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“Reporting Revolutions: What the papers said”

***“Reporting 1916 in the North of Ireland: a study in the political equivalent of the  
Doppler effect.”***

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In physics, the Doppler effect describes how the properties of waves - as in sound waves - change in frequency as an observer, or listener, moves in relation to their source. This study of the modalities of reporting and commenting on the events of 1916 in Dublin across both the Unionist and Nationalist newspapers in what was to become Northern Ireland after 1922 offers new perspectives on the way in which both physical distance and embedded political positions will influence the selection and the presentation of news.

While it demonstrates – as might have been expected - that intra-communitarian and sectarian tensions are echoed in the reports concerned, it also reveals sometimes unexpected distortions and adds several layers of complexity to the study of both Unionist and Nationalist media in this period. It also indicates the weakness of the traditional Orange/Green dichotomy as an explanatory paradigm of the complexity of Northern Ireland at this time. The ways in which 1916 in Dublin is reported in Northern Ireland is, in this sense, therefore also a finely-tuned instrument for analysing the vagaries of the relationships there between Nationalists and Unionists, and within Nationalism, on the eve of one of the most profound shifts in Irish political history.

Finally, it is a unique guide to how not only journalists but public figures, often with a confidence that was to be belied by subsequent events, interpreted or misinterpreted the Rising and its potential consequences. It is worth remembering, especially by historians, that judging public figures by the effects of their actions sometimes ignores a possibly vital factor: these public figures – unlike the historians who comment on them - were not in a position to know what happened next. This is

why the journalistic evidence of their mind-sets, properly understood, can and indeed should form a vital part of the interpretative framework.

For the purposes of this study, I used those newspapers circulating in Northern Ireland which are available in the NLI, either in hard copy or on microfilm, for the period covering the Rising, generally beginning a week before Easter and concluding within a week of the final executions. This comprised some eighteen newspapers. I had not originally included the Belfast dailies, because my intention had been to study only the regional papers, generally published only once a week although a handful published more frequently. However, a subsequent decision to include the Belfast daily papers as well was particularly fruitful and did not I feel, skew the study in any way.

The headline results of my research can be reported in brief as follows:

- Initial reports of what was happening in Dublin were severely constrained by censorship;
- Eye-witness reports in the first week were few and far between;
- Nationalist and Unionist papers were, to an unexpected degree, united on a single explanation for the cause of the insurrection: the alleged vacillation and incompetence of the British administration of Ireland in Dublin Castle, and especially that of the Chief Secretary, Augustine Birrell.
- They also shared, to an even greater degree, a tendency to blame James Larkin as a major figure behind the Rising and, in one case, as the instigator of the entire affair.
- They shared, too, a general editorial view that the rank and file of those involved in the Rising should be treated with comparative leniency;
- They differed sharply, however, in their views of the role of John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party, and their allocation of responsibility for what happened in Dublin. Unionist newspapers were more inclined to see Redmond and the IPP in much the same way as latter-day Unionists saw John Hume's SDLP and Sinn Fein at the time of the Hume-Adams talks; Nationalist papers displayed a strong, indeed vociferous loyalty to the IPP, combined with a belief in the inevitability of Home Rule, and a ferocious critique of all those involved in the Rising on the grounds that their actions aided and abetted the Unionists' campaign against it.

Before addressing these findings, however, it is also useful to view the contemporary media portrayal of the political and social situation in the six counties of Ulster that eventually became Northern Ireland. The impression of normalcy, of business as usual, is hard to avoid, even during the Rising itself. “Alec”, a columnist in the *Carrickfergus Advertiser and East Antrim Gazette*, found space to advise a lady who asked for advice on cosmetics that “most of the gilded ones frequenting the [Scotch] quarter on Sunday nights usually rub a little dust scraped off the kitchen bricks on their cheeks. Borrow a brick, if you haven’t got one handy.”<sup>1</sup> The Unionist Belfast Newsletter published a substantial, and warmly approbatory review of the Jesuit Fr. Stephen Brown’s “Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folklore.”<sup>2</sup> Some newspapers’ commercial operations were evidently unconstrained by geography: The Ulster Herald and Provincial Advertiser carried an advertisement for the Atlantic College in Cahirciveen in Co. Kerry ( offering wireless training and evidently linked to the cable station there). Even the ultra-Unionist Northern Whig found substantial space for the commemoration of 200 years work by the Christian Brothers. The Unionist Coleraine Chronicle and North of Ireland Advertiser was most substantially exercised, in the middle of the week in which Dublin had become a war-zone, by a local controversy about whether the Blue Pool, a popular local bathing spot, should revert to being a men-only facility following a year of experimentally making it available to both sexes.<sup>3</sup>

There was also considerable news coverage given to demands for the prohibition of the sale of alcohol.<sup>4</sup> There was substantial reporting, also, of a military demonstration given by the Third Royal Iniskillings in the grounds of St. Columb’s College, Derry, which was witnessed by an enthusiastic crowd,<sup>5</sup> and at which “the spectators were thrilled by a sham fight between Zulus and British soldiers”.<sup>6</sup> The unionist Ulster Gazette and Armagh Standard,<sup>7</sup> editorial tongue no doubt firmly in cheek, devoted substantial space to what it headlined as “Brother Hibernians at Law”, a row which arose following a dance in Keady, which was eventually settled

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<sup>1</sup> 19 May 1916.

<sup>2</sup> 24 April 1916.

<sup>3</sup> 6 May 1916.

<sup>4</sup> Belfast Newsletter, 25 April; 1 May; Banbridge Chronicle 22 April; Northern Whig, 25 April, 6<sup>th</sup> May; Lisburn Herald and Antrim and Down Advertiser, 29 April 1916; North Down Herald and County Down Independent, Incorporating Newtownards Independent, 28 April.

<sup>5</sup> Irish News, 25 April.

<sup>6</sup> Derry Journal, 24 April 1916.

<sup>7</sup> 22 April 1916.

following an intervention by the parish priest. The Unionist Belfast Evening Telegraph gave substantial space to the annual Belfast Gaelic Feis.<sup>8</sup> And the North Antrim Standard, Ballymoney, Portrush and Ballycastle Advertiser, and Ballymena Mail (a title whose length is probably a record, even for Northern Ireland) waxed lyrical about the retirement of the Rev. J.B. Armour, a Presbyterian clergyman from Ballymoney and a Home Ruler, who was later a much-quoted favourite of the editor of the Irish Times, Douglas Gageby.<sup>9</sup>

I could go on: but I must content myself with one final notice, from the Ballymena Advertiser and County Antrim Advertiser, which reported that "A number of young unmarried men of Clones have established a society called the 'Clones Bachelors' Club' ....to resist the imposition of a tax on bachelors; to provide good fellowship and brotherly love between all unmarried males, irrespective of age, creed or class; to train the members in the art of housekeeping, knitting, sewing, darning, and all other such domestic duties as may be necessary for the bachelor's comfort in his happy home; to discourage the prevailing habits of 'walking' and 'company-keeping'; to do away with the thankless practice of buying ice cream, chocolate, Christmas-boxes, or other dainties or articles for local ladies or bringing such ladies to pic-nics, picture hoses, on excursions, motor drives or cycle runs."<sup>10</sup>

There was, of course, substantial coverage of the European war; and the local manifestations of that war were most evident in the controversy about whether or not conscription should be extended to Ireland. Allied to this was quite an amount of commentary about a fiscal policy of the Asquith government which conferred certain tax benefits on the revenues of the GAA: in the Unionist papers generally, this was the subject of much adverse comment in the context of the debate about conscription. Allied to this was quite an amount of commentary about a policy of the Asquith government which, at Redmond's urging, had conferred certain tax benefits on the income of the GAA: in the Unionist papers generally, this was the subject of much adverse comment in the context of the debate about conscription.<sup>11</sup>

The Derry People and Donegal News reported just before the Rising that although there had been rumours of Dublin troubles reported earlier in the Irish News, "We are convinced that the versions in circulation have been greatly exaggerated and

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<sup>8</sup> 26 April 1916.

<sup>9</sup> 27 April 1916.

<sup>10</sup> 21 April 1916.

<sup>11</sup> Northern Whig, 5 May 1916.

that many of the rumours emanated from fertile imaginations.”<sup>12</sup> In most of the papers studied, initial reports were perforce initially limited to the official statements issued by the political and military authorities under censorship. At the same time, as the crisis developed, some newspapers began to circumnavigate the censorship by reprinting material from the London newspapers. The reports in the London Times from their Irish correspondent, who of course was John Healy, editor of the Irish Times, were particularly favoured by Unionist papers, as was the Daily Mail.<sup>13</sup> Nationalist papers, for their part, preferred the liberal-leaning Manchester Guardian<sup>14</sup> or the Daily News, which among other reports highlighted George Bernard Shaw’s public statement that:

"It is absolutely impossible to slaughter a man in this position without making him a hero and even a martyr, even though the day before the rising he may have been only a minor poet. Perhaps I had better add that I am not a Sinn feiner...but I remain an Irishman, and am bound to contradict any implication that I can regard as a traitor any Irishman taken in a fight for Irish independence against the British government which was a fair fight in everything except the enormous odds my countrymen had to face."<sup>15</sup>

This mix-and-match approach by some of the papers studied carried its own dangers. Although most of the borrowings concerned were adequately attributed to whatever newspaper they had been taken from, not all were so scrupulous. The Impartial Reporter and Farmers’ Journal of Enniskillen, for example, which was the first Northern paper to get a reporter actually into Dublin, carried extensive eye-witness reports from the then owner and editor’s son, William Egbert Trimble. These included what seemed, from the lack of attribution, to be an account by Trimble of a visit to Cork, where it was reported he met the leader of the Cork rebels, who was described as “unarmed, save for a slim volume of Sophocles he carried in his white, ladylike fingers.”<sup>16</sup> However, a slightly later report in the Irish News disclosed that the report in question had not been written by Trimble but had been lifted by him wholesale, and

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<sup>12</sup> 29 April 1916

<sup>13</sup> Portadown News, 6 May 1916; Belfast Evening Telegraph, 10 May 1916.

<sup>14</sup> Derry Journal, 10 May 1916.

<sup>15</sup> Derry Journal, 12 May 1916. This practice by Irish newspapers, particularly in what became the Free State, was particularly troublesome to the censorship authorities during the War of Independence.

<sup>16</sup> Impartial Reporter and Farmers Journal, 4 May 1916.

replete with errors (particularly about the role of the bishop of Cork), from an earlier report by Harold Ashton of the Daily Mail on 30 April.<sup>17</sup>

A rare unanimity was exhibited in the attitude of the newspapers, and therefore no doubt of the political leaders whose views they by and large mirrored, to Dublin Castle. The Unionist Northern Whig attacked the “cynical neglect of repeated warnings will be accepted as adequate excuses for a policy of inaction that in the light of all we know today can be described only as a crime against the national interests.”<sup>18</sup> The Unionist Down Recorder endorsed the opinion that the revolt was “a natural result of official feebleness, in allowing the Sinn Feiners to arm, parade, drill, and even to practise street fighting unmolested by Mr Birrell.”<sup>19</sup> The Belfast Evening Telegraph observed that “It was a street corner tip in Dublin for at least a week that there would be history made at Easter”.<sup>20</sup> The same paper even carried a cartoon of Birrell wielding a crozier ineffectually against a serpent labelled Sinn Fein and saying: I’m afraid I’m not so smart as my brother saint in sealing with this kind of thing. I’m apt to take reptiles too lightly.<sup>21</sup> The Nationalist Derry Journal, somewhat tardily, endorsed the view, “reflected with varying degrees of emphasis in the leading organs of public opinion . . . that the time has arrived when the Dublin Castle system of rule in Ireland must be swept away – must be relegated to the scrap-heap.” It also welcomed evidence in the Belfast Newsletter that “some influential Unionists’ are breaking away from past evil traditions and are presumably engaged in a sincere effort to exorcise baleful influences and to make political authority in Ireland stable by resting on the broad basis of popular responsibility.”<sup>22</sup> The Derry People and Donegal News remarked editorially: “What a change to find the Ulster Tory, who viewed the machinations of that mysterious institution [i.e. Dublin Castle] with sacramental awe, agreeing with the Nationalists that a true bill has been found against it!”<sup>23</sup>

There was little agreement, however, on what could or should replace the Dublin castle administration. For the Unionist papers, the answer was a tougher – i.e.

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<sup>17</sup> Irish News, 1 May 1916.

<sup>18</sup> 26 April 1916.

<sup>19</sup> 29 April 1916

<sup>20</sup> 27 April 1916.

<sup>21</sup> 5 May 1916.

<sup>22</sup> 17 May 1916.

<sup>23</sup> 27 May 1916.

a Tory – British administration and Dublin appointees that reflected their view. For the nationalist papers it was some form of Home Rule. Neither was to be satisfied.

There was greater unanimity, however, on the question of Larkin –indeed, the papers on either side of the divide seemed almost to vie with each other to find words of condemnation. The Unionist Lurgan Mail said that the “notorious” James Larkin was “apparently directly responsible for the outbreak;”<sup>24</sup> The nationalist Derry People and Donegal News was equally censorious: “Liberty Hall became notorious during the larkinite disturbances some years ago. It was, we believe, formerly a Hotel, and was acquired by Mr James Larkin to be used as a centre for the propagation of his views and principles:”<sup>25</sup> in the same issue, it helpfully informed readers that Larkin was “reported to be in an insane asylum on White Plains in America.” Another nationalist newspaper, which evidently circulated widely in the border area, and which has been included for this reason, reported the administrator of Dundalk, the Rev. James McKeone, who told his congregation that he preferred to “listen to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the teachings of peace than to listen to the insane vapourings of a coterie of intellectuals that run an organisation that once stood for something: I refer to listen to the teachings of Jesus Christ - than to listen to the proselytising Countess Markievicz, or the saints of Liberty Hall.”<sup>26</sup>

An editorial in the Derry Journal on this topic bared its philippical as well as political teeth in a passage which suggested that the priestly authority of someone in St. Columb’s College might have been enlisted in its composition. Seizing on an statement by the rebels to the effect that Liberty Hall was the official headquarters of the Sinn Fein force, it continued:

"These phrase tend to show that the originators of the insurgent outbreak were not really the Sinn Feiners as a compact force in themselves, but rather the very considerable body of men who frequented Liberty hall and who are known in Dublin as the "Citizen Army." These are followers of the notorious Syndicalist Larkin. I is to be feared that many of these men have not had sufficient education to gauge correctly the dire consequences that must ensue from a hot-headed endeavour to carry into effect the principles underlying the teaching of Larkin and desperate characters of his type....disciples of men like Proudhon and Bakunine" ... Teaching of that type ladled out hot and strong is well calculated to foster in the minds of an impetuous and reckless crowd an

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<sup>24</sup> 6 May 1916.

<sup>25</sup> 29 April 1916.

<sup>26</sup> 13 May 1916.

utter abhorrence not only for the payment of taxes, tithes and stipends, but also for all regularly constituted government."<sup>27</sup>

There was also, unusually, at least one Unionist who found that Connolly, normally described as the doctrinaire lieutenant of Larkin (the Impartial Reporter described him as “the worst of the whole gang”<sup>28</sup>, was possibly in some respects a normal human being. The columnist “Alec” in the Carrickfergus Advertiser and East Antrim Gazette, had additional evidence to offer:

I heard [Connolly who was executed last Friday] address open-air meetings on various occasions, and must admit he was a ready and fluent speaker – in bearing and words totally unlike a man which anyone could imagine would embark on a wild, hare-brained revolutionary scheme. If I am not mistaken, he paid a visit to Carrick at one time for the purpose of inducing the quarry labourers to join the, at the time, newly formed Irish Transport Workers Union. During that visit, I believe, he was also desirous of attracting the salt workers of the district to the Society, but he met with little encouragement. Larkinism had to go further afield than Carrick to work havoc and red ruin.<sup>29</sup>

Connolly’s Clones origins were widely commented on; but one rumour credited him with being a “Belfast Orangeman”!<sup>30</sup> In the same context, many papers, of both persuasions, carried min-biographies of the signatories of the Proclamation, which all seem to have originated from the same or similar sources, and were, indeed, rarely abusive, with the exception of the unionist Fermanagh Times, which described Clarke as “an old hand at this kind of game”, and Patrick Pearse, who according to the Armagh Guardian “has not previously been heard of”<sup>31</sup> was also described as “a nominal barrister, a Gaelic enthusiast, and a combination of fanatic and fool.”<sup>32</sup> But even this paper was less severe about some of the others: Thomas McDonagh was a “writer and poet”; Plunkett “the son of Count Plunkett, a well-known gentleman of great polish and attainments, with whom many friends, Unionist and Nationalist, will greatly sympathise.”<sup>33</sup>

Even less to be expected than kind words about any of the revolutionaries in the Unionist press was the fact that quite a number of them published the full text of the proclamation, in sharp contrast to the nationalist papers. Only one nationalist paper published the proclamation:<sup>34</sup> nine unionist papers did so.<sup>35</sup> Equally interesting was the fact that the Unionist newspapers which did publish the Proclamation generally did so with little or nothing by way of commentary, although the Impartial Reporter’s editor, the redoubtable Copeland Trimble, could not resist the observation that “it reminds one of the three tailors of Tooley-street pretending to speak in the name of

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<sup>27</sup> 28 April 1916.

<sup>28</sup> 4 May 1916.

<sup>29</sup> 19 May 1916.

<sup>30</sup> In a Daily Mail report from Dublin, reprinted by the Unionist Fermanagh Times, 4 May 1916.

<sup>31</sup> 5 May 1916.

<sup>32</sup> 11 May 1916.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Derry Journal, 28 April 1916.

<sup>35</sup> Belfast Newsletter (1 May), Fermanagh Times (4 May), The Impartial Reporter and Farmers Journal (4 May), Lurgan Mail (6 May), Portadown News (6 May), Ulster Gazette and Armagh Standard (6 May), Lisburn Journal (6 May), and the Northern Constitution (6 May).



‘the people of England.’”<sup>36</sup> The Northern Whig recorded the fact that copies of the proclamation were soon available in Belfast at a price of two pounds each – a bargain, by the standards of 2015.<sup>37</sup>

It is evident that the dispute about 1916 and its relevance for Home Rule was being carried on vigorously in newspapers on both sides of Irish Sea. The Unionist newspapers in the north of Ireland were not slow to criticize what they described as radical newspapers across the channel that “with brazen effrontery have argued that the present is a favourable opportunity for an experiment in Home Rule”<sup>38</sup> The Liberal Daily Chronicle was evidently one of their preferred targets in this regard: and that paper would receive the unflinching endorsement of the nationalist *Fritntier entinel* and *Down, Armagh and Louth Advertiser*, for its editorial view that the Ulster Volunteers “set a deplorable example of open lawlessness and defiance of the Cown in the months befoire the war”, and that “Mr Redmond and the Irish Natioalist Party - ...and the Southern Unionists have been alone in their respect for the law, with the armed Ulstermen on one side of them and the armed Sinn Feiners multiplying on the other.”<sup>39</sup> Virtually the only non-Nationalist paper to take this line – and virtually the only paper not associated directly with either side of the divide, was the *Ulster Guardian*, whose masthead proclaimed that it was the organ of the Liberal Party in Ireland, and that it was published in Belfast by Trade Union Labour. It published a column by R.J. Kelly QC which argued trenchantly that the men of the Dublin Rising were “foolhardy fanatics ...consciously or unconsciously playing the Unionist game and doing more to discredit , defeat and damage Home Rule than can possibl ybe imagined.”<sup>40</sup> A week later it was declaring its conviction that “Mr John Redmond and the Irish people are no more responsible for the sedition and rebellion of Dublin Sinn Feiners than General Botha and the lora y Boers were responsible for the actions of de Wet and his band of irreconcilables.”<sup>41</sup>

The *Banbridge Chronicle*, like a number of other Unionist papers, preferred to quite clerical authority than to commit itself editorially. The Church of Ireland Dean of Dromore, it reported prominently, had expressed the opinion that “the Sinn Fein Rising in Dublin would definitely settle the Home Rule question”, and that Home rule “would mean that if we had an Irish Parliament and England was engaged in a war such as the present...Ireland would be actively supporting the enemy and receiving into her ports vessels belonging to hostile Powers.”<sup>42</sup>

The earlier formation of the Ulster Volunteers, and the Larne gun-running, does not figure as prominently in the nationalist press as might have been expected; but unionist voices were occasionally forced to dismiss the idea that there might ever have been any connection between Larne and Dublin. The Northern Whig condemned – without seeing the need to make any argument to support its opinion – that “the dastardly manner in which a Cross-Channel Home Rule Journal seeks to connect loyal Ulster with this murderous and traitorous rebellion, and attempts to ascribe it to what it calls the “deplorable example of the ulster Volunteers under Sir Edward Carson’s leadership.” Such an attempt, it declared “is in its way as disgraceful and

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<sup>36</sup> The Three Tailors of Tooley Street were, according to the British Prime Minister George Canning in 1827, individuals who presented a petition of grievances to Parliament claiming to represent “We, the people of England.”

<sup>37</sup> 8 May 1916.

<sup>38</sup> Portadown News, 20 May 1916.

<sup>39</sup> 29 April 1916.

<sup>40</sup> 22 April 1916.

<sup>41</sup> 29 April 1916.

<sup>42</sup> 29 April 1916.

criminal as the Dublin rebellion itself.”<sup>43</sup> The national independence of Ireland, it charged later, “is the avowed aim of all sections of the Nationalist Party. Where they differ is as to the means of gaining it.”<sup>44</sup>

Whatever about the Unionist condemnation of the Rising, generally associated with a strong sub-text about the disloyalty of the rebels’ appeals to – and, through Casement, connections with – the German enemy, the condemnation of it in the nationalist papers was so strong, and so uniform, that it is difficult to avoid the impression that it was, if not orchestrated, at least inspired by Joe Devlin and the Irish News. Phrases from the Irish News editorials are mirrored, sometimes word for word, in the editorials of the smaller nationalist papers. They concentrate on what they describe as the folly of trying to dislodge the elected nationalist leadership of the country: a sub-text accuses the rebels, probably correctly, of trying to inflame Irish-American opinion to an extent that would help to keep America out of the war.<sup>45</sup> The same paper published an interview with a Col. Donegan, a Cork solicitor and leader in the Irish National Volunteers in Cork: “We Irish do not regard this outbreak as a nationalist demonstration. We know the men who made it, and we know them for class agitators and revolutionaries. Here in Cork we have bitter experience of Larkin and Larkinism, Even the working classes here have nothing but distrust and contempt for his methods. It is not Sinn Fein that has caused this folly or even consented to it.

Just as interesting is the hostility displayed by the Irish News in particular against the Irish Independent. “The hand of the Independent”, it editorialized, “was on the handle of every pickaxe wielded against the foundations”. The foundations of the national movement had been undermined, it argued, and it quoted with evidently sombre satisfaction, the verdict of the Freeman’s Journal that “Mr William Murphy’s bogey-makers, who invented that terror, may now be proud of the manner in which they eased the task of the destroyers.” It was equally caustic about the Irish Times.”There is not a decent man in the country who will not shudder in repulsion at the spectacle of that infamous incarnation of hypocrisy, the Irish Times, sitting on its uninjured perch in Westmoreland Street, Dublin, and shrieking for blood, and more blood, like a monstrous combination of witch and vampire.”<sup>46</sup> One notable absentee from the media commentary in the Nationalist press was the Freeman’s Journal, an absence undoubtedly explicable by the close relationship between the Freeman and the Irish Parliamentary Party.

Redmond, who was in New York, immediately made no secret of his view that he considered the Rising an “attempted deadly blow at Home Rule...made more wicked by the fact that Germany plotted it, Germany organized it, Germany paid for it.”<sup>47</sup> Even the Unionist Banbridge Chronicle reassured its readers that “any grievances that still remain can all be removed by supporting Mr Redmond and his loyal and patriotic parliamentary colleagues, ” and prominently reported one of a number of Catholic priests in the North who also denounced the Rising.<sup>48</sup> The Nationalist Frontier Sentinel and Down Armagh and Louth Advertiser declared that 99 per cent of the Irish people endorsed Redmond’s attitude, and that Ireland was “not now as in the days of Gavan Duffy a corpse on the dissecting table, but proudly erect and assured of victory.” Even the Unionist Impartial Reporter and Farmers Journal

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<sup>43</sup> 29 April 1916.

<sup>44</sup> 1 May 1916.

<sup>45</sup> Irish News, 1 May 1916.

<sup>46</sup> 6 May 1916.

<sup>47</sup> Ulster Gazette and Armagh Standard, 6 May 1916.

<sup>48</sup> 3 May 1916.

had kind words for Redmond when it reported that "on Monday last Dublin women had no language too vile with which to execrate Mr John Redmond, who had never harmed them, and who has led the blameless private life of an Irish gentleman."<sup>49</sup>

This study of the Northern Ireland papers at the time of the Rising offers, I would suggest, convincing evidence that the mindset of both Nationalists and Unionists at this time was dominated to such a considerable extent by the drama of the Rising that its significance was misunderstood by both. Unionists and nationalists alike were – with surprisingly few exceptions – slow to draw the connection between the foundation of Carson's Ulster Volunteers and that of MacNeill's Irish Volunteers: even at this remove, it can be confidently stated that for a week is a long time in politics, three years can seem like an eternity.

Unionists were not to know that the Rising was less the natural extension of Irish nationalism (as their newspapers charged) but, as Fearghal McGarry has pointed out, more a desperate attempt by a minority of a minority to fan the dying embers of Fenianism at a time when Redmond and his supporters held most of the political high ground.<sup>50</sup> Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party's primary misjudgment – based at least in part in the immediate rejection by nationalist Ireland and its newspapers of the Rising itself – was to continue their support for the participation of Irishmen in the British Army during World War 1. This, instead of being the guarantor of Home Rule, was to be brushed aside as irrelevant by a British government which was to fail, yet again, to solve an Irish problem which had been turned inside out by Carson so that it became, essentially, a British problem. It is tempting to believe, also, that the support of the Nationalist Newspapers in the north for Redmond and the IPP, and their unwillingness to address the political problem posed by Carson and the Ulster Volunteers, was born of their well-founded conviction that they had most to lose from any failure of the Home Rule policy. Nationalist newspapers were not to know that their faith in the Parliamentary party – a faith which, in the North, was reflected in the fact that five of the six IPP seats that remained after the political bloodbath of the 1918 election were in that corner of the island – was to be trumped by the geopolitics of the archipelago. And even the men and women of the Rising, although they may have been prophetic to a degree in their anticipation of the political effects of their doomed rebellion, could hardly have anticipated the subsequent political effect of the British authorities' scorched earth tactics of repression, born of their experience of the European War, or of the doomed attempt to introduce conscription in Ireland even as the war ended.

Seen in this context the Rising, and the contemporary newspaper coverage of it, can probably best be seen, and interpreted, not as a nodal event in itself, but as a staging post – albeit a highly significant one – in a historical continuum that began in 1913 (if not even earlier) and during which few if any of the participants, including the newspapers, had the faintest idea of what might happen next.

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<sup>49</sup> 4 May 1916.

<sup>50</sup> Fearghal McGarry, "History and Irish Republicanism: between Myth and History", pp. 46-54 in *Towards Commemoration: Ireland in War and Revolution 1912-1923*, John Horne and Edward Madigan (eds.), Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 2013.

## **Appendix**

*Newspapers studied as part of this essay include:*

Derry People and Donegal News

Portadown News

Carrickfergus Advertiser and East Antrim Gazette

Belfast Newsletter

Irish News

Ulster Gazette and Armagh Standard

Banbridge Chronicle

Northern Whig

Frontier Sentinel and Down Armagh and Louth Advertiser

The Ulster Guardian (Liberal Unionist)

The Down Recorder

Coleraine Chronicle and North of Ireland Advertiser

The Northern Constitution

The Fermanagh Times

The Fermanagh Herald

North Antrim Standard, Ballymoney, Portrush and Ballycastle Advertiser, and

Ballymena Mail

Ballymena Observer and County Antrim Advertiser

The Ulster Gazette and Armagh Standard

The Lisburn Herald and Antrim and Down Advertiser

Dundalk Examiner and Louth Advertiser (Newry)

Derry Journal (tri-weekly) (Nationalist)

Derry Standard (tri-weekly) (Unionist)

North own Herald and County Down Independent, incorporating Newtownards

Independent (Unionist)

Newtownards Spectator and Donaghadee Review (Unionist)

Impartial Reporter and Farmers' Journal

Ulster Herald and Provincial Advertiser (Nationalist)

The Lurgan Mail (Unionist)

The Armagh Gardian (Unionist)