In public perception, anti-communism in Ireland was uniquely relentless and all-pervasive before the liberalisation of social values in the 1960s. The most acclaimed survey of the political history of twentieth-century Ireland, Lee's *Ireland: 1912-1985*, made just eight passing references to ‘communism’ in 687 pages, and all of them actually dealt with anti-communism.\(^1\) What little has been written on the subject has focused largely on the ‘red scares’ of the early 1930s and the onset of the Cold War. Neglect of other periods is presumed to reflect the absence of anything for anti-communists to protest against. Another blind spot in the literature is Northern Ireland, where the state could be more repressive, and politics more tolerant of the communists, than in the south.

The golden age of Irish anti-communism stretched from 1930 to the 1960s. The Bolsheviks were fairly popular in Ireland during the independence struggle of 1916-21, and continued to have an influence on republicanism and trade unionism throughout the 1920s. Yet the Catholic church said very little on the subject before ... cold war period, when international events were more influential, and the church exploited popular paranoia to intensify public piety and clerical direction of spirituality. Fear of communism declined with the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), and purely secular mobilisation against communism was very intermittent, though it was still possible for political opportunists to conjure the Republic’s last significant red scare in June 1969.\(^2\) By August of that year, the Northern

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22. There were two numbers of *The Rhyming Reasoner*: a journal of indiscretion published in September and November 1956 and edited by ‘W. McGonagall’, a name British and especially Scottish readers will know as the perpetrator of doggerel and reputedly the worst poet in the world. Purporting to come from the Elysian Fields, it was in fact produced in Glasgow by Ronald Meek and John Houston.


troubles were turning violent, giving the political elites something more substantial to worry about. In Northern Ireland, everything was refracted through a sectarian divide that both frustrated the communists and distracted their enemies. Seeing its chronic political duty as the protection of the beleaguered minority, and excepting during the period of the Spanish Civil War, the Catholic church confined anti-radicalism to specific instances where the left challenged the Nationalist Party. Fears of socialism miraculously evaporated when Labour confronted the Unionists. For Protestants and Unionists, communism was almost always less dangerous than republicanism; a perspective shared by the majority in the Republic after the emergence of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Despite its reputation as a ‘sacra insula’, the Irish case was not entirely sui generis. While Ireland was exceptional in the extreme weakness of its communism, in the overwhelmingly religious basis of its anti-communism, and in the near-totalitarian social power of the Catholic clergy between the 1930s and 1960s, the policies of the Irish hierarchy, and in many respects the communist response, reflected international trends. Scares, by definition, entail exaggeration and manipulation, and it was usually the international climate that made the exaggeration plausible. The manipulation was home-grown. For the most part, the scares served the interests of the Catholic church. But arguably, in 1931-2 and 1936-7, they were used by Cumann na nGaedheal and Fine Gael to discredit Fianna Fáil, and undoubtedly in 1969 Fianna Fáil invoked the communist bogey to smear the Labour Party.

**A sacra insula?**

The failure of English/British governments to impose Protestantism on the native Irish created a strong affinity between national identity and Catholicism. The power of the church was reinforced after the Great Famine by the ‘devotional revolution’, a process marked by the imposition of Ultramontanism in the hierarchy, a major growth in the number of religious, and a consolidation of clerical control over religious practice, education, and health provision. A high proportion of religious came from a farming background, and down to the 1960s they would be accused of indifference to, or incomprehension of, urban social problems.

From the campaign for Catholic emancipation in the 1820s, the clergy had a reputation for intervention in politics and hostility to radicalism. Friedrich Engels famously lamented to Karl Marx in 1869:

> Ireland still remains the sacra insula, whose aspirations may not be lumped together with the profane class struggle of the rest of the sinful world. Partly, this is certainly an honest madness of these people, but equally certainly it is partly a calculated policy … to maintain their domination over the peasants.

The point was brought home to Marx in 1872 after he had persuaded the International Working Men’s Association to organise in Ireland. Within three months the International’s Irish branches had sunk beneath a clerically induced red scare; the Catholic church being in a violently anti-socialist mood in the wake of the Paris Commune. The infernal acronym of the International’s Irish cover name, the Hibernian Excelsior Labour League, would not have reassured the clergy. When Ireland’s most famous Marxist, James Connolly, became active in Dublin in 1896, he insisted that religion and politics were quite separate, denounced socialist anti-clericalism as much as Catholic anti-socialism, and had no time for Christian socialism.

It became the norm for Irish socialists to take the same line and cite Connolly in justification. The Church had a somewhat analogous sense of demarcation, for while Ireland was mainly Catholic, it was anglophone as well, and imbued with an European pattern rarely gained traction. The church virtually ignored Labour as long as Labour ignored socialism, and deemed *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the first papal encyclical on the labour question, all that needed to be said on the subject. When trade unionism increasingly became influenced by Jim Larkin, and Larkin by syndicalism, between 1907 and 1914, clerical censure rose commensurately. The criticism was scattered, and focused on the importation of ‘foreign’ ideas or the malign role of ‘agitators’, before some concentrated condemnation during and after the 1913 Dublin lockout. The preference...
was for ‘Christianising’ unions rather than sponsoring Catholic alternatives. An awareness of its historical neglect contributed to a surge in Catholic publications on the Labour question during the industrial unrest of 1917-23 and to a more considered stance.

A curious interlude, 1917-29

The decade after the October revolution was a time of curious quietism regarding politics for the Catholic church, though it was the period when it had greatest cause for concern with Bolshevism. Between 1917 and 1920, trade union density rose from under ten per cent to over twenty per cent. Reflecting European trends, Labour moved sharply to the left and identified strongly with the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were popular too in the republican movement, for their opposition to the world war and support for national self-determination. The British secret service responded to contacts between Sinn Féin and the Bolsheviks by running a propaganda campaign to depict the independence struggle as Bolshevik manipulated. Also by 1920, employers, farmers especially, were starting to denounce trade union direct action – which included some hundred workplace occupations called ‘soviets’ – as ‘Russian methods’. The Irish Farmers’ Union considered the formation of a ‘Farmers’ Freedom Force’, an armed militia to be a ‘national bulwark against Labour, Socialism, and Bolshevism’. Vigilantes styling themselves the ‘White Guards’ emerged during farm strikes in 1923. The militancy and radicalism of mainstream Labour was crushed during the slump of 1921-3, while Sinn Féin and the IRA split over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. The conservatives of what became Cumann na nGaedheal routed the die-hards in the Civil War of 1922-3, and formed the government for the next ten years. Communist influence had been pervasive but not cohesive. The defeats and the deportation of Larkin from the United States in 1923 created opportunities for the Comintern to change that.

In 1924 the Comintern dissolved the first Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) in favour of Larkin's Irish Worker League. It seemed an obvious move. Since its foundation in 1921, the CPI had been small and ineffective, whereas Larkin enjoyed a big personal following. Sixteen thousand workers, two-thirds of the Dublin membership, defected from the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU) to the breakaway Larkinite Workers’ Union of Ireland, which became the largest anglophone affiliate of the Profintern. A further 5000 workers were affiliated to the ‘all-red’ Dublin trades council – which rivalled the anti-Larkinite Dublin Workers Council – and they sent delegates to conferences of the British Minority Movement in 1925, 1926 and 1928. Larkin himself became the only communist ever elected to Dáil Éireann, the Irish lower house, in 1927. There were various reasons for the muted reaction to these developments. The Workers’ Union of Ireland embarked on a series of reckless strikes which left it checked and financially exhausted within twelve months. Temperamental and near impossible to work with, Larkin frustrated Comintern efforts to constitute the Irish Worker League as a Leninist-type party, ensuring it functioned as little more than a personal soapbox. A man described by the Department of Justice as ‘a dangerous revolutionist’ in 1924 would generate ‘no cause whatsoever for anxiety about his relations with Russia’ during the British general strike of 1926. Moscow’s cultivation of the IRA was bearing fruit in the creation of divers front organisations, but the IRA was anathema to the Cumann na nGaedheal government in any case, and Cumann na nGaedheal had greater cause for concern with the launch of a new republican party, Óstán de Valera’s Fianna Fáil, in 1926.

Most importantly, the Vatican had regarded the disestablishment of the Russian Orthodox church after 1917 as presenting a major opportunity, and sought a concordat with the Soviet government permitting Roman clergy to proselytise in Russia. The Soviets admitted an apostolic delegate who ordained priests and bishops between 1925 and 1927, but following recognition from the British and American governments they turned less co-operative. By 1928, Pope Pius XI had concluded that open confrontation with communism was only a matter of time. Pius was already championing Catholic action as a social and political answer to the world’s descent into crises, and Irish Catholics were starting to respond. In 1926 the Jesuit-guided An Ríogacht [The Kingdom]: The League of the Kingship of Christ became the first of a number of Catholic social study circles to emerge over the next ten years. Broadly speaking, they aimed to recover the idea of Christendom destroyed by the three great historic evils, the reformation, the French revolution and...
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1917-18. The national question was also to become a source of internal division as a sizable minority of religious opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty.24 From 1925 the clergy found a fresh rationale in addressing the problems of the dance-hall, cinema, and what was called sin literature. From 1929 onwards, the clergy also found a fresh rationale in addressing the problems of social morals presumed to be arising from the novel temptations of the dance-hall, cinema, and what was called sin literature.25

Popular enthusiasm for the centenary celebrations of Catholic emancipation in 1929 pleasantly surprised the clergy, and was seen as an affront to clerical authority. Moreover, to prosecute the clergy found a fresh rationale in addressing the problems of social morals presumed to be arising from the novel temptations of the dance-hall, cinema, and what was called sin literature.25

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Emmet O'Connor

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silver jubilee in 1935 with renewed action against communist and unemployed meetings. If the Catholic church in the North was more discreet, a report to Moscow noted in July 1933: ‘the best progress is now made in the non-nationalist section’. What clerical power could mean in practice is illustrated in a letter from one comrade on a visit from his parish priest:

He started with trying to make me give up the idea of forming [a] RWG. When all failed he said, ‘If I brought a Doctor of Divinity to you he would convince me I was wrong. I said in reply that they would show him where he was wrong. Any way they brought pressure to bear on my people and I had to leave home’.31

The reaction climaxed in 1933. Inflamed by lenten pastorals and missions, and led by St Patrick’s Anti-Communism League and the Catholic Young Men’s Society, crowds made nightly attacks on communist and leftwing meetings. IRA leaders had taken a lonely stand in challenging the clerical criticism. This being the height of the Third Period, there was no love lost. North or South, between the communists and the Labour parties and the bulk of trade unionists. The Irish Labour Party was particularly deferential to the Catholic church between the 1930s and 1960s, a period during which its two leaders, William Norton and Brendan Corish, were both Knights of Columbans.32 The IRA now concluded that the communists were more trouble than they were worth, and condemned communism for its ‘denial of God and active hostility to religion’.33

The following year, 1933, was also a high-water mark of fascism in Ireland. The British Fascists had a small presence in Northern Ireland, and among ex-Unionists in Dublin, from the mid-1920s to 1932, when they were displaced by bigger but still insignificant units of the British Union of Fascists. Fascism in the Free State acquired significance in reaction to Fianna Fáil’s clerical victories and the Economic War, a trade war with Britain which severely affected cattle ranchers. Protesting the denial of God and active hostility to religion,34 the British Fascists, led by the anti-Catholic Union of Fascists, held a small presence in Northern Ireland, and were displaced by bigger but still insignificant units of the British Union of Fascists. Fascism in the Free State acquired significance in reaction to Fianna Fáil’s clerical victories and the Economic War, a trade war with Britain which severely affected cattle ranchers. Protesting the
need for defence against IRA gangs, Cumann na nGaedheal men flooded into a small circle of anti-Fianna Fáil ex-officers known as the Army Comrades’ Association, and gave it the style of Europe’s ‘shirted’ movements, with the Roman salute and blue shirts. Under former police commissioner Eoin O’Duffy, the Blueshirts mushroomed to forty-eight thousand members in mid 1933. Like Cumann na nGaedheal, the Blueshirts represented Fianna Fáil and the IRA as crypto-communist. The movement faltered in August after the government banned a march to parliament buildings at Leinster House – widely seen as an emulation of Mussolini’s march on Rome – and merged with Cumann na nGaedheal to form Fine Gael. O’Duffy left Fine Gael in 1935 to form the tiny National Corporate Party and its minuscule paramilitary wing, the Greenshirts.37

The political extremes had receded a little when the Spanish Civil War triggered a sudden revival of the passions. For the bulk of Irish Catholics, Franco’s war was for the church, against the Reds. Spain was the focus. Targets at home were hard to find. After doing its best to avoid the issue, the Labour Party published the pamphlet *Cemeteries of Liberty: Communist and Fascist Dictatorships*, which equated Stalinism and Nazism and ignored Franco, indicating that Labour would take no stance on Spain.38 Outraged by anti-clerical atrocities in Spain, thousands thronged the rallies of the pro-Franco Irish Christian Front, formed in August 1936 by Fine Gael TD [MP] Patrick Belton, with the encouragement of the church and the *Irish Independent*. In response to a request from the Carlist Count Ramírez de Arellano, Joseph Cardinal McRory asked O’Duffy to raise an Irish unit for Franco’s army. Some 680 men joined O’Duffy’s ‘Irish Brigade’, while the CPI and the Republican Congress – a left-wing splinter from the IRA – sent about 150 to join the International Brigades.39 The hierarchy also raised £44,000 in church-gate collections for Spanish Catholics.40 The political climate relaxed in the summer of 1937. The Irish Brigade limped home in June, tarnished by an undistinguished military performance, and was received with embarrassment. Fianna Fáil was re-elected in July despite de Valera’s neutrality on Spain. Fears that Ireland would lurch to the far right abated. Belton himself was unseated, and the Christian Front withered. In Northern Ireland the Unionists had little sympathy for either side in the war. Northern Labour was more forthright in support of the Spanish Republic, and its chief opponent was the Catholic church.

**Wartime oddities**

In December 1939 the CPI’s Belfast branch launched a campaign for Northern Ireland’s withdrawal from the war, and in 1940 it supported protests for the reprieve of IRA men later executed for a bombing in Coventry. Stormont responded with arrests and suppression of communist publications. In Éire, a handful of veterans of the International Brigades joined a larger IRA contingent in internment camps as the government adopted strict security measures. Otherwise, the CPI was free to oppose the ‘imperialist war’. All changed with the German invasion of the USSR. The party in Éire agreed to disband to avoid conflict between the Comintern line and Irish neutrality, leaving the CPI to become, in effect, the Communist Party of Northern Ireland. The Northern party’s absolute commitment to the war effort, coupled with its phenomenal enthusiasm for all things Soviet in the United Kingdom, caused membership to mushroom from a few dozen to 1000 by 1943. The party ended the war with six full-time workers and long-term positions of influence in Belfast’s engineering unions. Already, a general suspicion of communism had returned. Party membership fell sharply in 1944 and would dwindle to 172 by 1949.41

From the vantage point of neutral Éire, ‘The Emergency’, as the government called the war years, was a time when the old certainties of liberal capitalism were in the melting pot, inviting radical initiatives on the far-right and in reform of industrial relations. The new European order encouraged the creation of diverse organisations, with values blending anti-capitalism, anti-semitism, fascism and anti-communism. The Financial Freedom Federation, the People’s National Party, the Monetary Reform Party and the Social Credit Party remained obscure. The most successful was *Ailtirí na hAiséirghe* [Architects of the Resurrection], which sought a Gaelic Christian corporatist anti-modernist state. Aiséirghe literature sold in the tens of thousands. One moderated version of Aiséirghe thinking, commending the example of Pétain and Salazar, was advocated in the pamphlet *National Action*, with the impri-
alleged domination of the ITUC by British-based unions. Legislation to restructure industrial relations in 1941 had brought to a head the latent differences between British-based and private sector Irish unions. The former had an ingrained commitment to free collective bargaining and a liberal conception of Labour-state relations, whereas the CIU, representative mainly of low-paid workers in the private sector, wanted a more collaborative relationship with government. Tellingly, the bulk of Irish public sector unions stuck with the ITUC. As the ITUC asserted its ‘internationalism’, the CIU advertised its nationalism, and by extension its Catholicism and anti-communism. Early CIU congresses were opened by a prelate in the presence of the American Vice Consul, and it sometimes seemed that delegates wanted to defend any argument on any subject as the best means of fighting communism. In many instances, crucifixes appeared in union halls, meetings were started with a prayer, and branches had a priest address their annual meetings. The process was driven by the unions rather than the church; the ITUC had little difficulty in staying comparatively secular and laconic on communism. The government encouraged unity talks in 1954, and the two congresses merged in 1959 as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Cold War: Nihil Obstat

Europe’s swing to the left after the war, and Britain’s Beveridge report in particular, initially spurred the church into positive initiatives. In 1946, leading Catholic actionist Professor Alfred O’Rahilly had University College, Cork, offer lectures for trade unionists ‘to resist the steady pressure of crypto-communists’. The crypto-communist Cork Socialist Party was read from the altar. With CIU backing, a programme similar to O’Rahilly’s later developed at University College, Dublin. The ITUC-backed People’s College – a title which deepened suspicion of eastern European influence – was founded in 1948 to offer courses based on those run in Britain by the Workers’ Educational Association. The People’s College encountered ‘massive opposition’, and to forestall the extension of secular adult education, O’Rahilly expanded his programme at Cork throughout Munster, while the Jesuits founded the Catholic Workers’ College in Dublin. Meanwhile, an Éire communist party, the
the projection of religion as a talisman against the red octopus. The director of the crusade told Waterford workers in 1957: "In some homes in Dublin, the picture of the Sacred Heart was replaced by a picture of Stalin." 52 Douglas Hyde, the British communist turned Catholic, and hero of English Catholicism, was lionised in Ireland. When he warned of communist infiltration in Waterford's Municipal Theatre in 1958, the ITGWU branch secretary seconded the vote of thanks. 53 It became impossible for any non-communist organisation to survive if it included known communist members. Victims of red scares ... Society, which ran a small shop in a working-class area of Dublin, and Dublin unemployed associations in 1953 and 1958. 54 Nor was reaction confined to Catholic Ireland. The Promethean Society in Trinity College, Dublin, had been making a modest but steady progress until the Korean war produced a 'right-wing landslide', crushing the student left in the college until the late 1960s.

Northern Ireland escaped the hysteria. The Northern communist party was small, and largely Protestant and pro-Union in the 1950s. Finding it too proletarian for its taste, the Nationalist Party abandoned the Social Democratic and Labour Party in 1945, minimising the possibility of conflict between the Catholic church and Labour groups. Michael McGonagle, a Northern Irish communist, was arrested in 1945 for his activities. When Stephen McGonagle stood as an Independent Labour candidate against Nationalist leader Eamonn MacDaid in Derry in 1962, he was convicted of false imprisonment.

There were limits to the neurosis, usually set by the hierarchy's satisfaction with the status quo or by popular appetite for entertainment. Groups like Maria Duce had no success with campaigns to make Ireland a confessional state. The ITGWU rejected confessionalism, and dismissed clerical reservations about its one prominent Protestant leader. Protests by the Catholic Cinema and Theatre Patrons' Association against performances in Dublin by supposed fellow-travellers like Orson Welles, Gregory Peck and Danny Kaye attracted little support.

A celebrated own goal occurred in 1955. McQuaid had persuaded the Football Association of Ireland to decline a Yugoslav request for a friendly international in 1948. The government, led by the Fianna Fáil leader Éamon de Valera, who had been a key figure in the foundation of the Irish state in 1922, declined to accept the Yugoslav challenge. McQuaid deplored the fixture, and the Irish government, which was under pressure from the Vatican to maintain good relations with the Church, was forced to announce that it would not interfere in the matter.

Irish workers' movements, re-established in 1948, were semi-clandestine. Sales of its paper, the Irish Workers' Voice, amounted to about a thousand per issue in 1950, and four hundred of these were by personal contact. One critic recalled trying to sell the paper in public places without success.

The weakness of domestic communism, coupled with the impact of Pius XII – the first 'media Pope' – and his engagement with the Cold War, soon altered the thrust of anti-communism towards concern with the red menace in Catholic countries. The weakness of domestic communism was coupled with the impact of Pius XII – the first 'media Pope' – and his engagement with the Cold War, soon altered the thrust of anti-communism towards concern with the red menace in Catholic countries. The weakness of domestic communism was coupled with the impact of Pius XII – the first 'media Pope' – and his engagement with the Cold War, soon altered the thrust of anti-communism towards concern with the red menace in Catholic countries.

Outrage at the arrests of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac by the Yugoslav authorities and of Cardinal József Mindszenty of Hungary in 1946 initiated the change of tone. The press published long lists of organisations and groups of employees having masses said for their persecuted co-religionists. Responding to the Pope's fears of a communist takeover in Italy, the Irish hierarchy raised £60,000 for the Christian Democrats in the run-up to the Italian election of 1948. The government allowed the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, a name synonymous with the reach and power of the contemporary church, to broadcast an appeal on Radio Eireann and facilitate the transfer of the government's appeal to the Vatican. The bomb attack on the Parliament building in Rome in 1949, forty thousand workers from a wide variety of unions and clerical reservations about its one prominent Protestant leader. Protests by the Catholic Cinema and Theatre Patrons' Association against performances in Dublin by supposed fellow-travellers like Orson Welles, Gregory Peck and Danny Kaye attracted little support. A celebrated own goal occurred in 1955. McQuaid deplored the fixture, and the Irish government, which was under pressure from the Vatican to maintain good relations with the Church, was forced to announce that it would not interfere in the matter.

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Radio Éireann declined to broadcast it, and no government officials were present. The attendance of 21,400 was about half the crowd that a friendly match of that calibre would normally have drawn, but it punctured the image of universal fidelity. There was no repeat of the controversy when the Republic played Poland in 1958 and 1964, and Czechoslovakia in 1959 and 1961.58

Hostility to communism relaxed under the reforming pontificate of John XXIII and Vatican II. Moreover, the government’s abandonment of tariff protectionism for a free trade strategy, and its application for entry to the European Economic Community in 1961, entailed a wholehearted embrace of modernism. The last red scares of note occurred in 1968-9. Stormont represented the civil rights movement as a republican-communist conspiracy.59 In the Republic, the Labour Party lost the run of itself in its anxiety to catch up with the zeitgeist. A lurch to the left caused one deputy to resign in protest at its takeover by ‘ambitious fellow-travellers’. Others pleaded that the new policies were compatible with papal encyclicals. In the 1969 general election, Fianna Fáil, and to a lesser extent Fine Gael and the provincial press, slandered Labour as communist and its new intellectual recruits as anti-clerical. Astonishing mileage was made out of a passing commendation of Cuba by Conor Cruise O’Brien. Tánaiste Jack Lynch subtly endorsed the smears in his genteel manner with an egregious tour of convents. Apart from a few religious, the church itself said nothing. The slight rise in the Labour vote, and slight fall in the number of its TDs, was a huge disappointment to a party anticipating a big advance. The leadership quickly concluded it had gone too far left. Journalists dubbed its subsequent backpedalling ‘the retreat from Havana’.60

From red scare to green scare

Whereas liberalism or social radicalism in the 1960s were often justified with reference to Pope John, secularism gathered pace in the 1970s. Attacks on Maoist bookshops in Limerick and Cork in 1970 reflected the intolerance of a few reactionaries, and failed to generate broad-based scares. Increasingly, the mores of ‘de Valera’s Ireland’ – as the mid-twentieth century was labelled – were interrogated with incredulity. The left toasted the secular turn with memorials to International Brigaders – fourteen between 1984 and 2008 – who were re-imagined as victims of clericalism and prophetic forerunners of modern, European Ireland.61 All-party backing for the legalisation of divorce in 1995, despite sizable electoral opposition, confirmed that liberalism had displaced Catholicism as the hegemon of the political elite.

Toleration of marxism was deepened too by the re-emergence of a more substantial threat in the Provisional IRA, and by the fact that the leading marxist group after 1970, Official Sinn Féin, Sinn Féin/the Workers’ Party from 1977, and the Workers’ Party from 1982, developed an aggressive antipathy to nationalism after its split with the Provisionals.62 It became an article of faith in the Officials that Fianna Fáil had had a hand in the split to frustrate the evolution of a ‘red’ republican movement. Fianna Fáil, like the Northern and southern establishment generally, would soon prefer the ‘red’ to the ‘green’ republicans. In explaining Northern Ireland to the outside world, the Northern Ireland Office went so far as to praise communists as evidence of the fundamental ‘normality’ of a society plagued by a few terrorists: ‘Members with all types of religious affiliation, as well as atheists and communists, have played a full part in the development of trade unionism … with hardly an exception, sectarianism stops at the factory gates’.63 In the Republic, wariness about republicanism attained levels reminiscent of the anti-communism of the 1950s. With their zeal for flushing out suspected fellow-travellers of the Provisionals – ‘sneaking regarders’ and ‘hush-puppies’ as they called them – Workers’ Party cadres were allowed to secure an extraordinary degree of control in state broadcasting. No questions were asked about the Official IRA, ostensibly on ceasefire since 1972. Fraternal links with communist regimes and third-world marxist movements generated no more than the occasional jibe. CPI, again an all-Ireland party from 1970, remained republican and objected to international fraternal recognition of the Workers’ Party as Ireland’s communist party.64 During the Ronald Reagan presidency, the Moscow press tried to counter criticism of the Soviet Union’s human rights record by citing the Provisionals as a symptom of oppression in the west, causing the Workers’ Party to look further afield, to sclerotic North Korea, for foreign friends.65
In the 1989 elections, the Workers' Party crowned two decades of incremental advance with a peak of five per cent of the vote and seven TDs, entitling it to official status as a group in Dáil Éireann and all the perks that went with it. This success and the 'fall of the wall' could well have led to a revival of smear tactics: as their own candidates faltered in the 1990 presidential election, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil highlighted Mary Robinson's backing from 'the Marxists' of the Workers' Party.66 But it is doubtful that the ploy had any effect, and it was to be the last gasp of red scare politics in twentieth century Ireland. In 1992 the Workers' Party split over internal demands for the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and ties with the allegedly moribund Official IRA. It never recovered.

**Conclusion**

The popular perception of Irish anti-communism as relentless, groundless and reflective of insularity and clerical terror, is inaccurate in the first three respects. Soviet persecution of Catholics made Catholicism the mainspring of Irish anti-communism, and the politics of the Vatican, the Kremlin, Spain in 1936, and Cold War America dictated the Irish response.

Up to the 1960s, the church seemed to have it on tap. It was able to ignore the activity of communists in Ireland in the 1920s and, to a lesser extent, during the Emergency, and mobilise near blanket opposition to them in the 1930s and 1950s. Clericalism ensured that most Catholics were motivated, not by the domestic communist threat or events in the Soviet bloc, but by the idea of communism as anti-Christ and a virus. Catholic actionists were often inspired by anti-modernism as much as by anti-communism. Anti-modernism was a minor but persistent theme in Irish social thinking up to the 1950s, and acquired a mainstream influence during the zenith of Catholic actionism in the 1930s. One of its weaknesses was its failure to permeate trade unionism. Labour had a negative relationship with the church, combining deference driven by fear with an aversion to confessionalism. Reflecting the very intermittent success of the communists, secular opposition was significant only in the early 1920s, in anti-trade unionism, and the 1930s in Cumann na nGaedheal, Fine Gael and the Blueshirts. The attack on the Labour Party in 1969 was unique in being the only red scare that was absolutely groundless. The growth of secularism and the Northern Ireland conflict virtually ended anti-communism. In Northern Ireland itself, the Catholic church had made an issue of it only during the Spanish Civil War or in defence of the Nationalist Party; and for Unionists, with the exception of 1931-2, it was always secondary to the republican threat. The final curiosity in a curious tale is that the CPI was one of the few marxist parties to survive the 'fall of the wall' almost unscathed. As the red flag came down on the Kremlin on 25 December 1991, it was raised over the CPI's Connolly House in Dublin.

**Notes**

2. Southern Ireland was known as the Irish Free State from 1922 to 1937, then Éire, and then the Republic of Ireland from 1949.
4. The ‘devotional revolution’ thesis is associated with Emmet Larkin and widely accepted by historians, though some argue that the changes were part of a longer process. See Larkin’s *The Consolidation of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1860-1870*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987; and *The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism*, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997.
9. By ‘Labour’ is meant trade unions, trades council, and related political groups. Workers are otherwise referred to as ‘labour’. 


16. National Archives, Dublin, NA, Department of Justice, Larkin file, JUS 8/676.


21. For opposition to confessional trade unionism see the *Irishman*, 21-8 April 1928.

22. Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of Dictators*, p139.


28. For the harassment see Report of the Communist International commission in Ireland to the Anglo-American secretariat, Executive Committee of the Communist International and Western European Bureau, 17 March 1930, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (henceforth RGASPI) 495/89/91-23.

29. NA, Department of the Taoiseach, memo, September 1931, S5864B.


33. RGASPI, Report from Ireland, undated [July 1933], 495/89/91-23.

34. RGASPI, letter from Patrick O’Farrell, undated [1932], 495/89/83-91/99.


36. *An Phoblacht* [The Republic], 1-8 April, 10-17 June 1933.

39. See Feargal McGarry, Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War, Cork: Cork University Press, 1999. Some 250 Irish fought in the International Brigades, but about 100 of these were exiles.
44. O’Connor, Reds and the Green, pp231-2; Whyte, Church and State in Modern Ireland, p94.
47. National Library of Ireland, CIU, Annual Reports, 1946-52.
61. O’Connor, Reds and the Green, pp231-2; Whyte, Church and State in Modern Ireland, p94.
64. Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, pp334-5.