwise, are so dedicated to the use of the public as to be available for the purpose of public meetings. But speaking in general terms, the Courts do not recognise certain spaces as set aside for that end.\textsuperscript{62}

Accordingly, the Garda had some leeway in suppressing the organisation, and after the government had proscribed the National Guard in August 1933, the Garda prevented O’Duffy from speaking at meetings in Waterford and Fermoy.\textsuperscript{63} The September Beal-na-Blath commemoration was also banned but, as previously mentioned, O’Duffy was able to circumvent this ban through an audacious car chase. After the formation of Fine Gael in September 1933, however, the Garda became more reticent in using outright suppression. Suppressing the meetings of Blueshirts, now reconstituted as the Young Ireland Association, was not possible without also suppressing Fine Gael meetings and, thereby, denying the political opposition the right to assembly. Throughout the last four months of 1933, Garda officers, including Commissioner Ned Broy, sent several appeals to the Minister for Justice as to what course of action to take in policing Blueshirt functions.\textsuperscript{64} No response was forthcoming at this time, leaving the gardai to devise policing strategy through their own initiative.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that it was during this period that some of the most severe incidents of violence resulting from Blueshirt public rallies occurred. As mentioned in chapter one, there were riots in Limerick and Kilrush in September while, the military had to be called to restore order at the Fine Gael convention in Tralee on Friday 6 October 1933. In this latter instance, the Garda cordons were ineffective because they had been established only around the convention hall, thus permitting the republicans to attack delegates as they were making their way towards

\textsuperscript{62} Memorandum on article 9 of the Constitution of Saorstát Éireann, 1923 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/438).
\textsuperscript{63} Manning, \textit{The Blueshirts}, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{64} Chief Superintendent, Clare, to the Garda Commissioner, 3 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/722); Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to the Garda Commissioner, 11 December 1933, Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 13 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
the convention. Also, notably, the gardaí did not use a baton charge on the hostile crowds.\textsuperscript{65}

After Tralee, every Blueshirt function became a potentially serious threat to public peace and the gardaí struggled to maintain control. The two primary tactics used to contain disturbances were cordons and baton charges. The gardaí would establish cordons to prevent the Blueshirts and their opponents from approaching each other or to contain the Blueshirts within a limited area. To be effective, these tactics required the Garda to have absolute control over the urban space. For example, following a Fine Gael meeting at the town hall in Blackrock on 18 June 1934, the Blueshirts wanted to march throughout the town to demonstrate their political strength. Recognising that this would lead to conflict with republicans, the gardaí only allowed the Blueshirts to march down a section of the main street. In addition, the force prevented Blueshirt members from congregating around the town hall.\textsuperscript{66} As such, the gardaí allowed the Blueshirts to march but prevented them from entering contested territory. They also prevented members from rallying around a potentially symbolic, and thus contentious, spot, the town hall, which might have provoked violence. As a result, there were no disturbances.

The limited urban space available to the Blueshirts in Blackrock facilitated the Garda's efforts at keeping control. In larger urban areas, the Garda required more officers to police these events. One of the most effective displays of Garda tactics occurred in Claremorris on 19 June 1934, when hundreds of Blueshirts, under Ned Cronin's leadership, descended on the town to seek revenge for an attack on members that had occurred two days earlier. Recognising that this meeting was likely to lead to conflict, the Garda brought in extra officers to effectively police the urban space. They prevented two hundred Blueshirts from the surrounding areas from joining the rally by establishing blockades on all the major routes into town. The three hundred Blueshirts who had assembled within Claremorris attempted to march down the main roads but were confined to a restricted area by Garda cordons. Once the Blueshirts had completed their march within this confined space they were ordered to disperse and leave town. Faced with determined Garda opposition the

\textsuperscript{65} Irish Independent, 7 October 1933.
\textsuperscript{66} Chief Superintendent, F Division Dublin, to Garda Commissioner, 12 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/61).
only possibilities were to outright defy the authorities or comply. The Blueshirts complied and left town with no incident.67

Considering an attack had occurred two days earlier, it was probable that violence would have ensued in Claremorris if the Blueshirts had freedom of movement throughout the town. To prevent this, the gardai had maintained complete control of urban space both outside and within town limits by drafting in supplementary gardai. Having adequate number of gardai was fundamental to effective policing strategies during this period. There are examples of limited numbers of gardai being able to maintain public peace, most notably in Cork city. For instance, in December 1933 two gardai were able to prevent a mob from breaking into the Young Ireland Association premises.68 Later that same month approximately two thousand people surrounded the same building, which, this time, was protected by only six gardai. Demonstrating astute local police initiative, a senior Garda was able to persuade Tom Barry, who was the leader of the mob, to disperse the crowd after promising to provide Barry with a list of all the Blueshirts inside. No such list was ever provided.69 These incidents were the exception, however, and generally the Garda required numerous gardai on duty to prevent serious violence. This often required the transfer of significant numbers of gardai from other divisions to the sites of conflict. For instance, before the monster meeting at Eyre Square in Galway in February 1934, two hundred extra gardai were brought in to police the actual procession and meeting as well as the railway lines and main roads into Galway. This was done in order to ensure that no disturbances occurred during the event or while the Blueshirts were coming into town from surrounding areas.70

As can be expected, the frequent transport of gardai led to increased expenditure and strain on the police force. Each year during this period, Ruttledge was forced to ask the Dáil for a supplementary sum to defray the charges resulting from police operations of the previous year. By no means were these increases due exclusively to Blueshirt activity, but they do indicate the increasing Garda duties

67 Chief Superintendent, Mayo, to Garda Commissioner, 20 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/124).
68 United Ireland, 9 December 1933.
69 Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 4 December 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/735).
70 Chief Superintendent, Galway, to the Garda Commissioner, 24 February 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/01).
during this period that were largely resulting from the inter-communal strife. In 1934 a supplemental sum of £25,846 was passed to cover the charges from 1933. This was increased to £35,985 for 1934 and to £1,212,129 for 1935. During the last three months of 1933 the force spent £375 per month for the subsistence costs of gardai rooming in different areas. The force spent another £450 per month transporting gardai from one district to another. A Garda report from Commissioner Broy claimed that the force’s resources were overstretched in 1934 due to the non-payment of annuities, destruction of the communication system and the political attacks on recreational halls and public meetings. During 1934, 1,826 Garda officers performed 144,000 hours of extra duty. Special Garda units had to be formed at Mullingar, Claremorris House and Naas. Broy was unequivocal as to who was to blame for this increase in expenditure and workload: ‘Large forces of Police have been drafted at considerable inconvenience and expense to meetings of this kind—simply to protect Blueshirts whose very presence and conduct at different centres incite disorders.’

As with their efforts to combat the Blueshirts’ anti-annuities campaign, intelligence on Blueshirt activities and meetings was required for the effective deployment of Garda manpower. This was often easily acquired since Blueshirt rallies and meetings were publicised well in advance. Yet, on occasion, there were lapses in Garda preparedness leading to sharp reprimands. The riot in Aglish, County Waterford, in July 1934 was unequivocally blamed on the superintendent’s lapse of judgement in not bringing in sufficient forces. The Blueshirts and their opponents had come to town armed with sticks and batons with the intention of starting a conflict. Both Commissioner Broy and the Chief Superintendent of Waterford ordered an inquiry into how this could have been planned and occurred without Garda knowledge, which reflected very poorly on the force.

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72 Memorandum from the Clerk of Accounts to the Minister for Justice, 26 February 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/357).
73 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 15 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/355).
74 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 2 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/157).
75 Superintendent, Lismore, to the Chief Superintendent, Waterford, 10 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/172).
76 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 12 July 1934, Chief Superintendent, Waterford, to the Garda Commissioner, 23 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/172).
On occasion, the Blueshirts kept their activities secret in order to confound the Garda and facilitate a conflict with their opponents free from police control. For example, the meeting arranged by Bishop Fogarty of Killaloe in Ennis to facilitate the merger between the Blueshirts, Cumann na nGaedheal and the Centre party had been kept secret so as to confuse the Garda. Blueshirts in Westport, County Mayo, kept their movements a secret, and cycled into town via different routes in order to start a fight with opponents free from Garda interference. The Garda blamed the occurrence of a riot in Thurles on the Blueshirts’ secrecy: ‘The Garda had not sufficient notice of the meeting to have adequate strength present to maintain the public peace. The meeting was kept quiet until practically the last moment as the Blueshirts apparently wanted to get the Garda napping and take the Law into their own hands as far as their opponents were concerned.’ The Blueshirts had actually told the Garda that the meeting was going to take place in Cashel in order to mislead them.

Even with ample warning and sufficient numbers of gardai assembled, there was no guarantee of absolute control over public disturbances. In situations where both the Blueshirts and their opponents mobilised at the same time and in the same location there was little the Garda could do to prevent the occurrence of violence. In both Blackrock and Claremorris, the Garda had been fortunate that this had not occurred. In Drogheda on 27 May 1934, the Garda were not as fortunate, when the Blueshirts held a rally attended by over 1,000 members at the same time as the I.R.A. and Cumann na mBan were holding a rally attended by over 2,000 members. The Garda had anticipated trouble, especially since there had been a previous riot in February, and had drafted in 250 extra gardai. Still these numbers were woefully insufficient considering the available urban space. The gardai formed a cordon between the two groups and were able to redirect the Blueshirt parade onto an alternate route, but the side streets were left unsupervised resulting in numerous

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77 Chief Superintendent, Clare, to Garda Commissioner, 3 September 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/722).
78 Superintendent, Westport, to Chief Superintendent, Mayo, 28 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/120).
79 Superintendent, Thurles, to the Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, 29 July 1934, Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 30 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/446).
80 Chief Superintendent, Drogheda, to the Garda Commissioner, 14 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 109).
street battles being fought on the sidelines. Eventually these isolated battles led to a general riot and the Garda struggled to re-establish control.  

The riot in Drogheda illustrates the limits to policing power in Ireland at this time. With sufficient numbers and a suitably expansive urban area, the Blueshirts and their opponents could assume control of the situation leaving the Garda with few options. Once violence had broken out, the gardai had to quell the disturbance before it grew to a general conflagration, usually through a baton charge. These charges required individual courage and fortitude on the part of the gardai considering they were often launched in the face of stone throwing or against rioters armed with sticks, hurleys or batons. Part of the reason that the disturbances in Tralee escalated to the extent that they did was because no baton charge had been launched while it had still been possible to control the situation. At the same time, though, baton charges were not guaranteed to succeed, especially in the face of superior opposition numbers. In Drogheda, five baton charges had been needed to restore order. On occasion, the number of rioters and severity of violence made the situation too dangerous to launch a baton charge and the mob would have free rein. Furthermore, if bystanders were caught up in the violence the Garda would opt not to launch a baton charge. For instance, a Blueshirt rally in Millstreet, County Cork, in March 1934 had been timed to occur alongside a town fair. The gardai were aware that violence was likely to occur, yet when the riot started they were unable to deploy a baton charge because innocent people attending the fair were mixed in with the Blueshirt agitators. Order could only be restored after several hours and not before there was significant property damage and personal injury on both sides.

The amassing of numbers of Blueshirts also posed problems for the Garda in identifying leading agitators. During the chaotic street battles, it was often impossible to identify those causing the most damage, as offenders would frequently

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81 Irish Press, 28 May 1934; Irish Independent, 28 May 1934.
82 Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Clare, 3 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/8); Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 7 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/20).
83 Irish Press, 28 May 1934; Irish Independent, 28 May 1934.
84 Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 2 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/516).
85 Superintendent, Macroom, to the Chief Superintendent, Cork, 6 March 1934, Garda Commissioner to the Chief Superintendent, Cork, 12 March 1934, Chief Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 20 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/231).
disappear into the crowds.\textsuperscript{86} This difficulty was compounded if the offending Blueshirts were from out of town and unknown to the gardai.\textsuperscript{87} Moreover, Blueshirts travelling to different regions for these events did not feel the same attachment to the community or the local police forces. The mobility that facilitated Garda strategies in policing these events was, therefore, also being used against the force by rendering impotent policing based on personal relations between the force and the community.

The Garda was well aware of these limitations to policing power but had few other options. The government would not permit outright suppression of Blueshirt processions despite the wishes of several prominent Garda officers including Commissioner Broy.\textsuperscript{88} After a major riot in Waterford on 31 May 1934, Broy took action. After leaving a Blueshirt dance, numerous Blueshirts had come into conflict with a Labour procession and parade. The gardai interposed themselves between the groups but were unable to stop the Blueshirts from rushing their opponents and had to resort to a baton charge to restore order. A second group of Blueshirts then entered the fray from a different part of town. Two more baton charges were required to get this group of Blueshirts to move off. The Blueshirts then tried a third assault by circuitously avoiding the Garda cordon but by this time the Labour crowd had dispersed. Several gardai were injured during the fracas. Afterwards, Commissioner Broy ordered the Chief Superintendent in Waterford to ban all Blueshirt parades in town.\textsuperscript{89} Broy instructed him to use whatever force was necessary to block all marches, parades or public displays that might be provocative or lead to a disturbance of the public peace.\textsuperscript{90} However, the Attorney General, Conor Maguire, intervened and asserted that Blueshirt parades could not be restricted unless the Garda witnessed an actual breach of the peace. The potential for a violent confrontation was not sufficient justification to prohibit a Blueshirt march; consequently the Garda could not prevent the Blueshirts from marching in contested

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[86]{Superintendent, Bandon, to Chief Superintendent, Cork, 7 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/39).}
\footnotetext[87]{Chief Superintendent, Limerick, to the Garda Commissioner, 26 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/103); Superintendent, Ballina, to Chief Superintendent, Mayo, 3 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/125).}
\footnotetext[88]{Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to Garda Commissioner, 6 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/156); Chief Superintendent, F Division Dublin, to Garda Commissioner, 12 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/61).}
\footnotetext[89]{Superintendent to the Chief Superintendent, Waterford, 1 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/167).}
\footnotetext[90]{Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 2 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/167).}
\end{footnotes}
territory. Maguire did recommend, though, that the Garda try to reorient Blueshirt parades away from these areas.91

Without the ability to outright ban Blueshirt processions, the Garda had to find alternate means of asserting control when cordons and baton charges had failed. In these circumstances, and if Special Branch officers were on duty, gardai could resort to firing their weapons in the air. This tactic usually worked in stopping the violence and scaring rioters off the streets.92 But this was recognised as a last resort since there was always the possibility of unintended injury or death, as the case of Michael Lynch demonstrated.93

When none of these tactics succeeded in maintaining order, the gardai were forced to call in reinforcements from the military. As the riot in Tralee demonstrated, this only occurred once the gardai had lost complete control over the situation. On 4 March 1934, in Listowel, County Kerry, a town riven by inter-communal strife, rival meetings led to a serious riot threatening loss of life. Opponents attacked the Blueshirts and gardai with stones, bottles, metal rods and sticks after the gardai unsuccessfully launched several baton charges and fired their weapons in the air to restore order.94 The violence against the gardai was so severe that they were forced off the streets, and had to take shelter in doorways from the bottles and stones. Several gardai were injured and reinforcements had to be called to restore order.95 The last incidence of military reinforcements being used was in Cork City on 21 June 1934.96 A Blueshirt meeting to rally support for the local elections had turned violent and there were insufficient gardai on duty. Storefront windows were smashed and vandalised, and it took several hours for the Garda and military to restore order.97

Notwithstanding their dramatic and serious nature, these incidents of military involvement occurred infrequently. The Garda was remarkably successful in

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91 Memorandum from the Attorney General to the Secretary of the Department of Justice, 6 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/167).
92 Garda report of outrage, 13 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/95); Irish Press, 30 April 1934; Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Drogheda, 21 February 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/108).
94 Superintendent, Listowel, to the Garda Commissioner, 20 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/336).
95 Garda report of outrage, 12 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/336).
96 Superintendent, Cork, to the Garda Commissioner, 22 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/25).
97 Irish Times, 22 June 1934.
preventing public disturbances from destabilising Irish society. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there was a ritualistic quality inherent in this communal violence that usually prevented it from escalating, but Garda policing strategies also kept the level of public disturbances within acceptable limits.

**Garda attitudes towards the Blueshirts**

Garda policing strategies also reflected institutional attitudes towards the organisation and were intended to de-legitimize Blueshirt public activities. It might be expected that there would have been a great deal of sympathy between the Garda and the movement since both emerged from the pro-Treaty side of the Civil War and were antagonistic towards the extra-parliamentary republican movement. Blueshirt members did claim, on occasion, that gardai approved of the rough treatment they gave republicans during public meetings. Moreover, two detectives who had been dismissed for shooting and mistreating the prominent republicans George Gilmore and T. J. Ryan in 1933 subsequently joined the Blueshirts. But these incidents were the exception and did not indicate any institutional collusion. Conor Brady contends that the force remained impartial in its administration of justice and loyal towards the state. ‘The principles inculcated by [Kevin] O’Higgins and O’Duffy had gone deep into the force, and the stability of the Guards in these vital months was to be one of the major factors in the resolution of the Blueshirt crisis.’ Analysis of policing strategies and attitudes, however, show that significant factions within the force were not as impartial as Brady has contended, and were in fact very much opposed to the Blueshirts.

The strategies used to police Blueshirt public demonstrations reveal an institutional appraisal of the movement as illegitimate within Irish politics, especially in comparison with more republican movements. The gardai frequently ordered only the Blueshirts to reorient or discontinue their parades and rallies. In Drogheda, it was the Blueshirt movement that was ordered to alter its parade route not the I.R.A. or Cumann na mBan. After the May riot in Waterford, Maguire told Broy and the

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98 Brady, *Guardians of the peace*, pp 190-191.
99 Letter from BJ Connolly to Blueshirt central council, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
100 Confidential departmental notes of events from the Office of the Minister for Justice, 29 January 1941 (U.C.D.A., Sean MacEntee papers P67/534).
Chief Superintendent to block Blueshirt parades from contested areas. During rival meetings between Fianna Fáil and the Blueshirts in Bunninadden, County Sligo, on 24 June 1934, the Blueshirts were prevented from marching through town and were confined to one end of the village. The Fianna Fáil supporters on the other hand were permitted to march without restriction and headed to the Blueshirt headquarters, leading to unruly scenes and exchanges of insults. The gardaí imposed an effective cordon and kept the groups apart but cautioned only the Blueshirts regarding the use of party cries. When the group continued to respond to the provocation of the Fianna Fáil supporters, the gardaí used a baton charge to break up the Blueshirt gathering. Only after the Blueshirts were dispersed did the gardaí turn their attention to the Fianna Fáil supporters.102

The Garda often considered the Blueshirts the primary instigators of much of the violence. For example, in the spring of 1934, the Blueshirts and their republican opponents had both agreed to meet in Cong, County Mayo, for a public brawl, yet the Garda superintendent attributed the blame to the Blueshirts: ‘The disturbance...[was] started and continued by the Blue Shirts’.103 The Chief Superintendent in Tipperary, after a riot in Tipperary town, stated: ‘The aggressors on both sides, but particularly the L.O.Y. (League of Youth) aggressors, require to be taught a salutary lesson and I believe that the proceedings now being instituted will have the effect of putting a stop to any future incidents of this kind in the area.’104 A fight in Dublin between Blueshirts and republicans returning from the Bodenstown commemoration was blamed exclusively on the Blueshirts who, it was claimed, were there only to ‘stir up strife.’105 Even Blueshirt graffiti was deemed proof that ‘it is the set policy of the Blueshirts to be as offensive and aggressive as possible in this Division so that the Garda may be given the maximum amount of trouble.’106 The Chief Superintendent of Naas remarked: ‘I know from experience

102 Superintendent, Ballymote, to Chief Superintendent, Sligo, 25 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/149).
103 Superintendent, Claremorris, to Chief Superintendent, Mayo, 4 April 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/114).
104 Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to Garda Commissioner, 16 November 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/161).
105 Chief Superintendent, Dublin Metropolitan Division, to the Garda Commissioner, 19 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/279).
106 Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to Garda Commissioner, 5 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/158).
that this lip service from the Blue Shirts of “helping the Guards” is a camouflage and cover for illegal displays.\textsuperscript{107}

The Garda’s antagonistic attitude towards the Blueshirts was exacerbated by personal conflicts between several Garda officers and the Blueshirt leaders. Ned Cronin and Superintendent O’Riordan of Thomastown, County Kilkenny, were embroiled in a personal feud dating back to when both had served in the National Army. O’Riordan had once claimed in court that Cronin had solicited a bribe from him in 1922. Considering this accusation harmful to his national reputation, Cronin had unsuccessfully sought a retraction.\textsuperscript{108} When O’Riordan refused to comply, Cronin attempted to subvert his authority as Garda superintendent. He accused O’Riordan of firing shots at a Blueshirt dance in August 1934, and demanded to inspect all Garda weapons. In two separate reports on this incident, Commissioner Broy expressed annoyance that O’Riordan had agreed to show Cronin his gun, as he considered this weakness on O’Riordan’s part. Broy believed the Blueshirts might have fired the shots themselves for propaganda purposes, particularly since Cronin had taken this story to the English newspaper, the \textit{Daily Mail}, an action Broy deemed unpatriotic.\textsuperscript{109} Despite having served as commissioner, O’Duffy was also not above making personal attacks on Garda officers. During a meeting in Ballina, County Mayo, in July 1934, he criticised Chief Superintendent O’Meara for not providing adequate protection for the Blueshirt and Fine Gael leadership. He also alleged that O’Meara was not intent on dispersing their opponents that were trying to disrupt the proceedings. Without a hint of irony, O’Duffy then asked for a special protective escort out of town, which he received.\textsuperscript{110} O’Duffy was also a frequent critic of Chief Superintendent Quinn of Tipperary.\textsuperscript{111} Quinn believed O’Duffy’s public criticisms of his performance were intended to undermine Garda morale, discipline and loyalty.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{107} Chief Superintendent, Naas, to the Garda Commissioner, 7 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/346).
\textsuperscript{108} Letter from Ned Cronin to Superintendent O’Riordan, 28 November 1933 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 93/3/19).
\textsuperscript{109} Reports from the Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 7 August and 8 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/96).
\textsuperscript{110} Superintendent, Ballina, to Garda Commissioner, 2 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/125).
\textsuperscript{111} Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 26 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/125).
\textsuperscript{112} Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to the Garda Commissioner, 25 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/125).
There is also evidence of a republican bias against Blueshirt members within the Garda. For example, the Chief Superintendent of Naas commented that, among a Blueshirt crowd, were ‘ex-Unionists, all types of squireens and people who have been the imitators of the characteristics of ascendancy…people who long to see the Union Jack again floating in Kildare…[there is] an anxiety by the Ranchers of today to copy and emulate the Landlord who has gone.’ These attitudes were not confined to local officers. Garda Commissioner Ned Broy, appointed ahead of more senior colleagues by the Fianna Fáil government in 1933, evinced a partisan outlook, and was personally opposed to the Blueshirt organisation. For instance, after the riots in Waterford he wanted only Blueshirt processions banned. He also characterised Fine Gael supporters as opposing ‘the national advance’. He blamed members’ practice of wearing their blue shirt uniforms to Mass for causing a brawl in Glynsk, County Galway. Broy’s antipathy was motivated, in part, by his belief that Blueshirt activities had a sinister ulterior motive. He believed the group was using their public meetings and resultant violence as a means to undermine morale in the force.

Although there remains no evidence to indicate a concerted effort to demoralise the Garda, the Blueshirts did represent a significant challenge to policing during this era. The Garda presented a firm and determined opposition to this challenge and preserved public peace at a time of violent communal conflict. The strength and uncompromising nature of the Garda’s response to the movement’s activities contrasts sharply with the judicial response.

**Judicial response**

Throughout this period the Garda worked in conjunction with the Irish judiciary in confronting Blueshirt disturbances, but, given the separation of powers in the Irish constitution, in an uncoordinated manner. Since the Garda viewed public

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113 Chief Superintendent, Naas, to the Garda Commissioner, 7 May 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/346).
114 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 10 April 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/142).
115 Handwritten note on memorandum to the Minister for Justice, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/76).
116 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 3 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/125).
disturbances as a consequence of Blueshirt criminality, imprisonment was the preferred form of judicial punishment. According to Western conceptions of judicial punishment, prisons provided the absolute surveillance and control of convicts' bodies and actions deemed fundamental to reforming their character and potentiality to commit crime.¹¹⁷ The Irish judiciary, composing both the district courts and the military tribunal, took an alternate view. The Irish judiciary recognised that Irish political culture had long been antagonistic, as hostile political communities competed for supremacy through popular politics. Imprisoning the Blueshirts, individually or collectively, would not have solved the underlying political polarisation.

Judicial responsibilities were almost evenly split between the district courts and the military tribunal. The district courts handled the majority of cases concerning disturbances resulting from Blueshirt public events, while the tribunal concerned itself with Blueshirt criminality resulting from the anti-annuities campaign. District judges considered public disturbances within the broader context of political tensions rather than the inherent delinquency of the individual. As such, prison terms were infrequently imposed for these offences, and convicted persons were more often released on their own recognisances. District judges often evoked the 1907 Probation of Offenders Act, which permitted the release of convicted individuals according to the judge's judgement. It was feared that imprisoning offenders after peace had been restored might only re-enflame political sentiment and cause more harm.¹¹⁸ Alternatively, district judges routinely delayed proceedings or adjourned the trial. Such adjournments were often defended on very weak excuses, such as the inability to co-ordinate the schedules of the judge, defence attorney and state solicitor.¹¹⁹ The judges used these delays and adjournments to allow for the situation in the community, following an incident of inter-communal strife, to stabilise. Once communal peace had been restored, the charges would be dropped.

These judicial tactics were used regardless of the severity of the public incident that had brought the defendants before the courts. A riot in Kilrush, County

¹¹⁸ Superintendent, Thurles, to the Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, 27 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/156).
¹¹⁹ Superintendent, Kanturk, to the Chief Superintendent, Cork, 13 April 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/516).
Clare, on 17 June 1934 had required two baton charges to clear the combatants off the streets and resulted in twenty-five men being brought before District Judge Gleeson. Nevertheless, he still released them on their own recognisances under the understanding that they were to behave themselves from this point onwards. A major riot between rival political parties in Kilkenny on 27 June 1934 resulted in several Blueshirts requiring medical attention, but the case was adjourned several times to allow the district judge to observe whether more violent incidents occurred in the area. After an assault on Blueshirts in Ballinrobe, County Mayo, in June 1934, the district judge adjourned the case for over six months until the situation became peaceful and then dropped the charges altogether.

Notably, all three of these incidents occurred in June 1934, the same month as the local elections. The application of light sentences was recognition that the proximity of these incidents to the date of the election had created an exceptionally tense situation. Judicial decisions were withheld until the district judges could evaluate the developing situation within the communities. Charged individuals were released back into the communities and had their behaviour evaluated before sentences were delivered. In the majority of cases, their behaviour justified the district judges’ judgement and charges were dropped.

On occasion, the Garda was in accord with this community approach to the application of judicial punishment, but more often than not they were at odds with the district judges. For instance, after Blueshirt graffiti appeared on public roads in Clogheen, County Tipperary, the gardaí wanted the offenders jailed so as to stop the spread of these disorders, but the district judge disagreed and the men were released on their own recognisances. Tensions between the two branches of the security apparatus could lead to Garda officers disparaging the district judges’ performance and professionalism. Commissioner Broy, in particular, had strong opinions regarding certain district judges who refused to apply harsher judicial punishment against the Blueshirts. District Judge McCabe in Waterford was

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120 *Cork Examiner*, 5 September 1934; Superintendent, Carlow, to Chief Superintendent, Clare, 3 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/8).
121 *Irish Times*, 3 October 1935.
122 Superintendent, Claremorris, to the Chief Superintendent, Mayo, 16 January 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/123).
123 Superintendent, Carlow, to Chief Superintendent, Clare, 3 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/8/); Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to Garda Commissioner, 3 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/442).
124 Garda officer to Superintendent, Cahir, 2 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/158).
particularly targeted. Broy wrote to the Minister for Justice in July 1934: ‘The Garda Officers at Waterford have no confidence in the impartial administration of the law by Mr. McCabe. He is of “Blueshirt” tendencies and is of little assistance to the Gardaí at the present juncture.’ District Judge O’Sullivan in Dublin was also viewed as being biased. He was characterised as a bitter politician rather than an impartial judge. After he released a Blueshirt who had brandished a sword to defend himself from a mob, Broy commented: ‘Judging Mr. O’Sullivan on the criterion of his conduct of this case it is clear that he cannot be relied upon to administer justice as befits his Office.’ An incident in Cashel on 25 June 1934 brought Broy into direct conflict with the district courts. A group of Blueshirts had attempted to force entry into the licensed premises of Michael Davern whose pub was a frequent locale for Fianna Fáil supporters. Davern fired his revolver at them to hold them back but ended up shooting himself. Chief Superintendent Quinn believed the Blueshirts were ‘far from being a harmless benevolent society’ and wanted the Blueshirt leader, John Quinlan, subjected to the full rigour of the law. District Judge Troy disagreed. He was not convinced by the state’s case and refused to bind the majority of the accused to the peace. Quinlan was sentenced to three months imprisonment, but for having an unlicensed firearm and ammunition, not for the attack. In addition, Troy revoked Davern’s firearm license because he believed Davern to be too excitable to own a revolver. Broy was incredulous at this sentence and refused to revoke Davern’s firearms license.

The Fianna Fáil government was also at odds with district judges over the lenient punishment applied to Blueshirts. After a riot in Wexford in April 1934, the gardaí were unequivocal in blaming the Blueshirts for causing the violence and challenging their authority. Yet District Judge Fahy sentenced the Blueshirts to

125 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 11 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/167).
126 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 3 July 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/279).
127 Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, to the Garda Commissioner, 14 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/128).
128 Superintendent to the Chief Superintendent, Tipperary, 13 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/128).
129 Irish Press, 21 July 1934
130 Garda Commissioner to the Minister for Justice, 15 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/128).
131 Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Wexford, 30 April 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/157).
only one-month imprisonment while their opponents were sentenced to three.\textsuperscript{132} Although the Minister for Justice Ruttledge and the Minister for Agriculture James Ryan pressured Fahy to impose a harsher sentence on the Blueshirts, he refused.\textsuperscript{133} Local Fianna Fáil politicians were also disturbed by the lenient sentences handed out. In September 1934, the Fianna Fáil cumann in Waterford wrote to James Ryan arguing that Blueshirts were receiving preferential treatment from district judges.\textsuperscript{134} Ryan forwarded their protest to Commissioner Broy but nothing was done.\textsuperscript{135} The Fianna Fáil cumann in Millstreet also protested that cases against Blueshirts were being adjourned without sentencing. It was alleged that the Blueshirts were applying inappropriate pressure on the district judge and state prosecutor.\textsuperscript{136} Again no action was taken. After Blueshirt rioters received lenient sentences in Thurles, the Urban District Council attempted to take matter into its own hands by banning all Blueshirt parades. As with Garda efforts to do likewise, the government in Dublin overruled them.\textsuperscript{137}

It should be noted that the judges were not always motivated by concerns for social justice in their application of penal punishment. It is apparent that, on occasion, the judges demonstrated a class bias in their judicial decisions. District judges used the term ‘corner boys’ to characterise the Blueshirts’ opponents.\textsuperscript{138} For example, District Judge Fahy defended the disparity in his application of judicial punishment between the Blueshirts and their opponents by claiming the latter were of the ‘rowdy, unemployed Communist type’.\textsuperscript{139} Yet such references were infrequent and should not detract from the overall effectiveness of this judicial policy.

Despite the dissatisfaction of both the Garda and government, the actions of district judges were generally successful in maintaining community peace. By

\textsuperscript{132} Memorandum from Secretary Roche to the Minister for Justice, 23 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/157).
\textsuperscript{133} Memorandum from the Secretary to the Minister for Justice to District Judge Fahy, 20 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/157).
\textsuperscript{134} Memorandum from the Minster for Agriculture to the Secretary to the Minister for Justice, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/276).
\textsuperscript{135} Minister for Justice to the Garda Commissioner, 28 September 1934, Garda officer to Superintendent, Waterford, 11 September 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/276).
\textsuperscript{136} Letter from the Millstreet Fianna Fáil cumann to the Minister for Justice, 22 May 1935 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/509).
\textsuperscript{137} Nenagh Guardian, 11 August 1934.
\textsuperscript{138} Irish Independent, 10 July 1934.
\textsuperscript{139} Memorandum from Secretary Roche to the Minister for Justice, 23 June 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 2008/117/157).
denying Blueshirts prison sentences the judiciary denied the organisation the opportunity to use the release of prisoners as occasions for further public spectacle. Thousands of Blueshirts could be mobilised for these occasions, which often included a number of visual effects to increase their impact. For instance, on 24 July 1935, Philip Burton, district director, and John McSweeney, captain of the Kanturk Unit, were released from prison after serving twelve months. It was reported in the party press that over one thousand Blueshirt men and women joined in a parade welcoming them back. 'Every few yards there was a blazing tar barrel, houses were gay with flags, and the streets were festooned with streamers bearing expressions of greeting.'\(^\text{140}\) As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Blueshirt public events were crucial to the formation of the movement’s collective identity, but these events were particularly radicalising. There remained an element of glorifying prisoners within Irish culture. It was claimed that 'a felon’s cap is the noblest crown an Irish head can wear.'\(^\text{141}\) Former Blueshirts remembered the prestige attached to prison terms almost sixty years later.\(^\text{142}\) The rhetoric used during these meetings was notably more radical than at other gatherings. During a demonstration welcoming released prisoners in August 1934, Commandant Cronin made a speech declaring that the Blueshirts had to be prepared to go outside the law or they would not be wanted in the organisation. He also stated that they would continue to meet even if the government banned the organisation.\(^\text{143}\) The visual spectacle of prisoners being glorified accompanied by such rhetoric could have only served to encourage Blueshirt anti-state activities. Denying the organisation such opportunities served to dampen Blueshirt adherence to criminality as part of the movement’s collective identity.

**The Military Tribunal**

District courts were not the only courts applying judicial punishment to the Blueshirts. The military tribunal was reconvened in August 1933, specifically to deal with the menace to the state posed by the organisation. The majority of

\(^{140}\) *United Ireland*, 3 August 1935.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.

\(^{142}\) Interview with Thomas Kelly by Mike Cronin, Keshcarrigan, 5 December 1991; interview with Timothy O’Connell, by Mike Cronin, Buttevant, 7 December 1991.

\(^{143}\) Superintendent to Chief Superintendent, Cork, 27 August 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/37).
historiographical attention regarding the judicial response to the group has focused on the military tribunal but is mostly concerned with the implications of such a repressive judicial institution for a liberal democratic state without examining how it functioned. Bill Kissane argues that the emergency legislation was a direct response to Blueshirt violence against the state infrastructure and served to reassert governmental authority over the movement. He argues that the passage of this legislation needs to be viewed in the context of the political instability affecting fledgling democracies in the inter-war period. Furthermore, he claims that it should not obscure positive government initiatives in bringing extra-parliamentary organisations into constitutional politics. Kissane is taking a moderate view in justifying the legislation in the context of the times and downplaying its repressiveness. This argument is challenged by Seosamh Ó Longaigh who has conducted an expansive analysis of the implications of this legislation. He focuses on governmental reactions to the convening of the tribunal, illustrating that there were some concerns regarding the implications of its implementation in a liberal state. Longaigh views the tribunal as representative of the repression of the period. However, he does not examine the material processes of its operation or judicial sentences. In addition, his section on the Blueshirts is limited since he focuses on the use of the tribunal against the I.R.A.

The tribunal was intended as a court of the highest and most unquestionable authority and not subject to any other court in Ireland:

The Tribunal's seal was to be received in evidence in all Courts without further proof and be deemed to be an order or other act (as the case may require) of the tribunal made and done with competent jurisdiction...No appeal shall lie from any order, conviction, sentence, or other act of the Tribunal and the Tribunal shall not be restrained or interfered with in the execution of its jurisdiction or powers by any Court nor shall any proceedings before the Tribunal be removed by certiorari to any Court.

145 Ibid., pp 172-174.
146 Ó Longaigh, Emergency law in independent Ireland, pp 154-161.
147 Confidential departmental notes of events from the Office of the Minister for Justice, 29 January 1941 (U.C.D.A., Sean MacEntee papers P67/534).
In addition, the tribunal formulated its own evidentiary procedures, could impose the death penalty and, most interestingly, could prosecute people for being former members of an organisation legal at the moment of membership but subsequently banned.\textsuperscript{148} The \textit{Daily Herald} dubbed it the ‘Death Tribunal’.\textsuperscript{149} Blueshirt efforts to get the tribunal deemed an inferior court by the high court, which were successful, did not have any lasting effect but only forced the tribunal to pay greater attention to legal formalities to prevent its sentences being set aside.\textsuperscript{150} The only significant result of Blueshirt litigation was the release of 40 I.R.A. and Blueshirt prisoners because it was believed their convictions would be overturned.\textsuperscript{151} The Attorney General was candid about these powers when challenged by the high court justices, claiming that the tribunal was independent from all Irish civil courts and responsible only to the Irish government.\textsuperscript{152} Consequently, the military tribunal maintained its status as the ultimate judicial authority in Ireland.

There was a noticeable increase in the number of days the military tribunal convened during these years. It sat for 23 days in both 1931 and 1932. In 1933 this increased to 28 days. 1934 and 1935 were the busiest years for the Tribunal, as it sat for 110 and 107 days respectively. This decreased to 43 days in 1936. From 1934 to 1935, 655 people were convicted of which 417 were Blueshirts.\textsuperscript{153} Cork, Kilkenny and Limerick had the most convictions at 170, 88, and 87 respectively. Considering the number of outrages reported by the Garda in Waterford, it is interesting that the Tribunal convicted few people from that county. Additionally, in 1934 the majority of offences in Cork, Kilkenny and Limerick were committed by groups of people rather than single offenders. This demonstrates local branch organisation and participation in the committal of offences in these counties. Blueshirt participation in the anti-annuities campaign cannot, therefore, be viewed solely as the actions of lone individuals, as some Blueshirt and Fine Gael leaders have argued, but rather as representing an organised grass-roots initiative.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} \textit{Irish Times}, 26 January 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{149} \textit{Daily Herald}, 14 August 1933.
\item \textsuperscript{150} \textsuperscript{151} \textsuperscript{152} \textsuperscript{153} \textit{Irish Press}, 25 January 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Confidential departmental notes of events from the Office of the Minister for Justice, 29 January 1941 (U.C.D.A., Sean MacEntee papers P67/534).
\item \textsuperscript{151} Memorandum from the Office of the Registrat, Constitution (Special Powers) Tribunal, 7 January 1937 (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/396).
\end{itemize}
As noted, the tribunal primarily dealt with Blueshirt criminality connected to the anti-annuities campaign. In 1934 and 1935 Blueshirts were most frequently convicted for obstructing roads, membership of an unlawful association, cutting telegraph wires and/or possession of firearms. Firearm offences, particularly in relation to armed assault, increased notably in 1935. It should also be noted that Blueshirts were not convicted for being members of the League of Youth but rather for being members of the Annuities Defence League, which was proscribed during this period.

What has yet to be recognised in the historiography of the tribunal, is that, as with the district courts, the majority of sentences against the Blueshirts resulted in convicted individuals being released on their own recognisances. In 1934, 86% of sentences imposed were deferred or had the men enter into recognisance. Admittedly some recognisances merely decreased the length of imprisonment, but the majority involved no prison time whatsoever. Even when the tribunal imposed prison terms they were generally of limited duration. The most serious sentence imposed in 1934 was three years for attempted murder. Accomplices generally received nine months. Armed assault with intent to maim on the Garda resulted in eighteen months imprisonment. Other instances of armed assault resulted in twenty-one months, while disruption of telegraph, railways and roads generally resulted in six to twelve months’ imprisonment. Contempt of court by not accounting for one’s whereabouts consistently received three months imprisonment.

1935 saw an increase in the use of imprisonment as judicial punishment since many people coming before the tribunal were repeat offenders and received stiffer sentences. For instance, first time offenders received twelve-month imprisonment for the destruction of telegraph wires while repeat offenders received between two to three year terms. The destruction of railway tracks now received two-year prison terms while armed assault generally resulted in five-year terms. Accomplices to these crimes saw their sentences double to eighteen months. Membership of an unlawful association generally resulted in a £25-£100 fine. Releasing prisoners on their own recognisances was still used as judicial punishment but, reflecting greater Blueshirt militancy, on eleven occasions Blueshirts refused to enter into
recognisances. They, therefore, had to serve out their sentences, generally between three to six months.\textsuperscript{154}

Significantly, the jail terms remained relatively low. Historians who have focused on the representation of the tribunal as a repressive tool have overlooked its actual operation. As a judicial institution, it remained reluctant to impose jail terms and operated within prevalent notions of social justice. Consequently, its operation remained remarkably similar to that of the district courts. A form of social justice was practiced that focused on the communal circumstances surrounding the violent outrages. Although often in direct opposition to Garda inclination, this judicial response was an effective corollary to the police strategies in preventing further communal destabilisation.

\textbf{Governmentality}

The suppression of the Blueshirt anti-annuities campaign and maintenance of communal peace during the movement’s public events were important parts of Fianna Fáil’s exercise of state authority during this period. Recent political theory conceptualises the practice of governing as a series of dispersed strategies shaping popular conduct and consent. These strategies are employed through the various institutional structures that regulate interaction between the state and its citizens.\textsuperscript{155} Integral to the exercise of this power is the accumulation of knowledge regarding certain collectives or ‘populations’ within the state. Michel Foucault has termed this a power/knowledge matrix from which stems his notion of ‘governmentality’. This is ‘the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.’\textsuperscript{156} According to Foucault, scholars cannot confine their examination of power relations to centralised institutions but need to locate and analyse the exercise of power in the

\textsuperscript{154} Particulars of persons dealt with before the Constitution (Special Powers) Tribunal year 1934 and 1935, n.d. (N.A.I., Department of Justice 8/396).

\textsuperscript{155} Nikolas Rose, \textit{Powers of freedom: reframing political thought} (Cambridge, 1999), pp 3-4; Stuart Corbridge et al., \textit{Seeing the state: governance and governmentality in India} (New York, 2005), pp 5-7.

\textsuperscript{156} Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, pp 219-220.
localities or ‘capillaries’ of the social collective. These would be the institutions, techniques and instruments that compose the material processes of subjugation that are situated between the centre of state power and the periphery.

The Garda and the Irish judiciary served as the intermediary institutions bringing state power to bear on the Blueshirts. Even though they worked independently of each other, both branches of the security apparatus facilitated a specific understanding, or knowledge, of the organisation. Garda reports and military tribunal records identified the Blueshirts as a specific collective within Irish society; individuals were identified according to their political affiliation, and individual incidents or crimes were often viewed as indicative of the organisation as a whole. Consequently, the institutional response to the Blueshirts, as an organisation, depicted it as a disruptive and even unlawful movement within Irish political culture. This conceptualisation of the group was abetted by certain discursive tropes that depicted the Blueshirts as anathema to Irish national identity, or at least to a particular cultural understanding of Irish nationalism.

Culture has been viewed as a system of values saturating downwards through the ideological domination of a particular ruling group. This cultural hegemony produces a sense of majority, community and belonging, as the state controls representations of the national narrative. Culture transforms the extra-cultural spheres, such as politics, through symbolic representations. Within Ireland during this period, all of the most prominent political groups used representations of Catholicism and Gaelic culture in their constructions of a national community. Yet within these broad categories, distinctive variations of Irish nationalism were apparent.

The Blueshirts espoused a more moderate and conservative nationalism than the Anglophobic and radical nationalism of the anti-Treatyites. While republicans were focused on declaring Ireland a republic, the Blueshirts and Fine Gael were more equivocal regarding Ireland’s nominal constitutional status as long as the

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158 Foucault, ‘Two lectures’, pp 96-98.
country was independent in fact. The catchphrase of both the *United Irishman* and *United Ireland* newspapers was ‘Ireland is more to us than Republic, Kingdom or Commonwealth’. In February 1934 Ernest Blythe, writing as Onlooker, proudly claimed that one Blueshirt member was a doctrinaire monarchist, which he believed demonstrated the group’s willingness to consider alternate political ideologies.¹⁶²

Such stances could be viewed as a form of post-colonial hybridity. Many post-colonial societies reflect multiple identities, as individuals identify with the indigenous and the imperial culture. This results in a culture of ambivalence and blurring of cultural boundaries.¹⁶³ Yet Blueshirt hybridity should not be overstated. The movement’s acceptance of Commonwealth membership was not akin to John Redmond’s acceptance of imperialism as a civilising mission.¹⁶⁴ It was rather acceptance that national goals, especially reunification, could ultimately be better achieved through co-operation with the British rather than confrontation.

This did not mean the organisation was unwilling to protest against specific British policies, especially in relation to the discriminatory nature of the northern statelet. At the 1935 Blueshirt Ard Fheis a resolution was passed condemning the Belfast riots, while in 1936 the party newspaper protested the gerrymandering of votes in Derry.¹⁶⁵ Northern nationalists were even invited to speak at Blueshirt conventions.¹⁶⁶ In general, however, while the movement always prioritised the ending of partition, Blueshirt and Fine Gael leaders did not want to intervene in Northern Irish politics. In November 1933, all of the Fine Gael leaders agreed that O’Duffy should state publicly that the party would not comment on the elections in the six counties because such interference would confuse and divide northern nationalist forces.¹⁶⁷ James Hogan considered organising Blueshirt branches in the North as tantamount to declaring war. He believed that partition was only going to be ended through conciliatory relations with Great Britain and northern Unionists. As such, Commonwealth membership was not an end in itself but rather a tool to be used to achieve nationalist purposes. As Richard Mulcahy claimed ‘There is one

¹⁶² *United Ireland*, 3 February 1934.
¹⁶⁶ *United Ireland*, 1 September 1934.
thing at any rate that we can remark on with regard to a united Ireland, that is, if we expect it in our own time it must be through our membership of the British Commonwealth of Nations.\textsuperscript{168}

Republicans, however, disregarded such nuances to Blueshirt nationalism. Post-colonial theory, as influenced by subaltern studies, focuses, in part, on empowering and disempowering discourses and competitive cultural formations.\textsuperscript{169} This is particularly apparent in the construction of post-colonial nationalisms. In his discussion of Ireland’s post-coloniality, Edward Said claimed Irish nationalism was constructed in a limited, coercive, combative and oppositional manner.\textsuperscript{170} The Blueshirts’ advocacy of Commonwealth membership ended up being a disempowering discourse for the movement due to republican criticisms that such a view was anti-national. The coercive power of these republican criticisms has yet to be appreciated. Republican organisations, particularly the I.R.A., maintained a sustained discursive attack on the Blueshirts that directly influenced popular understanding of the movement.

The first mention of the group in the I.R.A.’s newspaper \textit{An Phoblacht} established a rhetorical strategy that was to be consistently followed by the I.R.A. In a satirical article, the Blueshirts’ objectives were described as:

1 To promote clashes with Republicans and by thus creating confusion in the public mind, pave the way for an Imperial military dictatorship. 2 To uphold the British imposed ‘Treaty’ and Constitutions, and frustrate the people’s desire to end these. 3 To attempt to force Fianna Fáil to attack Republican organisations. 4 To enthrone blatant Fascism and economic and social reaction. 5 To safeguard the privileges—grants of land, pensions, Army Reserve pay—which these ‘Comrades’ were given as a reward for their services to Imperialism.\textsuperscript{171}

While fascism was mentioned, the Blueshirts were much more prominently associated with Great Britain and imperialism. In fact accusations of fascism were

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\textsuperscript{171} \textit{An Phoblacht}, 20 August 1932.
often tied to accusations of imperialism. ‘Fascism is based on Imperial and pro-
Imperial interests, and on those who benefit by the British connection.’

There were larger implications to these discursive attacks. A synthesis
between republicanism and Irish nationalism was being formed that permitted no
alternate national visions. The prominent republican George Gilmore believed that
the Blueshirts were officered by men who had collaborated with the British, and
argued that the movement’s August 1933 commemoration had been intended to
‘honour the leading figures in the overthrow of the Republic in 1922.’ Gilmore
argued that the pro-Treaty republican tradition was incapable of reflecting Irish
nationalism. By contrast, he considered the anti-Treaty republican tradition as
representing the universal aspirations of the Irish people.

The anti-Treaty campaign for ‘no free speech to traitors’ was an extra-
parliamentary campaign to restrict any movement or political group that espoused
divergent ideas on Irish nationalism. At an I.R.A. rally in Carrick-on-Shannon,
County Leitrim, the Blueshirts’ political programme was labelled an imperial
programme, and it was asserted that there could be no place for any friend of
England in Ireland. Four weeks later Maurice Twomey, I.R.A. chief of staff,
spoke in front of a banner proclaiming ‘Blueshirts’ England’s Allies’ and claimed
the Blueshirts were imperialist thugs. The average republican used much more
expressive language. During one Blueshirt rally, shouts of ‘Clear John Bull’s
whores off the road, they have no right here’ were heard.

The passion of some I.R.A. members in confronting the Blueshirts should not
be underestimated. At the I.R.A. General Army Convention in March 1933, the
Listowel battalion wanted all Blueshirts disarmed while the South Dublin battalion
wanted to use all means at their disposal to suppress the group. Tom Barry in West
Cork wanted the leading members in his area executed. The I.R.A. leadership,
however, did not condone such a drastic escalation of violence.

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172 An Phoblacht, 5 August 1933.
174 Ibid., pp 16-17.
175 Ibid., pp 10-11.
176 Leitrim Observer, 2 June 1934.
177 Leitrim Observer, 30 June 1934.
178 Garda report to Superintendent, Boyle, 26 March 1934 (N.A.I., Department of Justice
2008/117/92).
179 Notes from the General Army Convention, 17-18 March 1933 (U.C.D.A., Maurice Twomey
papers P69/187).
This conceptualisation of the Blueshirts as imperialist was widespread within Irish politics during this period. Labour party leaders connected the movement's presumed fascism to the reassertion of imperialist influence. Shouts of ‘Fight the Blueshirts’ were heard at Anti-Imperialist League meetings and rallies. Local Fianna Fáil branches claimed that the movement was going to impose a dictatorship in Ireland in order to maintain imperialist interests.

The Fianna Fáil government also discursively marginalised the Blueshirts as opposed to Irish nationalism. By depicting the economic war as a fundamental test of Irish independence, Fianna Fáil characterised the Blueshirts as British collaborators. Fianna Fáil leaders claimed that by opposing the economic war the Blueshirts were aiding the British, with some even intimating that the inter-communal strife might lead Britain to claim Ireland was unfit for self-government. Éamon de Valera once publicly asserted ‘I find it hard to understand how any Irishman with any sense of duty to his country could adhere to such methods during years when our economic life was being subjected to attack from outside and when every exercise of our right to determine the nature of our own institutions was being challenged.’ He believed that England was watching the Blueshirts in hopes of another civil war breaking out. During a speech in Ennis, de Valera provocatively claimed that J. H. Thomas, British Secretary of Dominions, had told him that the British government was not going to bother with him or the Fianna Fáil government because it was waiting for the Blueshirts to take over the state.

This was not the first time that divisions appeared between conservatives and radicals within Irish nationalist politics. At the time of the 1918 election, Sinn Fein and Irish Parliamentary Party politicians often disputed each other's vision of independent Ireland. These divisions permeated national and local politics and even extended to such cultural institutions as the Gaelic League and G.A.A. Nonetheless, these discursive attacks on the Blueshirts need to be analysed in their historic specificity, and are not merely a footnote to the popular and state reaction to

180 *Irish Independent*, 14 April 1934.
181 *Sunday Independent*, 11 November 1934.
182 *Anglo-Celt*, 19 August 1933.
183 *Anglo-Celt*, 23 June, 1 September 1934.
184 *Irish Times*, 30 March 1935.
185 *Irish Press*, 2 October 1933.
186 *Dáil Éireann debates*, liii, 133, (12 June 1934).
the Blueshirts. They represented how the Blueshirts were understood and, as Foucault has argued, operated alongside the institutional response. Constructing the Blueshirts as alien to Irish national identity facilitated state repression.

**Blueshirt reaction**

Blueshirt leaders routinely disputed such claims. T. F. O'Higgins argued ‘The Army comrades are not protagonists of any British cause. They are banded together in the Irish cause which Collins died for’.\(^{188}\) It was alleged that the term ‘Republican’, as associated with Fianna Fáil politics, was being used as political blackmail by depicting anyone who did not support Irish republicanism as a traitor.\(^{189}\) During a political rally in Wexford, O’Duffy contended, ‘We are supposed to be at war with John Bull and because we do not join with Mr. de Valera in that sham war we are traitors and entitled to a traitors’ fate. This is a strange type of Republicanism. What bluffs, what tragedies are being carried on in the sacred name of Freedom.’\(^{190}\) It was argued in the party newspaper that the continuing emphasis placed on republican and nationalist rhetoric was preventing solutions to pressing material issues, such as unemployment.\(^{191}\) Several former members remembered being called imperialists or traitors.\(^{192}\) One former member contended that there was a general lie being propagated that the Free State men were slaves to Britain and imperialists. He believed few of the pro-Treaty politicians had disputed this lie up to that point. Joining the Blueshirts was his way of challenging this lie.\(^{193}\) However, another member conceded that Fianna Fáil won the propaganda war in branding the Blueshirts pro-British.\(^{194}\)

The coercive power of this discursive marginalisation is apparent in the political trajectory taken by the Blueshirts and Fine Gael. After he split from the movement, O’Duffy became much more republican in outlook and the N.C.P. adopted the 1916 Proclamation as the basis of its political programme. Fine Gael

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\(^{188}\) *United Irishman*, 24 September 1932.  
\(^{189}\) *United Irishman*, 29 April 1933.  
\(^{190}\) *Anglo-Celt*, 13 January 1934.  
\(^{191}\) *United Irishman*, 29 April 1933.  
\(^{192}\) Interview with George Plunkett and Bernard Lee by Mike Cronin, Oldcastle, 3 December 1991; interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991.  
\(^{193}\) Interview with Don Pureell by Mike Cronin, Stafford, 12 June 1991.  
\(^{194}\) Interview with Paddy Quinn by Mike Cronin, Garadice, 5 December 1991.
also subsumed its political identity into Irish republicanism. Frank MacDermot, no longer a member of Fine Gael, attempted to insert an amendment to the 1937 Constitution declaring that Ireland would remain free and independent in the Commonwealth and recognise the British King as King in Ireland. Fine Gael T.D.s did not vote on or discuss this amendment. An *Irish Times* editorial expressed surprise, considering Fine Gael was the party of the Commonwealth. The editorial writer claimed if it did not maintain this position it would lose all relevance with the Irish public. Yet it was Fine Gael that declared Ireland a republic and seceded from the Commonwealth in 1948-49.

The role of the Blueshirts in this political trajectory was important. Through the interstices of gender, ritual and power, the Blueshirts were a significant force in Irish political culture. It served as a vehicle of mass mobilisation that conformed to many of the cultural idioms integral to Irish politics of the immediate post-independence period. More women were involved with the Blueshirts than with any other inter-war Irish political organisation. Although these women inadvertently challenged predominant conceptualisations of femininity through their public activities, their discourse of domesticity alongside Blueshirt representations of masculinity conformed to notions of manliness hegemonic within Irish politics. Blueshirt men also conformed to the predominant association within Irish political culture between masculinity, militarism and citizenship, even though they were able to delineate a specific identity for themselves based on the defence of citizenship rights and the state. The movement’s use of iconography and public demonstrations forged collective solidarity and empowered individual members to protest their political marginality, while also challenging local and state power. Through the group’s use of political symbols and rituals, the Blueshirts appealed to those pro-Treaty nationalists underserved by Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael elitism. Yet ultimately it was Fianna Fáil’s vision of republicanism that became synonymous with Irish nationalism. Crucial to this process was the suppression of the last populist organisation of pro-Treaty nationalism, the Blueshirts. This chapter has shown that this was achieved through determined opposition by the police force, conciliation by the judicial institutions and widespread discursive marginalisation.

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195 *Irish Times*, 26 May 1937.
In conclusion I will examine what effect this process has had on the collective memory of the Blueshirts.
Conclusion: The Blueshirts in popular memory

It has proven difficult to assess the Blueshirt movement’s long-term impact. Politically, the group had little lasting influence. There were no other shirted movements in Irish history although it has been argued that there was more widespread enthusiasm for fascism than has been generally accepted.1 Nevertheless, these other parties never achieved the mass appeal of the Blueshirts and remained fringe groups. Corporatism also enjoyed only moderate popularity within Irish politics. Between 1939-1943 the Commission on Vocational Organisation deliberated on the merits of applying corporatist structures to Irish society and economy. Despite being supported by many within the Catholic hierarchy, the only tangible repercussion of these deliberations was the reconstitution of the Irish senate on a partial corporatist basis.2 The changes in the second chamber of the Oireachtas are possibly the most significant of Blueshirt influences on Irish politics, since the Seanad was reformed as a result of the defeat of the Wearing of Uniforms bill.

In addition, participation in the Blueshirts, although not a barrier to future political careers, did not necessarily lead to later success. The prominent Blueshirt leaders Eoin O’Duffy and Ned Cronin did not have post-Blueshirt political success, but Fine Gael members that wore the blue shirt attained moderate positions within Irish politics. T. F. O’Higgins, Richard Mulcahy and Ernest Blythe all had long careers as T.D.s or senators with the first two serving as ministers in the coalition governments of the late 1940s and 1950s. Local Blueshirt leaders were also able to attain political success. Patrick Lindsay, a self-proclaimed ‘unrepentant Blueshirt’, also served in the coalition governments.3 John L. Sullivan, convicted for arson due to his Blueshirt activities in 1935, was a T.D. for Cork well into the 1980s. However, none of these men’s political careers can be considered as resulting exclusively or even primarily from their involvement in the Blueshirts.

This does not mean that the Blueshirts had no impact on Irish political culture. Whether in Oireachtas debates or the media or even in popular culture, the Blueshirts remained prominent in Irish collective memory. In the decades that

1 R. M. Douglas makes this argument in his work, Architects of the resurrection: Ailtiri na hAiséirghe and the fascist ‘new order’ in Ireland (Manchester, 2009).
3 Patrick Lindsay, Memories (Dublin, 1992) p. 53.
followed the organisation's demise, several discursive tropes were repeatedly employed to describe the group. Although consistently retaining emotional intensity, the particular employment of these tropes shifted as the Blueshirt period receded into history. In my conclusion, I intend to analyse the nature and uses of these tropes in understanding the group's legacy. As a final note, I will examine how this collective memory has influenced the oral history of the Blueshirt movement right up to the twenty-first century.

In the years immediately following the organisation's demise, references to the Blueshirts resonated with significant emotional intensity. Opponents, especially Fianna Fáil ministers, continued to allege that the organisation had been fascist and had posed a definite threat to Irish democracy. Éamon de Valera rebuked the opposition for having wanted to establish a dictatorship while in association with the Blueshirts. He claimed to have excerpts from the *United Irishman* newspaper that demonstrated that Fine Gael leaders did not believe in democracy.\(^4\)\(^5\) Sean MacEntee, Minister for Finance, was also vociferous in claiming that Fine Gael had wanted to establish a fascist dictatorship with the Blueshirts. He accused former members of wanting to bring down the government through the cutting of telegraph wires, breaking of railways, obstructing trade, and endangering the lives of Irish citizens.\(^6\)\(^7\)\(^8\) Dr. James Ryan was another frequent critic of Fine Gael/Blueshirt attempts to bring down the government.\(^6\)

These accusations were not just made in the Dáil. The *Irish Press* newspaper also ran a series of editorials in the late 1930s attesting to the threat posed by the Blueshirts. One writer claimed that the military tribunal had been convened in order to stop the Blueshirts from not only overthrowing the government in August 1933, but also from disrupting the administrative and social fabric of the Irish countryside through its anti-annuities campaign.\(^7\) Just over two weeks later, another editorial indicted O'Duffy for wanting to bring about a dictatorship, and the Fine Gael leaders, Cosgrave, Dillon and MacDermot, for waiting to see if it would happen. This writer also contended that the Blueshirts were complicit in a British plot to reassert control of Ireland.\(^8\)

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\(^4\) *Irish Press*, 22 June 1937.
\(^6\) *Irish Press*, 19 June 1937.
\(^7\) *Irish Press*, 4 June 1937.
\(^8\) *Irish Press*, 19 June 1937.
This latter claim forms the second most prominent discursive trope, Bl...
Interestingly, the strongest defender of the Blueshirts was James Dillon who had never joined the group or worn the uniform. During a Fine Gael county convention in Cavan in June 1938, Dillon defended the election of a delegate who had been a local leader of the Blueshirts by reiterating that the movement had protected freedom of speech and stood firm in their patriotism despite being labelled West Britons. Years later he reminisced about the first time he encountered the Blueshirts during a political rally in Macroom:

After I had been speaking for about two minutes, a Fianna Fáil gang proceeded to shout me down and tried to break up the meeting...there were some Blueshirts present, and one fellow put up his hands and said: ‘Will you wait a minute, Mr. Dillon? I don’t agree with ye, but I think ye have a right to speak, and if ye’ll give us five minutes, we’ll see that ye get that right’...the Blueshirts sailed into the Fianna Fáil mob, scattered them, and chased them off the streets, and this fellow came back and said: ‘Now ye can talk, Mr. Dillon.’ And I did.

Dillon continued to publicly defend the Blueshirts even after becoming Minister for Agriculture in the first inter-party government in 1948.

Fine Gael’s return to government led to increased attention on the party’s past links with the Blueshirts, particularly after John A. Costello was elected Taoiseach. His 1934 Dáil speech, when he declared, ‘the Blackshirts were victorious in Italy and that the Hitler Shirts were victorious in Germany, as, assuredly...the Blueshirts will be victorious in the Irish Free State’, was repeatedly brought up to question his political ability; after he had been elected Taoiseach, the Irish Press reprinted the speech in its entirety. One journalist questioned Costello’s political judgement since this prediction had proved so spectacularly incorrect. Speaking in Kilrush, de Valera questioned Costello’s claim to be a democrat since he had once defended the Blueshirts so publicly and passionately. De Valera’s refusal to

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14 Anglo-Celt, 11 June 1938.
15 Sunday Independent, 1 November 1987.
16 Irish Press, 23 May 1951.
17 Irish Press, 16 February 1948.
18 Irish Press, 21 May 1951.
19 Irish Independent, 21 May 1951.
recognise the Irish Free State institutions or the will of the Irish people between 1922-1926 was conveniently forgotten.

Vitriolic attacks continued into the 1950s and 1960s. The Irish Press continued to print articles alleging that the organisation had represented a threat to the state. One editorial recommended that Fine Gael forget the Blueshirt period since the movement had been responsible for causing widespread anarchy in Ireland. In 1956, the newspaper printed a history of the past 25 years, focusing on certain events deemed pivotal to Ireland’s national legacy. The Blueshirts were characterised as a fascist organisation created to bring down the Fianna Fáil government while the Fine Gael leaders stepped aside to let it wreak havoc. Included next to the article, no doubt for maximum effect, was a photograph of a Blueshirt rally with numerous adherents giving O’Duffy the fascist salute.

Dr. James Ryan also continued his attacks on presumed Blueshirt imperialism: ‘If the Blueshirts had not taken the part of England in that, we would be all right (sic). The Blueshirts, to their eternal discredit, took the side of England against us.’ He often disrupted parliamentary business in order to reiterate his contentions as to the traitorous behaviour of the Blueshirts:

Dr. Ryan: Does the Deputy deny he did not join forces with them? He organised the Blueshirts, the Fifth Column in this country, to help fight for British interests.
General MacEoin: Who were the Imperialists in the last war? The Minister should be ashamed of himself.
Dr. Ryan: I should be ashamed? The Deputy should be ashamed of himself for supporting the Blueshirts. What is this country coming to at all?
General MacEoin: Only for the Blueshirts here, the story might be different. Say a few words about them now and the Government's majority will be less.
Dr. Ryan: I would be ashamed to say a few words to the Blueshirts, the British Fifth Column in this country. Let us get on with the Budget now.

He was not the only Fianna Fáil politician claiming the Blueshirts had been covert British allies. In 1955 Edward Daly, a Fianna Fáil councillor on the County Meath

20 Irish Press, 13 March 1956.
23 Dáil Éireann debates, cxc, 582 (09 May 1962).
council, verbally attacked Captain Giles, a former member of the Blueshirts and T.D. for Meath-Westmeath, by claiming that the Blueshirts had been a fifth column in Ireland, organised to fight England’s battle against the Irish people during the economic war.\textsuperscript{24}

Fine Gael continued to retort that the Blueshirts had been democrats. In the Seanad it was asserted ‘The Blueshirts were necessary when there were rogues and blackguards in this country trying to put down free speech and when your Taoiseach at the time would not protect free speech here.’\textsuperscript{25} During one debate Dillon claimed ‘I saw men beside me with their faces split by missiles thrown by mobs led by Deputies of the Fianna Fáil Party, and the only reason I reached the platform to speak at a public meeting was because there were Blueshirts to stand between me and the broken bottles hurled by mobs led by Fianna Fáil Deputies with the intention of preventing me speaking.’\textsuperscript{26} He was also clear that the Blueshirts were not fascists:

Mr. Dillon: I want the House to remember that the Blueshirts inherited a great tradition.

Mr. B. Lenihan: Mussolini.

Mr. Dillon: Do not be silly— Mussolini, my foot. We were then only ten years away from the founding of the State. This country was still alive with young people blazing with enthusiasm for the vindication of the sovereignty of this State and its inception. You have not got that now.\textsuperscript{27}

While these three tropes, Blueshirts as fascists, anti-nationals or defenders of free speech, were the most prominent during these decades, other references were also made to the organisation. Large farming associations, particularly those that were hostile towards Fianna Fáil policy, were forced to defend themselves against accusations of being Blueshirts. In 1939, the Irish Farmers Federation felt compelled to pass out booklets listing the size of members’ agricultural land in order to prove that they were not another Blueshirt organisation supporting the interests of ranchers.\textsuperscript{28} Local branches in Carlow and south Meath also had to defend

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Meath Chronicle}, 23 April 1955.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Seanad Éireann}, liii, 1488 (24 March 1961).
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Dáil Éireann debates}, clix, 1520 (03 December 1958).
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Dáil Éireann debates}, cxxv, 1628 (24 November 1966).
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Meath Chronicle}, 13 January 1939.
themselves against accusations of being Blueshirt organisations by claiming they were non-political and composed mainly of small farmers. These accusations continued into the 1960s, with the National Farmers Association (N.F.A.) having to defend itself against accusations of Blueshirtism. In 1966, during a series of Seanad debates Dr. Ryan claimed ‘The National Farmers Association are not satisfied that the Government have done enough and I would like to say...that if this were another Government they would not be half so hard...the people who composed these Parties were always the same...the Blueshirts came along and you had the same thing. Now, you have the N.F.A.’ After this accusation, the N.F.A. organised a publicity campaign claiming that the label Blueshirt was injurious to their interests. It was subsequently claimed that during the 1960s, Neil Blaney, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Agriculture, had been determined to destroy the N.F.A. because he believed it had Blueshirt elements within it.

1960s onwards

At the same time, however, a shift gradually emerged in how people discussed the Blueshirts during the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the politicians of the Blueshirt period began to retire and a new generation of Irish leaders emerged. These new politicians often evinced frustration at the continued disruption to parliamentary business by accusations about the historical integrity of its deputies. This usually involved ascertaining not only whether an individual had been a Blueshirt, but also what he/she had been doing in 1916 or 1921. In 1953 the Labour T.D. Brendán Mac Fheorais proclaimed ‘The references that are made here from time to time to civil wars, Blueshirts, greenshirts, who killed who and what so-and-so did in 1916 or 1921. I see from both sides of the House that among the younger people—and if I say “younger” I mean Deputies who are under 40— there is evidence of disgust in their minds at these references, at these interjections.’ There was, increasingly, an element of farce to these gibes hurled across the Dáil floor. In 1961, the An Leas-Chathaoirleach had to interject during one rancorous
debate, ‘There must be no more interruptions. I notice that this discussion always ends up with the Economic War and the Blueshirts. They are extremely remote from the Finance Bill of any year in the 1960s.’

Another factor that influenced the collective memory of the Blueshirts from the 1960s onwards was the advent of serious historical investigation into the organisation. The first work that gained widespread attention was a lecture on the movement during a series of Thomas Davis history lectures on the years 1926-1936, called the Years of Great Test, broadcast on Radio Éireann. Dr. David Thomley presented the lecture on the Blueshirts. He gave a superficial history of the rise and fall of the organisation, arguing that O’Duffy was attracted to the movement because he loved the demonstrations and uniforms. Thomley contended that there had been two uniformed private armies in existence at this time; one was convinced of its historical continuity from the Easter Rising, while the other was convinced that it was defending order and religion against a weak and partial government and socialist I.R.A. He also argued that the movement collapsed because O’Duffy had been politically unstable rather than due to the government’s attempts to proscribe the movement, which he believed had been unsuccessful. By providing greater contextualisation of the rise of the movement and its demise, Thomley moved the discussion of the Blueshirts into new directions. Tim Pat Coogan in his book *The I.R.A.*, although barely mentioning the Blueshirts, argued that the movement was dedicated to defending free speech. This argument received support from several letter writers to the *Irish Independent* who agreed with his assessment and hoped this scholarly argument would stop those criticisms of the group as fascist. The major historical work on this subject was Maurice Manning’s *The Blueshirts*. Manning was clear that the Blueshirts were not fascists but rather a product of civil war political divisions. As a historian, he spoke with a degree of detached authority on the subject that had been missing from previous debates on the organisation. He also lent academic authority to Fine Gael’s contention that the Blueshirts had been democrats. As such, Fine Gael T.D.s referenced his work in the Dáil as conclusive proof that the movement was not fascist.

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36 Irish Independent, 2 November 1964.
37 Irish Independent, 2 August 1970.
38 Dáil Éireann debates, ccix, 2109 (21 July 1971).
Over a four-week period in 1979, Maurice Manning reiterated his conclusions in a four part series on the Blueshirts printed in the *Sunday Independent*. He again argued that the organisation emerged due to the hardships of the economic war and a desire to defend freedom of speech. He emphasised the general disorder in Irish communities during the movement’s peak without actually attributing this disorder to Blueshirt activities. He did, however, mention the group’s increasing radicalisation after Michael Lynch’s funeral but concluded that they were not a fascist party.

The confluence of these two factors, the emergence of new political leaders and the development of historical research into the movement, resulted in a general waning of emotional intensity to discussions of the Blueshirts. This is not to say that on occasion accusations of being a Blueshirt could not still elicit strong emotions. Generally speaking, however, criticisms of Blueshirtism were now being used for scoring political points against Fine Gael, which remained negatively associated with the Blueshirts. For instance, during the Fine Gael-Labour ministry from 1973-1977, it was claimed that Fine Gael had inherited right-wing fascist tendencies from its Blueshirt days. Oireachtas debates continued to be interrupted by deputies wishing to embarrass Fine Gael T.D.s. A Fianna Fáil senator asserted, ‘It is in the tradition of Cumann na nGaedheal, the Blueshirts, the Fine Gael Party, to want to see an end to this right of debate here in Leinster House, the right of discussion, the right to differ, the right to put another point of view’.

Fine Gael was not the only political party criticised for its presumed ideological links with the Blueshirts. The Progressive Democrats (P.D.), a much more conservative party, was also occasionally labelled Blueshirt. They were once accused of stealing ‘Blueshirt votes’ from Fine Gael. It was claimed, ‘When Bobby Molloy went with the P.D.s you could find people who said that some “Blueshirt” blood was in his family years back, and he was never “real Fianna Fáil”. When Bridie O’Flaherty switched from Fianna Fáil to P.D., people pointed to “Blueshirt” (Fine Gael) connections among her forebears in the Loughrea area.’

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40 *Southern Star*, 9 July 1977.
41 *Dáil Éireann debates*, ccxii, 474 (5 November 1964).
42 *Seanad Éireann*, lxxv, 70 (31 August 1976).
43 *Connaught Tribune*, 9 September 1994.
These last two quotes demonstrate a novel aspect to Blueshirt references from the 1980s onwards. While the discursive trope remained consistent, Blueshirt equals right-wing politics, it was now being applied to people who had presumed familial links with Blueshirts. Blueshirt identity was viewed as being passed from generation to generation. John Bruton was one of the most prominent examples of this characterisation. His campaign to become Fine Gael leader in the 1980s was questioned, in part, because he still had ‘an aura’ of the Blueshirt movement around him due to his family’s past involvement with the group. Some journalists subsequently viewed his political reformation and ascendency in the context of this legacy. 

‘Then there is John Bruton. More than any politician, with the exception of Mary Robinson, Bruton has changed. Over the past two and half years, he has dropped his tough, ideological politics, he has become a manager, a facilitator, even perhaps a soft touch for Labour and Democratic Left. It was easy this time to vote for Fine Gael without feeling that you were voting for the Blueshirts.’

The discursive trope of Blueshirts as anti-national also persisted. During the election campaign of 1981, Gerald FitzGerald claimed that Northern Ireland and the hunger strikers in particular were not election issues, leading some republican protesters to attack Fine Gael supporters at a Waterford railway station calling them Blueshirts. Bernadette McAliskey, the prominent Northern Irish political activist, claimed she would never vote for Fine Gael Blueshirtism, which represented ‘the whole British thing’. The possibility of extraditing republican suspects to British courts by the Fianna Fáil government was characterised as ‘craven Blueshirt collaboration’. Opponents claimed that ‘No difference will be seen by the electorate between you [Fianna Fáil] and the Blueshirts’. In 1991, a letter to the editor of the Southern Star protested the decision by the Bantry Town Commission not to display the 1916 Proclamation in their chambers. The letter writer wrote ‘There was and is, a strong fascist element in the “blueshirt” mould, who see anything nationalistic as subversive.’ At a Kerry County Council meeting Independent councillor Tommy Foley called for convicted I.R.A. prisoners to be repatriated from England to Irish jails. This provoked Fine Gael councillor Dan Barry into anger. Foley responded,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{45} Sunday Independent, 15 March 1987.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{46} Sunday Independent, 15 June 1997.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{47} Irish Independent, 25 May 1981.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{48} Irish Independent, 6 February 1982.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{49} Kerryman, 27 November 1987.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{50} Southern Star, 29 June 1991.}\]
‘you should be ashamed of yourself. You are nothing but a blueshirt. As a republican and an Irishman, I will stand and protect their rights.’

Fianna Fáil supporters also viewed Blueshirts as anti-national but in the context of their own politics. Fianna Fáil viewed itself as representing the republican tradition and, as such, Irish nationalism. Since the Blueshirts had opposed Fianna Fáil, they had opposed Ireland’s national progress. “Throughout the 1980s, under Charlie Haughey, the party was fiercely resentful of the media, and most of all of R.T.E. The bitterness was severe. The party embodied the nation itself. To criticise the party was not alone cheeky, it was unpatriotic. Critics had to be secret Fine Gaelers, Blueshirts, enemies of the State.” As can be imagined, many Fine Gael T.D.s resented this attitude. The Fine Gael T.D. Philip Burton claimed that this attitude ‘is typical of the attitude of all Fianna Fáil people. That attitude is that, outside of Fianna Fáil, there can be no good and that it is they who have a monopoly of patriotism and nationalism here...The Deputy referred to the Blueshirts. I was a Blueshirt. I was proud to be one and I make no apology to Deputy Foley or to any member of Fianna Fáil for that.”

Even into the twenty-first century, historical allusions continued to be used to score political points. As the following debate indicates, Irish politicians can have a long historical memory when it suits their purposes:

Mr. Leyden: They will not get their hands on it. However, to be sure, legislation should be introduced because I am fearful that a party that can take the shilling off the old age pensioner would certainly be prepared to take €17 billion——

Mr. J. Phelan: For God’s sake, what a load of crap.

Mr. Leyden: I am blessed with a great memory.

Mr. J. Phelan: Was Senator Leyden a pensioner then?

Mr. Leyden: There are two things that upset the Fine Gael Party. One is referring to the Blueshirts and the other is the shilling off the old age pensioner.

Mr. J. Phelan: I am not a bit upset about the Blueshirt reference.

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54 Seanad Éireann, cixxv, 917 (30 November 2006).
Disputes over the Blueshirt legacy also permeated Irish popular culture. The official screening of the 1996 movie *Michael Collins* at City Hall in Cork City was viewed as a gala event for Fine Gael. ‘One sensed an air of mild blueshirt triumphalism about the platform party, which included the Fine Gael Lord Mayor and the Fine Gael Taoiseach.’ It was alleged that opponents of the movie, such as Eoghan Harris writing in the *Sunday Times*, were attempting ‘to suffocate the independence achievement with the tragedy of the Civil War and alleged attendant Blueshirt excesses.’

**Oral history**

It was in this context that the oral accounts compiled by Mike Cronin were generated. In one fashion or another, all of the respondents were reacting to this collective memory of the Blueshirts. This is quite common with oral accounts, as contemporary cultural and social perceptions of history influence how individuals structure their reminiscences. The respondents’ subjectivity always has to be acknowledged before these sources can be effectively used. This is not meant as a criticism of oral history but as a means of emphasising how these accounts provide evidence of the way history lives on in the present, and how the present informs views of the past.

The former members interviewed by Mike Cronin were consciously reacting to the three dominant tropes regarding the Blueshirts within Irish collective memory. While some of the members mentioned that the hardship resulting from the economic war or opposition to Fianna Fáil policies were important motivations to joining the Blueshirts, all thirteen respondents claimed defence of free speech as the primary reason for becoming a member. Respondents generally emphasised this point in order to contest the notion that the organisation had been fascist. Several members admitted that some of the leadership was favourable to fascist ideology but all firmly asserted that the rank and file were not. Moreover, numerous respondents

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55 *Sunday Independent*, 10 November 1996.
56 *Southern Star*, 16 November 1996.
were keen to reiterate their patriotism. They were well aware of republican characterisations of the Blueshirts as anti-national and explicitly depicted their involvement as defending Ireland’s best interests, such as citizenship rights. Several respondents also expressed continued antipathy towards the republican tradition. Finally, some respondents, although not all of them, contested the notion that the Blueshirts were mainly large farmers and cattle ranchers.

Mike Cronin’s collection of Blueshirt reminiscences is not the only oral history source for the movement. In 2000, Nick Coffey produced a *R.T.E.* documentary on the movement entitled, ‘*Patriots to a man*: the Blueshirts and their times’. Interspersed with film footage of the Blueshirts from the 1930s, were interviews with former members, family members of former members, opponents and historians of the movement. These reminiscences generally followed the dominant tropes in understanding the Blueshirts. As the title of the documentary indicates, supporters of the movement argued that they were patriots who had formed to defend free speech. The economic war’s impact on larger farmers was also presented as a major impetus to the organisation. The opponents of the movement claimed they were anti-democratic and fringe imperialists. Maurice Manning was quite critical of the movement and placed a lot of emphasis on O’Duffy’s poor leadership for the organisation’s demise. By contrast, Mike Cronin was more balanced in his assessment and claimed that Fine Gael should not be embarrassed about acknowledging the influence of the Blueshirt movement in their origins.

While the actual analysis offered by the documentary did not offer anything particularly new, it did indicate the importance of Blueshirt public demonstrations and concomitant violence. The 1932 Kilmallock riot and the 1933 Tralee riot were both mentioned. Lynch’s death and subsequent funeral were also paid special attention. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the documentary was the popular reaction it elicited.

In a series of letters to the editors of the *Irish Independent* and *Sunday Independent*, a number of commentators debated the Blueshirts’ historical legacy. Manning wrote to once again reiterate that, aside from a few of its leaders, the movement was not fascist. He claimed that it was only Cumann na nGaedheal and
Fine Gael meetings that had been disrupted due to a concerted plan by the I.R.A.\textsuperscript{59} Another letter to the editor claimed the \textit{R.T.E.} documentary was to be commended for portraying the Blueshirts as defenders of democracy against a resurgent I.R.A. that had been the real threat to democracy. This writer also maintained that the I.R.A. was still intimidating and assaulting people who disagree with their politics.\textsuperscript{60} Fianna Fáil Senator Des Hanafin wrote a letter arguing that the documentary was inaccurate and that the Blueshirts had constituted a justifiable threat to democracy with the proposed march on Dublin. He also claimed that de Valera told a few party members in 1957 that, although he did not initially trust the defence forces’ loyalty, they proved their service to the state that August and saved democracy.\textsuperscript{61} John A. Murphy, professor emeritus at University College Cork wrote:

It is often assumed that the party’s brief dalliance with the paramilitary, semi-fascist Blueshirts badly damaged its image, and it certainly ushered in a long period of vote loss. A recent television documentary depicted the Blueshirts as the skeleton in the Fine Gael cupboard, the embarrassing reprobate uncle in the family. But as long as the memory of the Blueshirt episode lasted, it gave a bonding camaraderie and a badly needed sense of identity to the party. The few surviving Blueshirts are unrepentant, indeed proud of their spell in the limelight.\textsuperscript{62}

These debates demonstrate the enduring contestation of the Blueshirt movement’s legacy. The passions involved reflect the sense of community evoked by the Blueshirts. Due to location, political affiliation or cultural worldview, individuals in contemporary Ireland can still be referred to as Blueshirts, despite being born decades after the movement’s demise. Referencing the group involves referencing a vision of Irish national identity and history distinct from Irish republicanism. Yet it is too simplistic to merely equate the Blueshirt community with the pro-Treaty strain of Irish nationalism. The intensity of Blueshirt references reflects the fact that the group was a vigorous vehicle of mass mobilisation. The Blueshirts were unreserved in their appeal to women, construction of robust masculinity or usage of public displays of popular support. Due to the challenges the

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Irish Independent}, 22 January 2001.  
movement posed to state power, the group aroused strong emotions during its brief period of existence. That this movement, having had only a four-year existence, continues to evoke strong passions and debate is testament to the impact of the Blueshirts on Irish political culture.
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