

## BCMH New Researchers in Military History article

# Divided Loyalties: The Effect the Boer War and its Aftermath had on how Irish Nationalists interpreted the Irish Soldier Serving in the British Army

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### ABSTRACT

*The Boer War proved to be hugely important in the evolution of Irish Nationalism. The conflict would bring about the reunion of constitutional Nationalists under John Redmond and grant advanced Nationalists the opportunity to express their militant politics. This paper will detail how both groups responded to the war in South Africa by examining their interpretations of British military recruiting in Ireland and that of the Irish soldier. The article will conclude by finding that the British military largely viewed Irish Nationalism negatively as a result.*

The outbreak of the Boer War on 11 October 1899 provided the perfect opportunity for Irish Nationalists to unite behind a single issue for the first time since the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell. The South African conflict created the environment in which the Irish Parliamentary Party would reunite. Furthermore the opening phase of the war facilitated co-operation between the moderate Parliamentary Party and the Irish Transvaal Committee, dominated by more extreme or advanced Nationalists, based on their united opposition to both the conflict and enlistment. It is little wonder then that R.F. Foster argued that the Boer War was ‘as nearly as crucial an event for Irish Nationalism as the death of Parnell.’<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless as the conflict progressed, divisions between the Transvaal Committee, whose leaders included Maud Gonne, Arthur Griffith and James Connolly, and

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<sup>1</sup> R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p.448.  
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constitutional Nationalists led by Parliamentarians such as John Redmond and John Dillon would come to the fore. Using their partisan publications, the Irish Parliamentary Party and the Irish Transvaal Committee, in the *Freemans Journal* and *The United Irishman* respectively, employed divergent strategies in dealing with recruitment. Both newspapers were guilty of over emphasising the success of their respective counter recruitment campaigns, which as Keith Jeffery noted 'only had a slight impact, if any at all, on recruitment'.<sup>2</sup> However it is not the success or failure of the Nationalist campaigns that is the focus of this article, it is how the competing interpretations of the Irish soldier held by constitutional and advanced Nationalists led to division between them and the longer term effect this had upon Irish Nationalism.

Even before the conflict erupted it was becoming clear that Nationalists of all shades were going to oppose the Boer War. Terence Denman wrote, 'weeks before the Boer War had broken out, and the question of seducing 'stalwart peasant lads to "take the shilling" was becoming one of acute political concern in Ireland.'<sup>3</sup> As rumours of the brewing conflict circulated in the press throughout the months preceding the Boer War, Nationalists emphasised their support for the President Kruger and the Boers. On 16 January 1898 the Chairman of the Arcklow Town Commissioners proclaimed, 'The only feeling which Irishmen could have for England in her hour of trial, which now seemed at hand, was one of joy and jubilation that retribution should come to her for all the wrongs she had inflicted upon Ireland.'<sup>4</sup> Later the chairman called for cheers in honour of President Kruger and remarked 'that any elements which were working for the disintegration of the British Empire should be welcomed by Irish nationalists at the present time.'<sup>5</sup> In June Maud Gonne told a meeting in Dublin that,

Today the cup of England's iniquity was full to overflowing and today the world knew England as she had not been understood a hundred years ago, for she stood today, in truth, without a friend in the world. The hour of justice would yet come to England, as it had to every other country that was a country of tyranny and oppression... It had well been said that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. Let them keep that for England's difficulty might be close at hand.

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<sup>2</sup> Keith Jeffery, *An Irish Empire?: Aspects of Ireland and The British Empire* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996), p.97.

<sup>3</sup> Terence Denman, "The Red Livery of Shame: The Campaign Against Army Recruitment in Ireland, 1899-1914," *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no. 114 (1994), p.208.

<sup>4</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 16 January 1898.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Gonne continued, 'in this year of '98 no Irishman would join the English Army or navy.' Gonne also believed Irishmen enlisted because 'the English, in fact, did all they could to precipitate a condition of starvation in order to encourage the recruitment of Irishmen as British soldiers.'<sup>6</sup>

The Parliamentarians also weighed in behind the pre-war anti-recruiting campaign. The Irish Party MP, Frank Hugh O'Donnell, wrote in the *The United Irishman*, 'It was not the example of Parnell or even of O'Connell which filled and still fills whole brigades of the English Army with mercenaries from Ireland.'<sup>7</sup> Peter Karsten found 'the Irish regiments embarking for service during the Boer War were hooted down the Dublin quays by Redmondite critics of the war because they were loyal to their oath.'<sup>8</sup> On 2 October Nationalists then held their first meeting to condemn British actions in South Africa. The platform was dominated by members of the newly formed Irish Transvaal committee, an organisation led by advanced Nationalists, but members of the Irish Party were also present. John O'Leary, an ex-Fenian, was first to speak and was met with massive roars of approval. However the biggest cheer was held for the unfurling of the Boer flag by another ex-Fenian P.J. O'Brien. Maud Gonne then took the opportunity to announce,

It was a terrible sorrow and humiliation to know that there were regiments of Irish name who had gone out to fight against the Boers; but it was hoped that those soldiers that those soldiers when they saw the green flag of Ireland waving side by side with the banner of the Transvaal would, even at the eleventh hour remember that they were Irishmen, and cast off the hideous English uniform.'<sup>9</sup> She then informed the audience 'one thing [we] could clearly put a stop to... [is] recruiting in Ireland... England should be prevented from filling up the breaches made in the ranks by Boer bullets, and Irishmen should not be available to replace troops sent to South Africa. In order to prevent recruiting in Ireland, they must take united action – they must call on all Nationalist papers to do everything in their power against it... The recruiting sergeants throughout Ireland must be watched, and if necessary, followed, into the places where most of their work was done – into the public houses.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *The United Irishman*, 16 September 1899.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Karsten, 'Irish Soldiers in the British Army, 1792-1922: suborned or subordinated,' *Journal of Social History*, XVII (1983-84), p.47.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

While the counter recruiting campaign seemed to be bringing together the forces of constitutional and advanced nationalism, there were already differences emerging between the competing ideologies. At the same meeting John Redmond objected to the conflict on the basis that it was imperialistic. He told those present, 'it would be a disgrace if Ireland did not clearly show her sympathies with the Transvaal now, when a most unjust attack is being made upon its freedom.'<sup>11</sup> Although T.D. O'Sullivan, told the same gathering, 'That this meeting condemns all enlistment of Irishmen in the English Army.' He did go on to say that he 'could not blame some of the poor fellows who had taken the shilling and put on the red coat' but 'In a crisis of this kind, in his opinion, the man that did so acted the part of enemy to his country.'<sup>12</sup> Despite the disparity the Royal Irish Constabulary reported that 'the disloyal sentiment, which leads to expressions of good will to the Boers, is decidedly wide-spread, and is encouraged and intensified by British reverses.' Though they also noted 'It is, however, only a sentiment as yet.'<sup>13</sup>

Maud Gonne took advantage of the existing sentiment by establishing, *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*, or Daughters of Ireland. They distributed anti-recruitment leaflets and spoke about the evils of Irish girls consorting with British soldiers. Controversially Gonne had some of her supporters follow soldiers distributing leaflets as they went, which often led to fracas.<sup>14</sup> In her autobiography Gonne claimed, outlandishly, that the campaign of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* 'almost stopped enlistment for the British Army in Dublin and considerably reduced it throughout the country.'<sup>15</sup> The Irish Transvaal Committee also adopted some of the strategies employed by the Parliamentarians, such as pointing out the fortunes of old soldiers who did not qualify for a pension. Gonne wrote, 'Old, broken down, and hopeless, they cower around the fires or wander aimlessly and drearily round the dismal courtyards of the workhouses – those Irishmen who forgot Ireland and wore the English red.'<sup>16</sup>

Although advanced Nationalists were profiting from the conflict, constitutional Nationalists became caught between representing the rights of Irish soldiers while opposing recruitment. After the news broke of how the Dublin Fusiliers were decimated at the battle of Glencoe, Michael Flavin told Parliament 'Their mothers and sisters to-day in Ireland are weeping for their lost relatives who have won a glorious victory for you, but many of these mothers and sisters may have to be

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<sup>11</sup> *The Freemans Journal* 2 October 1899.

<sup>12</sup> *Freemans Journal*, 22 September 1899.

<sup>13</sup> The National Archives, Kew, London [TNA], CO 904/69/705, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', January 1900.

<sup>14</sup> Maud Gonne MacBride, *A servant of the Queen* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1994), p.267.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.268.

<sup>16</sup> *The United Irishman*, 14 October 1899.

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

supported in the Irish workhouses.<sup>17</sup> Such statements served to distance themselves from the Transvaal Committee. Michael Davitt, whose background lay in advanced Nationalism, went a step further and resigned from parliament on 25 October 1899 with the intention of touring the Transvaal in support of the Boers. The emerging disunity between Parliamentarians and advanced Nationalists led to the authorities to believe that 'one decisive British victory would go far to put an end to the present feeling; and it would certainly encourage many Nationalists, who now hesitate to speak out, to express their real sentiments as to the Boers.'<sup>18</sup>

However British victories were not forthcoming, serving to intensify Irish opposition to recruitment. During November members of the Transvaal Committee visited Cork. In a symbolic gesture, the horses pulling the carriage carrying Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith were detached and the carriage dragged to the Victoria Hotel in the city where the Mayor once more highlighted the differing approaches taken by competing ideologies. Although the moderate Mayor, Eugene Crean, declared 'it was a matter of regret that so many Irishmen were in the British Army... God keep our people from the British Army; God save them from ever joining its ranks.' He also let it be known that 'with those men it was either starvation at home or the red coat.'<sup>19</sup> In contrast J.C. Flynn asked why 'Irishmen had to bear the burdens and do the bloody work of England in the Transvaal.'<sup>20</sup>

On 17 December 1899 the Transvaal Committee organised a major protest at Beresford Place in Dublin to coincide with the visit of Joseph Chamberlain. Despite the authorities banning the demonstration, advanced Nationalists went ahead with it. This resulted in clashes between Nationalists and the police throughout the city as the authorities attempted to arrest its organisers, Maud Gonne, James Connolly, George A. Lyons, E.W. Stewart and Arthur Griffith. Although three members of the Irish Party were to join with the above in Beresford Place, they choose not to. Instead Michael Davitt, Patrick O'Brien and William Redmond met with the leaders of the Beresford Place demonstration at the headquarters of the Transvaal Committee, where a meeting was chaired by John O'Leary.<sup>21</sup> While the incident once more demonstrates the overlapping nature of the counter recruiting campaign, it also highlights the subtle differences between the two Nationalists groups, as the Parliamentarians chose not to attend the illegal meeting but a following one in the offices of the Transvaal Committee.

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<sup>17</sup> HC Deb 25 October 1899 vol 77 cc696.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, CO 904/69/706, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', January 1900.

<sup>19</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 14 November 1899.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 18 December 1899.

Whereas advanced Nationalists choose to confront the authorities, moderates began to highlight the losses suffered by the Irish Regiments during the early stages of the war to make life increasingly difficult for recruiters. *The Freeman's Journal* noted 'the English regiments have lost 2,420, the Irish 1,680 and the Scottish 1,300. As there are nearly twenty five English battalions, only five Irish and nine Scottish, the apportionment of the work of the campaign can hardly be regarded as judicial. On the Irish proportion the English losses should now be over eight thousand, and the Scottish nearly four.'<sup>22</sup> John Redmond complained in Parliament that 'there were 120 Irishmen killed or wounded to 56 Englishmen.'<sup>23</sup> Although Redmond was attempting to impede recruitment by highlighting Irish casualties, he was also representing Irish soldiers, who were after all constituents. Redmond explained why he did so stating that,

There is scarcely a family in Ireland, from the poor people who live in Dublin slums, to the highest in the land that is not represented in one shape or other at the front. This is more the case with regard to Ireland than it is here, because in proportion to the population a larger number of our people take to soldiering for the mere love of the calling than with you... I as an Irishman cannot help feeling a thrill of pride at the record and heroism of the Irish lads from Mayo and Roscommon.<sup>24</sup>

William Redmond, who was more radical than his brother, held similar a view. He told Parliament that,

It is perfectly true that there are Irishmen in South Africa fighting as gallantly as Irishmen always have done in every part of the world. These men we consider are in the wrong... We believe that these men, under better circumstances, would never lend their sanction to this war; but being engaged in it we hold that their gallantry and bravery ought not to be made a matter of taunt to us, because we are as proud of it as any other people.<sup>25</sup>

Swift MacNeill asked Parliament why were the Inniskilling Fusiliers 'who were placed by Sir Redvers Buller in the forefront [of battle], but [were] never mentioned in the dispatches' and 'why Irish officers were being passed over' for promotion.<sup>26</sup> Jasper

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<sup>22</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 30 December 1899.

<sup>23</sup> *HC Deb 07 February 1900 vol 78 cc834*.

<sup>24</sup> *HC Deb 07 February 1900 vol 78 cc833*.

<sup>25</sup> *HC Deb 19 February 1900 vol 79 cc406*.

<sup>26</sup> *HC Deb 28 May 1900 vol 83 cc1562-1568*.

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Tully also campaigned for the rights of returning soldiers. After mocking the Army's performance in South Africa, Tully declared that,

...in Ireland the privates who fought in the Crimea were mostly to be found in the workhouses. The Irishmen who have gone out to this war will be treated when they come back just in the same way as the soldiers who went out and fought for you against Russia during the Crimean War.<sup>27</sup>

While it may have been possible at the beginning of the war for moderate and advanced Nationalists to stand on the same platform, the Parliamentary Party's policy of opposing the war and recruitment but at the same time praising and representing the rights of Irish soldiers prevented this. Although this was to succeed in the short term, in the long term they gave advanced Nationalists a platform from which they could promote their ideology, which had up to this point been smothered by the Parliamentarians.

The Transvaal Committee began to take full advantage of this opportunity by continuing to take a more forthright stance. In *The United Irishman* they wrote,

No feeling of sorrow fills us for the men with Irish names who have met the death they deserved at the hands of the Boers. Let England mourn them if she will. They died for her – these Irish Hessians... A hair of the head of one Dutchman, standing out for freedom in South Africa today, is more precious to us than all the lives of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.<sup>28</sup>

Maud Gonne went further. In Cork she claimed that Irish losses were proportionately higher because 'England was carrying out her policy of exterminating the Irish people.'<sup>29</sup> The combined Nationalist campaigns were producing results. The RIC found that

the most serious result of their activity has perhaps been the interference with recruiting and Militia volunteering which has been persistently attempted by private persuasion and open distribution of leaflets of more or less seditious character... vast numbers of these objectionable publications have been circulated.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> HC Deb 19 February 1900 vol 79 cc436.

<sup>28</sup> *The United Irishman*, 28 October 1899.

<sup>29</sup> *The United Irishman*, 18 November 1899.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, CO 904/70/7, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', February 1900.

In spite of the genuine sympathies felt toward the Boers the Police also believed that 'in many places, the pro Boer feeling is observed to be on the decline, as the more sensible Nationalists recognise the consequences to themselves of a British defeat; and in addition, they sympathise with the Irish soldiers who have fought so gallantly at the front.'<sup>31</sup> It was the officer's second point which advanced Nationalist found difficult to hurdle. Although the public supported the drive against recruitment, they would not vilify the Irish soldier, who was recognised for his bravery as much as being identified as a victim of economic circumstance.

This was to become clear during the South Mayo by-election in March 1900. The Irish Transvaal Committee put forward Major John MacBride to contest the election and had every reason to be confident. MacBride, a native of county Mayo, was the commander the Irish Transvaal Brigade fighting alongside the Boers. The seat had been vacated by Davitt who gave it up in protest over the war, although Davitt did not approve of MacBride's nomination because he was not selected at a convention.<sup>32</sup> Ironically though MacBride did not even know of his nomination and did not wish to be elected as he 'did not believe that Ireland's freedom could be gained through the good graces of the English Parliament and people.'<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless the Transvaal Committee confidently began to step up their attacks on Redmond and the Parliamentarians. In late January *The United Irishman* commented, 'The men who sit in the British Parliament and pose as the leaders of the Irish people are looking on silently at the sacrifice of the helpless ones of the English Moloch.'<sup>34</sup> Using *The United Irishman* they further berated the Parliamentary Party, asking, 'Will you not even visit your own constituents? The Dublin Militia are only two hour's rail from you. The Wexfords are at Aldershot. The South Cork at Dover - just on the way to Paris you know.'<sup>35</sup>

The response of the Parliamentary Party was not at all coordinated. They were caught by surprise by news of MacBride's nomination and their candidate John O'Donnell was as William O'Brien put it 'a stripling barely out of his teens.'<sup>36</sup> Worse was to come for O'Brien and the Parliamentary Party when it was revealed that O'Donnell had once tried to join the Royal Irish Constabulary. Then O'Donnell attempted to step down but O'Brien encouraged him to 'fight MacBride.'<sup>37</sup> An interesting subplot to the by election was the fact that neither candidate actually took

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<sup>31</sup> TNA, CO 904/69/706, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', January 1900.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony J Jordan, *Boer War To The Easter Rising: The Writings of John MacBride* (Westport: Westport Books, 2006), p.68.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p.69.

<sup>34</sup> *The United Irishman*, 20 January 1900.

<sup>35</sup> *The United Irishman*, 17 February 1900.

<sup>36</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten Protest*, p.60.

<sup>37</sup> *The United Irishman*, 10 March 1900.

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

part in the campaign. MacBride was in South Africa and O'Donnell was in prison on a coercion charge. As the candidate's personalities were removed the contest was a party one and a test of how strong support for the Transvaal Committee actually was. On 28 February 1900 the results were announced and despite the campaigning of veteran Fenians, John O'Leary and John Daly, MacBride finished nearly two thousand votes behind O'Donnell, 2,401 to 427.<sup>38</sup> *The United Irishman* claimed 'misrepresentation succeeds.' and they may have had a point.<sup>39</sup> Although O'Donnell's victory seems like a landslide the turnout was little over 25 percent.<sup>40</sup>

As the ideological struggle between Nationalists continued, an unlikely opportunity for unity arose when Queen Victoria began to take an interest in the Irish regiments. On 20 February 1900 Victoria held an interview with Bugler Dunn. This was followed by a telegram from the Queen to General Buller expressing her concern in relation to the losses suffered by the Irish regiments.<sup>41</sup> On 8 March 1900 it was then announced that Queen Victoria would visit Ireland at the beginning of April. This news was followed by an order issued by the Queen, allowing Irish regiments to wear a sprig of shamrock on their headdress on St. Patrick's Day. Whether these moves were sincere or a cynical move designed to garner more recruits has been much debated.<sup>42</sup> Either way it prompted a more extreme response from John Dillon. Addressing a crowd in Thule's on St. Patrick's Day, Dillon stated,

We are invited to be grateful because the Monarch of another race has sought to dip that emblem of our people in the blood that has been shed at the Tugela, and at other battle fields in South Africa, and to dye the green shamrock red in the rivers of Irish Blood which have been shed... We are asked to wear the shamrock to glorify the slaughter of Irish soldiers in an unjust war, in which they were put at the forefront of battle.<sup>43</sup>

The shamrock concession was quickly followed by Queen sanctioning a regiment of Irish Guards. A move which the military believed 'can hardly fail to have a beneficial

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<sup>38</sup> *The United Irishman*, 3 March 1900.

<sup>39</sup> *The United Irishman*, 3 March 1900.

<sup>40</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten Protest*, p.60.

<sup>41</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 1 March 1900.

<sup>42</sup> See, Donal P McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and The Boer War* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2003), pp. 66-71, James H Murphy, *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy During the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Washington DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 2001), pp. 275-289, Keith Jeffery, *An Irish Empire?: Aspects of Ireland and The British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 96-97, Keith Jeffery, 'The Irish Soldier in the Boer War' in John Gooch (Ed.) *The Boer War: Direction Experience and Image* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 148-151, Maud Gonne MacBride, *A servant of the Queen* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1994), pp. 266-278,

<sup>43</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 19 March 1900.

effect upon recruiting in Ireland.<sup>44</sup> Dillon was equally as sceptical of this move, declaring at the same meeting,

[the Queen] thinks that by coming to Ireland she will raise a regiment of Irish Guards and get fine tall Tipperary men to fight the battles of her Empire at a shilling a day in South Africa... they want the Irish to fight their battles, but they did not think of that when they allowed the homesteads and fields of Ireland to be stripped of their population.<sup>45</sup>

Typically Maud Gonne went further, writing, 'Taking the Shamrock in her withered hand, she dares ask Ireland for soldiers – for soldiers to protect the exterminators of their race!'<sup>46</sup> Both sets of Nationalists were attempting to identify the Queen's intervention with the recruiting campaign within a more extreme context. However, any chance of Nationalists coming together to oppose the Royal visit were quickly dashed when John Redmond told Parliament that the Irish people 'will treat with respect the visit which the venerable sovereign proposes to make' he added, 'no attempt will be made to give that visit a party significance.'<sup>47</sup> Although Redmond's sentiment may have been felt in London, in Dublin the Irish Transvaal Committee threatened Redmond to 'come to Dublin and repeat in public the statement you made tonight in the name of the Irish people.'<sup>48</sup>

While Nationalists continued to turn on each other, Queen Victoria's visit passed off successfully. Mary Kenny wrote that 'the plain people of Ireland turned out in their hundreds of thousands to give Queen Victoria the warmest welcome she had ever had in Ireland.'<sup>49</sup> The authorities did not have to wait long to feel the effects of the Queen's visit. In its aftermath the RIC reported that 'pro Boer sentiment received a severe blow from the loyal enthusiasm evoked by the Queen's visit.'<sup>50</sup> It was not just the Royal visit that was turning the tide on Nationalists. A series of British victories in South Africa also was said to have 'dejected and disheartened' many Nationalists.<sup>51</sup> Sentiment in Kildare was said to have undergone a 'complete change in local feeling about the war and which is probably due to the fact that many local men are serving

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<sup>44</sup> *Army and Militia. Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting for the year 1900*, p.8, 1901 [Cd. 519].

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *The United Irishman*, 7 April 1900.

<sup>47</sup> *HC Deb 08 March 1900 vol 80 cc402.*

<sup>48</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 10 March 1900.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Kenny, *Crown and Shamrock: Love and Hate between Ireland and the British Monarchy* (Dublin, New Island, 2009), p.63.

<sup>50</sup> TNA, CO 904/70/271, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', April 1900.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, CO 904/70/414, April 1900.

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.<sup>52</sup> However the campaign against recruiting was to get a shot in the arm later that week when the first of Michael Davitt's reports from South Africa were published in the Nationalist press.

Although Davitt's articles can only be described as propaganda, they added to the admiration of the Boers in Ireland. Davitt interviewed many of the key generals and ordinary Boer soldiers and described in detail how they won great victories over the British forces. Michael Davitt also portrayed the Irish fighting with the Boers in an honourable light. Davitt noted that the Irish Transvaal Brigades; 'did not fight for pay, had not yet surrendered and they did not attack civilians or wounded British soldiers.'<sup>53</sup> Conversely Redmond continued to highlight the bravery of Irish soldiers and admitted 'feeling pride at the record and heroism of Irish lads.'<sup>54</sup> It is little surprise then that the authorities believed that 'there does not exist at present any one leading Irish Nationalist who has the general confidence of the Irish people.'<sup>55</sup>

The view taken by moderate Nationalists was a pragmatic one. As many of the Irish Party's supporters were in some way connected with the Army, the Parliamentarians did not criticise it in the same manner as advanced Nationalists, but they did continue to campaign against recruiting. Although Michael Davitt was a member of the Irish Party at the beginning of the war, he returned to his Fenian roots as it progressed. He was critical of the stance taken by many Parliamentarians claiming 'enlisting in the British Army is a burning disgrace to Ireland' adding, 'Some Nationalists have praised these Irish soldiers under Roberts for bravery. Where has the bravery been exhibited? They may have fought better than the English Tommies [but] they could easily do that.' Davitt also lamented the fact that 'there are more Catholics from Cork, Tipperary, and Limerick in the British Army today than there are men from the whole of Protestant Ireland.'<sup>56</sup> However the result of the general election of 1900 endorsed the stance of the Irish Parliamentary Party. The Irish Party dominated the polls winning seventy seven seats. A further five Independent Nationalists who were estranged from the party were also elected.

Undaunted the Transvaal Committee continued their campaign. In February 1900 Henry McAteer, secretary of the Transvaal Committee, conducted a 'extended tour through the southern counties with the expressed object of stopping recruiting and

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<sup>52</sup> TNA, CO 904/600, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', June 1900.

<sup>53</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 6 July 1900.

<sup>54</sup> *HC Deb 07 February 1900 vol 78 cc833*.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, CO 904/70/546, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', June 1900.

<sup>56</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 4 September 1900.

Militia volunteering.<sup>57</sup> In Cork he distributed 'leaflets denouncing the war and warning members of the militia not to be entrapped into Foreign Service.' He also gave his card to a few young men and urged them to join the Boer ranks.<sup>58</sup> However, before moving onto Waterford, McAteer 'drank freely and went so far as to tell a Staff Sergeant all about his mission.' As a result the RIC surmised 'no one appears to have paid any attention to him.'<sup>59</sup> In Clare recruiting was said to be 'about normal and recruits are generally much better than average.'<sup>60</sup> Indeed the RIC reported that although many people in Ennis 'were very jubilant in the hope that England would be brought down,' they also observed that many were 'beginning to see that the British cannot be beaten.'<sup>61</sup> The Police also remarked on the fact that as many people had relatives in the Army 'it militated considerably against the pro Boer feeling.'<sup>62</sup> A similar attitude was found in Cork. After McAteer was caught distributing anti-enlistment leaflets it was noted that 'public expressions of pro Boer feeling have disappeared for some time past, but all the same there can be little doubt that the great proportion of the people wish the Boers success. Their sympathy, however, is a passing sentiment.'<sup>63</sup>

In March, after the Duke of Connaught visited the city, the authorities were so encouraged by the decline of pro Boer sentiment that they wrote 'the cognomen of Rebel Cork no longer applies to the city.'<sup>64</sup> After another member of the Transvaal committee was found handing out leaflets in Naas, depot of the Dublin Fusiliers, the Police found 'the general feeling amongst the people in the county is not now so pro-Boer as it was a few months ago, probably because the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, which have suffered so severely in the war and have so often distinguished themselves, are largely connected in the county.'<sup>65</sup> Even in Limerick, where anti-military sentiment was felt more than elsewhere, the RIC noted 'the collapse of the Boer War had a very desirable effect on the disaffected, who were hoping for a British disaster, had such taken place I am pretty sure Limerick city and county would have [seen] trouble.'<sup>66</sup> Indeed the men of the Limerick County Militia were given a hugely popular send off on 11 May 1900.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> TNA, CO 904/70/546, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', February 1900.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/31, February 1900.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/153, March 1900.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/24, February 1900.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/30, February 1900.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/140, March 1900.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/57, February 1900.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., CO 904/70/71, February 1900.

<sup>67</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 12 May 1900.

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

The string of British victories won throughout 1900 also took much of the momentum out of the Nationalist campaigns. Pretoria had fallen on 3 May, on 12 May Kroonstad was occupied, on 31 May Roberts captured Johannesburg and on 21 July Komatipoort fell cutting the Boers off, which forced President Kruger to seek asylum in Portuguese East Africa. However, as the war entered its final stage, the tactics employed by the British in South Africa somewhat rejuvenated the anti-recruiting campaign. As the Boers turned to guerrilla tactics, the British reacted by implementing a scorched earth policy and opening concentration camps. By December reports of British atrocities were becoming more numerous. At the national convention in December John Dillon claimed,

the war has entered a new stage and the farms are burned, women and children turned adrift on the veldt without clothing and without food, and famine as an auxiliary applied to the women and children to compel their mankind to yield... Wherever your troops move not only are houses burned down or blown up with dynamite, but defenceless women and children are ejected, robbed of all food and cover, and all this without any just cause existing for such proceedings.<sup>68</sup>

During January 1901 Dillon then stated that the Queen 'came to this country to glorify the acts of the unhappy Irish soldiers who were fighting upon the wrong side... We condemn and hate this war as the most unjust and cruel that has ever been waged upon a Christian people.'<sup>69</sup> However as a British victory was now almost certain the RIC in Longford concluded that 'pro Boer sentiment amongst the artisan and peasant class does not appear as strong as it was'<sup>70</sup> The half-hearted opposition of Nationalists toward returning Irish soldiers seemed to encapsulate the findings of the RIC. While the Dublin Yeomanry were met by citizens mocking them with white flags upon their return, there was little else.<sup>71</sup> In July 1900 the North Cork Militia returned to Cork where they were presented medals by the Duke of Connaught. Despite the storm stirred up by the deployment of the North Corks in South Africa the ceremony passed off without controversy.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, after men of the Royal Artillery were involved in a drunken brawl with locals in Kilkenny the Police chief in the town claimed that recruiting had been 'unusually brisk' throughout December.<sup>73</sup> In February

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<sup>68</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 12 December 1900.

<sup>69</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 11 January 1901.

<sup>70</sup> TNA, CO 904/72/475, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', March 1901.

<sup>71</sup> *The Freemans Journal*, 11 June 1901.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, CO 904/73/158, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', July 1901.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, CO 904/74/210, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', December 1901.

1902, Chamberlain recorded, 'recruiting has been fairly active during the month particularly in the counties Waterford, Kilkenny and Clare; no doubt the continuance of the war affects it considerably.'<sup>74</sup>

There was to be one last sting in the tail when Boer forces ambushed and captured Lord Methuen and over half of his column at the Battle of Tweebosch on 7 March 1902. In Ireland news of the Boer victory was celebrated and in some places where 'bands turned out and paraded the streets after the disaster to the British Forces.' Although only 'corner boys and low rowdies' were observed to have taken part in the celebrations. Chamberlain worried that 'the recent disaster to Lord Methuen's force may have the effect of stirring up Pro-Boer feeling, which has been somewhat on the wane for some months past.'<sup>75</sup> However it was to be the last major action of the conflict as the Boers formally surrendered on 31 May 1902.

The Boer War had offered advanced and Parliamentary Nationalists the opportunity to unite behind a common cause for the first time since the fall of Parnell. Although both sides opposed the war and recruitment, it was the position of the Irish soldier within the Nationalist narrative that was disputed. While the army as an institution may have been marginalised, the Irish soldier was not; in fact he was respected for his accomplishments. Whereas advanced Nationalists refused to acknowledge this, constitutional Nationalists believed it was possible for a man to wear the British uniform and not deny his own nationality. William Redmond alluded to this telling Parliament,

Who are these Irish soldiers who comprise the Connaught Rangers, the Dublin Fusiliers, and the rest of the Irish regiments? They come mostly from the South of Ireland; they are Catholics by religion, and in politics they are Nationalists and Home Rulers like we are. I have myself heard these gallant and brave men cheering at Irish meetings and demonstrations, and cheering Members sitting upon these benches in the towns which they have visited. You must not imagine because these men have entered your Army that they are not in sympathy with us, because they are, and we have the sympathy also of the classes in Ireland who supply these men.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> TNA, CO 904/74, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', February 1902.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, CO 904/74/644, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', March 1902.

<sup>76</sup> *HC Deb 19 February 1900 vol 79 cc406.*

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Although the debate surrounding the recognition of Irish soldiers seemed minor within the wider Nationalist context, it contributed to Nationalists being unable to unite as they had under the leadership of Parnell. Therefore, once the Boer War came to a close, John Redmond had no influence over advanced Nationalists who were allowed to forge their own future. In turn many prominent members of the Irish Transvaal Committee, such as James Connolly and Arthur Griffith, would go on to become leading republican figures. However the effect of this would only be felt in the long term. In the short term, opposition to military recruitment became a theme within Nationalist politics. It would become one of the many battle grounds over which advanced and constitutional Nationalists would compete. The patterns set by the competing ideologies during the Boer conflict would continue until the outbreak of the First World War. In fact, in 1907, the Irish Parliamentary Party decided that their 'influence should and must be used against enlistment.'<sup>77</sup> They had also decided to 'inculcate an attitude of aloofness from the Army because it was the Army which held Ireland by force. Enlistment had been discouraged, on the principle that from a military point of view Ireland was regarded as a conquered country.'<sup>78</sup>

As a result the British Military never truly trusted Irish Nationalists. During 1905 General Lord Grenfell told the Committee of Imperial Defence,

on the surface Ireland appears to be contented, but there is still strong racial antagonism in the country to the British connection, a feeling that might, under certain conditions, prove a source of weakness to the British Empire.' Adding that the 'germ of insurrection has never fully been eradicated in Ireland.'<sup>79</sup>

General Lyttelton contended that it would not matter whether an invading force was French or German as 'the Irish would be just as likely to join one as the other.'<sup>80</sup> In May 1912 Lyttelton wrote,

the political situation in Ireland might be such that it would be most undesirable to completely denude many parts of the country of all troops even for a few days, for a raiding force successful in landing at that critical period the temper of the civil population in any part of Ireland might be such that an extremely dangerous situation might arise... political possibilities in Ireland are of such character

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<sup>77</sup> Stephen, Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (New York: Longman's Green and Co., 1919), p.141.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.140-141.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, CAB 38/10/74, 'The Defence of Ireland'.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

that I consider it would be unwise to count on the Constabulary being available for defence purposes against invasion.<sup>81</sup>

The Boer War proved to be a catalyst in the evolution of Irish Nationalism. It gave advanced Nationalists a platform from which to express their views, which had hitherto been concealed by the largely moderate Parliamentary Party. Extremists would use it to create Sinn Féin in 1905 and press the anti-recruiting campaign. During 1905 Special Branch found that many of the anti-recruiting leaflets that were being distributed had been printed during the Boer War when Maud Gonne and the Transvaal Committee had 40,000 posters printed.<sup>82</sup> Although the authorities in 1912 believed that Sinn Féin, the I.R.B. and other extremists had 'very little effect,'<sup>83</sup> with the Great War only two years away, it is the continuation of the counter recruiting campaign and not its influence that is important. Indeed Sinn Féin's opposition to recruiting assisted them defeat the Irish Parliamentary Party in the 1918 general election.

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<sup>81</sup> TNA, WO 32/71/10, 'EMPLOYMENT OF MILITARY FORCES: Mobilization and Demobilization (Code 53(E)): Mobilisation of Territorial Force: Allotment of territorials to local force in Ireland to release regular troops', 3 May 1912.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, CO 904/11/84, 'Précis of information and reports relating to the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) District', June 1905.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, CO 904/89/206, 'Inspector General's and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports', February 1913.