

Sport in a Time  
of Revolution:  
Sinn Féin and the Hunt,  
Ireland, 1919

INTRODUCTION

ON MARCH 5, 1919, twenty-five members of the Muskerry Foxhounds from east Cork rode out. The Muskerry's master, Jerry Rohan, was not present. For several weeks he had sought a compromise that would see local Sinn Féin activists end their campaign to stop fox-hunting, but by early March he had conceded defeat, leading the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) inspector for the area to report that the Muskerry had abandoned their sport for the year. Master or no master, however, twenty-five defiant members set off that morning and, according to the correspondent of the *Freeman's Journal*, at first "all went merrily" and there "was abundant promise of good day's sport." Early on, two men on foot attempted to persuade the hunters to stop, but after a brief conversation the spoilsports were ignored and the incident was momentarily forgotten when a fox appeared, offering the opportunity of a chase. When that fortunate animal eluded them, the hunters moved on to the townland of Ballyshoneen. There the unusual action began. As the hunters prepared to rouse a new quarry they heard the sound of whistles that signaled the arrival of fifty to sixty Sinn Féin supporters. This group adopted a vigorously persuasive approach. Wielding hurleys and sticks, they immediately set upon the hounds and horses. When a Catholic clergyman, who was among the hunting party, demanded that the attackers desist, he was, in the words of the *Freeman's* prolix euphemism, "answered by an opprobrious sally of unseemly names and epithets." Hurleys, sticks, and stones were met with riding crops, but soon the hunt was in full retreat, withdrawing to the sound of a revolver shot and the

shouted question, “Now will you obey Sinn Féin and the orders of our Executive?”<sup>1</sup>

This incident was among the final confrontations in an almost forgotten campaign that saw radical nationalists wreak widespread disruption upon the activities of Ireland’s hunt enthusiasts during the early months of 1919.<sup>2</sup> The Irish revolution of 1912 to 1923 has been explored in ever more depth and using a variety of approaches in recent years, but as yet scholars have written comparatively little about the ways in which the profound instability of a period, punctuated with violence, affected the quotidian of Irish life. To what degree did the series of political crises, that together constitute this “revolution,” impact upon the day to day? To what extent, and in what ways, did commonplace practices become sites of contest? Irish sporting life is an obvious place to explore these questions because sport is one of the most significant markers of identity in modern societies. Fox-hunting is not a product of the Victorian sports revolution. It is not a mass participation sport today and it was not one in 1919, but it did have deep roots in rural Ireland, and local hunts impacted upon the lives of many who did not themselves ride to hounds. Indeed, it was in part this combination of exclusivity and pervasiveness that exposed the hunt to attack. This article will explore the origins of the campaign, the pattern of its progress, the motivations of those who participated, and the responses of those for whom it posed challenges or questions. In doing so it will throw into relief aspects of Ireland’s multilayered revolutionary conflict, and provide an alternative angle from which to view the contests around political identity, class identity, space, and legitimate authority that marked Irish provincial society at the beginning of 1919.

1. Monthly Reports, County Inspector for Cork East Riding and City, Feb. and Mar. 1919, CO904/108, The National Archive, London (TNA); *Freeman’s Journal*, 7 Mar.; *Irish Times*, 6 Mar. 1919.

2. Historians have not ignored the campaign entirely, but it is only in Peter Hart, *The IRA and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 1998[incomplete publisher information]), 144–45, and Caroline Corballis, *Hunting in County Kilkenny* (Kilkenny, 1999[incomplete publisher information]), 110–11, that it receives more than passing reference, and then not much more.

## ORIGINS OF A CAMPAIGN

The “stopping the hunt” campaign of 1919 originated in the exuberance that followed Sinn Féin’s triumph at the general election of December 1918. Increasingly confident, the party pressured the British government to release the large number of political prisoners incarcerated in England and Ireland. They focused, in particular, upon a group of ninety-six internees held at seven English prisons.<sup>3</sup> Many of these had been arrested in May 1918 when the authorities, intent upon a more aggressive policy in Ireland, justified their actions on the grounds of a “criminal conspiracy” among advanced nationalists to cooperate with Germany. The evidence for a “German plot” was very thin;<sup>4</sup> nonetheless, prominent national figures in Sinn Féin were among those interned. These included its four MPs (Eamon de Valera, George Noble Plunkett, William Cosgrave, and Joe McGuinness) and Arthur Griffith, who was then campaigning to become an MP at a by-election in East Cavan. Others embraced the majority of the national standing committee of the party, Sinn Féin propagandists, and regulars on party platforms, but also less well known yet key local figures. In the autumn of 1918 Sinn Féin selected thirty-four of these internees to contest the general election and twenty-eight were successful as the party won seventy-three seats.<sup>5</sup>

Having secured election victory, Sinn Féin organized public protests in support of the prisoners: first in Dublin on Sunday, December 29, 1918, and then across the country on the next Sunday, January 5, 1919.<sup>6</sup> The Inspector General of the RIC reported that more than one hundred meetings took place throughout the provinces and that at some, “strong language was used, and drastic measures were threatened.”<sup>7</sup> The *Irish Independent* recorded that at Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary, one speaker promised that if the day’s demonstrations

3. Sean McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848–1922: Theatres of War* (London, 2003[incomplete publisher information]), 623–38.

4. Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1999[incomplete publisher information]), 142–46.

5. William Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912–1921* (Oxford, 2013[incomplete publisher information]), forthcoming.

6. *Irish Independent*, 30 Dec. 1918; *Freeman’s Journal*, 6 Jan. 1919.

7. Report of Inspector General of the RIC, Jan. 1919, CO904/108, TNA.

did not secure the internees' release, then "the Irish people would adopt other and very effective means."<sup>8</sup>

A movement to employ other means had already begun. On January 2, at a meeting of Mullingar Rural District Council (RDC), County Westmeath, Christopher Lennon, a farmer and long-time councillor, proposed an addendum to a motion calling for the unconditional release of Irish political prisoners. He suggested that "the people of Westmeath and every other county in Ireland, take steps to stop all forms of sport," adding that he "was no spoil sport, but at the present time the people were in no mood" for it. The resolution that the council passed unanimously, and forwarded to every other council in the country, called for a halt "to all classes of sport" but "especially hunting," which Lennon identified with "'English' Irishmen."<sup>9</sup> Lennon's initiative received attention in the local and national press, and the proposal to stop the hunt gained wider attention when Sinn Féin's national standing committee took it up. That body first discussed the issue on January 9 when they were informed that the East Cork Comhairle Ceanntair (a constituency executive) had passed a motion calling for hunting to stop in their area. The standing committee resolved then to urge a ban throughout the country while "our men are in Jail," while on January 23 they discussed the matter again and went further, deciding to issue "an official order" to prohibit hunts "pending the release of the political prisoners."<sup>10</sup>

As Mike Cronin and David Mayall have pointed out, "sport is a vehicle, in many ways, for the construction of individual, group and national identities."<sup>11</sup> Modern political movements and states enthruse followers, shape citizens, achieve prestige, and communicate ideology through sport,<sup>12</sup> but they also pursue their ends by attack-

8. *Irish Independent*, 6 Jan. 1919.

9. *Westmeath Examiner*, 4 Jan.; *Kildare Observer*, 18 Jan. 1919.

10. Minutes of Sinn Féin Standing Committee, 9 and 23 Jan. 1919, Pos 3269, National Library of Ireland (NLI).

11. Mike Cronin and David Mayall, "Sport and Ethnicity: Some Introductory Remarks," *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration and Assimilation*, eds. Mike Cronin and David Mayall (London, 1998[incomplete publisher information]), 1-2.

12. André Gounot, "Sport or Political Organization: Structures and Characteristics of Red Sport International, 1921-1937," *Journal of Sport History* 28, no.1 (Spring 2001), 23-39; Simon Martin, *Sport Italia: The Italian Love Affair with Sport* (London, 2011[incomplete publisher information]), 53-95; Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*

ing the sporting activity of the enemy, often because the targeted sport gives that enemy pleasure or is a symbol of resented prestige or privilege.<sup>13</sup> During the period of the Irish revolution there is little doubt that an already politicized sporting scene became ever more so. The Gaelic Athletic Association's (GAA) extension of its existing politically motivated bans<sup>14</sup> and crowd violence when Linfield played Belfast Celtic are obvious examples of this;<sup>15</sup> however, the trend also impacted on other sports. In 1913 and 1914, during the militant suffrage campaign in Britain, suffragists attacked sports clubs as bastions of male privilege,<sup>16</sup> and this tactic spread to Ireland where suffragists burned the stand at Newtownards Racecourse and Belfast's bowling pavilion.<sup>17</sup> The decision by republicans to dig up the greens at the Westmeath County Club in Mullingar in July 1918 had similar motives at base:<sup>18</sup> a combination of the local elite and British army officers had dominated the membership of that golf club for years.<sup>19</sup> In May 1921 a group of Irish Republican Army (IRA) men raided the home of Lord Inchiquin's brother, in Co. Clare, with the purpose of preventing him, and his guests, from playing tennis in apparent retaliation for a ban on fairs and markets introduced by the authorities.<sup>20</sup>

*in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884* (Dublin, 1999[incomplete publisher information])[page numbers?]; R. V. Comerford, *Inventing the Nation: Ireland* (London, 2003[incomplete publisher information]), 212–35.

13. Douglas Booth, "Hitting Apartheid for Six? The Politics of the South African Sports Boycott," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no.3 (July, 2003), 477–93; Allen Guttman, "The Cold War and the Olympics," *International Journal* 43, no. 4 (1988), 554–68.

14. Paul Rouse, "The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland: A History of the GAA Ban on Foreign Games 1884–1971. Part One: 1884–1921," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 10, no. 3 (December 1993), 357–59.

15. Neal Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-Partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004[incomplete publisher information]), 125–27.

16. Joyce Kay, "It Wasn't Just Emily Davison! Sport, Suffrage and Society in Edwardian Britain," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no.10 (2008), 1338–54.

17. Diane Urquhart, *Women in Ulster Politics 1890–1914: A History Not Yet Told* (Dublin, 2000[incomplete publisher information]), 36.

18. W. F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association & Irish Nationalist Politics 1884–1924* (Dublin, 1987[incomplete publisher information]), 184.

19. Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2008[incomplete publisher information]), 88–89.

20. David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913–1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork, 1998[incomplete publisher information]), 66.

Long before the proliferation of bowling pavilions, golf clubs, and modern team sports, even before fox-hunts, rural protest movements targeted various forms of hunting. The hunting activities of elites were resented for a combination of practical and symbolic reasons. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English forest communities attacked recently constructed deer parks, “resisting the social and economic repercussions of landscapes created for pleasure and social prestige.”<sup>21</sup> In eighteenth-century France, disrupting the pleasures of the hunt, often through poaching, “provided the ideal cover for inarticulate social protest” by angry peasants.<sup>22</sup> Although shooting became greatly democratized in nineteenth-century France, hunting on horseback “by and large . . . remained an activity of the nobility” and as such it continued to attract resentment and occasional harassment from peasants in the form of legal suits.<sup>23</sup>

By 1919 “stopping the hunt” had been part of the vernacular of rural protest in Ireland for forty years.<sup>24</sup> Those with small holdings—tenant farmers and the increasing numbers of owner occupiers—resented the hunts participants who rode across their land because they destroyed ditches and sometimes crops, but also because to ride to hounds was an assertion of social and economic superiority.<sup>25</sup> In such circumstances the temptation to stop the hunt was great. The first and most significant “stopping the hunt” campaign took place during the Land War in the winter of 1881–82. L. P. Curtis has explored this in an innovative essay published in 1987, and Heather Laird has also written about this at length in 2005.<sup>26</sup> In between Philip Bull, Terence Dooley, and Roy Foster have paid it brief, but sophisticated,

21. Andrew Charlesworth, ed., *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548–1900* (London, 1983[incomplete publisher information]), 56–58.

22. P. M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1988[incomplete publisher information]), 50.

23. Richard Holt, *Sport and Society in Modern France* (Connecticut, 1981[incomplete publisher information]), 18–38.

24. Terence Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland: A Study of Irish Land-Ed Families 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001[incomplete publisher information]), 260–63.

25. Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford, 1989[incomplete publisher information]), 243.

26. L. P. Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt, 1881–1882: An Aspect of the Irish Land War,” *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, ed. C. E. Philpin (Cambridge, 1987[incomplete publisher information]), 349–402; Heather Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland, 1879–1920* (Dublin, 2005[incomplete publisher information]), 77–102.

attention.<sup>27</sup> For Curtis, stopping the hunt was an effective tactic that allowed the leadership of the land agitation to open “a new front” in their war with the landlord and magistracy class: a front that the various classes, which he believed formed the Land League, could unite around. Laird’s analysis is guided by postcolonial and subaltern theory. For her, “stopping the hunt” was a subaltern activity and is therefore a key indicator not only that the Land League was a movement of the “rural poor,” but that the role of nationalist elites in opposing the colonizing process has been exaggerated at the expense of subaltern struggle. In the decades after the Land War, the strategy was employed sporadically and locally, most often as an expression of tenant grievance against a particular landlord who was prominently associated with a particular hunt; although during the Ranch War of 1906 to 1908 it was again used with some vigor and consistency in several midland counties.<sup>28</sup> During the Land War, the immediate impetus for antihunt agitation was very often a demand for the release of imprisoned Land League activists.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that Christopher Lennon made his proposal at Mullingar RDC in the context of a crusade for prisoner release.

#### PATTERNS OF A CAMPAIGN

For two months the local, national, and sporting press in Ireland carried news of tens of antihunt resolutions passed at meetings across a swathe of counties. These counties were predominantly in the fertile midlands, east, and south and included Meath, Westmeath, Longford, Dublin, Kildare, Queen’s County (Laois), King’s County (Offaly), Galway, Mayo, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Limerick, Cork, Waterford, Wicklow, and Wexford—places well suited to hunting foxes. The decision of the Bohermeen Gaelic Football Club to call

27. Philip Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin, 1996[incomplete publisher information]), 123–25; Dooley, *Decline of the Big House*, 260–61; R. F. Foster, “Stopping the Hunt: Trollope and the Memory of Ireland,” *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (Oxford, 2002[incomplete publisher information]), 127–47.

28. Muriel Bowen, *Irish Hunting* (Tralee, 1908[incomplete publisher information]), 138–39; Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt,” 392–94; *Irish Independent*, 8 Nov. 1907 and 10 Jan. 1908; *Meath Chronicle*, 9 Nov. 1907.

29. Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt,” 359–60; Laird, *Subversive Law*, 78–79.

on farmers in their district—a rural area not far from Navan, Co. Meath—not to allow hunting over their lands was a very unusual, if not a unique, instance of a GAA club supporting the campaign.<sup>30</sup> The great majority of resolutions were the products of local or regional units of Sinn Féin.<sup>31</sup> Although the campaign also prompted a good deal of debate at meetings of various representative public bodies, few of these followed Mullingar RDC's example. Among the exceptions were district councils in Castlecomer, Athlone, Dunshaughlin, Clonmel, Granard, Mountmellick, and Abbeyleix, and the poor law guardians of Trim and Carlow.<sup>32</sup> The resolution passed by the North East Cork Sinn Féin executive was typical, stating that “the United Hunt Club and the Duhallow Hunt [should] be prevented hunting until the political prisoners were released from English Dungeons.” Again, the demand of the South Meath Comhairle Ceanntair was characteristic, although this body was somewhat more menacing than many other bodies in its promise of action: “all hunting in South Meath should stop until political prisoners are released, and we call upon the hunting committee to cease hunting against the wishes of the great majority of the people otherwise we shall take strong steps to enforce our decision.”<sup>33</sup>

Christopher Lennon's original proposal had called for a general ban on sport, albeit, as already noted, with an emphasis on hunting, but the campaign quickly concentrated on fox-hunting (and stag hunting). To a lesser extent horse-racing—in particular point-to-point meetings that were associated with local hunts<sup>34</sup>—and angling<sup>35</sup> were targeted, but most sport carried on without criticism or challenge. The failure to apply a ban across all sports rarely became an issue at the meetings of local government bodies,<sup>36</sup> and when, for instance,

30. *Meath Chronicle*, 22 Feb. 1919.

31. For examples see *Tipperary Star*, 22 Feb.; *Waterford News*, 31 Jan.; *Wexford People*, 29 Jan.; *Westmeath Examiner*, 18 Jan.; *Leinster Leader*, 1 Feb.; *Nenagh Guardian*, 1 Feb. 1919.

32. *Irish Independent*, 20 and 29 Jan.; *Irish Field and Gentleman's Gazette* (hereafter *Irish Field*), 18 Jan.; *Tipperary Star*, 8 Feb.; *Irish Times*, 8 and 12 Feb.; *Leinster Leader*, 1 Feb.; *Meath Chronicle*, 25 Jan.; *Carlow Sentinel*, 15 Feb. 1919.

33. *Cork Examiner*, 29 Jan.; *Meath Chronicle*, 8 Feb. 1919.

34. *Limerick Leader*, 5 Feb. and 5 Mar. 1919.

35. *Cork Examiner*, 31 Jan.; *Irish Times*, 10 Feb. 1919.

36. *Westmeath Examiner*, 8 Mar. 1919.

the chairman of New Ross board of guardians, Michael Byrne, suggested that “there should not be football any more than hunting until the political prisoners are released” he received little support. The circumstances were hardly propitious; the moving of a motion of congratulations to the Wexford Gaelic football team on their recent victory in the All-Ireland final had prompted his remarks.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, not even all bloodsports were treated equally. Harrier packs pursued their pleasures up and down the country without interference. They tended to hunt hares and rabbits on foot: because this was a far less costly pastime they attracted a less exclusive membership. Nonetheless, at least two such packs—the Killinick, Co. Wexford, and the Limerick—sought to protect their activities by passing motions in support of the release of prisoners.<sup>38</sup> Lennon himself continued to enter greyhounds at coursing meetings. On January 14, he was at Delvin where his dog, de Valera, won the Ballyhale Stakes. Two days later Lennon explained his actions to the RDC, stating that “Sinn Fein did not intend to interfere with sport such as cockfighting and coursing which were the only sports accessible to ‘the poor man.’”<sup>39</sup>

The threat of action was sometimes enough to prompt the abandonment of a fox-hunt. “Neither hounds nor huntsmen” assembled at Ballykilcavan, Queen’s County, as planned on Monday, January 27, because the “order of the Sinn Fein Executive had been published on the previous day at various chapel gates in the county” and in the weekend papers.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, hunts did test the resolve of their opponents, and the imposition of the ban was often patchy at first as radical nationalists only gradually roused themselves to action. On February 1 the *Irish Field and Gentleman’s Gazette*, the paper of the hunting and horse-racing fraternity, felt sufficiently confident to state that “the prospect is not quite as dark as it appears to the eye. The stoppages that have come about are few and far between, and the majority of our Hunts are able to continue to show sport without any interference.”<sup>41</sup> By then, however, the campaign had begun to gather momentum and, in some areas, venom. The order issued by

37. *Wexford People*, 8 Mar. 1919.

38. *Wexford People*, 12 Feb. 1919; *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 Feb. 1919.

39. *Westmeath Examiner*, 18 Jan. 1919.

40. *Leinster Leader*, 1 Feb. 1919.

41. *Irish Field*, 1 Feb. 1919.

the Sinn Féin standing committee on January 23 was crucial. Prior to that, resolutions had not been passed with any great alacrity and there were only three confirmed incidents when protestors had physically taken to the field in attempts to stop hunts: at Dalystown, Co. Westmeath on January 14;<sup>42</sup> at Headfort, Co. Meath on January 18;<sup>43</sup> and at Cappagh, Co. Limerick on January 22.<sup>44</sup> This had changed by February 19 when the Irish Masters of Foxhounds Association (IMFHA)—a coordinating body to which many, though not all, masters subscribed—met for an emergency meeting. Then, the chairman described the campaign as a “serious menace” and reported that “all packs of foxhounds in Ireland but one had been threatened” and “five packs had already stopped hunting.”<sup>45</sup> Between January 23 and February 19, there were at least twelve occasions on which crowds gathered with the intention of preventing hunts pursuing their sport. These took place in Limerick (January 24), Meath (February 1, 3, and 19), Galway (February 1 and 7), Westmeath (February 4 and 7), Kildare (February 8 and 18), and Kilkenny (February 10 and 18).<sup>46</sup> Despite a significant decline in hunting activity, there were six further incidents, and the geography of confrontation extended between February 20 and the end of the campaign, on March 6. During those final weeks, protesting crowds were mobilized in Kildare (February 20), Wexford (February 22), Dublin (February 25), Meath (February 26), Waterford (March 4), and Cork (March 5).<sup>47</sup> It is almost certain that other incidents occurred: Patrick J. Luddy informed the

42. *Westmeath Examiner*, 18 Jan. 1919. The County Inspector of Westmeath suggests that there was another incident during this period near Middleton Park, the home of the Boyd-Rochforts, but the details are vague and the press did not report it. See Monthly Report of the County Inspector of Westmeath, Jan. 1919, CO904/108, TNA.

43. *Meath Chronicle*, 25 Jan. 1919.

44. *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Jan. 1919.

45. Minutes of the IMFHA, 19 Feb. 1919, IMFHA. Many thanks to the IMFHA and Caroline Corballis.

46. *Irish Field*, 1 Feb.; *Meath Chronicle*, 8 and 22 Feb.; *Connacht Tribune*, 8 Feb.; Monthly Report of the County Inspector of Galway East Riding, Feb. 1919, CO904/108, TNA; *Irish Times*, 8 Feb.; *Westmeath Examiner*, 8 Feb.; *Leinster Leader*, 15 Feb.; *Kilkenny Journal*, 12 and 22 Feb.; *Kildare Observer*, 22 Feb. 1919.

47. *Cork Examiner*, 24 Feb.; *Wexford People*, 26 Feb.; Monthly Report of the County Inspector of Dublin, February 1919, CO904/108, TNA; *Irish Times*, 27 Feb.; *Waterford News*, 7 Mar. 1919; *Freeman's Journal*, 7 Mar. 1919.

Bureau of Military History of his participation in an undated altercation near Kilworth, Co. Cork, that involved a group of volunteers and the Duhallow Hunt.<sup>48</sup> On March 8 the *Irish Field* reported that the campaign had “stopped every hunt of consequence in Ireland outside of Ulster”;<sup>49</sup> by then, several masters had resigned, including E. W. Hope-Johnstone of the Westmeath, Isaac Bell of the Kilkenny, and Andrew Watt of the Meath.<sup>50</sup>

When crowds were mobilized the results fell into three broad categories. Most common were confrontations that fell short of physical violence, but involved intimidation and verbal exchanges. In some cases, the mere presence of the crowd and the threat of violence were sufficient to convince the master of the hunt to withdraw his hounds to home. Nigel Baring, master of the County Limerick Hounds, abandoned a day’s hunting when faced by a “large crowd” at Cappagh on January 22, despite the absence of what the *Irish Field* termed “overt hostility.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the *Irish Independent* reported that Mr. Shepard, master of the East Galway, withdrew immediately when faced with 150 protestors led by T. P. Killeen, secretary of the Sinn Féin executive in that area and a recently released prisoner.<sup>52</sup>

Alternatively, some hunts withdrew from the immediate arena of potential conflict, but would then attempt to move to another covert. A covert is a sheltered place in which game—in this case foxes—are known to take cover. When embarking on a day’s sport a hunt usually assembled at an advertised covert. Typical of these incidents was the stalemate between a large field of the Kildare hunt and a group of Sinn Féin enthusiasts from Naas at Bettaghstown, Clane, on February 8. This resulted “after considerable delay and discussion” in a decision by the hunt to move off to other ground at “Mt. Armstrong.”<sup>53</sup> At least one hunt sought to evade interference by advertising an initial meeting point that was false. On February 22 at Ballyrankin, Strahart, Co. Wexford—near the home of Walter Clarmont Skrine, a

48. WS1151 (Patrick J. Luddy), BMH, NAI.

49. *Irish Field*, 8 Mar. 1919.

50. *Irish Field*, 8 Mar.; *Sport*, 1 Mar.; *Kildare Observer*, 1 Mar. 1919.

51. *Irish Field*, 25 Jan. 1919.

52. *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1919.

53. *Cork Examiner*, 12 Feb. 1919; WS1155 (Michael O’Kelly) Bureau of Military History (BMH), National Archive of Ireland (NAI).

leading member of the Island Hunt and father of Molly Keane, the future novelist and chronicler of the decline of the Big House—a small Sinn Féin crowd and the RIC found themselves at a decoy site, while the Island went about its, almost certainly enhanced, enjoyment at Ballinpark, Newtownbarry (Bunclody).<sup>54</sup>

Violence seems to have been confined to three incidents, and then it was directed primarily at hounds and horses. The first violent confrontation occurred during a protest against the Ward hunt at Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath, on February 19. On that occasion, when the Ward attempted to defy a crowd, a horse was shot, apparently not fatally.<sup>55</sup> The second occurred on March 4 when the East Waterford hunt, led by its master, Joseph Widger, forced their way through a cordon of Irish Volunteers at Tramore.<sup>56</sup> Later that evening windows were broken at the Widgers' home. The last was the attack on the Muskerry, described in the introduction.

When seeking to explain the occurrence of confrontations or more serious conflict, a consistent causal pattern is difficult to identify. The visibility of the hunt seems to have been a factor. All of the six counties in which more than one confrontation occurred had large populations of recreational horses. Local volunteers or Sinn Féin clubs undoubtedly viewed persistence on the part of the local hunt as provocative, perhaps explaining why two of the three violent confrontations occurred in the last days of the campaign. A tradition of agrarian campaigns within an area was also a factor. Meath and Westmeath had been cockpits of the Ranch War,<sup>57</sup> while Cork had been a center of agrarian agitation right back to the Rightboys. It is just possible that the volunteers of Ballyshoneen, who drove a priest from the field, may have been descended, at least in spirit, from the Rightboys of Ballyshoneen who attempted to intimidate the local Catholic clergy in 1785 because of dues and fees that they considered excessive.<sup>58</sup>

If continuities across time are a feature of this protest, then there

54. *Wexford People*, 26 Feb. 1919.

55. WS1715 (Seán Boylan) BMH, NAI; Monthly Report of the County Inspector for Kildare, Feb. 1919, CO904/108, TNA; *Cork Examiner*, 20 Feb. 1919; *Irish Field*, 22 Feb. 1919.

56. *Waterford News*, 7 Mar. 1919.

57. Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party*, 120.

58. Maurice Bric, "Priests, Parsons and Politics: The Rightboy Protest in County Cork, 1785–1788," *Past & Present* 100 (Aug. 1983), 114.

were also discontinuities. During previous “stopping the hunt” campaigns, protestors had frequently laid poison—often strychnine—in the coverts.<sup>59</sup> In 1919 the threat of poisoned land or poisoned coverts featured in reports from Carlow,<sup>60</sup> Wexford,<sup>61</sup> and Kildare,<sup>62</sup> but there were no reports of poisoned hounds. When Leitrim County Council debated whether to support the campaign, Councillor Pat Gaffney was one of the most vociferous contributors. Gaffney stated that he was for the release of prisoners, but against the antihunting agitation, insisting that “it would be better to propose a resolution for the release of the prisoners than to poison dogs.”<sup>63</sup> As a long-time Irish Party supporter and farmer, who had been a leading light in founding the conservative Farmers’ Defence Association,<sup>64</sup> Gaffney may have been disposed to oppose the campaign, but even advocates of the campaign disapproved of poisoning. While passing the motion that began the campaign, Mullingar RDC condemned the recent laying of poison for hounds in that district,<sup>65</sup> an action that seems to have been connected to a local agrarian dispute that predated the broader campaign.<sup>66</sup> In Waterford, when the Tramore cumann of Sinn Féin passed a resolution, it included the provision that “foxes and coverts in the district should not be interfered with.”<sup>67</sup> The *Waterford News* agreed, although with a good deal less vehemence: “We have no sympathy with the poisoning of dogs, but the loss of a few dogs is as nothing when compared with the hideous brutality of keeping in prison Irish women and Irish boys who are guilty of no offence.”<sup>68</sup> An increased awareness of debates around cruelty to animals may have placed what had once been an acceptable tactic beyond the pale for many, but it did not stop the beating of hounds and at no point did

59. Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt,” 355–56.

60. *Carlow Sentinel*, 1 Feb. 1919.

61. *Cork Weekly Examiner*, 15 Feb. 1919; Report of the Press Censor, Feb. 1919, CO904/167, TNA.

62. Monthly Reports of the County Inspector for Kildare, Jan. and Feb. 1919, CO904/108, TNA; *Kildare Observer*, 8 Feb. 1919.

63. *Leitrim Observer*, 22 Feb. 1919.

64. Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910–1916* (Oxford, 2005[incomplete publisher information]), 40.

65. *Kildare Observer*, 18 Jan. 1919.

66. *Westmeath Examiner*, 4 Jan. 1919.

67. *Irish Times*, 1 Feb. 1919.

68. *Waterford News*, 21 Feb. 1919.

stopping the hunt campaigners appear to have used the argument that the hunt itself was cruel.

According to Curtis and Laird, a “grass-roots” impetus animated the “stopping the hunt” campaign of 1881–82 and it received minimal support or direction from the Land League executive.<sup>69</sup> The protests of 1919 appear to have been less popular affairs. The proposal to stop the hunt did not originate from within the executive of Sinn Féin, but the momentum accrued through the order of Sinn Féin’s standing committee and the shouted demand at Ballyshoneen—“Now will you obey Sinn Féin and the orders of our Executive?”—suggest that this campaign was given its force by the Sinn Féin and Irish Volunteer organizations and their activists. Reports of the various incidents give credence to this assertion. In the *Westmeath Examiner’s* account of the very first confrontation at Dalystown, the protesting crowd was said to represent Tyrellspass, Rochford Bridge, Kilbride, and Belvedere Sinn Féin clubs.<sup>70</sup> Of the confrontation at College Hill on February 1, the *Meath Chronicle* recorded that the protestors were members of the Kilbarry and Gormanlough Sinn Féin clubs.<sup>71</sup> The *Wexford People* described the assembly at Ballyrankin on February 22, as “the first effective step taken by Co. Wexford Sinn Feiners to translate the orders of their Executive into action,” and identified the “cudgel”-carrying protestors as members of the Ballycarney Sinn Féin Club.<sup>72</sup> Michael O’Kelly, a Sinn Féin activist and Irish Volunteer based in Co. Kildare, later recorded that the confrontation at Bettaghstown took place at the initiative of the Naas Sinn Féin Club and in response to the direction of the Sinn Féin executive.<sup>73</sup> For Laird, the tactic of “people’s hunts” constituted important evidence of the subaltern nature of “stopping the hunt” in 1881–82.<sup>74</sup> These popular counterhunts or, to put it another way, incidents of organized, large-scale poaching, were not a factor in 1919; this absence adds to the impression that the later campaign did not generate widespread popular participation, but was dependent on

69. Laird, *Subversive Law*, 78–79; Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt,” 357.

70. *Westmeath Examiner*, 18 Jan. 1919.

71. *Meath Chronicle*, 8 Feb. 1919.

72. *Wexford People*, 26 Feb. 1919.

73. WS1155 (Michael O’Kelly) BMH, NAI.

74. Laird, *Subversive Law*, 90–102.

quite small numbers of Sinn Féin activists, urged to action by party headquarters and organized by their local clubs.

It is not surprising then that the character of the stopping the hunt campaign, while drawing on a preexisting tradition of protest, is typical of the modes of activity emphasized by Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers in the early months of 1919. Although January 1919 witnessed one of the most notorious incidents of violence during the revolution, the shooting dead of two policemen at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary, the months of January to March 1919 did not see a significant upsurge in violent activity on the part of the revolutionary movement. The ground was shifting, but, as yet, the revolutionary method tended toward “public defiance” rather than “guerrilla warfare”<sup>75</sup>: demonstrations, passive resistance, and political action were still preferred to high levels of violence directed against the state or other members of the community. As such it could be argued that the campaign marks a step toward intimidation as a strategy, while shying short of the strategies of terror that would mark later phases of the revolution.<sup>76</sup>

The campaign also coincides with an increase in other forms of coordinated resistance centered on prisons and prisoners. The stopping the hunt campaign emphasized internees held in English jails, but it was the Irish prison system that the Irish Volunteer leadership challenged when they issued an order on January 13, that “every Irish Volunteer then in jail” should participate in a concerted strike against prison discipline.<sup>77</sup> As with the stopping the hunt directive, this order was both a response to the spontaneous actions of individual activists, and an attempt to escalate, coordinate, and contain these protests. The stopping the hunt campaign allowed Sinn Féin to engage its membership to assist in a concentrated attack upon the imprisonment of leading activists, while the press coverage of the campaign supplemented other forms of propaganda that focused attention on

75. Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerilla Warfare: The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 1996[incomplete publisher information]), 87–88.

76. Anne Dolan, “‘The Shadow of a Great Fear’: Terror and Revolutionary Ireland,” *Terror in Ireland, 1916–1923*, ed. David Fitzpatrick (Dublin, 2012[incomplete publisher information]), 26–38.

77. Special General Order, Óglaiigh na hÉireann, 13 Jan. 1919, GPB1919/2026, GPB DORA Box Seven, NAI.

the prisoners' continued detention. In reaching for a residual, familiar, form of protest and employing it for contemporary ends using their party structure, Sinn Féin provided members with a local, commonplace, focus for protest. The campaign gave members a direction and engendered a degree of excitement at a time when it was likely that most ordinary adherents to both Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers were experiencing a postelection anticlimax.

#### MOTIVATIONS FOR A CAMPAIGN

Laird argues of 1881–1882 that “while the arrest of ‘suspects’ . . . functioned as an immediate stimulus for the agitation against hunting, the underlining roots of this agitation are . . . to be found elsewhere.”<sup>78</sup> Dooley characterizes the demand for the release of internees, both in 1881–82 and 1919, as a “pretext.”<sup>79</sup> Curtis takes seriously the demand for the release of prisoners in 1881–82, but does argue that “the wording of anti-hunting resolutions suggests that members were protesting not only coercion but the harsh attempts of landlords to recover rent by sale of interest, distraint of goods, or eviction writs.”<sup>80</sup> If the wording of those resolutions passed throughout the country in January and February 1919 are to be taken at face value, then that campaign had the release of prisoners as its sole aim, and it is important not to underestimate the capacity of the prisoner issue to motivate the Irish public at that time. Again and again during the revolutionary period disputes around imprisonment, prison treatment and status, and hunger strikes generated new separatists and energized existing ones. In 1919, however, stopping the hunt appealed to Sinn Féin as a tactic for many other reasons. Most important, it facilitated an emboldened Sinn Féin in confronting various arms of the British state in Ireland in ways both rhetorical and practical. P. Brady expressed this motive for the campaign when, in a letter to the *Meath Chronicle*, he insisted that “nearly all the followers of hunts in Ireland belong to the [Dublin] Castle gang.”<sup>81</sup> The British army, the magistracy, and the RIC

78. Laird, *Subversive Law*, 81.

79. Dooley, *Decline of the Big House*, 262.

80. Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt,” 362.

81. *Meath Chronicle*, 15 Feb. 1919.

were among the most important groups that Sinn Féin imagined it could target through the hunt.

This was not the first time that nationalists used sport to define the police and army as other. A GAA ban of 1906 had provided that “police, militiamen and soldiers on active service be prevented from playing hurling or football.”<sup>82</sup> This may have contributed more to shaping the GAA’s image than it bothered soldiers, but stopping the hunt certainly discommoded some. Current and former British officers (Irish and visiting) were a conspicuous presence among the fields of Irish hunts. For British army officers temporarily stationed in Ireland the hunt, and hunt balls, provided significant entertainment and social interaction.<sup>83</sup> When the fifth division of the British army in Ireland, which was responsible for Leinster, created its record of the War of Independence, the authors considered it worthy of note that neither hunting nor racing was interfered with in the 1919–20 or 1920–21 seasons.<sup>84</sup> In 1919, Major E. F. Talbot-Ponsonby was master of the Kildare, Captain R. A. B. Filgate was master of the Louth, Major A. W. M. Richards was master of the Island, Major Robert Hamilton-Stubber was master of the Leix, and several other masters had records of service in the British army.<sup>85</sup> The IMFHA did not disavow this connection. When they met to discuss the threat to their sport, on February 19, they prefaced their discussion by passing, with applause, a resolution congratulating the members of the association who had “been fighting so gallantly and with such distinction on various fronts for the last four years.”<sup>86</sup>

In early 1919 supporters of the agitation drew explicit attention to the perceived intimacy of the link. P. Brady reminded readers of the *Meath Chronicle* that the “Secretary of the [Meath] Hunt Club (John Law, J.P.) openly took the side of the Conscriptionists when war was declared by England against this country some months ago.”<sup>87</sup> In justifying the ban, David Kent, an influential member of

82. Rouse, “The Politics of Culture and Sport,” 348.

83. Ernie O’Malley, *On Another Man’s Wound* (Dublin, 2002[incomplete publisher information]), 56.

84. A History of the 5th Division in Ireland, Nov. 1919–Mar. 1922, 137, Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine Papers, 72/82/2, Imperial War Museum (IWM).

85. Bowen, *Irish Hunting*, 56 and 89.

86. Minutes of IMFHA, 19 Feb. 1919, IMFHA.

87. *Meath Chronicle*, 15 Feb. 1919.

Sinn Féin in east Cork, alleged that “one of the principal Hunt Clubs in the district” had “discharged an employee” because “he refused to join the Army?”<sup>88</sup> When, on February 13, the majority of those riding with Waterford Hunt signed a petition seeking prisoner release in a vain effort to convince Sinn Féin to mitigate its actions, the *Waterford News* dismissed their actions as inadequate and stressed that the army officers present had refused to sign.<sup>89</sup> Most interestingly, in the aftermath of a confrontation at Killare, Co. Westmeath, on February 7, the nearby O’Growney Sinn Féin Club claimed that the hunt had been supported on that occasion by “the presence of military forces in the shape of two British aeroplanes . . . with the apparent object of intimidating the people and helping the followers of the hunt against Sinn Féin.”<sup>90</sup> Whether real or phantom, these aeroplanes were a manifestation of Sinn Féin’s perception of the hunt.

For Curtis and Laird, the prominence in various hunts of magistrates, who were perceived to be enemies of the Land League, was one of the reasons that fox-hunting became a target in 1881–82.<sup>91</sup> During the revolutionary period, David Foxton has argued that “as representatives of one of the more prominent projections of British power in Ireland, crown court officials naturally found themselves subject to threats and attacks.”<sup>92</sup> When Sinn Féin condemned the hunt, the presence of legal officers and magistrates featured among their criticisms. P. Brady, again, noted that the acting master and secretary of the Meath Hunt were both justices of the peace. Athy RDC linked its antihunt resolution specifically to the actions of Sir Hunt Walsh, secretary of the Leix and a local magistrate, who, they alleged, had called for “coercion” at the previous year’s spring assizes.<sup>93</sup> Hunt Henry Allen Johnson Walsh was a baronet, farmer, magistrate, and captain of the army reserve from Ballykilcavan, Queen’s County,<sup>94</sup>

88. *Cork Examiner*, 8 Feb. 1919.

89. *Waterford News*, 14 Feb. 1919.

90. *Irish Times*, 12 Feb. 1919.

91. Curtis, “Stopping the Hunt,” 350; Laird, *Subversive Law*, 89.

92. David Foxton, *Revolutionary Lawyers: Sinn Féin and Crown Courts in Ireland and Britain 1916–1923* (Dublin, 2008[incomplete publisher information]), 181.

93. *Leinster Leader*, 1 Feb. 1919.

94. See his return at the 1911 census of Ireland at [www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/naio03158819/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/naio03158819/)

and he was certainly the primary incentive for Sinn Féin when it successfully warned against the holding of a hunt meeting at Ballykilcavan in late January.

Significantly, stopping the hunt is a little remarked upon phase in the contest for control of public space in rural Ireland between Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers, on one hand, and the RIC, on the other. The period from the autumn of 1917 through the late spring of 1918 had witnessed widespread and open drilling by Irish Volunteers in defiance of the RIC.<sup>95</sup> During that period, even when the authorities made arrests they often found themselves releasing the prisoners following hunger strikes. Hart has noted the demoralizing impact this had on the RIC.<sup>96</sup> The early summer of 1918 until January 1919 was characterized by a lull of sorts in such “open defiance”:<sup>97</sup> this was linked to the authorities’ success in (temporarily) neutering hunger strikes as a weapon. It would be 1920 before the Irish Volunteers began a consistent campaign of assassinating policemen and burning outlying barracks that would see the RIC concede significant ground in the battle for rural space in a number of rebellious counties by retreating to big barracks in larger provincial towns.<sup>98</sup> In January 1919, however, radical separatists were once again possessed of an urge to assert their right to the public space, but more than that, imbued with a confidence derived from an electoral mandate, Sinn Féin attempted to determine the rights of others to the public space. They would control, they asserted, who would sport, when they would sport, and in which sports they could indulge. In passing motions, posting intimidating notices, and gathering to stop hunts, local Sinn Féin members and Irish Volunteers were asserting that in 1919 it was their writ that governed the land, and they undermined the credibility of the RIC as the arbiters of law and the custodians of the public space.

Stopping the hunt also facilitated the expression, at a local level, of enmities and resentments based on class, political identity, and, perhaps, sect. Fox-hunting in Ireland was—as James Howe has argued

95. Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance*, 78–80.

96. Hart, *I.R.A. and Its Enemies*, 56.

97. Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance*, 78–81.

98. W.J. Lowe, “The War against the R.I.C. 1919–21,” *Éire-Ireland* 37.3–4 (2002), 79–117.

when discussing fox-hunting in England—not just a sport. It was “a ritual” or “highly structured and dramatic form of social communication” through which messages about the appropriate organization of society and control of the rural landscape were delivered.<sup>99</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, hunting fields in Ireland were not as exclusive as they had once been, reflecting the slow decline of the Ascendancy and the growth of the Catholic middle class,<sup>100</sup> but they remained privileged and hierarchical gatherings<sup>101</sup> and were still led by, or strongly associated in the popular imagination with, the Ascendancy. Dermot Doyne, a cousin of Lord Fitzwilliam, was master of the Coollatin that hunted in south Wicklow and Carlow, while the Limerick was mastered by Nigel Baring, scion of the banking family and son-in-law of Lord Fermoy. When protestors disrupted the Meath hunt on January 18, it was at Headfort House, the home of the Marquis of Headfort,<sup>102</sup> and when they interrupted the Ward hunt at Batterstown, Co. Meath on February 26, the Earl of Fingal was acting-master for that day.<sup>103</sup>

Deference was expected within the hunt field and it was also expected from those whose land the hunt rode across. Each hunt had established a territory or “country” and, as Howe has pointed out, “the imposition of hunting territories on the landscape makes a strong symbolic claim to territorial dominion” that “is reiterated, in the most forceful possible way, as the riders of the hunt gallop across its country.”<sup>104</sup> The hunt then sought to confirm a certain vision of class entitlements; in Ireland this had the further impact of facilitating the “continuance of colonial social ordering.”<sup>105</sup> When protestors organized crowds to stop the hunt and farmers poisoned their land, they withdrew their assent and expressed a counterclaim to territorial and cultural dominion. Laird has written that when Land Leagues activists and supporters engaged in antihunting agitation, they were

99. James Howe, “Fox Hunting as Ritual,” *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 2 (1981), 281–82.

100. Dooley, *Decline of the Big House*, 57.

101. Hunt, *Sport and Society*, 25–29.

102. *Cork Weekly Examiner*, 25 Jan. 1919.

103. *Meath Chronicle*, 1 Mar. 1919.

104. Howe, “Fox Hunting,” 289.

105. Stoddart, “Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 4 (1988), 654.

“making visible a widely-held desire for a more permanent inversion of rural power relations.”<sup>106</sup>

In justifying their actions, then and subsequently, Sinn Féin appealed to this resentment of the Ascendancy. Years later Michael O’Kelly, who had been a driving force behind antihunt activity in the vicinity of Naas, recalled the reasoning behind their actions. He wrote that they had stopped the hunt in “retaliation for the association of the ascendancy class” with the “repressive” policy of jailing Sinn Féin activists. The Naas Sinn Féin Club wanted, he stated, to bring “home to this class in the county that they could not indulge their hostility to Irish ideals in this way with impunity.”<sup>107</sup> This reflected the rhetoric of 1919. Then, O’Kelly’s close ally Tom Harris informed a meeting of Kildare farmers that the “principal people in the Kildare Hunt were the Ascendancy party who ran the Kildare Street Club and dictated the policy of Dublin Castle.”<sup>108</sup> The Ascendancy was also among the lengthy list of ne’er-do-wells that P. Brady associated with the hunt: “I say that those who make a profession of hunting (i.e., the so-called aristocrats, idlers, who have no occupation, and who have never done a day’s work in their lives) are, almost without exception, bitterly anti-Irish.”<sup>109</sup>

The class resentment surrounding these events was not, however, reserved exclusively for the Ascendancy. Both proponents and opponents of the “stopping the hunt” campaign were aware that an increasing proportion of hunt members were Catholic farmers and businessmen. When the Queen’s County hunt decided to suspend activity in face of threats, the *Leinster Leader* noted that “a goodly number of Athy professional and business men” were members.<sup>110</sup> In criticizing the Meath Farmers’ Association, which had expressed support for the hunt, P. de Burca, honorary secretary of North Meath Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Féin, wrote that the association was “made up to a large extent of the Ascendancy gang,” but also received support from “the seonin farmer class . . . who follow the political lead of the Ascendancy gang.” Similarly, when a Mr. Foran

106. Laird, *Subversive Law*, 102.

107. WS1155 (Michael O’Kelly) BMH, NAI.

108. *Irish Independent*, 6 Mar. 1919.

109. *Meath Chronicle*, 15 Feb. 1919.

110. *Leinster Leader*, 1 Feb. 1919.

spoke at Carrick-on-Suir RDC, he condemned “ascendancy men” who were “enjoying themselves hunting” while “our noble leaders are in gaol,” but he also attacked the “shoneens” who rode with them. South Westmeath Sinn Féin identified the offending classes as “English officers” and “Irish Shoneens.”<sup>111</sup>

*Shoneen* was a term of abuse regularly employed by Irish separatists to describe members of the upwardly mobile farming or professional classes who stood accused of adopting English ways. It could also be code for supporters of the Irish Party, and the democratization of the hunt ensured that in several counties the campaign provided Sinn Féin with opportunities to strike at nationalist rivals, including the wounded Irish Party. During the general election of December 1918, violence and intimidation had marked the contest between Sinn Féin and the Irish Party in Waterford, the home of Redmondism.<sup>112</sup> This bitter division subsequently colored the “stopping the hunt” campaign in that county. The *Waterford News* recorded, on January 24, that those who stopped the hunt were not only motivated by a desire to free the prisoners, but as a reaction to “the disgraceful and blackguardly conduct of some members of the Hunt during the Waterford election.” Captain William Archer Redmond, MP for Waterford, and his supporters, were close to the hunting set the paper implicated. When it covered the confrontation between Sinn Féin protestors and the East Waterford hunt on March 4, at which the hunt forcibly broke through a cordon of protestors, the paper reported that this was achieved with the support of “a body of John D. Nugent’s disciples, armed with iron bars and wooden rifles.”<sup>113</sup> John Dillon Nugent, who had become secretary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) in 1905 and Irish Party MP for College Green, Dublin, in 1915, was notorious for his use of the AOH as a street-fighting force wielded to intimidate the Irish Party’s opponents.<sup>114</sup>

In Westmeath, the cheerleader-in-chief of the campaign, Christopher Lennon, was a close ally of Laurence Ginnell, MP. With Ginnell, Lennon had abandoned the Irish Party in 1910 and joined Sinn Féin

111. *Irish Independent*, 11 Jan. 1919.

112. WS1105 (Nicholas Whittle) BMH, NAI.

113. *Waterford News*, 24 Jan. and 7 Mar. 1919.

114. Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891–1918* (Dublin, 1999[incomplete publisher information]), 237.

in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. James King, who led the group of protestors that met the Westmeath at Dalystown on January 14, was Ginnell's father-in-law.<sup>115</sup> On January 29, in contrast, the chairman at a general meeting of the Westmeath hunt committee—a meeting that decided in favor of continued hunting—was Sir Walter Nugent, a consistent rival of Ginnell's in the world of nationalist politics in Westmeath. As early as the general election of 1906, Nugent unsuccessfully opposed Ginnell for the nomination as the Irish Party's candidate, and he stood against Ginnell at the general election of December 1918.<sup>116</sup> John Bolger, chairman of Wexford County Council and a prominent supporter of the Irish Party, was among the targets of the Ballycarney Sinn Féin Club, near Enniscorthy, when it passed a resolution declaring “that fishing by alien and resident gentlemen holding anti-Irish ideas, on the Slaney, would be stopped in the event of the imprisonment being continued.” Bolger coalesced the fishing rights.<sup>117</sup>

The extent to which the Irish revolution facilitated, or was propelled by, sectarian conflict is a controversial one.<sup>118</sup> While it is clear that territorial, political, and class conflicts were given expression during this particular campaign, it is far less certain that some, or even any, of those who participated did so because they believed it was an attack on Protestants through a Protestant sport. If sectarian feeling was a motivation, then sectarian rhetoric is remarkably absent. However, given the degree to which political and class identities were bound up with religion, often crudely, it seems unlikely that this had no bearing on the campaign. Just because the stoppers were aware that an increasing number of Catholics hunted does not mean that they did not associate the hunt with Protestants. Further, it does not mean that advocates of the hunt were not wary that such a perception might, at least to some extent, motivate the stoppers. It is possible that the Catholic priest, who, according to press reports, experienced especial abuse during the confrontation involving the Muskerry on

115. Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party*, 128.

116. Hunt, *Sport and Society*, 36, 55; Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party*, 118, 122–23; Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation*, 237.

117. *Irish Times*, 10 Feb. 1919.

118. Hart, *I.R.A. and Its Enemies*, 273–92; John M. Regan, “The ‘Bandon Valley Massacre’ as a Historical Problem,” in *History* 97, no. 325 (2012), 70–98.

March 5 did so because some in the crowd perceived his actions as a betrayal of his sect.<sup>119</sup> Less speculatively, it seems certain that the *Irish Field* was making the point that the hunt was not exclusively a Protestant pleasure when it reported, on February 8, that Father James Poland, parish priest of Rathkenny, Co. Meath—apparently, “few rode to hounds straighter”—was distressed when a group of young men interfered with the Meath Hounds that had come to hunt on his land, at his invitation.<sup>120</sup>

There is no doubt that rural Ireland witnessed an escalation in class conflict during this time as agricultural laborers increasingly organized to achieve improved wages and conditions under the banner of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) and farmers mobilized as the Irish Farmers Union (IFU).<sup>121</sup> It is tempting to assume that “stopping the hunt” became a proxy front in this battle between labor and landowner, which peaked in a series of strikes in 1919. For some participants, in some counties, this may have been the case. Meath and Kildare were the sites of countywide strikes by agricultural laborers<sup>122</sup> and were two of the most active antihunt counties, while some of those who attempted to prevent Joseph Widger leading the Waterford Hunt out of Tramore in early March may also have been among the 300 laborers who clashed with over 100 policemen at his farm on November 24, 1919, during a wage dispute.<sup>123</sup> Hart and Augusteijn have demonstrated, however, that in most rural areas the dominant cohort among separatist activists consisted of farmers with small and medium-sized holdings and their sons, while agricultural laborers were not as important to the movement.<sup>124</sup> The evidence further suggests that organized labor did not become involved in the campaign. Just as the intervention of the

119. *Freeman's Journal*, 7 Mar.; *Irish Times*, 6 Mar. 1919.

120. *Irish Field*, 8 Feb. 1919.

121. Dan Bradley, *Farm Labourers Irish Struggle 1900–1976* (Belfast, 1988[incomplete publisher information]), 34–50; Emmet O'Connor, “Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement in County Waterford, 1917–1923,” *Saothar* 6 (1980), 40–58.

122. Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824–1960* (Dublin, 1992[incomplete publisher information]), 99.

123. Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, 46; O'Connor, “Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement,” 41.

124. Peter Hart, “The Social Structure of the Irish Republican Army,” *The I.R.A. at War 1916–1923* (Oxford, 2003[incomplete publisher information]), 110–38; Augusteijn, *Public Defiance to Guerilla Warfare*, 353–67.

Bohermeen Gaelic Football Club was exceptional, so too was that of the Drumree branch of the ITGWU, also based in Meath. On January 26, its members pledged to “assist in stopping the hunt and other aristocratic amusements.”<sup>125</sup> In contrast, defenders of the hunt regularly claimed that laborers were against Sinn Féin’s campaign because it endangered jobs that were dependent on the hunt.<sup>126</sup> Firm evidence of this is also rare, although a branch of the ITGWU in Bruff, Co. Limerick, anticipated a repeat of the campaign during the 1919–1920 season by unanimously requesting “the farmers of East and West Limerick to allow Mr. Nigel Baring . . . to hunt over their lands, as the departure of Mr. Baring from the District would throw 35 laborers and their families out of employment.”<sup>127</sup> Like the Democratic Programme, which Dáil Éireann adopted in January 1919, this agitation may have burnished Sinn Féin’s image as a party of the people, and may have contributed to some in the laboring and working classes investing hopes in the party, but it represented little in the way of a genuine commitment to, or tangible benefits for, those classes.

#### RESPONSES TO A CAMPAIGN

In adopting the “stopping the hunt” campaign, Sinn Féin’s standing committee posed questions and dilemmas for a whole range of individuals and groups and they responded in a variety of ways. The first such group was the party’s own grass-roots membership, and the members of the Irish Volunteers, who were expected to enforce the ban. Despite a slow beginning, clubs and individual members responded in sufficient numbers, following the order of January 23, to successfully stop almost all hunting throughout Ireland. This process did not prove unproblematic, however, as a minority of separatist activists stubbornly refused to participate or openly opposed the campaign. On January 28, the *Irish Times* opened an editorial on the situation: “We are glad to note that even Sinn Feiners are revolting against the Sinn Fein Executive’s ban on hunting.”<sup>128</sup> The county inspector for Kilkenny reported around the same time that “Even the

125. *Meath Chronicle*, 1 Feb. 1919.

126. *Irish Times*, 6 Mar. 1919.

127. *Irish Times*, 15 Sep. 1919.

128. *Irish Times*, 28 Jan. 1919.

Sinn Feiners themselves are divided on the matter.”<sup>129</sup> These observations might be treated with some skepticism, coming as they did from sources hostile to the campaign. Nonetheless, they had a basis in reality. When East Cork Sinn Féin proposed the protest it was in the face of the expressed hostility of its own chairman who, on January 23, traveled to appear before the standing committee of the party to make his case. On February 1 the *Cork Weekly Examiner* noted the uninhibited meeting of the County Limerick Hunt on the previous Monday and the presence in the field “of some gentlemen who took an active part in the recent election on behalf of Sinn Fein.”<sup>130</sup>

Pierce McCann, a “German Plot” prisoner in Gloucester prison and the newly elected Sinn Féin MP for East Tipperary, was a long-standing member of the hunt in that county. Richard Burke, a former master of the Tipperary Hounds, noted this in a letter to the *Irish Field*,<sup>131</sup> and, in a letter to the *Irish Independent*, an unnamed priest from the same county warned that pursuing this campaign was likely to lead to the “first serious split-up in the Sinn Fein ranks.”<sup>132</sup> It is possible that McCann’s relationship with the hunt was a factor in ensuring that in east Tipperary the hunt remained unmolested until quite late in the campaign.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, on February 3, Anthony McCann, younger brother of Pierce, a Sinn Féin member and owner of a large farm in Wexford, wrote to Pierce at Gloucester, stating that “at present the Wexford hunt is stopped but I am negotiating and hope to have matters settled satisfactorily in a few days.”<sup>134</sup> It is very likely that this explains, at least in part, the expression of concern at a meeting of the Sinn Féin executive for north Wexford on February 16 that some Sinn Féin clubs in the county were not acting to stop the hunt.<sup>135</sup> Anthony McCann persisted in his attitude, and at a meeting of residents of the district of Adamstown, Co. Wexford on February 27, he proposed a motion that condemned internment but

129. Monthly Report of the County Inspector for Kilkenny, Jan. 1919, CO904/108, TNA.

130. *Cork Weekly Examiner*, 1 Feb. 1919.

131. *Irish Field*, 1 Feb. 1919.

132. *Irish Independent*, 26 Feb. 1919.

133. *Tipperary Star*, 8 Feb. 1919.

134. Anthony McCann to Pierce McCann, 3 Feb. 1919, in Eight Report of the Correspondence of Irish Internees, 1–15 Feb. 1919, CO904/164, TNA.

135. *Wexford People*, 22 Feb. 1919.

that appealed “to all Irishmen who have the interest of Ireland, and the horse breeding industry at heart to allow hunting to continue.”<sup>136</sup>

Meath was one of the most active “stopping the hunt” areas, but also a site of resistance within Sinn Féin. The *Irish Field* reported on January 18 that James E. McGlew, who the paper described as a Sinn Féin member of the Meath County Council, proposed holding a meeting of north Meath farmers to protest against any interference with sport in the county,<sup>137</sup> while when Seán Boylan led a party of volunteers to confront the Ward Union Stag hunt near Dunshaughlin Workhouse on February 19, the local Dunshaughlin volunteers refused to participate. Instead, Boylan had to rely on volunteers from Dunboyne and Kilcloon. This division in the ranks worried Eamon Duggan, newly elected Sinn Féin MP for Meath South and Director of Intelligence of the Irish Volunteers. According to Boylan, Duggan noted that “if the people don’t back us up we are beaten,” to which Boylan apparently replied, “they will, if they don’t do it for love, they will do it for fear.”<sup>138</sup> It is important not to overstate the schism within Sinn Féin, but in some places it was real as the campaign’s slogans ran up against the somewhat more complicated reality of rural Ireland’s social, sporting, and political life.

The masters and members of the hunts were the second group from whom the situation demanded a response. Eventually, as we have seen, almost all hunting stopped and several masters resigned, but such an outcome was not obvious at the beginning as hunts and their supporters attempted to oppose the Sinn Féin agitation through a concerted campaign of their own in sympathetic organs of the local, national, and sporting press. Unsurprisingly, members of the hunts felt that the singling out of their leisure was unsporting, and central to the countercampaign was a familiar, if naïve, cry of the frustrated sports enthusiast: “Why,” asked Isaac Bell, master of the Kilkenny hunt, “mix up the nation’s sport with politics?” Addressing the local Sinn Féin secretary through the supportive pages of the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Field*, Bell pointed out that he was an American, that he

136. *Wexford People*, 1 Mar. 1919.

137. *Irish Field*, 18 Jan. 1919. McGlew[McGlew?] was a substantial landowner. Denis Boyle, *A History of Meath County Council 1899–1999: A Century of Democracy in Meath* (Navan, 1999[incomplete publisher information]), 62, 77.

138. WS1715 (Seán Boylan) BMH, NAI.

had devoted his “whole life, energy and income to fox-hunting,” that he knew nothing of (and took no interest in) politics, and that he always kept his hunt “free from politics.”<sup>139</sup> The masters of the Meath, Carlow, Westmeath, and Ward were among those to insist that they were not political or politicians in letters to the press or during confrontations in the field. W. E. Grogan, master of the Carlow, declared that “Nationalist, Unionist, and Sinn Feiners are all equally welcome at the covert side, and are expected for the time being to leave their politics at home.”<sup>140</sup>

The hunt fraternity’s insistence that sport and politics should remain separate was dented when a number of local hunt committees passed resolutions calling for the release of the prisoners in the hope that this might lead Sinn Féin to mitigate its actions. The hunts had been given occasional indications that this strategy might work. In a letter to the *Cork Examiner* on February 6, David Kent implied that if the hunt clubs called for the “instant release of every Sinn Fein prisoner,” then the interference with their sport would cease. The next day, Jerry Rohan wrote to the *Cork Examiner* announcing that he had called a meeting of Muskerry to discuss passing such a resolution. He indicated his own position by stating:

I’m no politician, but I am an Irishman and entirely opposed to my countrymen, no matter what their views may be, being locked up without charge or trial. I am not speaking for the Muskerry Hunt Club; I can only speak for myself, and if I never blow a horn, or ride a hunt again, I’ll sign any petition that is promulgated to help the release of the prisoners.

The Muskerry followed Rohan’s lead to the disgust of several dissenting members, including Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Peacocke, who complained that “the resolution would lead strangers to the belief that all the members of the Muskerry hunt are Sinn Feiners.”<sup>141</sup> Also risking this unlikely slur, the Waterford hunt assembled at the Mall in the city on February 13. There, thirty-one of the members signed a petition seeking the release of prisoners. Twelve members refused to

139. *Irish Times*, 30 Jan.; *Irish Field*, 1 Feb.; *Sport*, 8 Feb. 1919.

140. *Sport*, 8 Feb.; *Cork Examiner*, 7 Feb.; *Irish Field*, 8 and 22 Feb. 1919; *Carlow Sentinel*, 8 Feb. 1922.

141. *Cork Examiner*, 6, 7, and 12 Feb. 1919.

do so.<sup>142</sup> In neither case did these gestures prove sufficient to appease Sinn Féin.<sup>143</sup>

When the IMFHA committee met on February 19, they were in no mood to pass any resolution relating to the prisoners. Instead, they noted that neither Rohan nor Widger were members and agreed “that each hunt should stand on its own, and if it feels it has the land-owners and farmers as well as the general public on its side hunting and kindred sports should be carried out as usual.”<sup>144</sup> This motion was not released to the press, but a number of hunts were explicit in their refusal to imitate the Muskerry. Bell refused to allow the Kilkenny hunt to consider a motion calling for the release of prisoners, while the Kildare hunt declined to pass a resolution along these lines because it referred to “political matters.”<sup>145</sup>

Another key argument made often, and in vain, by hunts and their defenders was that to attack the hunt was to attack a national economic asset. All in rural society, they contended, would feel the consequences. The *Irish Times* asserted that “the whole Irish people suffer from this absurd measure of blind revenge. Indeed, the country gentleman often loses only his amusement by the stoppage, while the farmer, the labourer, the country tradesman, the hotel-keeper, and the house-agent—many of whom hold Sinn Féin views—are direct and considerable losers of cash.”<sup>146</sup> When announcing his intention to dispense with his stable, Rohan emphasized that “I will have to part with about 20 grooms—many with large families.”<sup>147</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1901, prior to his radical days, Christopher Lennon spoke at Mullinar RDC, opposing a local “stopping the hunt” campaign because of the damage to the local economy.<sup>148</sup> As a consequence, the *Irish Field* refused to countenance the possibility that the 1919 campaign had popular support: “We believe that nine-tenths of the Irish people deplore it.”<sup>149</sup> Years later, James Leahy, who was one of a crowd of forty or fifty volunteers to stop the Kilkenny

142. *Waterford News*, 14 Feb. 1919.

143. *Cork Examiner*, 11 Feb. 1919; *Waterford News*, 14 Feb. 1919.

144. Minutes of the IMFHA, 19 Feb. 1919, IMFHA.

145. *Irish Independent*, 26 Feb. 1919; *Irish Times*, 6 Mar. 1919

146. *Irish Times*, 28 Jan. 1919.

147. *Irish Independent*, 6 Feb. 1919.

148. *Midland Reporter*, 2 May 1901. With thanks to Tom Hunt.

149. *Irish Field*, 1 Mar. 1919.

hunt, conceded that this “action of ours was frowned upon by many local people,”<sup>150</sup> suggesting that there might have been some basis to the view of the County Inspector for Kildare, who believed the “opposition to hunting very unpopular with the majority of farmers & tradesmen,” but admitted it “is quite within the power of a few to stop fox hunting.”<sup>151</sup>

The hunts may have taken some comfort in the fact that so few local councils backed the campaign. In 1919 the great majority of sitting local government representatives had been elected prior to 1917, ensuring that while Sinn Féin had acquired an increasing voice in the form of councillors or guardians who had switched to its banner it did not dominate district councils, boards of guardians, and county councils across the country. Consequently, councils often ignored the issue, and, in some cases, representatives of the Irish Party and other varieties of non-Sinn Féin nationalists openly questioned the wisdom of the enterprise. The Naas Sinn Féin Club may have called for a ban on hunting, but both Naas No. 1 and Naas No. 2 RDCs refused to do so. In each case a lone voice proposed a motion to stop the hunt, but found not another supporter.<sup>152</sup> In nearby Celbridge only two members of the district council supported a resolution.<sup>153</sup> When the Board of Guardians of Kilkenny Union met on January 21, there was a heated debate between nationalists of various hues. All agreed that a motion should be passed demanding the release of prisoners, but became divided when faced with a proposal to stop the hunt, with several speakers wading in. While a Mr. Mulrooney and a Mr. Stallard were gung-ho, a Mr. Doyle thought that “there are as good nationalists following the hunt as you would get in any part of the world,” and a Mr. T. W. Kelly stated that he personally had subscribed to the hunt and thought “you might as well go down and close the Cinema and the Theatre and stop hurling and football or any other kind of sport as to stop fox-hunting.”<sup>154</sup> The Navan UDC seems to have been unique in passing a motion “protesting

150. WS1335 (James Leahy) BMH, NAI.

151. Monthly Report of the County Inspector for Kildare, Feb. 1919, CO904/108, TNA.

152. *Cork Examiner*, 8 Feb. 1919; *Kildare Observer*, 8 Feb. 1919.

153. *Kildare Observer*, 18 Jan. 1919.

154. *Kilkenny Journal*, 25 Jan. 1919

most strongly against the actions of some persons, which had resulted in the stoppage of the Meath hunt for the season.” The chairman, Joseph Keappock, a merchant, proposed the motion, and Eugene Gilsean, a flour and grain merchant, was among its supporters. He said that “hunting was responsible for making Navan what it was.”<sup>155</sup>

If the hunts were to withstand the campaign, the attitude of local councils mattered a lot less than that of the state and of farmers. The hunts relied on the state for protection and on farmers for permission to ride across their lands. Farmers participated on both sides of the debate. Politics aside, the hunt had always divided them. While some well-off farmers hunted with ardor, others watched in trepidation, resentfully anticipating damage to their property.<sup>156</sup> The “stopping the hunt” campaign magnified this ambiguity as farmers’ organizations came under pressure from both the hunts and the protestors. Farmers’ meetings throughout the country became hotly contested arenas. At first, farmers’ meetings in Navan, Mullingar, and Midleton passed resolutions offering unqualified support to the hunt.<sup>157</sup> Edith Somerville recorded in her diary that she sent her huntsman “to ascertain feelings of farmers re hunting. Message sent was that if we came every day in the week it wouldn’t be often enough, & if the fields were ripe for harvest we might ride over them!”<sup>158</sup> Throughout February, Somerville’s West Carbery continued to hunt without a problem and with the apparent support of farmers in her area.<sup>159</sup> She was fortunate. As the campaign became more organized and intimidating, it became typical for farmers’ meetings to become publicly equivocal. While continuing to pass resolutions that were generally sympathetic toward the hunt, it became more common for farmers to simultane-

155. *Meath Chronicle*, 8 Feb. 1919.

156. *Wexford People*, 15 Jan. 1919.

157. *Irish Field*, 1 Mar.; *Westmeath Examiner*, 1 Feb. 1919; *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 Feb. 1919. See also *Leinster Leader*, 8 Feb. 1919.

158. Diary of Edith Somerville, 7 Feb. 1919, Somerville and Ross Papers, Special Collections, QUB. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd., London, on behalf of the Estate of Edith Somerville. Copyright (c) Edith Somerville 1919. For general information on Somerville’s association with the West Carbery, see Gifford Lewis, *Edith Somerville* (Dublin, 2005[incomplete publisher information]), 219, 247, 269, 297–98.

159. Diary of Edith Somerville, 10, 22, and 28 Feb. 1919, Somerville and Ross Papers, Special Collections, QUB.

ously declare a desire to see the prisoners released.<sup>160</sup> Then, as Sinn Féin mobilized sympathetic farmers to organize meetings, or to disrupt farmers' meetings that were likely to be pro-hunt, the typical motion changed once more. When a meeting of farmers was called for Kilkenny courthouse on February 22, Sinn Féin ensured that its supporters turned up in force. Amid allegations that not all the antihunt advocates present were farmers, and to the disgust of a vociferous minority, the meeting not only carried a motion calling for the release of prisoners, but demanded that the hunt club be asked to adopt this position. The meeting ended in uproar and to the sound of "The Soldiers' Song."<sup>161</sup> Similarly, although the Kildare Farmers' Federation, which met in Naas on March 5, unanimously voted in favor of the continuance of hunting, they called for internees to be tried or released and sent this resolution to the Hunt Committee for approval.

The response of the state was, if anything, even less comforting to the hunts, offering as it did limited protection. Both the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction and the office of the press censor monitored the campaign, but neither intervened.<sup>162</sup> The RIC also monitored the campaign,<sup>163</sup> but, more important, their efforts to thwart intimidation were sporadic and not always very effective. Notably, the police were not present at the three violent confrontations at Dunshauglin, Tramore, and Ballyshoneen. When, on February 27, Major R. W. H. O'Neill, unionist MP for the constituency of mid-Antrim, inquired in the House of Commons as to the steps being taken "to prevent interference with hunting," Arthur Warren Samuels, Solicitor General of Ireland, gave him the qualified assurance that "if it is anticipated that a disturbance will take place the police are there."<sup>164</sup> The local newspapers did note a police presence at a number of hunt meetings that passed off without protest,<sup>165</sup> and there were occasions, such as meetings at Slane and Clane, when their presence may have averted violence even if it did not prevent

160. *Irish Field*, 1 Mar. 1919.

161. *Kilkenny Journal*, 1 Mar. 1919.

162. File on stopping the hunt, DATI 92/2/44, NAI; Monthly reports of the press censor, Jan., Feb., and Mar. 1919, CO904/167, TNA.

163. Monthly reports of county inspectors of the RIC, CO904/108, TNA.

164. *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, cxii, 1933–34, 27 Feb. 1919; See correspondence in Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, CSORP1919/5505, NAI.

165. *Cork Weekly Examiner*, 1 Feb.; *King's County Chronicle*, 20 Feb. 1919.

protestors from stopping the hunt.<sup>166</sup> In the aftermath of the shooting incident at Dunshauglin, the police did offer the Ward more assertive protection, although again this did not ensure that hunt untrammelled enjoyment of its sport.<sup>167</sup> The most effective intervention by the crown forces seems to have come in Cork when, in late January, the Ovens Sinn Féin Club attached an addendum to the usual stop the hunt motion. They called upon farmers and their employees “not to allow fishing on the Lee and Bride rivers as a protest against the action of the British Government.”<sup>168</sup> This was acted upon on Saturday, February 1, the opening day of the angling season, when some “fifty young men, armed with heavy sticks, patrolled the banks of the River Lee . . . and warned off a number of persons who were engaged in salmon and trout fishing, adding that no fishing would be permitted until the release of the political prisoners.” This successful intimidation was reported to the military and police authorities at Ballincollig and, in response, “a strong party of soldiers and policemen” attended and cleared the riverbank of protestors on the following morning.<sup>169</sup>

Overall, there is no record of any arrest or prosecution in connection with the campaign, and its success in bringing hunting to a halt seems to bear out David Fitzpatrick’s suggestion that levels of revolutionary activity were directly related to the likelihood that rebels would be caught and punished.<sup>170</sup> The failure by the police to adequately protect the hunts contributed to Sinn Féin’s victory in this contest for the public space.

Defenders of the hunt argued throughout that the “stopping the hunt” crusade was aimed at the wrong target and as a consequence likely to be ineffective. The *Kildare Observer* asked: Does “any reasonable man believe for a moment that the object which is said to animate those who would stop hunting—the release of political prisoners—can be gained by this means?”<sup>171</sup> A correspondent to the *Tuam Herald* offered the same view, more colorfully:

166. *Meath Chronicle*, 8 Feb. 1919; *Cork Examiner*, 12 Feb. 1919

167. WS1715 (Seán Boylan) BMH, NAI; *Meath Chronicle*, 1 Mar. 1919.

168. *Cork Examiner*, 31 Jan. 1919.

169. *Cork Examiner*, 4 Feb. 1919.

170. David Fitzpatrick, “The Geography of Irish Nationalism 1910–1921,” *Past and Present* 78 (Feb. 1978), 115.

171. *Kildare Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919.

The stopping of hunting because of the detention of the political prisoners is one of the most stupid acts of suicidal folly on the part of the Irish people that can be conceived. It is cutting our own throats. It won't affect or influence the Government a bit. They don't hunt nor do their followers.<sup>172</sup>

On March 4, the British cabinet decided to release the internees. If the stopping the hunt campaign had any impact on this decision it was limited and indirect. The cabinet had finally accepted the urgings of Chief Secretary for Ireland Ian MacPherson that, in Ireland, “responsible opinion was unanimous in favour of their [the prisoners] release.”<sup>173</sup> News from Gloucester prison of a significant outbreak of influenza, raising the fear of further prison martyrs, helped MacPherson's case, but the decision had not come soon enough to save Pierce McCann, who died at Gloucester on March 6. During January 1919 the Lord Lieutenant, Lord French, who had previously opposed calls to release the internees changed his mind, having come under the influence of Lord Haldane, the former Liberal cabinet minister, and Henry Robinson, vice president of the Local Government Board of Ireland. They had convinced him that it might be possible for the administration to deal with Sinn Féin, but this would require the release of the internees who, they represented, as predominantly from the moderate, politically minded wing of the party. Robinson admitted there were dangers, but not to release, he argued, would hand the Sinn Féin movement over to an “irresponsible hooligan minority” who would reduce the country to “murder, looting of country houses and revolution.”<sup>174</sup> The “stopping the hunt” campaign may have reinforced this argument for French, and the cabinet, but it alone would not have forced the internees' release.

## CONCLUSION

In the spring of 1919, at the GAA's annual congress, Harry Boland spoke in defense of a proposal to ban serving civil servants from membership of the association. The GAA “owed its position,” he

172. *Tuam Herald*, 8 Feb. 1919.

173. Minutes of War Cabinet, 4 Mar. 1919, CAB23/9, TNA.

174. Henry Robinson to Edward Saunderson, 6 Jan. 1919, JDPF 8/1D, IWM.

argued, “to the fact that it had always drawn the line between the garrison and the gael.”<sup>175</sup> During these months, separatists in Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers demonstrated their determination to draw this line ever more sharply as in committee and council rooms, in the pages of the press, and across the fields of provincial Ireland they used another sport, the hunt, to promote the same idea. The Irish people faced a simple choice, the separatists insisted, between them—the legitimate voice of Ireland—and the “Castle gang.” In this case, they must choose between the prisoners and the hunt. For those provincial separatists who participated, the stopping the hunt campaign was certainly an expression of support for their interned leaders, but it was much more than that. It was an activity that gave them a purpose at a moment when postelection lethargy might have set in. They used it to define and target their enemies: the British army and those sympathetic to it, magistrates, the “‘English’ Irishmen” of the Ascendancy and *shoneen* classes, and the Irish Party. Through shared action, they confirmed their intent and solidarity, and discovered those among their own number who were unwilling to act. Perhaps most important, they asserted their claim to authority in Ireland and challenged the existing state in a most practical way, by taking control of the public space and denying others access to it. In all of this the separatists’ actions emphasize the importance of sport as a cultural signifier, an importance that renders it useful for, or vulnerable to, politically motivated campaigns. In the context of a crisis such as the Irish revolution, the implications of this for sporting life were significant.

Tracing the contours of Sinn Féin’s campaign against the hunt, chasing the confusion of origins, motivations, and reactions that constitute the conflict also reminds us that Ireland in 1919 was a much more complex place than the separatists’ binary vision allowed. Deeply divided as that society was, it comprised individuals and groups whose identities could be subtle and mixed, and whose interests remained fluid and interdependent, even as the growing crisis seemed to impose stark choices. In the face of the campaign, the hunts tried to present themselves as more than the caricatures drawn by the stoppers. Local councils and farmers sought ways to express

175. Rouse, “Politics of Culture and Sport,” 358.

their sympathy for the prisoners, while keeping their distance from the campaign against the hunt. And although hunts throughout the country came under pressure, this was not exerted uniformly in all places. Just as some hunts were more persistent in pursuing their pleasure, so too the attacks upon them varied in intensity from place to place. These disparities had a variety of causes—in some areas, for instance, the tactic had deeper roots than in others—but at least some separatists openly expressed their opposition to the campaign, or refused to participate. A few of them hunted. Irish sporting life was colored by politics and identity and class, but even at a time of revolution, when these real differences took on heightened meaning, a gap remained between the complicated reality and the rhetoric of cultural politics.