Irish issues played an unusually divisive role in New Zealand society between 1916 and 1922. Events in Ireland in the wake of the Easter 1916 Rising in Dublin were followed closely by a number of groups in New Zealand. For some the struggle for Irish independence was scandalous, a threat to the stability of Empire and final proof, if any were needed, of the fundamental unsuitability of Irish (Catholics) as citizens in New Zealand, the Greater Britain of the South Pacific.\textsuperscript{2} For others, particularly the ‘lace curtain’ Catholic bourgeoisie, events in Ireland were potentially a source of embarrassment, threatening to undermine a carefully cultivated accommodation between Irish ethnic identity, centred on the Catholic Church, and civic respectability amidst New Zealand’s Anglo-Protestant majority population.\textsuperscript{3} For a third group the rebellion and its aftermath were a stirring realisation of centuries old hopes, an unlooked for opportunity to fulfil the revolutionary dreams of generations of dead Irish patriots.

This essay seeks to cast some fresh light on Irish issues in New Zealand from 1916 to 1922 by looking at a small group of ‘advanced Irish nationalists’ in Dunedin. These people were few in number and have left little evidence of their activities, let alone their motivations, organisational dynamics or long-term achievements. Yet their presence in Dunedin at all is worthy of some attention. There were genuine Irish ‘Sinn Féiners’ in New Zealand, recent arrivals who claimed intimate connections with ‘the martyrs of 1916’. Their radical credentials assured them of a special place along the spectrum of international extremist thought and philosophy that fed the development of left-wing politics in New Zealand in this period. The particular conjunction of Irish radicalism, the rise of the New Zealand Labour Party and the waning of Irish Catholic support for the Liberal Party cause, adds to the interest. Historiographical emphasis to date has concentrated on the attitude of the New Zealand Catholic episcopacy toward political Labour and on the “Irish campaign” of Labour leaders. But it was amongst working class Catholics that Labour won its battle for ‘hearts and minds’ after 1916.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}`Shoneen’ 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’ sometimes contrasted unfavourably with the spiritual purity of the poorer Irish. It was an epithet widely used among the Irish in all of these societies.

\textsuperscript{2} For the purposes of this essay Irish will be taken as virtually synonymous with Catholic Irish. Clearly this distorts the historical reality in which Irish Protestants played a part. See Alastair Galbraith’s essay in this volume for another perspective on this issue.

\textsuperscript{3} This is in contrast to the way in which Irish nationalism was used by Irish-Americans as a means of establishing a claim to inclusion in the American middle class. Reviewing the American literature Malcolm Campbell has accurately characterised what he terms by contrast “the timid tone and limited influence of the nationalist cause in Australia ... For most of the Irish in Australia, the nationalist cause was to be embraced only warily.” The same description is generally apt for the New Zealand Irish situation too. Malcolm Campbell, “Irish Nationalism and Immigrant Assimilation: Comparing the United States and Australia.” [Lyndon for further reference].

\textsuperscript{4} Analyses of episcopal political leanings has been offered by such landmark essays as P.S. O’Connor’s “Sectarian Conflict in New Zealand, 1911-1920” and R.P. Davis “The New Zealand Labour Party's 'Irish Campaign', 1916-1921”, both in \textit{Political Science}, Volume 19, 1967 or the more recent critiques by Rory Sweetman reflecting “the view from the Bishop's palace and from the presbytery”. R.M. Sweetman, “New Zealand Catholicism, War, Politics and the Irish Issue, 1912-
In 1916 there was a clear divergence in approach between what might be characterised as the ‘ornery Irish’ of the lower orders and the better class of Irish, those with aspirations to respectability, who had heretofore taken the lead in public platforms on Irish issues in Dunedin. This leadership was evident in the hosting of delegations of Irish nationalist politicians who toured the colonies at regular intervals from the 1870s. For although the Irish campaign for Home Rule via constitutional change retained a cachet of controversy, it was an increasingly acceptable cause. It offered moreover an opportunity for the colonial Irish to demonstrate at once their patriotic allegiance to Ireland and their devotion to the Empire. New Zealand (and Australia) were offered as concrete proof that ‘Home Rule’ under the Empire strengthened the bonds between its disparate parts. This line of argument was consistently promoted to, and by, each of the Irish delegations. Hence the enthu.

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constitutional equivalents. Though little evidence remains, it is fair to assume that some New Zealand Irish would have cheered the efforts of O'Donovan Rossa’s Fenian dynamiters in the 1870s and even the terrorist killings of the so-called “Irish Invincibles” of the 1880s.

The physical force advocates, chiefly the Irish Republican Brotherhood [IRB] in Ireland and the Clan Na Gael and the Fenian Brotherhood in the United States, atrophied in the 1890s. The future then seemed to lie with the constitutionalists, who recovered from the set-back of the Parnellite split to make real progress in a transfer of power in Ireland. After 1900, however, there was a quiet resurgence in the IRB as a new generation came to the fore. This youthful cohort of revolutionaries drew on the cultural energies unleashed in Ireland by the Gaelic revival and infiltrated its key organisations, the Gaelic Athletic Association and Gaelic League. Hard-nosed ideologues like Bulmer Hobson and Dennis McCullough developed cells of committed young Republicans in Ulster, while James Connolly fostered a revolutionary spirit among Dublin socialists and Patrick Pearse developed a mystical vision of a resurgent Gaelic and Catholic Ireland. From this volatile mix of disparate factions and contradictory philosophies emerged the odd combination of forces that directed the uprising in Dublin at Easter in 1916. By which time a few stray representatives of this new generation of Irish revolutionaries had found their way to New Zealand. They were to play a key role in forging a positive response to the rebels amongst their new countrymen.

The 1916 Easter Rising nonetheless fell like a thunderclap on the New Zealand Irish. The immediate, and seemingly universal, reaction to it was one of dismay and repudiation. This mirrored the reaction in Ireland itself. Few had been involved in the rebellion itself, fewer again had been part of its planning. It was a desperate act by a tiny minority within the secret and little-known Irish Republican Brotherhood (in whose name its declaration of independence was made). So poorly organised and coordinated was the rising that it was virtually restricted to central Dublin. It was a rebellion with no chance of military success, a fact embraced enthusiastically by its notional leader, the visionary poet Patrick Pearse. He believed that Ireland’s freedom would only be won through a redemptive blood sacrifice by its patriots and offered himself on the altar of martyrdom. The result was exactly the

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10 A surviving report from an Australian convict Fenian, Edward Kelly to O’Donovan Rossa in 1876 records that a Fenian “organisation” was in fact active in New Zealand in 1868, raising funds toward the release of Fenian prisoners in Western Australia. Kelly also stated one of the West Australian convicts, John Flood, visited New Zealand after his release and “started the organisation anew, remodelling the old one”. Letter to O'Donovan Rossa from Edward Kelly, April 1876, quoted in Keith Amos, *The Fenians in Australia 1865-1880*, NSW University Press, 1988, p 196. In 1876 Michael Cody followed up on Flood’s visit to raise funds for the Fenian rescue mission to Western Australia on the “Catalpa” [see below] Amos, p219.

11 Apart from the evidence of Kelly’s report to Rossa, I have two carte-de-visite sized photographic reproductions of portrait sketches of the “Irish Invincibles” from a *Weekly Irish Times Supplement*, 3 March 1883. They were printed in Dunedin by local photographer W.R. Frost, suggesting that there was a market for such ‘souvenirs’, presumably among Fenian-disposed local Irish.


13 There may well have been a ‘push’ factor involved too with the British maintaining their traditional recourse to the colonies as a dumping ground for the disreputable. Tom Troy recalls his father John, a Sinn Féin activist in Cork, as being given the choice of jail or the colonies in 1915. He chose the latter arriving first at Melbourne and then at Wellington. Tom Troy, Napier, 1999.
military fiasco that saner counsels within the IRB had foreseen, another imbroglio in the catalogue of disastrous Irish risings stretching back over a century.

But if the rising itself was something of a farce, its significance in the context of the European war was of the utmost seriousness. The IRB’s entrenched principle - England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity - predicated any rebellion on just such a situation. Every British military engagement for over a generation had accordingly been explored as a possible basis for a successful Irish rebellion. Each time, however, a rational assessment of the position had been made, against a rising. Indeed the IRB had effectively put off actual rebellion indefinitely by adopting a second principle - that the time for a rising would be decided by the Irish people themselves. In 1916 the Irish people were solidly committed to the war against Germany, 150,000 Irishmen having enlisted in the British Army. In any case the Home Rule case had apparently been won. In 1914 John Redmond’s Irish Parliamentary Party had negotiated a Home Rule Bill into the British statute book, to come into force at the conclusion of hostilities. Ireland’s fulsome participation in the war effort was a means of sealing the deal.

New Zealand’s Irish leadership was four-square behind Redmond, enthusiastic at the prospect of Home Rule after the war, and committed to the war effort for reasons of its own. To begin with the war effort seemed an unprecedented opportunity to draw New Zealand society together. Patriotism looked like being a salve that could heal divisions and promote unity. Irish Catholics could benefit considerably, it was felt, by integrating their distinctive sectarian identity under the banner of national unity in the Empire’s cause. The foremost advocate of this integrationist approach was Henry Cleary, the Bishop of Auckland. His commitment to the war effort was deep and personal; in 1916 he became a military chaplain and served with distinction in Flanders. The New Zealand Tablet enthusiastically promoted the same line. Its columns through 1915 and 1916 were full of war news, jingoistically recording the noble sacrifice of the troops, emphasising the Irish contribution to the point


15 This position was part of the revised Constitution of 1873, probably as a reaction to the farcical rising of 1867. O’Broin, 1976, p 7.

16 R.F. Foster’s Modern Ireland 1600-1972, Penguin, 1988, p 471. A high proportion of Irish recruits were Ulster Unionists but Catholic Irish also volunteered in very high numbers.

17 Significantly the position of Ulster had been deferred for determination later.

18 A Tablet editorial of 16 March 1916 for example extolled the sons of St Patrick fighting under England’s flag, and declared that ‘the charter of [Ireland’s] freedom is on the Statute Book, and she is hopeful that the pledge will be kept.’

19 O’Connor (1967) describes an upsurge in sectarian ill-feeling in New Zealand from 1911. This centred on Catholic opposition to the ‘Bible in Schools’ movement.


21 The Tablet was edited by J.A.Scott, a convert from Presbyterianism, but he was in failing health. Fr James Coffey held the reins in effect. Sweetman, 1990, p 89.
of absurdity. Catholic families offered up their sons, buying into the patriotic fervour as much as any other sector of New Zealand society.

The Easter Rising was thus a huge shock, a slap in the face for the ‘integrationist’ line and an embarrassment for New Zealand’s Irish community. Reaction was swift. A hastily assembled meeting “fully representative of the Irish in Dunedin” telegraphed its support to John Redmond and to Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister. Similar groups took an identical line up and down the country. The Tablet thundered editorially against “The Made-in-Germany Rebellion”. Consolation was taken from the small scale of the rebellion and the identification of its leaders as a bunch of nobodies, unrepresentative of Irish opinion and with negligible support in Ireland. At this point the New Zealand Irish were in step with their fellow countrymen, and indeed at one with the majority reaction to the rising within Ireland itself. Almost immediately, however, a new position began to emerge, with New Zealand Irish opinion diverging sharply from that of the general community.

For Pearse’s punt on the glory of martyrdom had in fact paid off. The British over-reacted badly to the tiny rebellion in Dublin, adopting a heavy-handed response that was unnecessarily punitive. The rebel leaders were executed without mercy - James Connolly famously having to be shot in a chair, still badly wounded from the fighting. Seventeen hundred Sinn Féin supporters (or suspected supporters) were rounded up and deported to prison camps in England and Wales. A state of military emergency was declared in Dublin and a force of military occupation settled in to ‘pacify’ the city. Its conduct soon effected a sea change in the public mood. The rebels as martyrs took on a symbolic potency, that could only be strengthened by British repression. The imprisoned Sinn Féiners, moreover, were offered a superb chance to develop their organisation, transforming a motley crew of detainees into cadres of committed members, schooled in the Republican message as well as the methods of effective political action. Six months later they were released and returned to Ireland to spread the word.

New Zealand’s Irish community followed these developments closely. Unlike the wider community it had access to sources of information beyond the British cable news service. Friends and relatives in

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22 The Tablet’s war coverage in this period was heavily weighted toward the activities of Irish (recruited in Ireland) troops, almost more than for New Zealand forces. The notion of the war effort as a point of integration for Ireland and the Empire as well as for the Irish ethnic community within New Zealand society is marked.

23 Tablet, 4 May 1916.

24 J.J. Marlow, chairman of the Dunedin meeting, stated to general applause that, “The lowest strata only were concerned in it, and it was their proud privilege to know that the bulk and the flower of their people were doing their duty at the front involved.” Otago Witness, 3 May 1916. Father Coffey denounced Sinn Féin from the cathedral pulpit as anti-clerical and anti-Catholic. Tablet, 4 May 1916.

25 The over-reaction was possibly because the British had been taken unawares. Their normally reliable security intelligence services, and their networks of informers, had been by-passed by the tiny circle of conspirators involved.

26 The defeated Rebels had been jeered at by Dublin crowds in April. Within months they were being venerated as martyrs. O’Broin, 1976, p 174.

27 Sweetman points out there was also a defensive quality in the reaction by New Zealand Irish Catholics to the avalanche of hostility in the New Zealand press, drawing on the cable news, to all things Irish. Sweetman, 1990, p 102.
Ireland were one source. Another was the Catholic news agencies, from which the *Tablet* could draw a steady stream of detailed reports. One point of reference of unimpeachable reputation was the Marist priest Fr James Watters. Formerly the founding head of St Patricks College in Wellington this priest was killed by British troops at his school in Dublin. His death shocked New Zealand Catholics, exposing the harshness of the British reaction to the rising. Further stories, such as the murder of Francis Sheehy Skeffington, confirmed that the British were going too far. Sympathy for the “innocent victims” of the Rising was the first response, made public with the launch of an Irish Relief Fund in September. In October a Hibernian Society meeting in Wellington was prepared to applaud P J O’Regan’s refusal “to censure those who gave their lives”. By November the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch, Matthew Brodie, went so far as to publicly state that the “misgovernment of Dublin Castle” was largely responsible for the rebellion. Catholic opinion was by now slipping out of step with general feeling in the community.

Any kind of support for the Irish rebels was a dangerous position to adopt as war bit harder into the fabric of New Zealand life. By 1916 patriotism was already turning vicious as the casualty lists grew longer. It did not take long for old sectional animosities to re-emerge and Catholics were always going to be a prime target for accusations of disloyalty. The apparent Catholic support for a treasonous Irish rebellion only made it worse. By mid-1916 a Conscription Bill was making its way through the New Zealand Parliament, as volunteering failed to keep pace with the demand for reinforcements. Opposition to conscription drew together a loose alliance of pacifists, socialists and Christians. Labour groups, hitherto plagued by factionalism, were galvanised into unity by the conscription debate. It was here, together in the outer darkness of public opinion, that Labour and the Irish reached out to each other. Labour advocacy of the Irish cause, and against conscription, established a bridgehead into the Catholic electorate. From there Labour was able to broaden its appeal to the working class concerns which affected the majority of this ethnic group. Just as Labour’s rise expressed a new

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28 Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was arrested while trying to prevent looting and shot by an officer whom he had previously seen shooting an unarmed boy. Foster, 1988, p 484.

29 *Tablet*, 7 September 1916. Bishop Verdon was its Dunedin treasurer and the money raised was going to the Archbishop of Dublin for disbursement.

30 *Tablet*, 2 November 1916.

31 Bishop Brodie’s comments echoed the line then being adopted by the Irish hierarchy. They drew a sharp reply from *The Press*, which dismissed the Distress Fund (a meeting for which had been the venue for Brodie’s comments) as unnecessary and interpreted his remarks as effectively approving of the Rebellion and therefore treasonous. A fierce public debate then ensued between Brodie and the newspaper. The newspaper certainly had a valid point. Sympathy for the ‘innocent victims’ of the rising was undoubtedly metamorphasising into support for the rebels, just as was happening in Ireland.

32 The New Zealand Labour Party was formed in Wellington in July 1916. See Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland, 1988, p 153-54. At the same time there was also strong support for conscription among some Labour circles, particularly in Dunedin. See Barry Gustafson, *Labour’s Path to Political Independence*, AUP, 1980. The old Trades and Labour Council support base of the labour movement in Dunedin contrasted with its impetus among doctrinaire socialists in Auckland and Wellington.

33 This is another way of raising the question, who led and who followed? Did Catholics begin to vote Labour because their Bishops became well disposed to the Party or did the Bishops become well-disposed to the Party because their flocks were heading that way for practical reasons connected with daily life in the world.
group’s struggle toward political influence in New Zealand society, so too the Irish Republicans represent a new element pushing for influence in the Irish Catholic ethnic community.

As the ‘integrationist’ line began to come unstuck, along with the ‘Home Rule’ cause it had always championed, this new element offered an alternative approach on Ireland. On 5 August 1916 a new Irish organisation held its first meeting in Dunedin. Its promoters described themselves as “a few clear-thinking young Irish men and women” who wanted to mark themselves off from the “self-righteous crawling poltroons” who had sent the cablegrams of support to Redmond and Asquith in May. No account survives of the inaugural meeting - neither the Otago Daily Times nor the Tablet reported it. Called simply the Irish Club at first, it functioned as a more regular version of the annual St Patrick’s Day social event. Irish musical entertainment and dancing were the focus of its early meetings. Only the choice of songs and a mass singing of “God Save Ireland” justified its promoters description of a Club meeting as a “real Irish Ireland night”. Behind the scenes, however, a harder edge was being worked out for the Dunedin Irish Club and links established with committed Irish patriots around the country.

Before Dunedin Club members had even had a chance to hold their first meeting for 1917 a new national organisation was announced, with the Irish Club its Dunedin branch. Similar clubs formed in Gisborne, Napier, Hastings and Wellington. Together they were to be branches of a Maoriland Irish National Association, soon shortened to Maoriland Irish Society [MIS]. Each branch took the name of one of Ireland’s nationalist heroes - all of them Protestant heroes of the risings of 1798 or 1848 rather than the recent ‘martyrs’ however- with Dunedin as the “Robert Emmet” branch. The social programme continued through 1917 but members were now to be educated too, with lectures on Irish history and more appropriately rebellious songs. There were also hints of a more hard-core involvement with the Irish struggle - “we are linked up with our brethren at Home and in America”. News from other centres was encouraging. By June Wellington’s Thomas Davis branch was holding fortnightly socials, MIS members in Napier were supporting a “gallant comrade”, Thomas Spillane,

34 The date is derived from an entry in the diary of Dunedin Catholic Thomas Hussey, though he never attended this or any MIS meeting himself. See below. Hussey Papers, AG 545, Hocken Library.

35 Green Ray, January 1917. This description of the Irish Club meeting of 14 December 1916 at Dunedin’s Savoy is the first meeting for which any description survives.

36 The ‘Maoriland’ of its title foreshadowed later links with the Labour movement and may in fact have signalled existing connections in echoing the title of the Labour weekly The Maoriland Worker. It is noteworthy that there were no branches in Auckland or Christchurch, despite the large Irish populations of the two largest New Zealand centres. Nor were there any on the West Coast, although this region was frequently lauded in the Green Ray for its support for the ‘cause’.

37 Gisborne was Wolfe Tone, Napier Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Hastings John Mitchel and Wellington Thomas Davis.

38 There were lectures from Padraic Comain on “Robert Emmet”, Thomas Cummins on “Old Gaelic Erin”, and the words for “Bold Robert Emmet” were published in the Green Ray as ‘a song for militant gatherings’, April, 1917.

39 This sounds very much like an IRB circle had been established in Dunedin. The personnel certainly existed for such a circle (see below) but if it was there is no documentary record of it. This is hardly surprising given the secret nature of the Brotherhood. The activities of MIS members in propagandising for Irish causes through the Green Ray and in assisting Irish objectors to avoid conscription is certainly consistent with an IRB programme.
through his conscription appeal (presenting him with a gold watch to help mark his time in jail), and a new branch had even been formed at Riversdale in rural Southland.

An intriguing aspect of the new organisation was not who was in it, but who was not. Of all the ‘leading’ Irishmen who had appeared on platforms to welcome Irish delegations in earlier years, only Frank Armstrong, a middle aged Protestant dentist, was involved with the new movement. No Dunedin priests appeared at the Club’s socials, their absence a defacto condemnation to the Irish Catholic community. Also missing were any of Dunedin’s ‘lace curtain Catholics’, the middle class social achievers whose names were ubiquitous on committees for the Hibernians, the Catholic Federation, St Patrick’s Day concerts and the like. They may not have felt welcome. As the MIS began its second year of existence, in August 1917, its new President John T Sullivan declared that while there were no limits to membership, “the Shoneen Irish, the anti-Irish and the Westminster type of Irish would be out of place.” He went on to put it even more bluntly. “This club is not restricted to professional ladies and gentlemen - indeed we are not too eager whether they join us or not.” This is the real significance of the first incarnation of the Dunedin Irish Club. It posed a low-key challenge to the usual leadership cadre of Irish Dunedin - the Catholic clergy and its ‘shoneen’ favourites among the laity.

With no surviving first-hand accounts of the Irish Club, it is difficult to make any further judgement on it. Like similar groups in Australia at this time the majority of its members were undoubtedly drawn

40 Armstrong was 49 in 1916. He was the son of a Wexford Anglican, J P Armstrong, who had come to Dunedin after spells in America and on the Victorian goldfields. Armstrong senior was a chemist who became a dentist, an occupation followed by his son Frank and daughter Grace. He had also served 8 years on the Otago Provincial Council and been a keen participant in political affairs. His memoirs ‘Adventures of an Irish Pilgrim’ had been published in the Otago Daily Times. Frank Armstrong had been on the platform for Dillon’s reception in Dunedin in 1889 and Davitt’s in 1895. More recently he had been one of those to second the motion of opprobrium of the Easter rebels by Dunedin’s loyal Irishmen in May 1916. Despite this he was inaugural Vice President of the new Irish Club and chaired its early social functions. As the organisation became more overtly ‘political’, however, his name disappears from published reports of its activities.

41 O’Leary one of the Irish priests recruited to Otago by Bishop Moran in the 1870s. He had been parish priest in Lawrence since 1882 and was known both for his outspokenness in general and his passion for Ireland. Much was made of the reputed hearty endorsement of the MIS (and Green Ray) by Monsignor O’Leary of Lawrence. The “good old Mons”, a “lion-hearted Fenian” had returned to Otago from a sabbatical in Ireland at the turn of the century as an enthusiastic advocate of the Gaelic revival and an outspoken supporter of the “Irish Ireland movement”. He had offered to provide Gaelic notes to the Green Ray. His death in late 1916 was “an irreparable loss” to the new movement, especially since so few other Catholic clergy were prepared to support it. Had he lived such support might have been forthcoming as O’Leary was a mentor to many young priests. Green Ray, January 1917.

42 Bernard Cadogan has identified some of the identities of this group in Dunedin. Cadogan, B F, “Lace Curtain Catholics: the Catholic Bourgeoisie of the Diocese of Dunedin, 1900-1920”, B.A. (hons) research essay, Otago University, 1984.

43 John Timothy Sullivan was born in Co Kerry circa 1850, emigrating to Napier in 1870. He came to Otago in the early 1890s working for the Customs Department and then the Government Life Insurance Office. He was a popular and gregarious figure and well-known to a wide circle of acquaintances in Dunedin. He was still working for the Department at his death in 1934. Tablet, 5 December 1934.

44 Green Ray, Sept 1917.

45 Ibid. He also reassured potential members that their standard of dress was not important.
by the social enjoyment it offered. The vicarious association with a stirring tradition of Irish patriotism was simply an added spice. The real action, however, was elsewhere. Publicly, the cutting edge of Irish political activity in Dunedin was the propaganda work of a new journal, the Green Ray. It began publication as a monthly journal at the end of 1916, independent of the Dunedin Irish Club but growing out of it. It declared itself “the only truly Irish newspaper South of the Line, and the only Republican journal in Australasia.” The editorial line was strong and clear: against Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party, for Sinn Féin and the rebels of 1916. It was also, unsurprisingly, anti-conscription, reporting with approval the efforts of conscientious objectors to evade the authorities. It professed itself “purely non-sectarian but intensely Irish National” and strongly disavowed any connection with any other paper (viz the Tablet, the “slave of the Irish Parliamentary Party”). Its target was not so much the government, British or New Zealand, but “the wishy-washy, hand-rubbing, knee-bending, ‘beggin’-your-pardon’ Irishmen - creatures termed in old Ireland as the shoneen class.”

Shaming the ‘shoneens’, and promoting Sinn Féin was the Green Ray’s mission. It pushed the same fusion of Gaelic cultural revival and nationalist politics, summed up in the sobriquet “Irish Irelander”, that had transformed the nationalist movement in Ireland in the decade before 1916. The old order of colonial Irish leadership had not kept pace with these developments and was left stranded when Irish support for its champion, the Irish Parliamentary Party, began to collapse. Into the breach charged a small group of emigré Irish republicans, armed with recent experience and claiming hard-core credentials in the nationalist movement. The Green Ray was their idea.

At the helm as editor was the itinerant Irish journalist Thomas Padraic Cummins. Nothing is known of his early life but before coming to New Zealand he had led an adventurous life as a journalist, teacher and soldier in the United States, Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay. He had mixed with some of the luminaries of radical Irish republicanism, claiming personal acquaintanceship with both Patrick Pearse and Thomas McDonagh. By the time these former comrades had embarked on the disastrous Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, Cummins was already in Dunedin, where he worked as a correspondent for the Truth newspaper. Tall and dark, a poet, Cummins was the very type of the

47 No copies of the first issue of the Green Ray seem to have survived. Issue number 2 was published in January 1917. Its full title was The Green Ray: a Review of Current Affairs, Literature, Art, Industry, and a Magazine of Irish National Thought.
48 Green Ray, April 1917.
49 See for instance the letter from Tim Sullivan, a “Sinn Féiner in detention in Wellington”, Green Ray, October 1917. The first subscriber to sign up for a second year to the journal (‘Tim Brosnan, Irish rebel in prison’) did so from Trentham Camp, where he was serving the standard 2 years hard labour meted out to military evaders. Ibid., Jan 1918.
50 Ibid., Feb 1917.
52 Tablet, 1 August 1918 and Moores, 1966, p 63.
53 Claims to a personal acquaintance with Pearse and McDonagh are made in Green Ray columns by Odin O’Mel. This is a pseudonym for Cummins, as revealed by a cross-reference to a letter written to the Evening Star 18 September 1915 under Cummins name. ‘O’Mel’ elsewhere refers to this as his letter.
romantic revolutionary. He was also married with three children, giving him a degree of protection from the threat of conscription. He was therefore able to front the Green Ray operation and take a prominent public role in the MIS.

John Tohill (Seaghan O’Thuatail) on the other hand was ‘underground’ in Dunedin to avoid conscription. He was also the journal’s Irish language specialist, offering a column of lessons in Gaelic as well as notes on the personalities of the nationalist movement. From Co Tyrone in Ulster, he had attended boarding school in Belfast, before emigrating with his parents and nine siblings to Napier in 1909. His father, also John Tohill, was a leading light in the Napier branch of the MIS and the family had long been associated with groups like the Ribbonmen and more latterly the IRB back in Ireland. In one Green Ray column Seaghan O’Thuatail records how,

In the winter of 1906 I attended a lecture by Mr Thomas O’Donnell MP, before the Young Ireland Branch of the United Irish League, Belfast, on Thomas Davis ... [who became a] personal friend from then on and ... together [we] helped found the ‘Dungannon Club’ some of whose members have since paid the penalty of death, or are in prison.

Elsewhere he claimed that he knew Pearse, Plunkett, McDonagh and McBride “intimately but only met [Thomas Clarke] once.” This is a peerless pedigree, if true, in the context of early twentieth century radical Irish nationalism. It also suggests that the MIS may have been a front for IRB activity.

This IRB connection is also suggested by the shadowy presence of James Bradley in Dunedin. Though he is nowhere mentioned in the Green Ray or in reports of the MIS, he is supposed to have suggested the idea of such a journal. Bradley was from the same district in Ireland as the Tohills and

54 His name appears on the list of “military defaulters” published at the end of the war, as John Patrick Tohill of Masterton, though no warrants were issued for his arrest. His brother’s Henry and Frank (my great-uncle) are also on the list of defaulters and warrants were issued for their arrest. NZ Gazette, 1919.

55 Local people in Magherafelt are said to have been pleased with the Tohill’s departure from the district because of their recruiting for ‘the organisation’. Peter Tohill, information from family contacts in Tyrone, 8 Oct 1995.

56 Green Ray, March 1917. The Dungannon Clubs were established by Bulmer Hobson and Dennis McCullough as a vehicle to promote extreme nationalism among young people in Ulster. According to R.F. Foster they “represented a tiny, but highly disciplined tradition: puritanical, anti-alcohol, highly selective. The Dungannon Clubs nurtured ruthless revolutionaries ... they represented a generational clash” which by 1912 had gained control of the nationalist movement in Ireland. Foster, 1988, p 474.

57 Green Ray, June 1917.

58 Bulmer Hobson, founder of the Belfast Dungannon Clubs, describes in his memoirs how their aim was “really to create an intense conviction and a passionate faith among a necessarily small number of people”. These few men later “supplied the driving force to organise the country, in so far as it ever was organised.” Bulmer Hobson, Ireland Yesterday and Tomorrow, Tralee, 1968, p 22. The Green Ray fits very well with Hobson’s own mode of operation as an inveterate publisher of propaganda organs. Elderly members of Tohill’s family also recall that he tried to start an ‘organisation’ in New Zealand but were unable or unwilling to be more specific. Peter Tohill, 28 Dec 1995.

59 Moores makes this attribution, although there is no other reference to even link Bradley with the paper or the MIS in Dunedin. His sources for this and other claims about Bradley seem to have been A.J. Dowling of Dunedin and Gerald
the two families were close. Bradley was reputed to have been very active in militant republican circles in Ireland, even serving for a time on the Supreme Council of the IRB. James Bradley and his brother Bernard (Ben) had come to Dunedin before the war, following an uncle who had emigrated earlier. When the National Register was compiled in late 1915 the two brothers were working land at Ferndale, Mataura. Once conscription came into force, however, they went underground. James spent some time sheltering in Mornington, Dunedin, before hiding out at the property of an Antrim-born Anglican, Nat Gordon, at Sawyers Bay. He was eventually able to stow away to Australia, where he remained for several years. His brother was not so lucky. A warrant was issued for him in Mataura in October 1917. The following August he tried to stow away on a ship in Wellington along with five other Irish objectors. They were caught and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment for trying to leave New Zealand without a permit. After they were released in December Ben Bradley was then court martialed for ‘desertion’ from the Expeditionary Force and sentenced to two years. He served 18 months.

A Fenian pedigree would also explain why a branch of the MIS appeared at Riversdale in mid-1917. This was essentially the work of one extended family, the Codys, who were perhaps the most defiant opponents of conscription of any single family in New Zealand. The family patriarchs were the brothers Patrick and Laurence Cody who had arrived in New Zealand from Co Galway in 1875. They settled at Riversdale and Heddon Bush respectively and each had a large family. By 1916 five of Patrick’s sons and four of Laurence’s were liable for military service. All were determined not to serve the British Crown. Patrick’s eldest son, Daniel, left New Zealand for South America early in the war.


Family information from Hugh Tohill, Dunedin and Peter Tohill, Auckland. A third family from the district, the Mulhollands, connected to both the Bradleys and the Tohills, also had emigrants to New Zealand in this period who involved themselves in Republican activity.

Moores, 1966, p 63. Though certainly possible I have not been in a position to verify these claims.

Warrants were issued for their arrest by the Mataura police when they failed to report for a medical examination on call-up. James in July 1917; Ben in October 1917. Police Gazette, 1917, 1918.

See also footnote 108 below.

He was in Dunedin in April 1917 when he acted as godfather at the baptism of Thomas Cummins’ daughter. Bradley had an interesting connection in Australia. His mother was a Scullin and Jim Scullin, the Australian Labour Prime Minister, was a cousin. A congratulatory letter from the latter on Bradley’s marriage in Dunedin in 1923 is a treasured family memento. Family information from Catherine Craig, Invercargill, 1995.

Four of the six were Irish-born: Bradley, Michael O’Connor, Jeremiah Courtney and Patrick Toohey; Thomas Prendergast and William Collins were New Zealand-born. Police Gazette, 1918.

Ibid., 1919, 1920. Family members told me that James Bradley cheekily visited his brother in prison, despite being hunted himself, before leaving for Australia. If this is true it means he was able to remain ‘underground’ from July 1917 to at least August 1918.

Laurence’s sons, Walter and Thomas, also fled the country after the introduction of conscription. The others all went ‘underground’ as soon as they were called up. Warrants were issued progressively through 1917 and 1918 for Luke, Lawrence, Michael, George, Walter and Patrick Cody (President of the Riversdale branch of the MIS). Lawrence and Michael assumed names and went north. They were both eventually captured and served time. Patrick and John, who had been exempted to run the family farms were called up to take the place of their brothers who had disappeared. When they refused they were tried at a Trentham military court in August 1917 and sentenced to eleven months jail, serving eight. Walter had of course escaped overseas, while George and Luke evaded the police until their warrants were cancelled in 1920.

Why was this one family so defiantly opposed to serving the Crown? The Codys left no memoirs of their experiences like that of the pacifist objector Archibald Baxter. The only contemporary record of a Cody’s motivation is in the Green Ray report on Patrick and John Cody’s trial in August 1917. Patrick told the Military Court that “the Sinn Fein cause was his, and as a loyal Sinn Feiner he could only bear sworn allegiance to one cause”. These are fairly general sentiments, however, and still beg the question of why the family should be so ‘Fenian’. An intriguing, if speculative, explanation lies in the possibility that the Southland Codys were connected in some way to Michael Cody, the Fenian ‘head centre’ in New South Wales in the 1870s. Michael Cody’s background was in the extreme violent wing of the Fenian movement. He had been ‘centre’ of a Fenian circle in Callan, Co Kilkenny, before hiding out with the Fenian leader John Devoy in Dublin in 1865. Devoy described

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68 Walter and Thomas were both high academic achievers, having been duxes at Southland Boy’s High. Walter became a teacher (as did another brother George) while Thomas joined the Civil Service. He illicitly used his position in the Internal Affairs Department to arrange a permit for his departure to the United States. When conscription was introduced there he moved on to Mexico. After the war he returned quietly to New Zealand and lived the rest of his life as a virtual recluse with his sisters on a Southland farm. His older brother Walter had gone to South America, perhaps following his cousin Daniel, where he died during the Influenza pandemic of 1918. Information from Pat Cody, Timaru, 1999.

69 Police Gazette, 1917-1918. Luke Cody, who was the first to go underground in March 1917, was joined on the run by his wife’s younger brother Arthur Moynihan in May 1918. They were never caught, though the police were still actively hunting Luke in December 1919 when a sighting was reported from Timaru of him “on a chaff-cutter going towards Pleasant Point”. Ibid., 1920.

70 Michael Cody, posing as Martin Prendergast, was arrested in Wanganui in August 1918 and sentenced to 3 months for assuming a false name. On release he was court-martialled in the same court session in Dunedin as Ben Bradley and like Bradley sentenced to 2 years for “desertion”, serving 18 months. Lawrence went by the name Hansen and was captured at Patutahi in April 1918. Ibid., 1918-19.

71 Green Ray September 1917 and Police Gazette, 1918. Patrick must then have disappeared as a warrant was issued for him for desertion in May 1918. This warrant was cancelled in November 1919. Ibid., 1919.

72 George Cody may also have gone to Australia as he trained for the priesthood there. Luke despite being on the run managed to have a child (Molly, born 20 March 1920) before the warrants for military defaulters were cancelled in November 1920. Ibid., 1920.

73 Archibald Baxter, We Will Not Cease, Christchurch, 1968. One of Baxter’s letters, describing the ordeal of the conscientious objectors sent to Europe, was published in the Green Ray in January 1918.

74 This comment suggests of course that he had ‘sworn’ allegiance to Sinn Féin, another hint perhaps of oath-bound IRB membership in New Zealand. Green Ray, September 1917.
him as “a man of great determination ... [with] a weakness for punching policemen”.75 He took charge of a Fenian ‘assassination circle’ in Dublin before being arrested (putting up a fierce struggle and escaping custody once) in May 1866. He was then sentenced to twenty years servitude and transported with a party of sixty two Fenian prisoners among the last cohort of convicts sent to Western Australia from Britain in 1867.

Michael Cody was conditionally pardoned and released from the Perth jail in 1871. After spending time on various New South Wales goldfields he settled in Sydney.76 With other Fenian ex-convicts he immediately set about establishing a Fenian ‘organisation’ on the goldfields of New South Wales, Queensland and the South Island of New Zealand. Their efforts were sufficiently impressive - in terms of recruited members and fund-raising - for Australasia to be allotted one seat in a new seven member Revolutionary Directory established in 1877 by the United Brotherhood, a secret revolutionary wing of the American Clan Na Gael.77 These Australasian Fenian’s finest hour was their support for the United Brotherhood’s expedition to Western Australia in 1876, in which six of the 1867 convicts still in captivity were rescued and taken to freedom in America on the whaler “Catalpa”. Michael Cody’s role in these events was central. He toured New Zealand on a fund-raising mission in early 1876.78 The Cody brothers from Galway had arrived in New Zealand at the beginning of the previous year. No family relationship can be demonstrated from available data between them and Michael Cody, who is recorded in his convict record as Dublin-born. His fate beyond the 1870s is not known.79 But when the Codys established their Riversdale branch of the MIS in 1917, they did not name it in honour of one of the Protestant Irish rebels of 1798 or 1848, as had all the other branches. Instead they called it the “John Boyle O’Reilly” branch, thus honouring the most famous of the 1867 Fenians transported to Western Australia, a man who was both a colleague and intimate of Michael Cody.80

Fenians of old or no, the Codys were certainly in the thick of New Zealand Irish opposition to the war effort. With the reputed IRB connections of the Tohills, the Bradleys, and the nationalist pedigree of Thomas Cummins, this constitutes a reasonable degree of Fenian ‘smoke’ in Dunedin. Whether there was any Fenian ‘fire’, in the form of an IRB oath-bound circle, cannot be determined from the surviving evidence.81 It might be asked, however, what such an organisation would have concerned

75 Amos, 1988, p84.
76 Ibid., p 194.
77 Ibid., pp196-199 and p 268. The United Brotherhood acted as Clan Na Gael’s revolutionary wing. This1877 Directory was a joint effort by the IRB in Ireland and Clan Na Gael in America. It worked well for a time although the Australasian seat seems never to have been filled. See also O’Broin, 1976, p 19.
78 The sum raised, £384, was more than the £300 contributed by Australian Fenians toward the mission. The total Australasian contribution, however, compared very favourably with the support from the American Fenians with their much larger Irish population. Amos, 1988, p219.
79 The close connection between Australasian and American Fenians petered out after the “Catalpa” expedition as communication was not maintained. Ibid., p269 and O’Broin, 1976, p 19.
80 O’Reilly’s dramatic independent escape from Western Australia and his subsequent career as a journalist and writer in America gave him a high profile in international Irish circles. See Amos, 1988, Chapter Seven, ‘O’Reilly’s Escape’.
81 Unlike in Australia where surviving papers from Dr Albert Dryer reveal an IRB circle operating in Australia at this time. But for the ‘fluke’ of these papers survival nothing would be known of this episode which was of necessity secret and
itself with in the New Zealand context of 1916-20.\textsuperscript{82} One obvious answer is in assisting Irish conscientious objectors to avoid conscription and evade the authorities. There were many such men among the 2,045 defaulters officially recorded.\textsuperscript{83} Along with pacifists and socialists (and often overlapping with the latter category) they made up the largest category of ‘defiant’ objectors to military service. If caught and continuing in their ‘defiance’ such men could expect a very hard time from the authorities.\textsuperscript{84} Evasion was thus a serious business. A common strategy seems to have been to leave a local district and head for the opposite end of the country. Tim Brosnan, quoted above, left Owhango in the central North Island as soon as he was called up in January 1917 and headed south. He was eventually arrested at Winton at the end of August.\textsuperscript{85} Michael and Lawrence Cody went the other way, fleeing Southland until arrested at Wanganui and Pututahi (near Gisborne) respectively. Jim Bradley, on the other hand, laid low in the Dunedin suburb of Mornington and then at Sawyers Bay. A sympathetic network of friends and relations was clearly a crucial asset. This may have given Irish fugitives an edge as the earlier patriotism of Catholic New Zealand came under the shadow of growing sectarian animosity.\textsuperscript{86} A reminiscence of Cricklewood farmer Gerald O’Connor’s midnight flit - on a horse with muffled hooves - gives a hint of such support in the South Canterbury Irish community.

Here and there horsemen joined them. Below Albury an elderly farmer on a black horse came out of the shadows and wished them well and God speed and almost frightened them to death ... by three o’clock they were in Temuka, waiting in a side street for a goods train which passed through at 4 a.m. ... From there they caught a train to the West Coast and disappeared into the bush for the duration. The horses that were ridden were planted all over Temuka in the yards of sympathisers or relatives and left to be picked up innocently at some future time.\textsuperscript{87}


\textsuperscript{82} In Australia there was no conscription to worry about and the IRB men apparently occupied themselves with fund-raising and military training in preparation for possible service in Ireland. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Paul Baker suggests that the number of men who evaded military service or who failed to register at all as anywhere between 3,900 and 8,500. Of these he estimates that between 2,800 and 6,400 were not found by the authorities. Baker, 1988, p 208.

\textsuperscript{84} For an account of the treatment of ‘The Fourteen’ New Zealand conscientious objectors sent to Europe and of the brutal treatment meted out to objectors at the Wanganui detention centre (both groups including Irish objectors) see Ibid., pp 178-201.

\textsuperscript{85} Green Ray, January 1918.


\textsuperscript{87} Doreen Lange, Cricklewood, Invercargill, 1982, p 45. The West Coast was probably the best place for an objector to go. Its working class Irish communities were notoriously sympathetic to military evaders. They were also among the Green Ray’s most loyal readership.
the Wellington branch of the MIS. It smuggled objectors out of the country. After travel restrictions were imposed in August 1916, this required co-operative seamen to conceal and look after stowaways. The exploits of successful evaders like Jim Bradley supports this account, as does the failed escape of Ben Bradley’s party of five. The involvement of the Dunedin Irish nationalists in such an ‘underground railway’ is suggested by a police investigation in 1917. A concerned citizen, H. Butcher, wrote to the military authorities to report that Thomas McCracken had been offered a chance to be smuggled out of the country by Bert Ryan, who also boasted of having already gotten 5 or 6 others smuggled out by marine firemen. A figure of £10 was cited as the cost of the operation. The police investigated the allegation but when questioned Thomas McCracken put a different spin on the conversation, suggesting that Ryan had simply told him of the others getting away and being glad of it. The police concluded that Butcher had exaggerated. They also noted that Ryan was “the alleged editor of the Catholic Green Ray” and the chief detective requested a copy of the paper, the first instance of police interest in it.

Ryan was undoubtedly lucky to escape further investigation as he was a member of the core group of Irish nationalists in Dunedin. Unlike Cummins, Tohill and the Bradleys however, Albert James Ryan was a New Zealander, born at Waitahuna in 1884 to Irish migrants. Waitahuna had a high proportion of Irish settlers, who were ministered to throughout Ryan's youth by Monsignor Patrick O'Leary, the most fervently nationalist Irish priest in Otago. When war broke out in 1914 Bert Ryan was living in Dunedin and working as a commercial traveller. He was part of the MIS from the outset, becoming its chief organiser in 1917, and manager (not editor) of the Green Ray. His close shave with local detectives brought unwelcome attention to the journal, which was sailing close to the line of what it was permissible to publish. From mid-1917 the journal was monitored by Dunedin police. Only its limited availability seems to have saved it from official censure. For despite all its righteous thunder, the Green Ray was not a serious threat to the New Zealand establishment. It had a limited circulation

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88 Moores, 1966. Gerald Griffin was a son of Dave Griffin, the MIS President in Wellington. Both the Griffins (c1910) and John Troy (c1915) were recent immigrants from Cork with a Sinn Féin background in Ireland. Troy and Dave Griffin had known each other in Cork and quickly established themselves as leading lights in the Irish Republican movement in New Zealand. Dave Griffin’s son Gerald went on to found the Irish Republican Association in Wellington in 1924 to carry on the propaganda war on behalf of Irish Republicanism in New Zealand. He was also a founding member of the Communist Party in New Zealand. Troy on the other hand was a fervent Labour Party member, acting as local organiser in Miramar for Bob Semple and Peter Frazer. Family information from Richard Griffin, Wellington1995, Des Griffin, Sydney1995 and Thomas Troy, Napier 1999.

89 The regulations introduced permits for travel to Australia and passports to destinations further afield. Department of internal Affairs Circular, 10 August 1916.

90 Dunedin Police Commissioner, Register of Correspondence, National Archives Dunedin, AG 168/72, Nos 1200, 1216, 1279 and 1539, March to May 1917. The Commissioner concluded ‘I don’t think there is much [in the rumour] so far as the Dunedin districts concerned, possibly emanated from Butcher himself’. Hindsight suggests otherwise.

91 See Footnote 41 above.

92 Ibid, item 1216 & Police Registers of Correspondence, National Archives, Wellington, 17/1268 June 29, 1917.

and was largely preaching to the converted. What made it significant out of all proportion to its actual readership was evidence of a change in mood of the broad mass of Catholic Irish. The ‘shoneens’ were indeed being shamed.

The ‘shaming’, however, was not the work of the Green Ray alone. In mid-1917 Fr James Kelly had arrived in Dunedin to take over as editor of the Tablet. That paper’s jingoistic war reportage was now alienating its readership. Kelly, a Wexford man and ardent Sinn Féin supporter, had a mandate to turn the paper around. He turned the mandate into a mission, not simply to realign its war reporting but to ‘convert’ New Zealand Catholics to the Sinn Féin cause. “The Sinn Féiners” he wrote in his first Easter editorial, “died like men, bearing the punishment for the faults of all ...” extravagant terms which echo Isaiah’s prophecy of the sufferings of Christ. Nor was he afraid to attack the enemies of Ireland, taking a broad view of who they might be. His outspokenness quickly escalated the growing atmosphere of sectarian ill-feeling around the country. Through 1917 the possibility that Catholic clergy, seminarians and religious brothers would be liable for military service under the conscription regulations was stirring up Catholic anger more than Irish affairs ever could. Protestant extremists seized on the issue to push their own rabid anti-Catholicism. An explosive situation was brewing and Kelly seemed to delight in stirring the pot. Irish readers thrilled to the new editorial approach; the “taking off the gloves” as prominent Auckland Irishman Mick Sheahan approvingly described it. But the extremity of language employed by Kelly went far beyond the level of dissent allowed under New Zealand’s war regulations. Public reaction beyond the Catholic community was one of outrage. The government was nonetheless loath to target the official Catholic newspaper in the tense sectarian situation prevailing. The Green Ray provided a useful alternative and in June 1918 it was shut down.

The offending issue (May 1918) was no different from earlier Green Rays either in its sentiments or the language employed. It was a commemorative edition on the Easter rebellion and its lead article “To the Memory of the Dead” was seized upon as inciting sedition. A comparison with the Tablet reveals articles of similar phraseology and subject matter in every issue. The decision to prosecute the relatively insignificant publication was clearly a political one. The police had been watching the

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94 It was later stated in court that 600 copies were printed of each issue, about half of which were for subscribers. Otago Witness 31 July 1918.

95 Sweetman, 1990, provides the authoritative account of Kelly and the Tablet in this period. For Kelly’s biographical details see his entry in DNZB, Volume 3, 1996.

96 Kelly’s approach was similar to the Green Ray writers in that he centred his bulls eye on the ‘shoneen’ (seonin) element, using the traditional epithet repeatedly to mock those who followed Bishop Cleary’s integrationist line.

97 Tablet, 8 March 1918. The allusion would have been obvious to Catholic readers as the passage from Isaiah is part of the Easter liturgy: Isaiah 53.12 ‘for surrendering himself to death... while he was bearing the faults of many ...’

98 This controversy is well covered by O’Connor, 1967, Davis, 1974 and Sweetman, 1990.

99 Tablet, 19 April 1917. Circulation figures, which had been in decline, recovered and letters to the editor were full of enthusiasm.

100 The journal was officially suppressed by a notice in the NZ Gazette 4 July 1918 under the War Regulations Act 1914, amended 18 June 1918.
Green Ray for seditious comment at the request of the Minister of Justice since March. The Tablet was added to the list in June and copies of both journals were being forwarded to Wellington. A decision to suppress the Green Ray was taken by the Solicitor General and Dunedin detectives descended on its office on 8 July. Fortunately the ‘fugitive’ John Tohill was not present when the police called. Thomas Cummins, who was there, admitted writing the article in question while Bert Ryan admitted to being the journal’s manager. A fortnight later the pair were tried at the Dunedin Police Court and convicted of publishing a seditious utterance. The judge declared that it “seemed to him that on every page [of the Green Ray] there was a seditious utterance” and decided to make an example of the men. They were sentenced to 11 months with hard labour.

Much has been made of the link between the Tablet and the Green Ray and the Catholic attributes of the latter. Politicians and Protestant extremists at the time were insistent that the Green Ray was published from the Tablet offices - much to the chagrin of its writers. Historians have since lumped the two together as “Catholic papers”. It is true that most of the Green Ray writers were from a Catholic background. None was influential in church affairs, however, only a couple were devout, and the newspaper repeatedly attacked the New Zealand Catholic clergy for its lack of leadership on Irish issues. Fr Kelly and Thomas Cummins may have had surreptitious meetings at the Crown Hotel but he Green Ray had set its course before Kelly arrived in Dunedin. He subsequently took a similar tack, firstly over Ireland and then in promoting socialism. The Green Ray very definitely led the way toward Labour. Some of its non-Catholic contributors exemplify the wartime linkage between Irish issues and socialist politics. One such was Arthur McCarthy, one of Dunedin’s leading socialists, who wrote a regular column on “The Workers Realm”. Similarly, Mark Silverstone, a Polish-born

101 Police Correspondence file indexes 18/426, 6 March 1918. The actual letters no longer exist. Other journals also listed for careful scrutiny were The Maoriland Worker, NZ Truth and Stead’s Review. The Solicitor General’s instructions on the Green Ray are referred to in AG 168/75/3742 26 September 1918, National Archives, Dunedin.

102 Ironically the newspaper reports of their trial quoted the seditious words in full, transmitting the ‘seditious’ article to tens of thousands of readers around the country. The irony was not lost on Fr Kelly, Tablet, 5 September 1918.

103 Otago Witness, 31 July 1918.

104 Green Ray, October 1917

105 For example Eric Olssen in Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s-1920s, Dunedin, 1995, p 220. “Both Dunedin’s Catholic papers, the Tablet and Green Ray ...”

106 Cadogan, 1984, p 13, citing information from Fr Edward Fahey.

107 Green Ray writers Cummins and Patrick Comain had poems and articles published in the Tablet in 1917 but Fr Kelly did not write as “Savanarola” in the Green Ray as suggested by Cadogan. “Savanarola” was a “young Maoriland priest” [Green Ray, December 1917] and Kelly was neither young nor a ‘Maorilander’. Two possible candidates are Fr J.J. Fraher in Hastings or Fr Furlong.

108 McCarthy had been national secretary of the United Labour Party 1912-13 and national vice-president of the Social Democrat Party 1913-14. From 194-20 he was Secretary of the Dunedin branch of the SDP and had stood as a Labour candidate in the 1911 general election. Gustafson, 1980, p 160. He was the son of an Irish Protestant migrant, however, and a practising Anglican, not a Catholic as stated by Gustafson. James Bradley hid out at McCarthy’s home in Mornington and then moved on with McCarthy’s son Arthur Gregory to the Gordon property in Sawyers Bay. The two fugitives later married Gordon’s daughters. Information from A G McCarthy’s son Cormac McCarthy March 1994, and Jim Bradley’s daughter Catherine Craig, 19 March 1994. A military warrant was issued for Arthur Gregory McCarthy in
Jew and perhaps Dunedin’s most radical socialist, supplied articles on international events from a socialist perspective under his established literary nom-de-plume “Diplomaticus”.¹⁰⁹

This socialist link was further strengthened in the wake of Cummins and Ryan’s imprisonment. The Tablet maintained a studious silence on their case, discretion perhaps the better part of valour in the circumstances. The Dunedin branch of the MIS also proved a slender reed. With its hard-core Irish nationalists either in prison or ‘on the lam’, the Club’s second string leaders were indecisive. Instead of exploiting the opportunity to publicise the cause by appealing the case, they fell back on the traditional Irish fount of wisdom, turning to Father James Coffey for guidance. Coffey was the defacto head of the church in Dunedin as illness laid Bishop Verdon low. His advice, unsurprisingly, was to avoid a public stoush. Instead he helped them organise a petition to the Minister of Justice, in which they not only attributed Cummins’ seditious article to a moment of “excessive zeal for the cause of Home Rule for Ireland” [my emphasis] but sought a remission of sentence in return for a “bond of good behaviour”.¹¹⁰ Cummins, in jail, was furious but he and Ryan did not help matters by vacillating between an appeal and the petition.¹¹¹ Fortunately harder heads in the Wellington MIS stepped into the breach. They employed the well-disposed Napier lawyer, B J Dolan, to take over the case and started a fund to support the prisoners while they served their sentence. The Tablet failed to take the lead in supporting this appeal, as requested. Instead it was the Labour Party weekly, the Maoriland Worker which promoted the fund, publishing lists of subscribers from August to December 1918.¹¹² A sum of £440 was raised.¹¹³ The Labour Party leader, and Maoriland Worker editor, Harry Holland had been in Sinn Féin’s corner since 1916. Though he had no Irish connections himself, he became an expert in Irish history and wrote and lectured widely on the issue through 1917 and 1918. As a Member of Parliament, from May 1918, he was one of the imprisoned ‘Sinn Féiners’ few friends in high places. He wrote to them regularly and visited them in prison at Templeton. Cummins and Ryan were released from jail in April 1919, having served a longer sentence than either the Sinn

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¹⁰⁹ For biographical details see entry in DNZB, Volume 3, 1996.

¹¹⁰ The petition was duly circulated and “signed by a couple of thousand voters in Dunedin and surroundings”. Letter Rev James Coffey to T.K. Sidey M.P. 28 October 1918, Sidey Papers Ms 605/21, Hocken Library. A copy of the petition form is in the Griffin Papers, ATL. Cabinet rejected the petition.

¹¹¹ A series of letters in the Griffin Papers [Griffin 86-43, 3/6] indicate four different lines of communication with conflicting aims and expectations evident in each: Cummins-Dolan, Griffin (Wgtn MIS)-Coffey, Griffin- Pitches (Dn MIS), Griffin-Dolan.

¹¹² An advertisement for the appeal in the Truth on 7 September contained a passage describing the Easter rebels as ‘that gallant band of heroes’, which had been judiciously trimmed from the Maoriland Worker version. This led to the prosecution of the Wellington MIS President Dave Griffin and Secretary John Troy for making a seditious utterance. For their troubles the pair were convicted but only fined £5 since they could demonstrate a lack of seditious intent. A transcript of the court case is among the Griffin Papers, ATL.

¹¹³ The contempt of the Wellington men for the new leaders in Dunedin is evident in their refusal to pass on the appeal funds to Dunedin to distribute to Mrs Cummins. They sent the money directly to Mrs Cummins while the Dunedin group, with Father Coffey at the helm, raised a local subscription for her support independently. This perhaps explains why Dunedin names do not feature in the lists of subscribers to the MIS fund published in the Maoriland Worker.
Féiners interned in Britain in 1916 or the Sydney IRB circle imprisoned in June 1918. They returned to a rapturous reception in Dunedin from Irish Club members, still staunch in their Irish convictions and paying tribute to the “Socialists” who had been “so kind to them”. By then the war had ended, conscription was a dead issue. But New Zealand’s sectarian atmosphere remained hypersensitive and Irish issues, if anything, were becoming ever more divisive. British propaganda had characterised the war in Europe as a crusade for the “rights of small nations”. Ireland’s supporters around the world now looked to the post-war settlement as a test of Britain’s good faith. The principle of “self determination” was at the centre of international attention through 1919 but once again Britain failed to deliver in Ireland. Sinn Féin meanwhile had blossomed into a truly national movement (except for Ulster) winning a landslide victory at the polls in December 1918. In 1919 it began to assert itself as the defacto government of a Republic of Ireland, with a parliament - Dáil Éireann - meeting in Dublin and Eamonn De Valera as President. In January its military arm, the Irish Republican Army, swelled with the return of experienced Irish veterans of the war in France, began assassinating policemen. A new struggle was now joined in which public opinion, intimidation and guerilla tactics would all play their part. The British reaction was once again heavy-handed, deploying a mercenary force of misfits and psychopaths, the Black and Tans (after the colour of their uniforms) whose name was soon a by-word for outrage. By 1920 Ireland was in a state of war.

New Zealand’s Irish found themselves once more at odds with the wider community. British propaganda had an unchallenged dominance in the news services to the colony. Sinn Féin literature on the other hand was proscribed, mere possession of it enough to warrant sedition convictions. ‘Loyal’, ‘Protestant’ New Zealand was at best primly disapproving, at worst vehemently disgusted at developments in Ireland. One correspondent to the ODT spoke for many, declaring that “There is no room in New Zealand for disloyalists.” 200,000 joined the Protestant Political Association to demonstrate their hostility to a perceived Catholic threat to the Anglo-Protestant establishment in New Zealand. The Catholic Irish, however, had been won to the Sinn Féin cause, not just the ‘ornery Irish’, emigré Republicans and their socialist friends, but mainstream Catholics including the clergy and the ‘lace curtain’ shoneens. Between 1918 and 1921 there was a remarkable convergence of opinion among these strands of the community toward the point of view advocated since 1916 by the radicals. Cummins and Ryan now stood on the public platforms alongside the clergy, while “God Save Ireland” supplanted “God Save the King” at the St Patrick’s Day celebrations in Dunedin.

This radicalisation of the Catholic community is usually analysed by reference to the Irish Self-Determination Leagues, which sprang up in every New Zealand centre in 1919 with traditional ‘lace curtain’ Catholics to the fore. This essay will look instead at the phenomenon through the personal

114 Cummins noted the comparison bitterly in a letter from prison to his “comrades” in Wellington. Undated letter, among Griffin Papers, ATL.

115 Maoriland Worker, 30 April and 11 June 1919.


117 Much to the horror of newspaper correspondents who noted this symbolic gesture and the “open display” of Republican flags and emblems at the Dominican Sisters jubilee celebrations in Dunedin in 1922.

diaries of the Dunedin Irish Catholic businessman Thomas J Hussey. Hussey was in many ways the archetypal ‘lace curtain’ Catholic. The son of Irish immigrants, he had passed through the Catholic school system with honours and secured a place in an old established Dunedin mercantile firm. He was a talented musician, a keen golfer and an enthusiastic territorial soldier. He was also a Hibernian, a choir member at St Josephs cathedral, an active member of the St Vincent De Paul Society and a committee member of the Catholic Federation. Every ad hoc Catholic committee created to organise a fund-raising bazaar, a jubilee or a special celebration was likely to feature Hussey’s name, most often as Secretary or Treasurer. So too were the golf club committee, the Royal Dunedin Male Choir and the Liedertafel. He was a confidante of the Bishops, a friend to the priests, brothers and nuns, a key director on the board of the Tablet and a neighbour of the prominent Catholic lawyer J.B. Callan. All together he was the very embodiment of the devout Catholic who was also a loyal and valued member of civic society and generally able to reconcile the two dimensions of his life.

The Hussey diaries offer an insider’s view of Catholic Dunedin throughout this period. Hussey’s role at the Tablet was as a hands-on director with responsibility for its books. This made him a witness to all of its travails before and after Kelly became editor. His dairy reveal that the paper was slumping in circulation by mid-1916 with its coverage of Irish affairs was a key factor in its failing popularity. Kelly’s arrival in early 1917 began to turn its fortunes around. Coinciding with a furore over the possible conscription of Catholic clergy and religious “Brother Doody ordered into camp at Wellington. This means trouble.” [27 July] - the Catholic community rallied behind the feisty new editor. By October Hussey was recording a record month’s collection, with “Tablet subs coming in strong.”[10 October] The next month Kelly published his infamous description of Queen Victoria as “a certain fat old German woman”[16 November] in Dunedin. Kelly spent the evening of 25 November at the Hussey’s discussing the reaction. This included the Presbyterian Synod declaration “that Roman Catholicism is the greatest menace to the Empire in existence.” [29 November] Kelly’s enemies were not all outside the Catholic fold, however. In December Hussey recorded, “Dr Cleary on warpath. Bishop Brodie in Dunedin. Will see Dr Cleary does not do for Dr Kelly if I can help it.” [6 December] Kelly survived the episcopal onslaught but a week later the Tablet directors reacted to episcopal displeasure by striking out the proud boast carried on the paper’s masthead since 1872: “Sole Organ of Catholic Opinion”.

Hussey had noted the inaugural meeting of the new Irish Society in Dunedin in August 1916 but did not participate in it. By late 1917, however, he complained that the Christian Brothers end of year break-up was not up to standard because it had no Irish items. In January 1918 he was reading Leckie’s History of Ireland and spent an evening at Jack Sullivan’s. He followed political developments in Ireland closely as Sinn Féin began taking the fight to the British. Meanwhile the Tablet was “doing famously” [25 April 1918] and a bitter war of words raged between it and the ODT. The Green Ray suppression in July gave Hussey pause for thought - unfortunately he committed those thoughts to his diary in code, something he never used anywhere else. Kelly’s increasingly extravagant statements on Irish affairs caused growing concern among the Tablet Board. By January 1919 it was simply “Too hot and we will have to define our position.” [9 January 1919] Kelly resisted all requests for moderation, pressing ahead with his vigorous advocacy of Sinn Féin and lambasting his

119 I acknowledge the work of Rory Sweetman in convincing Hussey’s daughter Moira that her father’s papers should be deposited in the Hocken Library. The diaries are a splendid record of family, business and political life in Dunedin from 1904-40.

120 Tablet, 1 November 1917.
opponents in typical fashion. Meanwhile events in Ireland galloped toward anarchy as the guerilla war continued. Hussey noted each development with concern.

In December 1920 the new Bishop, James Whyte, finally arrived in Dunedin, succeeding Bishop Verdon who had died in the 1918 Influenza epidemic. Whyte, born in Co Kilkenny, had spent most of his life as a priest in Sydney. Under his patronage the Irish Society, which had reformed as a “Literary, Musical and Social Society” in July, took off. Unlike its earlier incarnation, however, the new Society had heavy clerical backing. Its programme through 1920 always included a lecture from one of the city’s priests. The lay leaders were now young colonial-born Irishmen from South Dunedin, Edmund Nolan and Frank Mullin, with Bert Ryan and Thomas Cummins in the background. John Robinson, another South Dunedin Catholic with strong Labour connections, took on the Protestant Political Association and all comers in a stream of letters to the papers and a series of public lectures on Ireland. The 1921 St Patrick’s Day celebrations, organised by the Irish Society, provided an opportunity for the new Bishop to raise his standard for Ireland. His comments on Sinn Féin were frank and fulsome. He ended by quoting the British Labor Commission comment that “the name of England stinks in the nostrils of the whole world” because of Black and Tan reprisals.

This public advocacy of Sinn Féin had its price however. The general public had a quite different view of Irish affairs, and of Sinn Féin. Hussey’s diary records the ‘loyalist’ reaction to these public displays of Catholic assertiveness, “a lot of recrimination in papers re St Patrick’s day celebration” [20 March]. Municipal elections the following month were marked as a result with “Great bitterness being shown towards Catholic candidates” [15 April]. One Catholic candidate, Mrs Margaret Jackson, was successful in the minor poll for the Charitable Aid Board but “Brown’s [John A Brown, the other Catholic candidate] Labour members did badly. Religious element very strong.” [28 April]. May 1921 saw the establishment of the Self-Determination League in Dunedin. Hussey was elected its President, having already hosted the touring Sinn Féin representative Miss Katherine Hughes to an evening of “very interesting discussion on Determination” [6 May] at his home two nights earlier.

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121 By 1921 there are signs that the Catholic community was tiring of Kelly’s tirades. Hussey recorded on 8 August that “Subs [are] going back” and had numerous “private chats” with Kelly trying to convince him to moderate his tone.

122 The earlier version seems to have fizzled out. There was some continuity however. Bert Ryan was to the fore, Thomas Cummins was made a life member in June 1921 and John Tohill established a sister organisation on the same model when he moved back to Wellington later in 1922.

123 Frank Mullin’s family had come to the city from the Lawrence area in 1908 and, like Bert Ryan, he would have grown up under the influence of Monsignor O’Leary’s Irish enthusiasms. Edmund Nolan’s father worked for the Railways Department, probably at the Hillside workshops. Edmund worked for the Union Steamship Co and was a bright young star of Catholic life in Dunedin.


125 Tablet, 24 March 1921. Some of the ‘loyalist’ reaction centred on the meeting’s failure to sing “God Save the King” and the singing of “God Save Ireland” instead. This seems a fair test of the tenor of Irish feeling. “God Save the King” had been sung at every St Patrick’s Day concert in Dunedin up to 1918. From 1919-22 it was noticeably absent from the programme, but was reinstated in 1923.

126 He was perhaps chosen as the ideal figure-head to convey an image of moderation. He was ‘bumped off the Publicity Committee’ in June however. Hussey, 23 June 1921.
The League proved an uneasy coalition, with some “very steamy” [21 June] meetings, but by mid-1921 even the leading Catholic lawyer John Callan and Dr Milligan were prepared to put in an appearance at a meeting.127 ‘Shoneen’ Dunedin was lining up behind Sinn Féin but sharing the SDL platform with the socialist Irish of South Dunedin, prominent among them John Tohill, John A Brown and Jack Robinson.

For Hussey the issue became very personal when his boss Edgar Hazlett, son of a Londonderry Anglican, took exception to his views.128 He had already become “very nasty” [28 April] during the local body elections in April. By the end of August, with the Self Determination League in full swing, matters came to a head. “Great go with E.C.H. over Irish question. Offered to resign from firm at 3 months.” [27 August]. The traditional reproach to the ‘shoneen’ Irishman had always been that he put his pocket before his country’s honour. If Hussey can be taken as the archetypal “lace curtain” Catholic, and synonymously as a ‘shoneen’ Irishman, this offer is the ultimate demonstration of a ‘radical’ commitment to Ireland’s cause. But at the same time the old attachment to ‘Home Rule’ and Ireland within the Empire’s fold died hard. Within the League men like Hussey and J.B. Callan were still promoting the model of Dominion Home Rule for Ireland, even as De Valera and Dail Eireann sparring with Lloyd George’s government over complete sovereign independence.129 With the signing of the Treaty to create the Irish Free State in January 1922, Hussey was jubilant, “My pick has come true” [9 January 1922]. Sectarian difficulties still lay ahead on the local front; 1922 saw both Bishop Liston’s trial for sedition in Auckland and a nasty campaign by state school teachers in Dunedin to exclude the Christian Brothers from local rugby competition.130 But by the year’s end Irish issues at least were settled, “Free State an accomplished fact in Ireland. People have lost interest in the matter.” [14 December 1922].

With the establishment of the Irish Free State, Dunedin’s Irish community stepped back from any further agitation over their homeland’s affairs.131 Independence, however qualified, had finally been won and it was now up to the Irish in Ireland to sort out their own political battles.132 Stripped of this

127 Hussey 31 May 1921. J.B. Callan was a prominent lawyer, who had served in the war and was of a very ‘loyal’ disposition. He was, even more than Hussey, the personification of ‘shoneenism’. Dr Milligan took over as President in August.

128 Hazlett’s mother on the other hand was an Irish Catholic and his parents had married in a Catholic ceremony. Their upbringing, however, was Protestant and Hazlett was very much part of the Dunedin Protestant establishment.

129 “At Determination meeting in evening with J.B. Callan and outlined our position re Dominion Home Rule.” 17 September 1921.

130 “Hard times going for Catholics just now” Hussey confided to his diary in the middle of these two crises, 9 April 1922.

131 The Self Determination League in Dunedin agreed to “mark time” in February 1922 pending the Irish plebiscite over the Treaty. In July it was wound up and remaining funds - £100- were left to Hussey and Neill to hold as trustees for 12 months and then dispose of “according to our lights.” 27 July 1922.

132 Diehard Republicans in Wellington established an Irish Republican Association in 1923. Their invitation to John Robinson to form a Dunedin branch was spurned. “In the first place Dunedin is a very conservative town, and the question of an Irish Republican Association is not a burning one with local Irishmen. The appeal directed to national sentiment and to humanitarianism in the days of the ‘Black and Tans’ now falls upon deaf ears.” Robinson to Griffin, 11 August 1924, Griffin Papers, 86-43, 3/11, ATL.
divisive element ‘Irishness’ could now reside solely in the ‘safe’ box of cultural activities. Political activity in New Zealand was a different matter. The years of controversy since 1916 left a solid legacy of support for the emerging Labour Party, the sole advocate of Irish independence of the New Zealand political scene. But a unity of outlook over Ireland was only part of this developing alliance. At least as important was the role of Irish socialists within the Party, as committed to its domestic platform as its international policy.\(^{133}\) Between 1916 and 1922 these men and women had pushed their way forward into a leadership role within their community, which owed nothing to their successful integration into the ‘establishment’. Labour had the most to offer an Irish working class constituency and deservedly won its electoral allegiance in the years ahead.

\(^{133}\) “In the South Dunedin branch of the Labour Party, one of the oldest and largest in the city, Catholics possessed great influence and stood for full employment, a living wage, and loyalty to the leaders and the party. They gambled and danced to raise money for both the church and for their party, and they provided a solid core of opposition to the Communists.” Eric Olssen, *A History of Otago*, Dunedin, 1984, p 187.