
The Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in London in December 1921 and ratified in Dublin in January 1922, was a watershed for Irish communities abroad, albeit in a different sense than for those in Ireland. For the New Zealand Irish the Treaty creating the Irish Free State represented a satisfactory outcome to a struggle which for six years had drawn them into conflict with the wider New Zealand community. Espousing the cause of Ireland had been at a cost to domestic harmony in New Zealand but with ‘freedom’ for the homeland won, the colonial Irish could be satisfied that they done their bit and stood up for Ireland. The Treaty was an end point to the Irish issue for most Irish New Zealanders. Now it was time for those ‘at home’ to sort out the details of Ireland’s political arrangements as they saw fit. Political energies in New Zealand would henceforth be expended instead on local causes. For many Irish New Zealanders by 1922 this meant the socialist platform of the rising Labour Party. But not every local Irish patriot was satisfied with the Treaty or prepared to abandon the Republican ideal. Die-hard Republicans – and New Zealand had a few - saw the Treaty as a disgraceful sell-out of the Republic established in blood in Easter 1916. Between 1922 and 1928 therefore, a tiny band of Irish Republicans carried on a propaganda struggle in New Zealand, which vainly sought to rekindle the patriotic fervour of 1921 among the New Zealand Irish in support of the Republican faction in Ireland.

This essay is a post-script to “Shaming the Shoneens: the Green Ray and the Maoriland Irish Society in Dunedin, 1916-1922”2. There it was argued that between 1916 and 1922 an established leadership strata among the New Zealand Irish, the ‘lace curtain’ or ‘shoneen’ Catholic bourgeoisie, had been upstaged by a small group of emigré Irish Republicans.3 The latter’s greater familiarity with recent developments in Ireland allowed them to seize the initiative in a crisis provoked by the 1916 Easter Rising. The Rising suddenly undermined the dominant colonial Irish position, which had long pushed for ‘Home Rule’ for Ireland citing the successful model of the Australasian colonies’ independence within an Imperial framework. The influence of the hard-core Republicans, expressed through a monthly newspaper the Green Ray and a new Irish organisation under the banner of Sinn Féin, was greatly advanced when the Catholic newspaper The New Zealand Tablet adopted a similar platform. As a result, and with a counterblast from Protestant ‘loyalists’, sectarian sensitivities were stirred up in New Zealand as never before. A succession of controversial incidents and issues helped fuel the fires and culminated in 1922 with the prosecution of Bishop Liston of Auckland over a St Patrick’s Day speech critical of British policy in Ireland. These struggles put the New Zealand Irish on the spot over their advocacy of Irish independence. Meanwhile the emerging Labour Party made the Irish issue its own during this period, reflecting and stimulating a coherence of Irish advocacy and socialism within the New Zealand Irish community.

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1 For the purposes of this paper ‘Irish’ in New Zealand is being used as virtually synonymous with ‘Catholic Irish’. Clearly this distorts the historical reality in which Irish Protestants also played a part.
3 At the Stout Research Centre’s conference “The Irish in New Zealand” (July 21-23, 2000) Professor Donald Akenson cautioned against the indiscriminate use of this word – “shoneen” – as one which is loaded with powerful contemporary political weight. It is a term, which has similar meaning in Irish history to ‘Uncle Toms’ in black American history. Irish aspirants to middle class respectability in Protestant majority societies like those of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and America were always open to an accusation of ‘selling out’ to fit in with the dominant establishment. There was an added dimension with the materialistic ethos of ‘getting on’, often contrasted unfavourably with the spiritual purity of the poorer Irish. It was an epithet widely used among the Irish in all of these societies and seems to me of key significance in understanding the Irish colonial definition of self. It was certainly caste about with gay abandon by many of the participants in New Zealand Irish affairs in this period, as a term of derision and thereby a marker of communal boundaries.
From 1916 to 1918 Dunedin had been the ‘hotbed’ of radical Irish activity in New Zealand. This reflected the coincidental presence in the city of a small number of ‘advanced’ Irish nationalists determined to move the Irish community on to support for Sinn Féin.\(^4\) These men laid claim to significant connections with the leaders of the 1916 Rising and some may well have been oath-bound members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Their involvement in the Irish struggle against the British Crown extended beyond the propaganda work of the Green Ray and the Maoriland Irish Society. They also actively supported Irish military service evaders through the development of an ‘underground railway’, which provided safe havens within New Zealand and escape routes to Australia and America. With the arrest and dispersal of this leadership after the suppression of the Green Ray in mid-1918, similarly disposed comrades in Wellington took over the lead. Foremost among them were Dave Griffin and John Troy, recent arrivals from Ireland with strong ‘Fenian’ connections.\(^5\) As founding President and Secretary respectively of the Maoriland Irish Society in Wellington they had marshalled the defence of the Dunedin men in 1918 and narrowly avoided conviction for sedition themselves. They are also assumed to have helped organise the flight of Irish conscientious objectors through Wellington.

After the war, however, there was no longer any scope for such cloak and dagger ‘Fenian’ activities. The ideological struggle for the sympathy of New Zealand’s Irish community on behalf of ‘Sinn Féin’ had also been won. After the initial shock of 1916 the traditional ‘shoneen’ Irish leadership in New Zealand had gradually been won over to its cause. By 1921, Irish New Zealand had developed a united front, demonstrated by the proliferation of Irish Self-Determination Leagues up and down the country. These organisations presented an apparent coalition of the old ‘shoneen’ leadership strata, which had always been hand in glove with the Catholic clerical establishment, and the young upstarts of the wartime period, who were now legitimised by clerical approval, in Dunedin at least. Another sign of the taming of the ‘wild men’ can be seen in the establishment of successor organisations to the Maoriland Irish Society in Dunedin and Wellington, but this time with the blessing of local church leaders. Dunedin’s new Irish Society for instance, established in July 1920, made the new Dunedin Bishop James Whyte its patron as soon as he arrived in the city from Sydney at the end of that year. Like its predecessor it was to be a “Literary, Musical and Social Society” but this time its lecture programme was dominated by local Irish priests, who had been notably absent from the Maoriland Irish Society.\(^6\) While the Anglo-Irish war raged the new organisation retained a political edge alongside its cultural activities, “combating calumnies against Ireland” amidst a fevered sectarian

\(^4\) See “Shaming the Shoneens” for biographical details of these men who included Thomas Cummins, Sean Tohill, James and Ben Bradley as well as the New Zealand-born A J Ryan and members of the Cody family of Riversdale.

\(^5\) For an account of John Troy’s Irish connections see “Shaming the Shoneens”. Dave Griffin had similar ‘Fenian’ roots and is supposed to have come to New Zealand following death threats against him in Cork [Michael Bellam, personal communication to author, 29 April 2000]

\(^6\) Clerics were also active in Wellington’s new Irish Society. Rev E J Carmine was on its inaugural committee (Cumann Na nGaedel Constitution, 1922, GP 3/18), priests spoke at C.N.G. meetings (P.J. O’Regan diary September 1, 1922, O’Regan Papers, Ms Group 0273, Alexander Turnbull Library) and the organisation hosted a special welcome for Archbishop Mannix during his visit to Wellington in 1924 (O’Regan Scrapbook 1924-27, Ms Group 0273, ATL). The contrast between the almost anti-clerical stance of the Maoriland Irish Society branches and these new groups can be gauged from the fawning tone of an address of welcome presented to Bishop Whyte by the Dunedin Irish Society on his return from a trip to Ireland in 1924. This document, beautifully decorated with embossed harps and shamrocks, reveals the sentimental ‘Irishness’ typical of the Irish diaspora everywhere. “We, The Irish Society of New Zealand, extend a hearty welcome home to you, our revered Patron. We followed with interest your visits to the various centres of the Old World, with pride and joy we shared the happiness you felt on reaching Ireland – the land of your birth – and we rejoiced with you in that happy reunion of dear friends, the fulness of which is only understood in the land where warm hearts beat and where the memory of the absent is green ….” (Undated, Catholic Archives, Dunedin).
atmosphere. It organised the 1921 St Patrick’s Day celebrations in Dunedin at which the newly arrived Bishop Whyte let fly at British policy in Ireland and staked a claim to leadership on Irish matters. Post-Treaty, however, Ireland rapidly disappeared from New Zealand political consciousness. Expressions of Irish identity were concentrated in the much less disputatious area of culture alone. By mid-1922 when former Green Ray writer John Tohill (Seaghan O’Thuataill) was involved in establishing a new Irish organisation in Wellington – the Gaelic Society or Cumann Na nGaedeal – the group declared itself to be “Non-Political and Non-Sectarian”.

What then of the supposed former ‘Fenians’? How did they react to the signing of the Treaty? Since none of them has left any documentary evidence of their opinions or activities we can only speculate. Most had been relatively recent arrivals in New Zealand. Their prominence in local Irish political activity derived substantially from the contacts they could claim with leaders of the 1916 Rising and their familiarity with the ‘advanced nationalist’ movement which preceded it. As time went on, however, and with the situation in Ireland constantly evolving, the currency of pre-war knowledge of the Irish scene was devalued. Sinn Féin literature was proscribed under wartime regulations, a restriction which was not lifted with the war’s end. It became increasingly difficult to follow events in Ireland, even for those with a keen interest. Letters from family and friends could only go so far in conveying the complexities of the situation, particularly once civil war turned brother against brother and threw former allies into bitter enmity. The Bradleys and Tohills, Thomas Cummins and John Troy would have been only a little better able than anyone else to make a judgement from 12,000 miles away. Even if some or all of these men were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, that organisation’s track record of sustaining colonial enthusiasts with a flow of relevant information was poor. The IRB was itself split by the Treaty in any case, with its Supreme Council supporting its acceptance but rank and file members generally adopting an anti-Treaty position. John Tohill’s position is perhaps indicative. From a fiercely Fenian family, and claiming youthful involvement in the ultra nationalist Dungannon Clubs in Ulster, by 1922 he was devoting himself to the cultural

7 New Zealand Tablet, July 1, 1920.
8 Bishop Whyte’s comments might be compared with interest to those which got his episcopal colleague James Liston into such trouble in Auckland a year later. On the face of it Whyte’s comments are the more trenchant and at least as worthy of prosecution as seditious utterances as Liston’s were to be. The difference may simply be in the dissemination of the texts: while the Tablet quoted Whyte who had cited the British Labor Commission’s comment that “the name of England stinks in the nostrils of the whole world” because of Black and Tan reprisals, this was not reported by the Otago Daily Times. Its version of Whyte’s speech was more muted. “It was not now necessary for Irishmen to speak. They could take English and American writers and condemn England out of the mouths of Englishmen themselves.” (ODT, March 18, 1921).
9 What this actually meant was that debate over Ireland’s internal politics was not permitted. Early Gaelic Society meetings were advertised with fliers proclaiming “Ireland for the Irish”, which was stock nationalist sentiment. More significantly, the new Wellington organisation took its name from the pro-Treaty rump of Sinn Féin in Ireland, i.e. the Free State’s ruling party. It was led by those who had been the stalwarts of the Self Determination League for Ireland in Wellington, such as Eileen Duggan and Mrs T.J. Bourke, with Edmund Nolan as the inaugural President. Nolan was also the first President of the Dunedin Irish Society but had recently moved to Wellington.
10 Since the publication of A Distant Shore new information has come to light about Thomas Cummins, who as editor of The Green Ray served time in jail for sedition in 1918 but who disappeared from New Zealand circa 1922. Cummins did return to Ireland at that time and worked as a journalist thereafter. According to his family in Ireland he had no known political or radical involvement after his return from New Zealand. He died in Crossakiel, Kells, Co Meath on November 24, 1971. Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, “Irish Felon in New Zealand”, unpublished notes, 1998, copy in author’s possession.
Parties or Politics: Wellington’s I.R.A. 1922-28

programme of Wellington’s Cumann Na nGaedeal. Similarly in Dunedin, Bert Ryan the convicted seditionist of 1918, was a leading light in the revived Irish Society with its now exclusively cultural focus.

By the beginning of 1923 such was the disinterest in Irish political issues that Gerald Griffin, barely twenty years old, led the field in promoting the Republican cause in New Zealand. Griffin was the son of Dave Griffin, the former President of the Wellington branch of the Maoriland Irish Society. The family had emigrated to New Zealand from Cork city circa 1913, settling in Wellington where David established himself as a bookseller. Interviewed about his life in 1969, Gerald Griffin described “the struggle for Irish freedom” as “the dominant influence in my life.” He recalled his father’s agitation about affairs in Ireland after 1914 and his constant talk “of the past struggles for Irish freedom, of Wolfe Tone, of Robert Emmet, John Mitchel, and the ‘Sixty-seven Men, as well as of the Young Irelanders’48.” As a thirteen year old Gerald heard of the outbreak of the Easter Week rebellion,

while on holiday in Christchurch with a family friend. I was wildly excited and full of enthusiasm at the news. When we arrived home at the end of Easter Week I can remember my disappointment when I discovered that my parents did not share my enthusiasm. Like most Irish overseas they were bewildered and shocked. Then, in the following weeks, when the executions of the leaders were announced, there was a marked change. I felt proud to have been for the rebels before the rest of the family.

The Griffins were great readers, ideally placed through Griffin senior’s business to follow developments in international political thought. Like many New Zealand radicals in this period they were strongly influenced by Marxist theory. The Griffins, recalled Gerald, “were greatly influenced by the Russian Revolutions in 1917 and from 1918 onwards my father and brother were very pro-Bolshevik. I was still attending school but read all the pamphlets my father brought home.”

Bought up as Catholics and educated by the Christian Brothers, both Gerald and his older brother had repudiated their faith by their teens. “Basically”, stated Gerald in 1969, “as far back as I can remember, my standpoint has been a marxist one.” The Griffins enthusiasm for Marxism was complicated, however, by the internal dynamics of a feisty and argumentative family. While both of the Griffin boys had strong leftist leanings, Richard, the elder brother, took the more prominent public role. He was a leading member of the Communist Party in New Zealand in the 1920s, representing the New Zealand Party at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928. Richard’s prominence, and the brother’s “strong disagreement … over policies and tactics and … personalities” compromised Gerald’s formal involvement with Marxist organisations in New Zealand through the 1920s and 1930s. Richard’s son has given me his impression of the family dynamics:

13 It is worth remembering that the Gaelic cultural revival was a highly politicised programme in the Irish context. Tohill’s links with the Dungannon Clubs ties in with his role as the Green Ray Irish language specialist. With the Free State established the promotion of Irish language, music and dancing in New Zealand would have had a wholly different focus and significance. In that sense, it had become ‘safe’ in comparison with its earlier twinning with advocacy for Irish political independence.
14 In September 1922 Bert Ryan was President of the Irish Society and with Bishop Whyte, its patron, was a guest of the Dunedin Caledonian Society. They encouraged its members to attend Irish Society meetings where a “commingling of the two societies” would encourage cultural links between Dunedin’s Irish and Scottish communities. (Otago Witness, September 5, 1922) It is hard to imagine such an exchange with the former Maoriland Irish Society or even with the second Irish Society during 1921.
15 Profile of Gerald Griffin in Australian Left Review, February-March 1969, ATL, Ms 6164-032, reference kindly supplied by Richard Griffin.
16 Ibid
17 Ibid
The relationship between the brothers, their father, mother and sister was fraught by the time they had reached adulthood. Dick was very obviously the most powerful personality and the most commercially active … David Griffin had a bookshop in Willis Street in Wellington that was... something of a Wellington establishment between the 40s and 60s. However, apparently the business did not exactly flourish because David, Gerald and an assorted range of friends and associates spent most of their time at the back of the shop arguing and debating the meaning of life, Soviet Russia and the Irish question. Argumentative family, much drama and in Dick's case much frustration with David and Gerald …

Without wishing to make too much of this family background, it seems to offer a good rationale for Gerald Griffin’s lifelong commitment to Ireland as a political cause. His adoption of a position on Ireland that was both more radical and more antagonistic to the establishment than that held by most Irish New Zealanders was characteristic of the Griffins. So too were his resolute commitment to the political struggle ahead of the fripperies of cultural pursuits and his intolerance for those who did not share his degree of commitment to the cause. Both of these attributes were to undermine his efforts to lead the New Zealand Irish community to a renewed enthusiasm for the pure Republican line after 1922. At the same time these attributes produced in him the very single-mindedness that such an uphill battle would require.

Gerald Griffin took his first independent initiative over Ireland in February 1923 when he wrote to Irish organisations in Australia to try and source reliable and up to date information on Irish affairs. Copies of a number of letters to the Irish Republican Association in Melbourne survive in his papers. They contain a bleak, and undoubtedly accurate, assessment of Irish affairs in New Zealand by the end of 1922. In his initial letter Griffin emphasised his own Republican position with repeated disparaging references to the “Free! State”, while expressing his admiration for the leadership of Dr Mannix and the “spirit of the Irish in Melbourne”. In sad contrast he reported that the New Zealand Irish were “composed mainly of seonín & even those who pose as Republicans are not, in nine cases out of ten, prepared to give any more than lip service to the cause they pretend to support.” Outside of Irish circles, he reported, there was a “sad misunderstanding” of the present situation in Ireland “particularly in Labor, Socialist & other sections of advanced & independent opinion” in New Zealand, which was all the more regrettable given the New Zealand Labor Party’s fine record of support for Ireland’s “complete independence”. The only remedy was to propagate the “real truth re the Free! State” to which end he wished to personally subscribe to the Victorian I.R.A.’s paper Irish News and offered to circulate it as widely as possible in New Zealand and solicit further subscribers. As to starting a similar organisation locally, it was “out of the question”. Previous efforts had all ended the same way, “either the wrong crowd get control or enthusiasm fizzles out.”

Griffin’s approach received a swift reply from Melbourne, along with a bundle of issues of Irish News. He was exhorted to establish a New Zealand branch of the Victorian movement, notwithstanding his reservations. In reply Griffin repeated his previous analysis of the shortcomings of the New Zealand Irish “the major portion” of whom were “composed of shoneens.” Propaganda was the way forward,

18 E-mail communication, Richard Griffin to Seán Brosnahan, May 30, 2000.
19 Gerald Griffin could be usefully compared to Dr Albert Dryer of Sydney, who shared a similar single-minded devotion to Ireland. Unlike Dryer, who was born in Australia and never even visited Ireland, Griffin had the passion of an expatriate. As a child migrant, however, he undoubtedly idealised Ireland in much the way that Dryer did. For Dryer see Patrick O’Farrell, The Irish in Australia, Sydney, 1993.
20 G.J. Griffin to Dr T.P.Walsh, Melbourne, February 23, 1923, Griffin Papers, 86-43, 3/8, ATL. He also wrote to the Irish National Association in Sydney. The latter also encouraged him to establish a New Zealand branch of its organisation but as it was also “strictly non-political and non-sectarian” he took this contact no further.
21 Ibid “This happened to a so called Gaelic Society (Cumann-na-nGaedeal) which is now strictly non-political.”
he argued, though even here difficulties abounded since “a lot that you can say & do over in Australia would not get very far here” under the stringent wartime regulations still in force. “Some of ‘us’ here were fined heavily & victimised for simply referring to the men of Easter as ‘a gallant and of heroes’”, he explained, referring to his father’s experience in 1918. This did not make them “frightened” he went on to explain, only wary, and “all that is possible” would be done. He then outlined a propaganda strategy, based on disseminating Irish News, targeting firstly “the Irish element”, then “the Labor element” and finally the “man in the street a small number of who [sic] are ready to be convinced …” He thought he could cope with 2 dozen copies of the paper per month to sell through his father’s shops and would endeavour to sign up as many additional subscribers as he could.\(^{23}\) The final portion of the letter contains an excoriating assessment of the New Zealand Tablet and its editor James Kelly “formerly”, Griffin acknowledged, “a staunch supporter of the Republic but since the Treaty … not alone does it support the Free!! State but week by week its editor pours out all the dirt and scurrilous abuse, he can lay hands on, on the very cause he previously supported.”\(^{24}\) Direct approaches to Kelly to ease up on the Republicans had been high handedly spurned – “he does not propose taking the advice of lay theologians … the Irish hierarchy [being] the best judge of what is good for the Irish people.” The Victorians could help out by replying to Kelly’s line through Irish News, suggested Griffin, which “we” could circulate widely “and thus show him up for what he is.”

Word of Griffin’s Republican enthusiasm reached Ireland in due course. In January 1924 he received a letter directly from Donal O’Callaghan, the Republican’s “Minister of Foreign Affairs”, initiating contact with “a worker in the cause of the Irish Republic.”\(^{25}\) O’Callaghan was seeking an analysis of Irish sympathies in Wellington and New Zealand, assistance with spreading Republican news and views, and looking to promote greater co-operation between Australasian Republican organisations. Griffin must have been thrilled by this contact and responded with alacrity. On 12 May the Irish Republican Association was established in Wellington “at the request of the Republican Government of Ireland”.\(^{26}\) A monthly meeting schedule was established with regular lectures, a campaign of letter writing to challenge Irish news reports in New Zealand papers and a push in promoting the Irish News from Melbourne. By July Griffin was able to report to O’Callaghan on significant progress. The new Wellington I.R.A. could claim “about 50 workers”, a branch had been established on the West Coast, all false statements in the press were being challenged, and circulation of Irish News had risen from 2 dozen to 15 dozen issues per month with 50 annual subscribers. On the negative side, he reported, there was the expected opposition to the new initiative from pulpit, press and police, while an approach to the Wellington Irish Society for co-operation had been spurned.

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\(^{23}\) Mail was to be sent to “120 Brougham St” to “put the ‘Ds’ off the track.” This address belonged to one ‘D.H. Scott’ who was a letter sorter for the New Zealand Post Office [1922 Electoral Roll, Wellington East, Supplementary 1]. It seems likely that he was a pal of Griffin’s in a position to help slip illicit literature from abroad past the regular process of screening.

\(^{24}\) P.J.O’Regan independently records a negative reaction to the Tablet position on this famine. “I find some dissatisfaction among Irishmen at the attitude of the Tablet towards the relief of the famine in Connemara, the paper having concealed it altogether until the cable agent was good enough to ‘let the cat out of the bag’ and then deprecated assistance on the ground that Ireland was now mistress of her own affairs and able to look after herself.” O’Regan even found himself the recipient of unsolicited donations for the relief of the famine, which he decided to pass on to the I.R.A.. (O’Regan diary, February 28, 1925)

\(^{25}\) Donal O’Callaghan to G.J. Griffin, January 8, 1924, GP 3/8. Griffin’s initiative in contacting Irish organisations in Australia may have been reported back to Ireland. On the other hand O’Callaghan was a Cork man, succeeding Terence MacSwiney as Lord Mayor of Cork after the latter’s death by hunger strike in Brixton prison in October 1920. He was one of the T.D.s who debated the Treaty in the Second Dail over Christmas and New Year 1921/22 and voted against it to follow Eamonn De Valera into the Republican wilderness. The Griffins also hailed from Cork, a Republican stronghold and Gerald Griffin’s aunt kept the family in touch with developments there in a series of letters through this period.

A second letter from Ireland arrived in July 1924 acknowledging receipt of Griffin’s report on the New Zealand position. It promised that the New Zealand I.R.A. would be put on to the Republican mailing list for propaganda and for copies of the Republican newspapers *Eire* and *Sinn Féin*. Griffin was assured that his communications would receive “personal attention from the President [De Valera] who will deal with the matter of external organisations henceforth”.\(^{27}\) A few months later a circular letter was indeed received from Eamonn De Valera, requesting assistance with the Australasian fund-raising tour of Republican emissaries Kathleen Barry and Linda Kearns. Gerald Griffin lost no time in making contact with Miss Barry, volunteering the I.R.A. as the New Zealand collecting body for her “Irish Relief and Reconstruction Fund”. Six collecting books were duly received with a query as to whether New Zealand would be up for £500 or £100 as a target figure.\(^{28}\) At the same time the Association was organising its own fund for the relief of distress in Connemara. This project struck an immediate snag, however, when Fr James Kelly the pugnacious editor of *The Tablet* refused to publish the Association’s appeal, even as a paid advertisement. Kelly went so far as to dispute the very existence of a famine in Connemara, ironically following a path well-trodden by the Protestant Political Association and its ilk in denouncing similar Irish fund-raising ventures in the past. Griffin was outraged, but probably not surprised, with little recourse but to pass the inevitable damning resolution against the *Tablet* at the next Association meeting.\(^{29}\) The acid test came with the fund-raising itself. By May 1925 the Association’s efforts on behalf of Miss Barry had garnered £157, while its own “Connemara Relief Fund” reached a mere £104. These were fairly paltry sums compared to the generous support of previous Irish relief funds. Over a third of the Connemara Fund money came from Republican stalwarts on the West Coast.\(^{30}\) Another £10 came from New Plymouth, while Miss A Quinn’s contribution in Gisborne accounted for a further £9. Aside from the Hokitika and New Plymouth collections a mere 52 people made donations to this Fund. Griffin lamented “the apathy that is unfortunately only too general throughout N.Z.”\(^{31}\)

Apathy was one thing, a quiet determination to let the Irish Free State find its way was another. As Professor O’Farrell has written of Australia in this period, “Irish Republicanism was blamed for the civil war, which was inexplicable, repugnant and totally offensive to those who assumed the Irish Free State meant what its title said…”\(^{32}\) In New Zealand too, few were stirred by root and branch Republicanism after 1922. The attempt to establish I.R.A. branches around the country foundered on this lack of sympathy, which Gerald Griffin characterised as apathy but which was really something more. John Robinson expressed this support for the Free State most eloquently. Robinson had been Dunedin’s leading Irish apologist during the sectarian battles of 1918 to 1921 and had taken on all comers, in print and in person, to defend the cause of Irish freedom. In 1924, however, he rejected Gerald Griffin’s invitation to form a Dunedin branch of the I.R.A.

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\(^{27}\) Donal O’Callaghan to G.J. Griffin, July 24, 1924, GP 3/8.  
\(^{28}\) Circular from Eamonn De Valera, Dail Eirean, September 1, 1924 with attached letter from Kathleen Barry to Gerald Griffin, December 8, 1926, GP 3/12.  
\(^{30}\) Badgered no doubt by the redoubtable Mick McGavin, the Fund collector in Hokitika and a one-time colleague of Jim Larkin. The money may actually have come from the funds collected by the Irish Self-Determination League. See letter to Gerald Griffin from J O’Brien, MP Feb 6, 1925 GP 3/11.  
\(^{31}\) Irish Republican Association, New Zealand, Report on Activities, May 12th 1924 to May 1925, GP 3/12. This figure could be contrasted with the £300 raised by the Labour Party supported James Larkin fund in New Zealand in 1921.  
I believe that the Irish people like every other people have the right to choose their own form of government without interference or coercion from outside. That is self-determination as I understand it. The only means we have of knowing what the wishes of the people are is by the voice of the people themselves. As it is they who will have to live under their Government it is right and just that they, and only they, should have a voice in the choosing of it. Now, the Irish people have already signified their choice of the Free State. You may say that their choice was not really their choice at all, but that it was the choice of the British Government dragged by the threat of war from the unwilling lips of a tormented people. That may be so. You may point to the setting up of a Republic in 1916 and the subsequent ratification of it on several occasions as evidence that the Irish people desire a republic today. But we must not forget that if the elections that ratified the Treaty were carried out in the presence of terror those that ratified the Republic were carried out in the presence of a national exasperation which defied terror. In neither case was the will of the people expressed in an atmosphere of dispassion. Therefore, we are not justified in claiming more in this respect for one set of elections than for the other, and in the absence of any superior method of ascertaining the will of the people we must accept their latest pronouncement in the manner in which it was delivered. To refuse to do this would be to deny them the right of self-determination, and it would bind the children of tomorrow with the will of yesterday. To do so would be to set bounds to the march of the nation.  

He went on to gently chide those like Griffin who by implication held the Treaty settlement as an act of cowardice in the face of British threats of renewed war.

As a New Zealander born and bred, and living here in comparative comfort and security I should hesitate long before venturing as a member of an association to urge or shame the Irish people into braving again the hell of warfare in which I could render them no assistance and from the dangers of which I should be completely free. In saying this I am not reflecting upon the courage or honesty of purpose of active Republicans outside Ireland, but the fact remains that the actual sufferings of the struggle will be borne by the Irish people residing in Ireland.

Robinson’s position is all the more interesting in view of his links with the Labour Party. In the mid-1920s he was to become secretary of the Otago Labour Council and built up what his obituary described as “an outstanding record as workers’ advocate in industrial disputes, including most of the important cases argued before the Court of Arbitration.” He contested the Dunedin Central seat for Labour in 1928, giving the sitting Speaker of the House Sir Charles Statham a close race for the seat. He also served several terms on the St Kilda Borough Council and was described on his death as “the ‘intellectual doctor’ of the trades’ unions of Dunedin.” A devout Catholic, Robinson was one of the ‘hinges’ between Irish Catholic and Labour communities of interest in Dunedin. His effective repudiation of further political agitation within New Zealand on Irish issues suggests that this was no longer a key component linking those communities of interest, as it had been before 1922.

The New Zealand Labour Party’s so-called “Irish Campaign” has been analysed before. From 1919 to the end of 1921 the Party had systematically courted Irish Catholic opinion with a series of public lectures on Ireland and by regularly raising the issue of Irish self-determination in Parliament. These

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33 John Robinson to Gerald Griffin, August 11, 1924, GP 3/11.
34 Ibid. Robinson was at heart a Republican but a democrat first. He believed that Ireland would never reach its full potential “as long as the country is part of the British Empire” and that the Treaty settlement was little more than an expedient “and will be honoured only so far as expediency demands.” When the people of Ireland opted for a Republic “by electing Republican representatives to Dail Eran [sic]” they would have his support. “But so far they have not spoken, and therefore I must wait,” (Ibid)
35 Robinson obituary, Otago Daily Times August 5, 1940.
36 John Robinson tribute, August 1940 (Unsourced copy of newspaper article in author’s possession). His newspaper The Democrat, published briefly from 1919, has been cited as a successor publication to The Green Ray. If so it emphasises how Irish Catholic socialists had other things on their mind than Ireland’s political arrangements even before the Treaty. The Democrat was unashamedly a socialist organ, with scarcely any references to Irish affairs apparent in the few surviving copies.
efforts were fronted not by prominent Irish Catholic Labour men (like Savage or Hickey) but by Party leader Harry Holland and the Scottish-born Member for Wellington Central Peter Fraser. Their efforts have been cited as a critical element in securing a de facto alliance between Labour and the Irish Catholic electorate. Labour’s policy was concerned with the principle of self-determination, however, rather than the actual form of government in an independent Ireland. “The Irish Treaty and the Irish civil war did not concern New Zealand Labour,” wrote R.P. Davis in 1967, “except insofar as the Irish Labour Party became the official opposition on the withdrawal of de Valera’s Republicans.”

In other words with the Treaty of 1921, Labour had no further policy interest in Irish affairs. Moreover, any electoral benefit among Irish Catholic voters had already been secured. There was no further electoral traction to be gained from taking a side in the messy ideological battle between Free State and Republican supporters. Though offered as a personal statement, Robinson’s response to Gerald Griffin in 1924 probably encapsulates the Labour Party’s position on Ireland after the Treaty.

Securing official Labour Party endorsement of the Republican cause was nonetheless one of the Wellington I.R.A.’s chief goals. Holland and Fraser were quite happy to offer the new organisation their encouragement, possibly because they were sympathetic on a personal level to the Republicans. Individual Party members were free to speak at Association meetings and Holland was prepared to do so himself in late 1924 though “not while the House is in session.” But they were equally happy to speak to meetings of the Cumann Na nGaedeal and an I.R.A. request that Ireland be added to a resolution of support for nationalist struggles in India and Egypt at the 1924 Labour Party Conference was fobbed off. Peter Fraser expressed the Party line in a letter acknowledging I.R.A. correspondence in early 1925. “The Labour Party”, he wrote, “stands for self-determination for all countries, including Ireland.” Like John Robinson he did not believe that this justified New Zealanders taking a stance on Ireland’s internal squabbles. “Personally, I consider that until such time as the Irish people clearly make up their minds as to the form of Government they want, it would be most unwise for outsiders to interfere in any way.”

The I.R.A. thus failed to link its cause with that of political Labour. It did, however, win the support

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38 Davis, 1967, p 23.
39 A common feature of the New Zealand Irish nationalists profiled in “Shaming the Shoneens” was their subsequent active support for the Labour Party. Labour affiliation was seemingly a natural consequence of Irish involvement in the years that followed.
40 One of Fraser’s chief electoral workers was John Troy, formerly Secretary of the Wellington branch of the Maoriland Irish Society and a Fenian from way back. Troy was a member of the Irish Republican Association but more active in this period in Labour Party organisation. Telephone conversation with Tom Troy, April, 2000.
41 Costelloe, p39-40.
42 Peter Fraser for instance gave a speech at a C.N.G. meeting in September 1922 to welcome home Jessie MacKay, the New Zealand Self Determination League for Ireland delegate to the Irish peace conference in Paris. (O’Regan diary, September 1, 1922).
43 I.R.A. Annual Report, May 1925, GP 3/12. The I.R.A. may have been compromised for Labour by its close association with the Communist and Socialist Parties. As well as the Griffins other Communist Party members associated with the I.R.A. were Peter Butler and Jack Loughran and the I.R.A.’s “West Coast Branch” Jack Doyle of Nelson Creek (Bert Roth, Communist Party Card Index, Roth Papers, Ms Group 0314, ATL). Fintan Patrick Walsh also made a bizarre reference to this association when he resigned from the Communist Party in 1924 citing as one reason “the [CP] support and assisting into existence in New Zealand of a reactionary organisation known as the Irish Republican Association.” (Quoted in a letter to the author from Dean Parker, Information on Ireland, July 12, 2000.)
of one notable Wellington personality, Patrick Joseph O'Regan. O'Regan had come to Wellington to represent the West Coast mining district of Inangahua in the parliament of 1893. The son of Irish immigrants from Co Cork, he had risen to prominence on the Coast via journalism, despite limited formal education.  

Only twenty four at the time of his election he had made his mark as a powerful speaker in the House and was noted as one of the most promising of that year's intake of new parliamentarians. This potential was never realised, however, as he placed his commitment to proportional representation and land value taxation - the "only two really important causes to fight for"- over the compromises necessary for party political success. Although associated with the Liberal Party he was always strongly independent and in 1899 he lost his seat. The next year he began his legal studies at Victoria College and in 1908 was admitted to the Bar. He quickly forged a new reputation as a working-man's lawyer and established an independent Wellington legal practice which prospered. During the First World War he acted on behalf of a number of labour leaders and was one of those who helped organise the "underground railway" to Australia for those avoiding military service under the conscription regulations. A devout Catholic and a staunch Irishman, he was highly regarded by his co-religionists and in 1921 was appointed, in absentia, as the national President of the Self-Determination League for Ireland. His successful defence of Bishop James Liston in the latter's high profile trial for sedition in 1922, and more importantly the defiantly Irish nationalist case he presented, secured O'Regan’s position as perhaps the leading lay Irish Catholic in the country at this time.

O'Regan's support for the Irish Republican Association is thus of some significance in the context of New Zealand Irish communal politics in the 1920s. He was the top drawer speaker on Irish affairs in Wellington and his occasional lectures to the I.R.A. drew the largest audiences the organisation was ever able to muster. But O'Regan was an unusual example of his type - the Irishman of humble origins who had made his way into the professions. Unlike many such, commonly derided as 'shoneens' on account of their timorousness when it came to public advocacy of Irish issues, O'Regan was never afraid to take an unpopular stand. In fact he positively gloried in his ability to prosper at law despite his refusal to kowtow to the Anglo-protestant establishment. He was a strident anti-Imperialist, contemptuous of Britain and its pretensions, and commited to the idea of New Zealand as a sovereign and independent state. He was thus a republican by temperament, quite apart from his views on Irish affairs. He did not share Gerald Griffin's doctrinaire attachment to the ideal of an Irish Republic.

45 The O'Regans had an excellent nationalist pedigree in colonial terms. Patrick’s father had marched at the infamous procession at Charleston in 1869, which generated a significant degree of Fenian hysteria around the colony. As a youth Patrick had himself been part of West Coast audiences for the touring Irish politicians William Redmond in 1883 (Diary October 7, 1928) and John Dillon in 1889 (Ibid, August 6, 1927).

46 O’Regan diary, June 27, 1922. O’Regan was a devoted follower of Henry George “the Prophet of San Francisco” whose critique of capitalist society ranked alongside those of Marx or Weber for many radicals of his generation.

47 Staying at the Grand Hotel in Dunedin soon after the Liston trial, O'Regan found himself summoned to meet Prime Minister Massey, who was also staying there. Thus identified as the man who had defended the bishop he had one of the Prime Minister’s party seeking him out to offer congratulations. This man whose name was Moloney he subsequently learned was “hardly to be reckoned a Catholic in spite of his name. Evidently, however, his heart is still in the right place!” (O’Regan diary, May 29, 1922). Meanwhile he found himself “the recipient of the greatest attention and civility from several of the girls of the staff who, being Catholic, were keenly interested in the Bishop’s case. Had the same experience at the United Service [Hotel] in Christchurch.” (Ibid, June 3, 1922).

48 He was dismissive for instance of the Catholic Federation as “jingos” because of that organisation’s support for conscription during the war and believed it contained “many enemies of Bishop Liston.” (Ibid, July 2, 1922). When Joseph Ward was the subject of sectarian campaigning in the 1925 election O’Regan wrote that “… Ward may at last realise that our co-religionists gain nothing by loyalty or war service. I am a republican and avowed believer in the independence of the colony and the bigots would offer no stronger opposition to my candidature than they would to the man who gave them 'Dreadnought'”. (Ibid, November 4, 1925)
Indeed he had welcomed the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922, recording in his diary; "Am satisfied that Ireland will one day (and should) be completely independent, but were I in Ireland I would certainly accept the Treaty." This did not detract from his philosophical commitment to Republicanism as the goal for Ireland (as for New Zealand), as he saw the Free State "only as so much on account". He had moreover his own sources of information on Irish affairs and knew from relatives' letters through the 1920s that despite its defeat at arms the Republican movement was far from finished in the Free State.

Patrick O’Regan’s personal diary provides an intriguing alternative to the Griffin Papers for information on the activities of the Wellington I.R.A. Though prepared to lend the fledgling organisation the weight of his name, O’Regan was quite clear-headed about its cause and alive to its limited appeal in the New Zealand of the 1920s. Writing after presiding over a vigorous I.R.A. debate in early 1926, he recorded that:

There were some speakers with whom I had little or no sympathy, but I believe in the principle of complete national independence and am unwilling to leave the supporters of republicanism completely ostracised. It is quite evident, however, that the Irish question is now dead as far as this country is concerned, and after all we have enough to do to mind our own affairs.

He maintained this support throughout the I.R.A.’s brief history, delivering lectures in mid-1925 and again the next year, chairing meetings and presiding over Association debates on two occasions in 1926, and becoming the Association’s (honorary) President in 1927.

Meanwhile events in Ireland were moving on again and New Zealand’s Republicans struggled to keep up. Despite Gerald Griffin’s energetic letter writing campaigns to kindred organisations in Australia and North America, and notwithstanding Donal O’Callaghan’s earnest assurances in 1924, solid information on Irish affairs had proven hard to come by. Then, in April 1926, Eamonn de Valera announced a “New Departure” for the Republican movement in Ireland. A month later the Fianna Fail party was formed to enter the electoral process and pursue Republican ambitions from within the Free State.

49 Ibid., June 22, 1922. The previous month the executive of the Self Determination League for Ireland had been unable to muster a quorum for its meeting and O’Regan noted that “since the Treaty everyone concludes that [if] the matter isn’t settled, it ought to be.” (Ibid, May 4, 1922) The League was wound up in September 1922. For an account of the League’s foundation and activities see O’Regan diary entry, February 20, 1922.

50 Ibid, August 22, 1922. The entry continued: “and, though I believe Ireland will yet be a free Republic, I would not spill one drop of blood to achieve it inasmuch as all human improvement can be achieved by the peaceful progress of opinion.”

51 In April 1924 he recorded that he had received a bundle of Republican papers from Ireland from a cousin in Cork, Margaret O’Brien. “It is already clear that the Republican Party is very much alive in Ireland and in America.” (Ibid, April 12, 1924)

52 Ibid, February 7, 1926. Among those who had been ostracising the Republican cause was Father James Kelly, editor of the Tablet, who refused to publish O’Regan’s 1925 address to the Association on the Republic of Ireland. This contrasted with Kelly’s earlier enthusiasm for publishing O’Regan’s political articles and in particular his address to the jury in the Liston sedition trial of 1922. (Ibid, March 28, 1925)

53 On three of these occasions O’Regan’s diary records these events as successes and his surprise at the large attendance at the meetings. For a June 1925 lecture on De Valera by Gerald Griffin he specified this as a capacity crowd of some 150. “Evidently the belief in the Republic of Ireland has not a few adherents in this country … The meeting was a distinct success.” (Ibid, June 7,1925)

54 In 1925 Gerald Griffin had written to the Republican Foreign Affairs Department, Dail Eireann, Dublin, stressing the need for regular information from Republican HQ in Ireland. This did not eventuate. In early 1926 he wrote to Joseph Begley of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic, New York, (February 14, 1926, GP 3/8) – complaining that there had been no direct communication from Ireland since O’Callaghan’s two letters in 1924. He hoped to establish an alternate route for communication via America but this source also fizzled out after an initial burst of enthusiasm. (GP 3/8)
State political structure. The inevitable split in Republican ranks – with an enduring Sinn Fein rump – was naturally replicated in Irish organisations abroad. Griffin cabled Dublin on 8 April seeking urgent clarification on this new development. A reply was received a week later assuring the New Zealand group that it was a “friendly division” and that “cooperation [is] intended”. This was not much practical use but in the absence of any firmer information the New Zealanders were not in a position to make a judgement either way. Eventually in late August a brief letter was received from Fianna Fail to Griffin outlining the background to the change of tack. Griffin responded, expressing his doubts about the “New Departure” but reported that the Wellington I.R.A. was awaiting similar information from Sinn Fein before defining its position. This took some time but finally, in April 1927, on the 11th anniversary of the Easter Rising, the Association passed a resolution reaffirming its allegiance to the Irish Republic. In effect it opted to sit on the fence, maintaining support for both Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein. While undoubtedly a realistic position to adopt, this blunted the Association’s appeal to Republican ideological purity and fatally weakened its raison d’etre as an advocate of hardline Republicanism.

In heightening ideological tensions within the Wellington I.R.A., the “New Departure” raised anew questions about its position vis-à-vis the other Irish organisation in the city – the Cumann Na nGaedeal. By 1926 both organisations were running regular social events for their members. In one case these were arranged under a “non-political” (albeit Irish National) banner, while in the other there were set against a backdrop of Republican rhetoric. In practical terms the “dos” were probably much the same. Both organisations drew on the same pool of “nationalist” Irish in Wellington for their support. Gerald Griffin had long been set on politicising the Cumann Na nGaedeal membership and had made approaches at regular intervals for “co-operation” between the two groups. The aggressive tone of these approaches perhaps explains the marked reluctance of the Gaelic Society to have any

55 Cables, 8 April and 16 April 1926, GP 3/8.
56 Griffin reported in a second letter to Joseph Begley in New York that there was no division as yet in New Zealand but that this was largely due to the scantiness of available information. (Letter to AARIR, New York, June 26, 1926, GP 3/8)
57 In the meantime three issues of an Irish Bulletin were published as a cyclostyled news sheet “explaining” the developments in Ireland and soft-soaping the notion of a split in Republican ranks. Copies of Issue 1 and 3 survive in GP 3/18.
58 The resolution was sent to Irish World, An Phoblacht, Fianna Fail headquarters, Sinn Fein headquarters and the I.R.A. Melbourne. Special note was made of the support of two Association members, Padraic Feeney formerly of Co Galway and Frank O’Sullivan formerly of Co Cork, both veterans of the armed struggle 1916-23.
59 See for instance its telegram to Sinn Fein AND Fianna Fail before the Irish elections in June 1927. (June 21, 1927, GP 3/8)
60 P.J.O’Regan recorded Dave Griffin’s enthusiastic response to news of Republican success in the Irish elections of June 1927. “Of course there is a strong but silent current of republican sympathy among the Irish everywhere.” A few days later he received a letter from Bishop Liston who also seemed “well pleased with the Republican victory”. (O’Regan diary, June 17 and June 20, 1927)
61 The C.N.G.’s founding documents defined its status as “Irish National, non-political and non-sectarian.” (GP 3/18) P.J. O’Regan attended some of its meetings, providing the speech of welcome for example when the C.N.G. hosted Archbishop Mannix, during the latter’s visit to Wellington for the Redmond Jubilee in February 1924. (O’Regan Scrapbook 1924-27)
62 The I.R.A.’s constitution and platform were virtually a straight copy of the earlier C.N.G. one. The only substantive difference was that the C.N.G. provided for membership for those “in sympathy with Irish aspirations” but not of Irish birth or parentage while the I.R.A. required a declaration of Irish birth or descent and restricted “non-Irish” to a special class of membership with no voting rights. Both organisations prohibited liquor at meetings or entertainments. (GP 3/18) The I.R.A.’s membership cards, however, added a second socialist objective to its main Republican platform: “Holding with Padraic Pearse that the Nation’s Sovereignty extends, not only to all men and women within the Nation, but to all wealth and wealth-providing resources, to work for the placing of them under the common ownership and control of the Irish people.” (GP 3/18).
dealing with Griffin and his colleagues.\textsuperscript{63} One undated circular for example, an “open letter to the rank and file” of the C.N.G., ends with the imprecation, “Down with Shoneens and time servers. Line up with the IRA and work for the Dawning of the Day.”\textsuperscript{64} But Wellington hardly needed two organisations to cater for the social and cultural needs of its Irish residents. In the end this seems to have overcome the C.N.G. executive members’ unwillingness to engage with Griffin and his executive. On 28 March 1927 a “Round Table Conference” was duly held with four representatives of each committee to discuss the future of Irish organisation in Wellington.

The C.N.G. representatives argued that a united organisation would have to follow its lead, avoiding Irish political issues, if it were to cater for all of Wellington’s Irish residents. They offered to alter the C.N.G. constitution to allow members of the I.R.A to join but wanted a monopoly on all future Irish social functions in the city.\textsuperscript{65} The I.R.A. representatives wanted pretty much the same, only in reverse. They would absorb the C.N.G. into their organisation, attaining the monopoly position on social functions, while maintaining their primary duty, which was “to organise in support of the struggle in Ireland for freedom.”\textsuperscript{66} Any club which ignored this basic fact, they said, “merely … a Seonin organisation of no credit and absolutely no use to Ireland.”\textsuperscript{67} Griffin – whose voice can be clearly discerned in the record of the I.R.A. position – seems to have believed that the C.N.G. Executive were “seonins” whereas its rank and file members could be won over to the ideological position he advocated, if only he could get to them. He proposed therefore calling a joint meeting of all members of both organisations, as well as anyone else interested in the question, to decide upon the political attitude of a new joint Club. The C.N.G., perhaps wisely, would have none of this and discussions came to an end. The only surviving account of this meeting is Griffin’s. Even so, his own records give ample evidence that Gerald Griffin was, as a close friend later described him, “a personality wrapped up in barbed wire”, abrasive, intolerant and self-opinionated.\textsuperscript{68}

Gerald Griffin’s record of these 1927 negotiations ends with a statement of contempt for those who preferred social activities to the hard graft of political advocacy. “The Irish Republican Association” it states, “is ready to cater for the social requirements of its members and supporters, in every way possible, but regards such activities as of minor importance compared with the duty of Irishmen and women abroad to attend to the fate of their country.”\textsuperscript{69} Perhaps Gerald couldn’t dance. The surviving evidence certainly suggests that the I.R.A.’s political campaigns were virtually a one man band at work – Gerald Griffin. It was Gerald who kept a watch on every newspaper in the country, knocking off speedy rejoinders to every published opinion on Irish matters which contradicted his own. It was

\textsuperscript{63} Nora Boyce’s reply to the first such approach as Secretary of the Wellington Irish Society in July 1924 thanked the I.R.A. for its challenge to debate the Irish situation but declined the invitation. (GP, 3/15)

\textsuperscript{64} Signed by P M Butler, President and G J Griffin, Secretary (GP, 3/15). Peter Butler was an Ulster Catholic who came to New Zealand after service in the British Merchant Marine Reserve during the war. At this stage of his life he was an ardent communist and active in the Seamen’s Union as a colleague and rival of Fintan Patrick Walsh. He later repudiated his marxism and returned to Catholicism but maintained his involvement in politics throughout a long and colourful trade union career. (Press clippings P.M. Butler, National Library Biographical Clippings Collection) In his old age he was dismissive of the I.R.A., recalling it in conversation to Dean Parker of “Information on Ireland” as “consisting of him and one of the Griffens and two policemen. According to Butler’s description, the four would meet and the policemen would listen and take notes as Butler and Griffen [sic] tried to win them over to Irish republican direct-force politics.” (Personal communication to author, Dean Parker July 12, 2000)

\textsuperscript{65} By this time the I.R.A. was holding regular picnics and weekly socials as well as its monthly meetings. C.N.G activities were probably similar in scale and had certainly included a weekly meeting from its formation in 1922.


\textsuperscript{67} Ibid

\textsuperscript{68} Bert Roth’s obituary of Griffin, published in the Public Service Association Journal, December 1976, quoted in Costelloe, p20.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid The I.R.A. delegates were E Murphy, D Griffin, P Feeney and G J Griffin.
Gerald who kept up the contacts with kindred organisations abroad and struggled to maintain contact with Republican H.Q. in Ireland. By late 1927 his self-righteous tone was beginning to pall on many of his fellow I.R.A. members. Some may even have wanted to pursue rapprochement with the C.N.G. Matters eventually came to a head over a set of hurling sticks. A hurling club, the Terence MacSwiney Hurling Club, had been established as an off-shoot of the I.R.A.’s social committee in early 1927. Matches were played at the Association’s regular picnics, held at Maidstone Park over the summer months. As Secretary of the I.R.A. Gerald Griffin was ex officio a member of the Hurling Club executive, whose every move required his endorsement.

Gerald’s general disapproval of such diversions and constant harping on about Irish politics seems to have become too much for the hurlers to take. From October 1927 they stopped inviting him to their meetings. When he objected they first tried to fob him off and then, according to his account, “attempts at physical violence on those claiming their rights were made.” The disagreement spilled over into the main body of the Association, where Griffin now found himself with few allies. On 19 October the I.R.A. executive committee voted itself out of office on a no confidence motion and voted in a new committee, which excluded Gerald Griffin. Ironically, two of Griffin’s bitterest rivals in this wrangle were recent arrivals from Ireland, Patrick Feeney and Frank O’Sullivan, whose status as “veterans of the Irish struggle 1916-1923” he had earlier deployed as markers of the Wellington I.R.A.’s Republican reputation. More personally wounding was the position adopted by his older brother Richard. “With all due respect to you for your ability and the work you put into the organisation,” Richard wrote in response to a stiffly formal letter from Gerald on 7 November, “you are not the organisation.” Gerald’s belated objection to some of his colleagues’ Republican bone fides did not wash either.

If they are not fit to be in the organisation which you say you created you had no right ever to agree to their becoming members. I consider them good enough members of the Republican Association in our conditions here in N.Z. at the present time. If you want to make membership more strict I will support you but no principle is so far involved which justifies your present attitude.

By this time the I.R.A. membership was much reduced in any case. Only eighteen members turned up for the special meeting to settle matters on 30 October and the anti-Griffin faction struggled to muster a quorum. The rules required two thirds of the members to be present at such a ‘general meeting’ and jiggery pokery followed with a purging of the roll to bring down the required number. This proved even more embarrassing as key members of the ‘anti-Griffin’ faction were revealed as ‘unfinancial’ in the process. The ‘rebels’ therefore called a second special meeting for 20 November where 22 members turned up – presumably constituting a quorum - and debated the issues for two hours. Gerald Griffin and his supporters refused to attend this meeting, while the nominal President of the organisation, P.J. O’Regan was not even invited. Richard Griffin, however, chaired the meeting. A

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70 Griffin/O’Connor report on I.R.A. schism, December 12, 1927, GP, 3/10. Griffin refers here to his “opposing the side-tracking of the Association into the service of an institution which has been historically opposed to all fights for Irish Freedom and social emancipation.”

71 Ibid

72 E.R. O’Connor and his father Dave Griffin formed the extent of the Griffin faction. His brother Richard was ‘among the enemy’.


74 Ibid

75 Richard was not a member of the new Executive elected at this meeting but at the next A.G.M., in May 1928, he was elected to the Executive and became Minute Secretary. The fraternal hurt this involvement caused is clear in Gerald Griffin’s records of these events in which his brother’s name is repeatedly underlined.
new Executive was duly elected with Feeney and O’Sullivan, the lauded Republican “veterans” in the ascendant.76

Gerald Griffin meanwhile had no intention of meekly submitting to the “usurping clique”. He issued a defiant circular to Association members declaring that, “in accordance with the mandate which I have received from Republican H.Q. steps are being taken to carry on the essential activities of the Association in the interim, and cope with this unscrupulous attempt to smash the organisation.”

Backed by the stalwart E.R. O’Connor and his father Dave, Gerald set up a “Control Committee” to “safeguard the assets of the organisation.”77 In practice this meant hanging on to all of the Association’s records, money collected for the “Irish Republican Fund, N.Z.” (amounting to some £57), and 30 hurling sticks.78 By May the ‘rebel’ I.R.A. Executive had initiated legal proceedings against Griffin and O’Connor for the recovery of this property.79 The case began in the Wellington Magistrate’s Court on 17 July 1928.80 P.J. O’Regan acted on behalf of the Griffins, though he held out little hope of their winning the case and advised them to compromise.81 This they would not do and eventually, on 6 November the magistrate found against the Griffins. In the saddest cut of all, the I.R.A.’s internal wrangling was to be adjudicated by an agency of the British Crown. “What the next move will be I do not know”, wrote O’Regan in his diary, “but the Griffins are almost certain to do something desperate. Illegality, of course, holds no terrors for them.”82 He predicted the imminent demise of the I.R.A. “and Republican though I am,” he wrote, “I am not sorry. It seems to be the fate of every good cause to become encumbered with people who are unworthy of it.”

O’Regan eventually prevailed upon his clients to accept the judgement of the court. On 20 November 1928 the I.R.A.’s paltry assets were surrendered to the ‘rebel’ faction.83 Without the dedicated Gerald Griffin to keep its books the Wellington I.R.A. fades from the historical record. Gerald was far from finished, however. In fact his finest moment was still to come. In 1934 he became a hero of the Australasian peace movement as an international delegate to a Peace Conference in Sydney. Banned from entry to Australia, Gerald went underground, attracting international media attention for three months as he eluded the Australian police and made clandestine appearances at peace rallies across Australia.84 His Irish convictions never dimmed either. In 1948 he was on the platform at the

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76 Feeney was appointed Vice President, O’Sullivan Secretary. These men were part of the exodus of I.R.A. men from the Irish Free State in the mid-1920s. Ironically they may have found Gerald Griffin’s devotion to the De Valera brand of “New Departure” Republicanism as much of a “sell-out” as he had found the C.N.G.’s pro-Free State position. Frank O’Sullivan was “a big amiable Irishman” who migrated to New Zealand from Cork in 1926. He worked in the hotel industry and in 1928 was elected to the executive of the Wellington Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union. He later became a fulltime union organiser and was Union President when he retired in 1963. (Obituary, Evening Post March 31,1966)


78 Griffin had already been taken to task over the fate of this money by Padraic Feeney, who had been listed as “Treasurer” in Fund publicity but given no actual role in handling the collected monies. (Letter Padraic Feeney to G J Griffin, October 31, 1927, GP 3/7)

79 I.R.A. Annual General Meeting, 6 May 1928, GP 3/10. Richard Griffin strenuously opposed any recourse to the law when this course was first outlined in March but seems to have overcome his objections by the time of this meeting at which he was elected to the I.R.A. Executive, see above.

80 O’Regan was surprised that no reporters turned up to cover the trial on this or subsequent days in court. “Were the press only alive enough they could get some most interesting ‘copy’”. (O’Regan diary, August 17, 1928)

81 Ibid, July 17 and August 17, 1928.

82 Ibid, November 6, 1928.

83 GP, 3/10. This being so it is intriguing that Gerald Griffin’s Papers contain almost all of the material on which this paper is based. Whether he made copies, recovered the material at a later date or handed over only some of the I.R.A. material in his possession is not clear.

84 For further details of the ‘Kisch-Griffin’ affair see Costelloe pp 47-56.
Wellington celebrations to mark the visit of Eamonn de Valera to New Zealand. Twenty years later he represented New Zealand organisations at celebrations in Dublin marking the centenary of James Connolly’s birth. He was active too in the new Irish organisations which sprang up in New Zealand in the early 1970s in response to “The Troubles” in Ulster. In 1974 he sued the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation for naming him as an Irish Republican Army supporter in a television bulletin on the Tower of London bombing. He died in 1976.

What does this sad and funny tale tell us about the Irish in New Zealand? Firstly it makes clear that for most the struggle for Irish independence from Britain lost all cogency after the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The struggle that really mattered was their own effort to get on in New Zealand, perhaps even to fit in. The advocates of ‘advanced’ Irish nationalism constantly railed against the prevalence of what they called ‘shoneenism’ amongst their fellow Irish. P.J.O’Regan for example reflected in his diary in late 1928 on the sad decline since he had stood as a fourteen year old amidst a packed crowd in the schoolroom at Ahaura in 1883 to hear William Redmond speak. “In those far-off days”, he wrote, “there were some sturdy Irishmen on the West Coast, and they rallied in fine style to support the [Redmond] brothers. I fear the microbe of shoneenism has since taken root among certain of their descendants, however.” Likewise the Labour member for the West Coast James O’Brien lamented to Gerald Griffin his failure to stir his fellow Coasters on Irish matters in 1925, “Irishmen in business and comfortable jobs”, he wrote, “placing self interest first.” An alternative way of looking at this apparently characteristic attitude, however, was that offered by the Napier lawyer Bernard Dolan in 1927. Responding to one of Gerald Griffin’s letters to the editor, Dolan affirmed that having visited Ireland six years before he much preferred living in New Zealand. Its priests were as staunch, its Church as holy, the climate was better, the standard of living higher and the prospects for future generations altogether brighter.

Against the positive opportunities of life in New Zealand, of course, stood those distinctive features of being Irish that made fitting in to Anglo-protestant New Zealand problematic, on occasion at least. Teasing out the finer points of ‘shoneenism’ and the bumps on the road to establishing a New Zealand identity for Irish Catholics are beyond the limits of this story. ‘Standing out’ was sometimes required but for most this was in the playground or the workplace rather than in groups like the I.R.A. Mary Troy’s experience at Miramar (state) primary school is more representative than Gerald Griffin’s. Her refusal to sing “God Save the King” at morning assemblies led to her being strapped in front of the class, while she regularly rescued her younger siblings from the anti-Catholic abuse and harassment of local bullies. Such petty struggles are recalled by many who grew up in this period and continued to

85 De Valera was out of office having lost the Irish election in the preceding February. Griffin’s son Desmond recalled that De Valera seemed to know his father when they met at the reception [personal communication with author, Desmond Griffin, Sydney, December 19, 1995]. The function was hosted at the Wellington Town Hall by an Irish National Club which had been formed in 1948 as a “non-political and non-sectarian” cultural organisation. It had some 227 members in 1948, including Griffin’s old adversary from the I.R.A. Padraic Feeney. Irish National Club, Annual Report, 9 May 1948, GP 3/12 and Evening Post newsclipping May 24, 1948, GP 3/18.
86 His Papers include material from the New Zealand Association of Friendship with Irish Workers and the New Zealand Association for Support of Democracy in Ireland.
87 Costelloe, p 43.
88 O’Regan diary, October 7, 1928.
89 J. O’Brien to G.J. Griffin, February 6, 1925, GP 3/11.
90 B Dolan to G.J. Griffin, February 28, 1928, GP 3/16. Dolan had been the lawyer who defended Dave Griffin and John Troy in their sedition trial in 1918.
91 Mary Troy was an Irish-born daughter of John Troy, Secretary of the Wellington branch of the Maoriland Irish Society. Though he was also a member of the Irish Republican Association he had no leadership role in that organisation. By then
be a feature of New Zealand life for many years. Intriguingly memories of the more systematic defiance of an earlier generation were quickly forgotten. Few contemporary New Zealand Irish Catholics have ever heard of the Green Ray or the Maoriland Irish Society, let alone the Irish Republican Association. Even among the children of the principal actors in the dramas of those organisations I found scant awareness of their parents’ exploits. The prison records of First World War Irish conscientious objectors were sometimes as embarrassing to them in later life as Peter Fraser’s was to him.

An Irish cultural identity has remained of importance to New Zealand descendants of the Irish diaspora. Until the latter part of the twentieth century this was invariably twinned with Catholicism in an amalgam of religion and culture. Today the religious affiliation may have attenuated but notions of cultural ‘Irishness’ persist, generally expressed through music, the celebration of St Patrick’s Day and enduring traditions of conviviality. Most Irish New Zealanders only ‘come out’ now on St Patrick’s Day or at funerals. The story of the Wellington I.R.A. suggests that it was almost always thus. Euchre parties and dances, picnics and hurling drew people into the I.R.A. more than the letter-writing campaigns and political networking so dear to Gerald Griffin’s heart, much to his frustration. Irish social organisations have come and gone regularly in the years since the demise of the I.R.A. Occasionally they have mounted political campaigns and even published newspapers. The latest incarnation Saoirse The New Zealand Irish Post provided a Republican perspective on Irish affairs for over eighteen years. It is arguable if any of these groups, however, has ever been able to rouse the New Zealand Irish to the heights of passion over the fate of their ancestral homeland reached in the heady days from 1916-1921. Post Treaty (1922 not 1840) Irish New Zealanders have had their hands full finding their way in a Pacific nation. Parties, not politics, are undoubtedly the legacy of Irishness in New Zealand.

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92 There are numerous references to such petty sectarian strife by those on both sides of the religious divide in the “St Kilda Memory Bank” a collection of oral history interviews in 1990-92 with over 170 people who grew up in St Kilda and South Dunedin. (Oral History Archive, Otago Settlers Museum, Dunedin)

93 Bert Ryan’s son for example, a distinguished academic at an Australian university, had no idea that his father had ever been in jail, nor indeed of his wartime involvement with The Green Ray and Maoriland Irish Society, until I approached him.

94 P.J. O’Regan expressed this view following the winding up of the Irish Self Determination League in 1922, “Though yielding to no man in my desire to see justice done to Ireland, I am pleased that henceforth we will be able to give our undivided attention to our own country.” (O’Regan diary, September 11, 1922)