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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **CAHIR HEALY PAPERS**

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# Cahir Healy Papers (D2991)

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## Summary

The Cahir Healy papers comprise c.3,000 documents and 24 volumes, c.1900-1970, and are the political, literary and personal papers of Cahir Healy (1877-1970), the Nationalist politician. He was Westminster MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1922-1924 and 1931-1935 and for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, 1950-1955, and Stormont MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1925-1929, and for South Fermanagh, 1929-1965.

The following is a brief (a fuller one follows later) description of the archive. It consists of: Healy's political correspondence in which the principal correspondents are Nationalist and Ulster Unionist politicians such as Alex E. Donnelly, Patrick Maxwell, Anthony Mulvey, Eddie McAteer, Sir Basil Brooke, later 1st Viscount Brookeborough, Capt. Terence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner, and also prominent Irish Americans and leading members of political parties and organisations in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, 1924-1970; general correspondence relating mainly to his historical and literary activities and constituency matters, 1900-1969; undated, miscellaneous literary and historical articles, plays, novels and poems written by Healy together with autobiographical accounts of his early life and political career, including his internment on board the prison ship 'Argenta', 1922-1924; and scrapbooks, notebooks, pamphlets and newspaper cuttings relating to his literary and political activities, Nationalist politics and elections, c.1900-1970.

The first part of the Cahir Healy papers was deposited in PRONI in 1974 and the second in 1978. In 1977, Dr Eamon Phoenix, then an MA student in the Modern History Department, QUB, undertook a sorting and calendaring of the papers as the project part of his MA in historiography and historical method. Dr Phoenix's introduction to the calendar of the papers was duly presented as part of his course work. Subsequent to this, he was employed in a temporary capacity by PRONI to sort and roughly list the further deposit of Healy papers which was made in 1978, and to integrate them with the papers deposited in 1974. On his work, in these two capacities, the arrangement, list and description of the archive are based. He has since published *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland, 1890-1940* (Belfast, 1994). In the following (very much abbreviated) version of his introduction to the archive, footnote references have been omitted, because the reader can now turn to *Northern Nationalism* for the source and authority for all quotations and statements up to 1940.



## Cahir Healy's early years

Cahir Healy (1877-1970) was born, the son of a small farmer, in December 1877, near Mountcharles, Co. Donegal, and was reared in 'a bi-lingual household'. He received his education at the local national school, and an early interest in reading and preoccupation with men and affairs, directed him to a career in journalism. His ambition, however, was temporarily thwarted by domestic circumstances, and his mother, seeing no room for three sons on a little holding, suggested that Cahir should go into business. He found employment with a drapery firm in Derry, but as one of his employers was also engaged as social editor of *The Daily Chronicle*, his journalistic instinct was revived. He began to contribute short articles and verse to the local press, whilst attending Irish language classes in St Columb's Hall, and later, classes in English and shorthand at Derry Technical School.

He first came to work in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, in 1895 as a junior reporter with the *The Fermanagh News* (1894-1899). A year later, he married Catherine Cresswell of Enniskillen (d.1940), and resigned his job for a position in a solicitor's office in Killarney, Co. Kerry. He remained a correspondent for a number of Irish and American papers, and, in 1898, returned to full-time journalism as a reporter for *The Roscommon Herald*, under the editorship of the colourful anti-Parnellite MP, Jasper Tully. He was subsequently engaged by *The Sligo Times* in Sligo, where he became acquainted with the poet, W.B. Yeats. At the turn of the century, he resigned finally from local journalism to become an insurance agent with the Refuge Company in Enniskillen; in this career, he found stability in the wake of an unsettled youth, and remained with the company until his retirement as district superintendent in 1937.

Healy was clearly exceptional amongst the generation in which he grew up, and before the age of twenty-five, had made his mark as a capable journalist, author, and litterateur. The details of his literary apprenticeship are obscure - there is a complete absence of early correspondence - but his name appears among the prominent contributors to the *Shan Van Vocht*, a literary magazine published in Belfast in the 1890s by Alice Milligan (alias Florence M. Wilson) and Ethna Carberry. It was through these early associations with the leading figures in the Irish literary revival that Healy was initiated into a select literary circle: centred at Ardrigh, the Belfast residence of the historian and antiquarian, Francis Joseph Bigger, it included such luminaries as Sir Shane Leslie, Alice Stopford Green, Roger Casement, Cathal O'Byrne and Seamus MacManus, the Donegal author, who hailed from Healy's birth-place and was, like Healy, a contributor to the *Shan Van Vocht*. In 1904, Healy was invited to lecture to the National Literary Society in Dublin, and in the following year, he collaborated with the Belfast author, Cathal O'Byrne, in an anthology of verse entitled, *The Lane of the Thrushes: Some Ulster Love Songs*.



## The Gaelic League and Sinn Fein

Healy was an early convert to the 'new nationalism', and his arrival in Fermanagh was to have a catalytic impact on the formation of nationalist cultural and separatist activities. The Gaelic League, founded in 1893, was the harbinger of the new era and, significantly, it was Healy who launched the Enniskillen branch in November 1902, with Rev. James McKenna (later P.P., Dromore, Co. Tyrone) as Chairman, and himself as secretary. By 1906, he had become chairman of the Fermanagh County Board of the Gaelic Athletic Association.

Healy's disenchantment with the Irish Parliamentary Party seems to have come early in his career, and he evinced no interest in the Home Rule campaign of the United Irish League or in the development of the Ancient Order of Hibernians by the Redmondite, Joseph Devlin. Indeed, he was a frequent contributor to Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* (1899-1906) - which became the linchpin of the novel 'Sinn Fein' policy of dual monarchy - and was amongst the twelve founder members of the Sinn Fein party.

The North Leitrim by-election campaign of 1908 witnessed the political debut of the infant party, but Healy himself had already gained valuable electioneering experience in the North Fermanagh contest of March 1903, when his active support of Edward Mitchell, the Russellite candidate, contributed to the defeat of the young James Craig. Moreover, the blow which their election failure in North Leitrim dealt to Sinn Fein morale did not dampen his enthusiasm, and he was to remain secretary of the *Comhairle Ceanntair* of Sinn Fein in North Fermanagh. Through that office, he was brought into personal contact with those elements within the revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood who were to form the leadership of the 1916 insurrection. At about this time, he attained local prominence through his election to the local board of Poor Law Guardians, and brought Pearse to open the Irish language session in Enniskillen. There is something of an archival and biographical hiatus during this politically seminal period, but there is clear evidence of Healy's gravitation to a more militantly republican stance.

The decision of the Irish Parliamentary Party to accept the 'exclusion' of six Ulster counties as a temporary expedient in 1916 imbued the dwindling Sinn Fein movement with renewed vigour. Healy attests the existence of Sinn Fein branches in Fermanagh 'long prior to 1916', and the establishment of the anti-Redmondite 'Irish Nation League' in Enniskillen in November 1916 was a prelude to the formation of a more sophisticated Sinn Fein organisation in June 1917. Healy was prominent amongst the organisers of a monster meeting of the organisation in Enniskillen in October 1917, and played a key - and perhaps controversial - role in the selection of Sinn Fein candidates in Fermanagh for the 1918 general election.

The general election of December 1918 sounded the death-knell for the Irish Parliamentary Party, and South Fermanagh was wrested from them by Sean O'Mahony for Sinn Fein, although the Unionists retained the North Fermanagh seat. The years 1919-1921 were to witness the establishment of Dail Eireann as the legislature of an Irish republic, and the beginnings of the Anglo-Irish War. As

constitutionalism gave way to physical force, Healy was unequivocal in his allegiance, and by June 1920, his political credit had been enhanced by his co-option onto Fermanagh County Council. However, his involvement in the Sinn Fein movement during the formative period from the establishment of the First Dail until the Treaty of 1921 is poorly documented. His peripatetic mode of livelihood did not conduce to archival survival, although, along with his able penmanship, it well qualified him to be a Sinn Fein organiser.



## The 'republican' courts

His chief contribution to the work of Dail Eireann seems to have been in the setting up of 'republican' or 'arbitration' courts in the border areas of the county. These courts attempted to supplant the normal petty sessions and country courts, and Healy's literary papers and reminiscences throw much light on their development. There is evidence in the correspondence, and his written memoirs, that Healy acted as county registrar of the republican courts. However, their progress in Fermanagh was negligible, and would seem to have been limited to 'a few raids by the Sinn Fein volunteers on poitin-makers'. In his quasi-legal capacity, Healy was closely involved with a prominent Sinn Fein priest, Rev. Lorcan O Ciarain, whose parochial house at Magherameena Castle (Belleek) was a frequent venue for clandestine judicial sessions. He was, moreover, an associate of Kevin O'Shiel, BL, who acted as a Republican 'judge' in Fermanagh during 1919-1921, and was active in raising the First Dail Eireann Loan, launched by Michael Collins in April 1919. Collins himself was personally known to Healy as a result of his fiancée's connections with Enniskillen.



## The Treaty and partition

In July 1921, a truce was signed between the British Government and Dail Eireann, and negotiations were opened. The Fermanagh nationalists assumed that they would be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Dail, and a delegation consisting of Cahir Healy, John McHugh, Nationalist chairman of the County Council and Father Lorcan O Ciarain met President De Valera in Dublin on 31 August 1921 to impress upon him the urgency of their case. They reminded the Cabinet that 'Fermanagh, by a large majority ... resolved that it would not submit to the partition Parliament in Ulster. ...'

Healy and the Fermanagh nationalists were excessively optimistic, and refused to consider the possibility of partition as a permanent reality. But gradually, almost imperceptibly, the Northern Ireland Parliament was extending its authority over the infant state, and Fermanagh was fast losing its links with the South. Events were moving to a climax, and with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, the split in the Republican Cabinet was repeated in microcosm in Fermanagh. The first impulse of the local nationalists was to reject any agreement which implied partition, and as a result of its calculated defiance of the new Northern Government, the Nationalist county council was dissolved. Many, however, welcomed the Treaty as a respite from the violence of the past two years, and were convinced that Clause 12 - with its guarantee of a Boundary Commission - would ensure 'the essential unity of Ireland'.

Healy – perhaps because of his personal admiration for Collins – endorsed his mentor's view of the agreement as 'the freedom to achieve freedom'. At a specially convened meeting of the county Sinn Fein executive in Enniskillen on 30 December 1921, he moved a resolution calling on the Dail representatives for Fermanagh-Tyrone to support the ratification of the Treaty in Dail Eireann.





## Internment on the 'Argenta'

Meanwhile, the birth-pangs of the new Northern state continued against a back-cloth of withering border warfare, and on 22 May 1922, the Northern authorities arrested some fifty nationalist spokesmen in Co. Fermanagh; amongst them – ironically, in view of his acceptance of the Treaty – was Healy. He was lodged first in Belfast gaol and, after a month, was interned with about 300 suspects on the prison ship, 'Argenta', then moored in Belfast Lough. Eighteen months later, they were transferred to Larne workhouse, before their eventual release in March 1924. This interesting phase of Healy's career is particularly well-documented in a Northern Ireland Cabinet Office file on his arrest and imprisonment, as well as his own closely-detailed narrative, 'Two Years on an Ulster Prison Ship', which is in the archive.

The mass arrests were ostensibly the government's reaction to the assassination of a prominent Unionist MP, W.J. Twaddell, but Healy not without justification - perceived a political motive. His endorsement of the Treaty had been conditional upon the implementation of the 'Boundary Clause', and the authorities must have been aware that - with his political cachet and keen local knowledge - he would be a key figure in the preparation of any Nationalist case to the forthcoming Boundary Commission. Arguably, therefore, the Government considered that his removal from circulation would both assuage the fears of local unionists, apprehensive about the Commission's final award, and impede the compilation of a strong anti-partitionist case for Fermanagh.

His internment, however, acquired a new dimension when, in November 1922, he was returned, together with an old Redmondite, T.J.S. Harbison, as one of the members for Fermanagh-Tyrone. As early as 22 November 1922, Sir Frederick Greer of the Irish Office, London, was pressing the Northern Ireland Ministry of Home Affairs for his release. The general election of December 1923 witnessed the disappearance of the Conservative Government's majority, as well as Healy's re-election in Fermanagh-Tyrone. The exigencies of parliamentary politics induced Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister, to write a secret letter to Sir James Craig on the political liability to the Conservatives of the continued internment of Healy. The circumstances surrounding the formation of the first Labour government dramatically altered the situation. By late January 1924, Healy's internment was being seen in informed political circles as a detriment to good relations between Craig's administration and the new Labour Government. Healy was finally released from Larne workhouse on 11 February 1924 but, although the original internment order had been revoked, a further order was made 'prohibiting him from entering that portion of the county of Fermanagh west of a straight line drawn from Pettigo through Newtownbutler ... to the boundary of Northern Ireland'. At length, however, '... on the grounds that Healy is an Imperial Member ... and in deference to [Ramsay MacDonald's] strong representations', the Prime Minister reluctantly agreed to cancel the prohibiting order.



## The Boundary Commission

Healy had been returned to parliament as a Sinn Feiner, but it had been the desire of the electoral convention which nominated him that he should represent them in the Commons. There was, in fact, no intrinsic contradiction in his political attitude and, as a supporter of the pro-Treaty faction in the Free State, he was pledged to accept the status quo – albeit with the important proviso of the Boundary Commission. Healy duly took his seat at Westminster in March. As far as he and the majority of Fermanagh nationalists were concerned, the real villains of the piece were De Valera's 'Irregulars' whose reckless actions had forestalled the setting up of the Boundary Commission. In Healy's view, '... the Orange extremists in the North, and the Republicans in the South, have been making the position more than ordinarily difficult for both governments. ...'

The Commission was finally appointed in November. Healy was appointed secretary of the Fermanagh nationalists in the preparation of submissions to be laid before it, and the Healy papers include a sub-file of letters, statements, and press-cuttings relating to the Commission's activities. The bulk of the correspondence consists of formal letters between Healy and F.B. Bourdillon, Secretary to the Commission. In his evidence to the tribunal, Healy argued that the anti-partitionist majorities in the general elections of 1922 and 1923 were sufficient proof of 'the wishes of the inhabitants' of Fermanagh and Tyrone, and he alleged intimidation, violence and gerrymandering on the part of the Northern Government. The apprehension of the border nationalists seemed confirmed by an inspired 'leak' to The Morning Post in November 1925, which forecast that the Commission's award would make no substantial adjustment to the border. Healy reacted harshly to a suggestion in an Irish Independent editorial that Article 12 should be scrapped in favour of some financial concessions to the Free State. His was the authentic voice of nationalist disillusionment. The Boundary Commission debacle totally undermined Healy's confidence in the Cumann na nGael (pro-Treaty) administration, and marked the beginning of his rapprochement with De Valera and his anti-Treaty supporters.

Arguably 1925 marks the beginning of Healy's political career proper, with his return to the Northern Ireland Parliament for South Fermanagh; he was to hold this seat until his retirement from active politics in 1965, and was again returned to Westminster as a representative of the Fermanagh-Tyrone constituency in 1931-1935, and 1950-1955. Healy's political career after 1925 cannot be studied in isolation from the history of the Nationalist Party, with which he was to share an almost symbiotic relationship over a period of some forty years. He represented a distinctive element within the party whose associations had been with Sinn Fein rather than the Irish Party, and in this respect, his co-operation with Joe Devlin – whose politics he had vehemently opposed in the pre-partition period – was somewhat paradoxical. His political career was that of a revolutionary turned constitutionalist, and it is significant that despite his sense of 'betrayal' at the outcome of the Treaty, he remained a convinced constitutionalist throughout all the vicissitudes of a long political life.



## **Divisions among the nationalists**

The failure of the Boundary Commission to fulfil nationalist expectations confronted the representatives for the border constituencies with a dilemma: should they persevere in a negative policy of non-recognition of the Northern Government, or should they follow the lead of Joe Devlin, now Nationalist MP for West Belfast, who had entered the Northern Ireland House of Commons in April 1925. In January 1926, Devlin felt sufficiently confident to appeal to his fellow Nationalist MPs to take their seats: '... He ... declared that the reasons had disappeared why they should remain out of [Parliament]. It was their business ... to recognise the Northern Parliament in the interests of democracy. ...'

His words produced an early response in February, when a Co. Down Convention, 'deciding that no useful purpose could be served by the Nationalists remaining away', asked its MP, Patrick O'Neill, to take his seat. On 10 March 1926, O'Neill took his seat along with George Leeke and Basil McGuckin, MPs for Londonderry; explaining their position, O'Neill declared '... they had now decided to accept the situation as it is, and to endeavour to make the best of it'. The remaining five Nationalist members, led by Healy and Alex Donnelly, continued to look askance at the Northern Parliament. Finally, in October 1927, a meeting of elected representatives, clergy, and businessmen in Fermanagh and Tyrone decided they should take their seats. Their decision was only painfully arrived at in the face of two factors; the decision of De Valera and his newly-formed Fianna Fail party to enter the Dail in August, and Craig's declaration that he wished to abolish Proportional Representation for parliamentary elections.

There can be no doubt that the abolition of P.R. in 1929 served to increase the bitterness and suspicions of the nationalists, and acted to freeze Northern Ireland politics. It contributed to an electoral situation, consisting of two main parties, whose electoral strength was to remain fairly constant. At times, there was some erosion of Nationalist strength in the Commons by the return of Republican-cum-abstentionist elements and also, from 1945 onwards, of Independents of nationalist outlook; but, considered as an anti-Unionist bloc, the Nationalists and their allies could generally count on having 11 seats in the Commons out of 52. After 1929, the preordained nature of electoral contests in most constituencies, and the reluctance of the anti-partitionists to appear to sanction the existence of the state, militated against the creation of any durable Nationalist party organisation or machinery on a par with that of the Unionists. The parliamentary group tended to exist from election to election very much on an ad hoc basis, and was particularly susceptible to the problems of disunity, lack of any effective or dynamic leadership, and the chimera of abstentionism, which was to prove a perennial and divisive force.



## The National League

At the beginning of 1928 moves had been set on foot to reconcile nationalist differences in a new body whose primary aim would be to work constitutionally for the end of partition. The architects of the new movement were careful to canvass the support of the Catholic Hierarchy, as well as the Fianna Fail party in the South. At a convention of the Fermanagh Nationalist Registration Association in May 1928, Healy revealed that negotiations had been opened in the interests of nationalist unity. Accordingly in May 1928, a representative convention of clergy, MPs and delegates formally launched the new organisation as the 'National League', with its *raison d'être* as 'the protection and defence of the interests of our people'. In a joint statement, the MPs declared that they had secured the views of all sections of nationalist opinion, adding that 'it is felt that the starting of such an organisation has been too long delayed. ...' Devlin was elected president of the League, with Archdeacon Tierney of Enniskillen as vice-president, and Cahir Healy and Patrick O'Neill as honorary secretaries.

In fact, the difficulties of the nationalists were such that, in the general election of 1929, the League seemed satisfied to contest only the eleven 'safe' Nationalist seats, and as late as December 1929 large areas remained without any organisation. Devlin, though nominally president, took little part in the affairs of the League, and the brunt of organisational responsibility devolved upon Healy. It would seem that the incontrovertible reality that the League was almost exclusively a Catholic organisation limited its appeal to Devlin, who saw the need for social reform as the immediate priority. He was quick to realise that the formation of the League had done little to reduce the impotence of the opposition in parliament: in October 1928, he refused to accept the leadership of the opposition on the grounds that he could not be a party 'to the setting up of two rival parties in N. Ireland, one Protestant, the other Catholic. If that were done, then all individual opinion would be crushed ...' His sense of frustration was shared by Healy, who complained in 1929 that '... the salaried members of the House, voting alone, can carry any vote or motion, even if the 14 members of the opposition vote unanimously against it.'

The pent-up frustration of the Nationalists was fast approaching breaking-point, and in May 1932, following a bitter exchange on the reserved services, Devlin led his supporters out of the Commons. In May, a meeting of the parliamentary group decided that they should resume their seats in the autumn session, but neither to become an official opposition nor to render a day-to-day attendance. By this stage, the National League had fallen into desuetude, and Devlin's efforts to enlist the support of republicans in an attempt to form a pan-nationalist party, wedded to constitutionalism, had proved barren. Devlin - now in the throes of a fatal illness - was reluctant to accept the Nationalist nomination in the 1933 election, and in October intimated that he 'was not going back to the Northern Parliament'. The subsequent elections in November 1933 revealed the Nationalists' inability to sustain their strength against Republican abstentionist candidates, and although the latter only succeeded in capturing the South Armagh seat from the Nationalists, their overall showing was impressive.



## **The wilderness years, 1935-1945**

By the end of 1935, the Nationalist Party had lost all semblance of unity (and Healy his Fermanagh-Tyrone seat at Westminster), and the urgent need for a new clear-sighted policy exercised the minds of its more perceptive members. By July 1936, negotiations were opened by the various elements with a view to organising a new Nationalist structure. Conventions were organised for Tyrone, Derry, and Armagh; and at Armagh, the delegates resolved 'that an association be established to have the partition of the country abolished as quickly as possible, to look after the interests of the minority ... and have all victimisation ... exposed ...' Meanwhile, a Healy-inspired organisation emerged at a Belfast convention in September 1936 under the title of the 'Irish Union Association': the new body's constitution studiously avoided any reference to Parliament, and pledged it simply to seek the co-operation and support of all Irishmen for the reunion of the country, whilst promising 'to assist in securing social services for all citizens'.

By October 1937, the Irish Union Association was declared officially dead. With a general election in sight, the Nationalists could not have been more divided on aims and tactics; amongst the local Nationalist MPs, there was general opposition to a suggestion from an extreme element, led by Mulvey and Cunningham (Westminster MPs), that they should refuse to participate in elections to a 'partition parliament'. The Nationalists were severely handicapped on this occasion by the fact that a section of the clergy in Fermanagh and Tyrone - hitherto a stabilising and moderating force in Nationalist politics - openly identified themselves with the extremist position. The rift in the Nationalist ranks was made brutally clear in the loss of three seats - two to Unionists - in the election of February 1938, and occurred at a moment when there was a particular need for Nationalist unity. In January 1938, De Valera had commenced vital talks in London with Neville Chamberlain, and had placed the abolition of partition at the top of his list of priorities.

As the prospect of war became a probability, the abstentionists and anti-abstentionists found themselves drawn together in opposition to the expected conscription, and at the end of September they held a joint meeting in Armagh. There is evidence also at the time that De Valera took an active part in fostering a more militant and unified campaign against partition. His initiative would appear to have been made through Eamon Donnelly, a confidant of Healy's, and described by him as the party's 'representative upon the Executive of Fianna Fail'. This campaign of public demonstrations against partition appears to have been closely related to an appeal, suggested by Healy, to Irish-American opinion. On 6 October 1938, the Nationalist parliamentary party resolved to make direct appeal to American opinion. Yet, it was transparent that the extremists were not prepared to reach an accommodation with the regular party, even in the teeth of the conscription threat; and when a vacancy occurred in Mid-Derry, owing to the death of George Leeke, such was the impotence and apathy that was to characterise the party during the war years that the writ for the by-election was not moved until 1945. Throughout the war years, the only Nationalist opposition at Stormont was provided by the two Belfast representatives, T.J. Campbell, KC, and Richard Byrne.



## **Internment in Brixton**

In July 1941, Healy was arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act and interned in Brixton prison. The precise reason for his detention is not clear, though he attributed it to '... a letter written to a clergyman, and containing "some loose sentences which could have been misunderstood" ...' Amongst his prison acquaintances was the Blackshirt leader, Sir Oswald Mosley, with whom he formed a lasting friendship. He was finally released in December 1942, after a sustained campaign led by John McGovern, an Independent Labour MP





## The Anti-Partition League

A Westminster election took place in July 1945, and a convention re-selected the two outgoing members for Fermanagh and Tyrone, Mulvey and Cunningham, whilst deferring the question of attendance to a general convention, together with a recommendation for the 'establishment of a united organisation for the entire partitioned area, and the framing of an effective policy to undo partition'. Mulvey and Cunningham were re-elected, and the dramatic Labour landslide threw a powerful argument in the scale against abstention: the Nationalists felt that, with a potentially sympathetic Labour government in Britain, parliamentary politics might bear more tangible fruit, and before the end of August, a meeting of MPs and Senators resolved on a policy of active participation in the affairs of Stormont, and the two anti-partitionists had taken their seats at Westminster, for the first time.

There remained the need to establish a strong united organisation to co-ordinate their efforts, both inside and outside Parliament, and early in November 1945, two of the new militant Stormont MPs, Eddie McAteer (Mid-Derry) and Malachy Conlon (South Armagh), took the initiative in inviting all 'nationally minded' groups and public representatives to a conference in Dungannon. An executive was formed comprising all the MPs and Senators, together with three representatives of each county, plus Belfast and Derry City, whilst James McSparran, a prominent Catholic barrister and MP for Mourne, was elected chairman – and effective leader of the party – and Malachy Conlon full-time secretary.

The Anti-Partition League marked the first serious attempt to create a viable party machinery since the decay of the National League in 1934. Moreover, two new factors served to enhance its enthusiasm and importance: it received an early fillip in the formation of a 'Friends of Ireland' group within the British Labour Party consisting of about thirty left-wing MPs led by Dr H.B. Morgan, Hugh Delargy and Geoffrey Bing, QC; and its star waxed in the South with the formation, in June 1946, of a new radical republican party in Clann na Poblachta. This group, led by Sean MacBride, presented itself as the dynamic alternative to Fianna Fail, and was pledged to a more strident anti-partitionist policy.

The A.P.L.'s greatest success in the post-war period was to reconcile the divergent views of the different sections of the Nationalist movement, - the old Redmondites such as T.J. Campbell and T.S. McAllister, the more militant Fianna Fail supporters such as Healy and McAteer, and even some former Republicans like Jack McNally, who was to become an A.P.L. Senator. A widespread publicity and propaganda drive, with rallies and button-holing exercises in Northern Ireland, Britain, and the United States, generated a feeling of euphoria amongst rank-and-file nationalists. In February 1948, the return of a Coalition Government in the South which included MacBride as holder of the crucial External Affairs portfolio, heralded a new phase in Nationalist politics as partition emerged as a primary issue in Dublin. The decision by the Taoiseach, John A. Costello, to repeal the External Relations Act and declare Ireland officially a republic, however, met with a mixed response amongst Nationalists.

The passage of the Republic of Ireland Bill through the Dail provided the Northern Ireland Government with an emotive election issue, and Parliament was dissolved in January 1949. Meanwhile, the Nationalists had renewed their pressure on the Southern parties for '... the need for some National Council in Dublin which would take partition out of the political cockpit, [in] which two parties in Dublin seem inclined to keep it. ...' The ultimate success of their efforts found expression in the establishment of an all-party anti-partition committee in the Mansion House in January 1949. The decision of the committee, however, to provide finance for anti-partitionists in the forthcoming Northern election was viewed with misgivings by many nationalists, and their apprehension was confirmed by the election results which enhanced the Unionists' strength at the expense of Labour. With the passage of the Ireland Act at Westminster in May 1949 - consolidating the Government of Ireland Act - the militants grew more restive, and in February 1950, embittered Nationalist conventions in Fermanagh-South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster endorsed an abstentionist policy.

By 1951, the Anti-Partition League was visibly fragmenting: its initial policy of publicity and demonstration had lost its novelty, and the organisation seemed to have lost sight of any steady and consistent policy, nor did it seem to have the means of enforcing one; individual MP's determined their own policies and tactics, without any reference to the organisation, with the result that it had one MP abstaining at Westminster (Healy), two MPs abstaining at Stormont (Maxwell and McGleenan), whilst the rest of the party maintained a fitful attendance. It was not long before even Healy was forced to recognise that the A.P.L. was undergoing a long diminuendo, and early in 1953 he informed Patrick MacGill - soon to become A.P.L. Secretary - that many of the League's branches 'only exist upon paper'.





## Physical force and abstentionism

As the efforts of the anti-partition movement reached an anti-climax, a feeling of restiveness and despair permeated the ranks of the Nationalist Parliamentary Party, and abstentionism gained ground anew. Such a policy was futile in the view of the more far-sighted leaders, such as Healy, and they sought desperately to forestall a repeat of the 1938 debacle. In August 1953, Healy's Westminster colleague, Michael O'Neill, mooted a new request for Nationalist representation in Dail Eireann as a prerequisite to any attempt to curb the disruptionist tide: '... Our main object is to preserve the Fermanagh and Tyrone seats at all costs. ...' O'Neill's anxiety was confirmed in the October Northern Ireland general election, when the party was challenged by militant republicans in two traditionally Nationalist seats. Liam Kelly succeeded in capturing the Mid-Tyrone seat, whilst a colleague, T.B. Agnew, polled heavily in Mid-Derry. Kelly's imprisonment, in December, for making a seditious speech, provided his supporters with an emotive issue, and Healy's worst fears were realised when they launched a new republican party, Fianna Uladh, wedded to a policy of abstentionism and physical force. The whole episode had serious repercussions within the dispirited Nationalist parliamentary group, and the indiscipline reached a zenith during the debate on the Flags and Emblems Bill in February 1954. The emergence of Fianna Uladh precipitated a final breach in the fissiparous anti-partition movement in March 1954, when the A.P.L.'s Southern support organisation, the 'Anti-Partition Association', appeared to favour an abstentionist line. The Anti-Partition League had clearly spent its momentum, and as Fianna Uladh threatened to make inroads into the Nationalist vote in Fermanagh and Tyrone, Healy sought some *modus operandi* which would safeguard the Westminster seats. O'Neill's suggestion that the Nationalist representatives should be admitted to the Dail had produced a negative response from the Fianna Fail administration but, with the return of a Coalition Government in May 1954, the idea gained new currency in anti-partitionist circles. In July, the decision of the Dail to return Kelly, the imprisoned Mid-Tyrone militant, to the Seanad prompted Healy to make renewed representations to the Taoiseach, John A. Costello: '... The position has somewhat changed of late, since the elected representatives [of the Dail]... have elected to the Senate one who has not been following a purely constitutional course ... If the Dail takes no further step, it may well be assumed in the North that the physical force policy is the only one which meets with approval [in the South]...'

Ironically, however, Healy remained personally unenthusiastic about admission to the Dail and, as late as March 1955, could defend the utility of Parliament 'as a sounding-board for our grievances.' In the event, however, the Southern Government, released from the need to conciliate MacBride, shared De Valera's scruples about giving Dail seats to an unpredictable group, and the Nationalists were left to their own meagre resources. When the Westminster election came in May 1955, Sinn Fein decided to follow up Kelly's initiative, and were able to capitalise on the traditionally loose structures of the Nationalist conventions in Fermanagh- South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster to have their candidates selected. Healy publicly denounced the policies of physical force and abstentionism, while noting pessimistically that 'the young people are so dissatisfied with partition that they are prepared to try any policy by way of change. ...'

## **The Nationalist Party in 1955**

The British general election of 1955 was, by all accounts, a turning-point in nationalist politics, at least in so far as the Westminster Parliament was concerned. The endorsement of Sinn Fein candidates by the Nationalist conventions seemed to represent a vote of no confidence in the policy of rigid constitutionalism advocated by Healy, and enabled Sinn Fein to claim a mandate for the imminent IRA campaign of physical force (1956-1962). The pyrrhic nature of the Sinn Fein victory - the fact that their two MPs were eventually unseated as felons - did nothing to mitigate the impact of the blow on nationalist morale. It was in vain that Healy reminded his critics that '... intrusions and physical force only consolidate Unionist opinion against us, and result in injury to Catholics as a whole. ...' For the Nationalists, the real tragedy of the 1955 debacle was that, having lost their foothold in Westminster, they were never able to regain it, and their most important 'sounding board' went by default.

By 1955, the loosely structured Nationalist Party had come full circle: over a period of thirty years, it had hovered indecisively between the poles of attendance and abstention, and had failed abjectly to develop either a strong, durable party organisation, or a firm and enlightened leadership. The Anti-Partition League represented the nearest the party had come to either, and its collapse left it divided and leaderless. Healy, a consistent opponent of abstentionism, telescoped the nationalist dilemma: '... It seems an anomaly that whilst... [the abstentionists] refuse to recognise Stormont, where laws are made, they have no objection to paying rates and taxes, nor to accepting grants and subsidies which issue directly from legislation enacted in that assembly. ...' He went on to lay bare the inherent contradiction in the Nationalist position: '... If abstention is to become a policy, it should have some logical basis,... it should be abstention from public boards which administer Stormont's statutes and regulations, as well as a refusal to pay rates and taxes. If this policy of civil disobedience is not feasible ... (and I admit it is not), then abstention from Stormont is just an insincere gesture ...'

Clearly, the Nationalists were not prepared to risk a more militant policy of passive resistance, and their abstentionist stance could only have retained credibility had they been able to fall back upon another assembly, such as the Dail. But the refusal of the Southern parties to consider such an extreme course, together with their flagging support for the A.P.L. in the early fifties, brought home to the Nationalists a lesson, which they had learned in 1925 - that they should cease to rely on Dublin, and look to their own resources. But even these - limited as they must needs be - were perceptibly ebbing by 1955. The party's narrow nationalist policy made no appeal outside the traditional Nationalist constituencies, whilst their preoccupations with partition, to the almost complete exclusion of economic and social issues, had enabled anti-partitionist Labour candidates to capture the two Belfast seats.



## **Healy and the Ulster Folk Museum**

Healy retired from Stormont in 1965. Perhaps his most significant contribution to public life in his last years was as an advocate for and a foundation Board Member of the Ulster Folk Museum at Cultra, Co. Down. His interest in Irish folklore was not wholly unrelated to his nationalistic ideals, but it was sincere and profound and essentially a reflection of the fact that his native county of Donegal and his adopted county of Fermanagh are noted areas of folklife survival. It would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to think of anyone better fitted to represent west Ulster on the UFM Board; and it is a measure of the keen interest which he took in the Museum's development that despite his advanced years and the fact that he travelled further than any other Trustee to Board Meetings, his record of attendance was exemplary. Furthermore, just as the strength of his political convictions made him a formidable figure in parliamentary debates, so his love and knowledge of folklore expressed themselves in the forthright and tenacious way in which he participated in Board discussions. With his death, UFM, and the whole folklife study movement which it represents, lost one of its most distinguished and dedicated supporters.



## **Healy's political correspondence**

Healy's surviving political correspondence runs from 1924 to 1970.

The most important section of the early part of it, to c.1930, is a run of letters, circulars and memoranda, c.1927-1929. These relate to the border Nationalists' decision to enter the Northern Ireland Parliament in 1927, Healy's rapprochement with Joe Devlin in the interests of nationalist unity, and the establishment of the National League in May 1928. They are an essential source for an understanding of the apparent nationalist volte-face vis-a-vis the Dail. These letters and associated printed matter appear to have been preserved by Healy as a discrete unit, the integrity of which has not been disturbed, though they have been added to and chronologically arranged. They now provide a blow-by-blow account of the ebb and flow of nationalist politics and decision-making during these formative years.

These papers include an important correspondence (D2991/B/9) between Healy and such Nationalist MP's as Alex Donnelly, John McHugh, John Henry Collins, and T.J.S. Harbison, on the efficacy of attendance at the Northern Ireland Commons in face of the Unionist threat to abolish Proportional Representation in 1927 and of the Fianna Fail party's decision to enter the Dail. Thereafter, they trace the beginnings of a working relationship between Healy and Devlin, on the one hand, and an entente between the Nationalists and the, by now, 'slightly constitutional' Fianna Fail party on the other. The correspondence underlines the importance of Fr Eugene Coyle, a Co. Fermanagh parish priest and a member of the Fianna Fail Executive, as the Nationalists' intermediary in discussions with Fianna Fail representatives, Sean Lemass and Sean T. O'Kelly, in 1928, prior to the launching of the National League. Moreover, a lengthy missive from Eamon Donnelly, Republican MP for Co. Armagh, is a reminder of the residual Republican-cum-Fianna Fail antipathy towards Joe Devlin.

With this section of the correspondence are the minutes of the National League branch in Enniskillen and details of Fermanagh electoral registration, c.1927-1938.



## **The period c.1930-c.1955**

The papers for the period c.1930-c.1955 include further material shedding new light on the formation and workings of Catholic Registration Associations - the essential machinery of the Nationalist Party in Fermanagh and Tyrone.

Much of the correspondence relates retrospectively to earlier political events and to Healy's earlier political career: in particular, a letter of 1938 includes the minutes of an important meeting between representatives of the Dail Cabinet and Nationalist spokesmen (including Healy) in Dublin on 7 December 1921, at which the Republican Cabinet, in the wake of the Treaty, enjoined the Northern Nationalists to a policy of 'non-recognition' of the infant Northern Ireland state.

There are letters from such Northern Nationalist politicians as Alex Donnelly, Joseph Stewart, Patrick Maxwell, Patrick O'Neill and Anthony Mulvey. But a major component of this section of the political correspondence is letters from Eamon Donnelly, c.1936-1940, the Armagh-born Fianna Fail T.D., who acted as the Northern Nationalists' representative in the Southern government party. The letters chart Donnelly's relentless efforts to commit De Valera to a more militant anti-partitionist line, c.1932-1938, his scheme to have Nationalist MPs admitted to the Dail, and finally his disillusionment with De Valera and Fianna Fail.

The papers for 1939 include a document detailing 'heads' for discussion by a deputation to De Valera regarding the wartime emergency and its implications for the Nationalists, whilst Patrick Maxwell's letters for this period reveal the Nationalists' preoccupation with the possible threat of conscription. Much correspondence, c.1938-1940, documents the rise and fall of the Anti-Partition League in Great Britain, and Healy's efforts to launch a similar movement in the United States.

Letters throwing light on Healy's internment in Brixton, c.1941-1942, include personal letters from him to his family during his incarceration. There are also later letters from his fellow internees, amongst them Sir Frederick Bowman, Sir Oswald Mosley, Gerald Hamilton, and Admiral Sir Barry Domville, for the period c.1950-1965.

One important letter, dated January 1948, contains a proposal from Sean MacBride, T.D. (Coalition Minister for External Affairs, 1948-1951), to introduce a 'right of audience' for Nationalist MPs in the Dail. Healy's reaction was unenthusiastic. The correspondence for the 1950s includes material on the Westminster general elections of 1950, 1951, and 1955, and on the perennial problem of abstentionism.



## **The period c.1955-1970**

A disproportionately large volume of letters dates from the period c.1955-1970, with the emphasis falling heavily on the years 1960-1965.

These include a great deal of routine 'constituency correspondence', but are not lacking in political exchanges between Healy and such key Nationalist politicians as Eddie McAteer, Senator Patrick MacGill and Senator J.G. Lennon, as well as isolated instances of correspondence with Civil Rights activists like Betty Sinclair, Dr Conn and Mrs P. McCloskey of the 'Campaign for Social Justice', and with various Irish-American activists c.1964-1969 - providing insights into the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Campaign, and the violent events of 1969.

Amongst the letters between Healy and various Nationalist personalities during the period c.1955-1970, perhaps the most illuminating are the letters from Senator Patrick MacGill, dating mainly from the 1960s. These throw light upon the tensions within the loose Nationalist grouping in the early 1960s, Eddie McAteer's fears of the progressive ginger-group, 'The National Political Front', taking over the party in June 1964, MacGill's regret at Healy's retirement in 1965, and his comments on the 1965 Northern Ireland general election. With Healy's retirement, MacGill's letters acquire a new significance, as MacGill assumes the role of a confidential political pundit, reporting on the local Nationalist political scene, the future of Capt. Terence O'Neill, the 1966 Westminster election, the Civil Rights Movement, and the events of 1969. As secretary to the Nationalist party, MacGill declares himself 'appalled' by the results of the 1969 'Crossroads' election, and regards the happenings of August 1969 as 'the outcome of Stormont's years of neglect'.

Equally seminal are a series of letters from McAteer to Healy between c.1955 and 1965. These include one of 1964 acknowledging the need for greater Nationalist unity, and attacking 'the traditional quinquennial get-together' as outmoded. Other letters discuss the National Political Front's attempts to impose unity on the party, the first Nationalist Party Conference in May 1966, and the need for the party to contest the Westminster seats if they are to retain credibility. That the revitalisation of the Nationalist Party presented no easy task is stressed by a letter from McAteer on the setting up of a new party organisation in 1965: '... The name, of course, is a stumbling block ...'.

The apparent ferment of Nationalist activity in the early 1960s is emphasised by a correspondence between Healy and the Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, in 1962 regarding the possibility that the Republic might raise Nationalist grievances at the United Nations. Again, correspondence of 1965 shows Healy lobbying British Labour MPs on the issue of alleged discrimination in Northern Ireland. Other papers relate to the Labour Lawyers' Inquiry of 1967.

All this high-level political correspondence has its corollary at a local level in distinct groups of letters from two minor Nationalist officials, Frank Traynor (of Ederney, Co. Fermanagh), and James Slevin (of Castlecaulfield, Co. Tyrone). Traynor's letters, covering the years c.1956-1966, touch on the demise of the Anti-Partition League (in

a letter of 1958), and the thorny issue of abstentionism, whilst Slevin's provide insights into grass-roots Nationalist expectations of the 'Orange and Green Talks' of 1962. The impact of the intellectual-orientated 'National Unity' movement in 1961-1962, with its call for a softening of nationalist attitudes towards the Stormont Government, is covered in a series of letters. This has its continuum in January 1965 in a correspondence between Healy and leading Fermanagh Nationalists on the question of whether the Nationalist Party should accept the role of official opposition in the Northern Ireland Parliament. These letters are important in that they underline the long-standing anti-partitionist tendency to look to Dublin for a lead. Moreover, a series of letters, dated c.1960-1965, demonstrate Healy's sturdy defence of his party against the strictures of such an able critic as Professor James Scott, and his use of the pseudonym, 'James McGuire', when responding to press criticism.

Other Anti-Partition League material includes letters on the development and activities of the A.P.L. in Northern Ireland, Britain and America, c.1955-1961, including c.12 letters from Tadhg Feehan, secretary of the movement in Great Britain. (Correspondence of the early '60s relates to the futile attempts by activists in bodies such as the United Ireland Organisation to revive the flagging A.P.L. movement in Britain.)

Other significant runs of political correspondence are: letters, c.1950-1965, from the effervescent Canon Tom Maguire of Newtownbutler; material relating to the ongoing partition debate between Healy and the former Free State Cabinet Minister, Ernest Blythe, c.1938-1962; and a weighty correspondence between Healy and C. Desmond Greaves, editor of *The Irish Democrat*, London, c.1955-1966, on politics in general.





## **American connections**

In addition to the already-mentioned correspondence with Irish-American Civil Rights activists, the American dimension to Irish nationalism is represented by letters from Judge Matthew J. Troy of New York, and by a correspondence between Healy and Rev. Dr LodgeCurran, National Chaplain to the Ancient Order of Hibernians in the United States. Troy's letters (c.1950-1969) reflect Troy's strongly self-opinionated views on Irish and American affairs - his vitriolic anti-Communism and opposition to American moves towards detente with Moscow; his cynicism about John F. Kennedy's visit to Ireland; his growing criticism of the Irish Government for alleged inaction on the unity issue during the late 1960s; and his impressions of the disturbances of 1968-1969. Numerous letters from divers Irish-American correspondents include some correspondence between Healy and James C. Heaney, Chairman of the American Congress for Irish Freedom, on the traumatic events of 1968-1969.





## **Politico-literary correspondence**

Finally, there is correspondence, some of it lengthy, with some significant politico-literary figures, including Sir Shane Leslie, 3rd Bt, the Co. Monaghan litterateur and cousin of Churchill (c.1954-1965), and H. Montgomery Hyde, Unionist MP, historian, and biographer.



## **Literary material**

The literary material - other than correspondence – comprises hundreds of historical articles, broadcast-scripts, reviews, plays (published and unpublished), and poems written by Healy, together with associated cuttings, and copies of newspapers and magazines (mainly dated late 1960s) containing articles by Healy.

Foremost among this material is a copy of *The Lane and the Thrushes*, published in 1905. Amongst the literary manuscripts are important autobiographical reminiscences pertaining to Healy's early years, to his internment on board the 'Argenta' in 1922-1924, to dramatic events in the Northern Ireland Parliament, and to important figures with whom he was associated. There are also a number of poems by Healy, and the typescripts of four short plays.



## **Press-cuttings and scrap-books**

The press-cuttings and scrap-books straddle the literary and political divide. There is one box of local newspapers, c.1940-1955, retained by Healy and relating to elections and the Anti-Partition League. Six scrap-books cover the period c.1930-1960, and are of both political and literary import.



## **Miscellaneous letters and papers**

The largest section of these is a 'general correspondence', including a voluminous correspondence from constituents (which is personal rather than political in content) and correspondence with all manner of (mainly obscure) individuals about literary and historical subjects, all arranged in strict chronological order in six boxes, as follows: 1900-1939; 1940-1949; 1950-1955; 1956-1959; 1960-1963; and 1964-1969.

In addition, there are personal diaries of Healy, 1940-1965, and photographs of him, c.1960s.



## Gaps in the archive

It is clear that there exist significant gaps and deficiencies. This is particularly true of the correspondence for the 1930s and 1940s. It is evident from F.J. Whitford's M.A. thesis, 'Joseph Devlin' (London, 1959), that a series of letters from Joseph Devlin, c.1929-1933, is still to be accounted for. Moreover, the papers are particularly thin for the period c.1929-1933, covering the Nationalists' most full-blooded spell of parliamentary opposition, and their dramatic withdrawal from the Northern Ireland Parliament in 1932. Again, there is a marked lack of documentation regarding the political sequel to the 1935 riots in Belfast and the Anglo-Irish negotiations in 1938, although such material as does occur suggests that a much fuller record may exist or may have existed.

The papers for the 1940s are rather disappointing, containing little more than a hint of the major issues – particularly conscription – which exercised the nationalist mind during the war years. In particular, the marked hiatus during c.1944-1946 is surprising in view of the fact that Healy played a key role in the launching of the pan-Nationalist Anti-Partition League at this juncture, and must have retained pertinent correspondence and memoranda (such material, by contrast, is well represented in the papers of Peter Murney, MP, and Malachy Conlon, MP). In this connection, it should be noted that the Nationalist leader, James McSparran, QC, is markedly underrepresented in the correspondence, particularly during the period c.1945-1958.

Moreover, whilst the archive contains a small but significant correspondence between Healy and De Valera, c.1935-1960, it seems reasonable to conjecture that certain important parts of this correspondence are missing. These might throw considerable light on the relationship between Fianna Fail and the Northern Nationalists during the period c.1932-1960 – giving the existing letters from Eamon Donnelly during the '30s a new perspective – and might reveal important contacts between the two parties during the war and post-war years.

Finally, the archive is signally bereft of any significant political correspondence - if we exclude a small file of papers regarding the Boundary Commission, c.1924-1925 – before c.1927. Whilst this tendency might be justified in terms of the Nationalists' decision to abstain from active politics until 1927, the documented involvement of Healy in deputations to the Dail Cabinet as early as 1921, and his membership of Michael Collins's special 'Advisory Committee on the North-East' in 1922 (as attested in Dail Eireann files in the National Archives, Dublin), suggest the sometime existence of papers relating to the period between the Treaty and the Boundary Commission. Such papers would be of enormous value in reconstructing the flux of anti-partitionist politics during these formative years.



## **Access arrangements**

When the archive was first deposited in PRONI, it was agreed that sensitive material would be closed for 75 years from the date of the document. This meant in effect the closure of all the correspondence in sections A and B of the list. A detailed set of extracts from the 1974 deposit only was prepared and placed in the Public Search Room, prefaced by a note stating that, while this calendar was available to the public, the original documents were closed for 75 years. Since 1995, the correspondence sections of the archive have been given what is called 'Permit Class' status. This means that the papers are made available to any researcher who signs an undertaking not to publish or communicate to another person any information which could distress any living individual. (The text of the detailed extracts from the 1974 deposit is still on the Search Room shelves, although it is liable not only to the disadvantage that it excludes everything deposited thereafter but also that it cites no reference numbers.) Requests for permission to publish passages from the papers continue to be referred to the Healy family.

