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‘Our Own People’: The Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association in Interwar Britain and Ireland

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The Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association (SILRA) was originally founded in London in 1922 to aid ‘refugees’ in Britain. It also had an Irish sub-committee, and soon focussed its attention almost exclusively on those loyalists who remained in the Irish Free State (IFS). Populated by diehard Conservatives and Irish unionists, SILRA demonstrates the longevity of the afterlife of the Irish Revolution for both of these groups – though both had experienced it very differently. As a non-violent reactionary movement that spanned Britain, Ireland, and the dominions, SILRA offers a useful transnational case-study of interwar counter-revolution in a British context. Moreover, SILRA’s Irish committee highlights some of the ways in which the sternest southern loyalists and unionists – who found themselves among the ‘losers’ of the Irish Revolution – preserved allegiances and social solidarity in the IFS.

At 4 o’clock on 30 October 1963, a meeting in Dublin city centre wound down the work of a voluntary charitable organisation. Office furniture had already been sold off for £73 12s 9d, payments in recognition of service to the committee were agreed, a remaining balance disbursed and an accountant asked to draw up a final statement.¹ If it was an inglorious end after forty years, it is remarkable that the Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association (SILRA) had lasted that long at all – and that its remaining members still believed it necessary, even if they were joined by an ever diminishing number of subscribers. By 1961, it was a small organisation running on annual receipts of about £2,200.² But for over a decade after 1922 SILRA boasted prominent British politicians, including dukes and marquesses, among its membership, offices in London and Dublin and a network of contacts in the Irish Free State (IFS). It also received regular coverage in national and local newspapers in Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

The association has received some brief attention in the historiography of the Irish Revolution.³ A significant collection of surviving minute books, correspondence, reports and pamphlets allows for further study of SILRA’s work and perceived purpose. Its cause – the ‘plight’ of the southern Irish

¹ Minutes of general meeting of the SILRA relief committee, 30 Oct. 1963, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), D989/B/1/3.

² *Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association, 11 Leinster Street, South, Dublin: Reports and Accounts for 1961*, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

³ See, for example, R. B. McDowell, *Crisis and Decline: The Fate of the Southern Unionists* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997), 132–5; Paul Taylor, *Heroes or Traitors? Experiences of Southern Irish Soldiers Returning from the Great War, 1919–1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 88, 247; Robin Bury, *Buried Lives: The Protestants of Southern Ireland* (Dublin: The History Press, 2017), 14–27; Michael Robinson, *Shell-Shocked British Army Veterans in Ireland, 1918–39: A Difficult Homecoming* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 78–9, 102, 114, 123, 128–30, 135. SILRA receives more sustained treatment in Leigh-Ann Patricia Coffey, ‘The price of loyalty: Southern Irish loyalists and the work of the Irish Grants Committee’, PhD Thesis, Queen’s University, Ontario, 2014. See also Mo Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Interwar England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 206–240.

loyalist – was not, as R. B. McDowell put it, ‘notably severe’ in a wider European context.⁴ And as Charles Townshend has written, even the dramatic reduction of the non-Catholic minority between 1911 and 1926 ‘may appear trivial in comparison with the massive dislocation of peoples in Europe, starting with the Greek-Turkish conflict in the early 1920s’.⁵ But the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and subsequent foundation of the IFS was, in Paul Stocker’s words, a ‘moment of profound trauma’ for the British Empire’s strongest proponents; representative of ‘the growing trend of subversion which was spreading like a virus around the world’.⁶

While SILRA’s members lamented the loss of a portion of the empire, and Ireland was but one of many perceived threats, there was no paramilitary wing and no overt counter-revolutionary aims for Ireland. This reflects what John Horne and Robert Gerwarth see as fundamental distinctions between the experience of violence and counter-revolution among the ‘victorious’ and ‘defeated’ powers of the Great War.⁷ Though Ireland followed a trajectory closer to much of central eastern and south eastern Europe, and the British government sent paramilitaries to Ireland in 1920, Britain largely escaped the ‘traumatic disorder and civil unrest’ that afflicted much of Europe after 1918. Both the left and right assured themselves, as Jon Lawrence suggests, that they were ‘a peaceable people, not given to extremism and the excesses of Continental-style political violence’.⁸ SILRA is thus part of Paul McMahon’s ‘loyalist, imperialist counter-revolutionary history’ as a case study in non-violent activism. Its context is ‘victory’ in the Great War followed by the loss of a (small but significant) piece of empire; additionally noteworthy as Britain’s relatively peaceable interwar period was not necessarily guaranteed before 1921.⁹ The survival of this particular form of reactionary activity, moreover, confirms that the legacies of revolution in Ireland continued to animate British conservatives long after 1923. In addition, however, it demonstrates the absence of any desire in Britain to overturn the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in December 1921 to bring an end to Ireland’s War of Independence, and see returned the twenty-six Irish counties that became the Irish Free State.

SILRA’s committee in Dublin, meanwhile, offers additional perspectives on the survival of loyalists and loyalism in the IFS. The association was part of a series of connected and overlapping concerns, movements and ideas: in Conservative political circles, existing private networks and organisations and in the press and publishing on the British right. The membership in Dublin experienced all of this as a recently defeated minority, and their survival offers insights into the ways in which even the most convinced of southern Irish unionists could make their (begrudging) accommodation with the new dispensation. It also lends weight to the argument that, overall, the IFS was a reasonably accommodating place for its political (and religious) minority. At the same time, as will be seen, SILRA’s work highlights some of the limits of that accommodation – whether real or perceived. Dublin’s view was ultimately local, while for the founders of the association in London it was imperial and transnational.

⁴ McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 135.

⁵ Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 452.

⁶ Paul Stocker, *Lost Imperium: Far Right Visions of the British Empire, c. 1920–1980* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 61.

⁷ Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, ‘Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 83, 3 (2011), 491–5.

⁸ Jon Lawrence, ‘Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 75, 3 (2003), 561.

⁹ Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916–1945* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), 163–4. Much important recent work on counter-revolution after the Great War has focussed on its violent manifestations: Horne and Gerwarth, ‘Vectors of Violence’; John Horne and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Martin Conway and Robert Gerwarth, ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution’, in Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); John Paul Newman, ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Europe, 1917–1923’, in Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith, eds., *The Cambridge History of Communism, Volume I: World Revolution and Socialism in One Country, 1917–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See also ‘Aftershocks: Violence in Dissolving Empires after the First World War’, *Contemporary European History* Special Issue, 19, 3 (2010).

SILRA adopted a broad definition of the southern Irish loyalist – ‘southern’ encompassing the twenty-six counties that formed the Irish Free State in 1922 where unionists and loyalists were a scattered minority. Unionism can be defined as support for the maintenance of Ireland’s place (since 1801) in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Loyalism, meanwhile, had broader implications that might include any manifestation – or a combination of manifestations – of allegiance or attachment to Britain, the Crown forces or the empire. Most southern Protestants were unionists, while loyalism, notwithstanding significant overlap between the two categories, embraced a potentially more complex cohort that included Protestant and Catholic Crown servants: members of the Crown forces, civil and imperial servants and their families. Many of the Catholics who fell into this category would not necessarily have considered themselves loyalist (or unionist), but could be labelled that way by others. SILRA, indeed, tended to ignore any complexity of allegiance in favour of an implied homogenous loyal minority. As discussed below, the association generally avoided references to religion but carried out targeted appeals on behalf of ex-servicemen of the British armed forces or former members of the Irish police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary (disbanded in 1922). A majority of these ex-soldiers and policemen were Catholic.

On the whole this was a loyalism that had little in common with its more recent incarnation in Northern Ireland. The latter carries connotations of paramilitarism and has, at times, displayed an ambivalent attitude to the Union. Southern Irish loyalists, by contrast, made little or no effort to arm before or after 1922 and were firmly opposed to a partition of the island that would set them apart from the unionist majority in the north-east.¹⁰ Some home rulers, most notably John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, demonstrated a variety of loyalism in seeking a self-governing Ireland within the empire.¹¹ There is no evidence, however, that SILRA explicitly sought the support of former Redmondites.

With the union between Great Britain and Ireland ‘gone beyond recall’, considering oneself a unionist or loyalist in southern Ireland after 1922 was ‘an attitude of mind rather than membership of a political party’.¹² Those who remained generally offered their support, if sometimes grudgingly, to the new state but also continued to display evidence of what Ian d’Alton has described as ‘cultural royalism’, both publicly and privately.¹³ For the most diehard southern unionists’ integration was not straightforward, but SILRA’s Dublin committee offered a sense of purpose and solidarity. Its history thus highlights one way in which former unionists, who retained pro-British and imperial sentiments long after 1922, could make their accommodation with the new order, while also retaining a connection with Britain and the empire.

This article draws on a large collection of surviving SILRA minute books, correspondence and literature held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland alongside material published in a wide variety of local and national newspapers. Historians continue to debate the nature, extent and sectarian motives behind the violence and intimidation experienced by the minority in southern Ireland during the Irish Revolution.¹⁴ Rather than focussing on what may or may not have actually happened, this research highlights the importance of examining how violence was perceived or portrayed: unpacking the stories that were told and the reasons they were told the way they were. It also challenges neat (and insular) timelines of revolution in Ireland, where a war of independence was followed by a truce and treaty and a civil war ending in victory for supporters of that treaty in May 1923. The article will focus

¹⁰ For more on the nature of southern Irish loyalism, see Brian Hughes and Conor Morrissey, ‘Southern Irish Loyalism from Home Rule to Republic: An Introduction’ and ‘Afterword: Layers of Loyalty’, in Brian Hughes and Conor Morrissey, eds., *Southern Irish Loyalism, 1912–1949* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), esp. 1–3, 334–5.

¹¹ James McConnel, ‘John Redmond and Irish Catholic Loyalism’, *English Historical Review*, 125/512 (2010), 83–111.

¹² McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 163.

¹³ Ian d’Alton, ‘Protestant “Belongings” in Independent Ireland, 1922–49’, in Ian d’Alton and Ida Milne, eds., *Protestant and Irish: The Minority’s Search for Place in Independent Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2019), 28.

¹⁴ Much of this has been prompted by the work of the late Peter Hart, in particular his *The I.R.A. and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in County Cork, 1916–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *The I.R.A. at War, 1916–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

on SILRA's history up to 1938, when the association was most active, and especially during the chairmanship of the Duke of Northumberland between 1922 and his death in 1930. The association's work in Britain and in the IFS will be assessed in turn, but to begin it is necessary to outline the context in which SILRA was founded.

Foundation and Membership

SILRA originated from a meeting in a House of Commons committee room in Westminster on 30 May 1922, with Victor Hope, second marquess of Linlithgow, in the chair. Among the attendees was Cyril Prescott Decie, the formidable former police commissioner for Munster, and Sir Henry Wilson, security advisor to Northern Ireland and recently-elected MP.¹⁵ A provisional general committee – including Linlithgow, Wilson, and Decie, and a gathering of Conservative peers and MPs – was tasked with ‘founding an organisation for the relief of distress amongst the Southern Irish Loyalists’.¹⁶ The association was ‘formally constituted’ at a meeting in June.¹⁷ By July, a number of smaller existing organisations had taken up an invitation to amalgamate.¹⁸ The Irish Unionist Alliance (IUA) in Dublin was reconstituted as a SILRA Irish sub-committee while ladies’ general and executive committees were formed and sat in London.¹⁹ The association also supported and financed the Irish Claims Compensation Association (ICCA), which focussed specifically on the issue of compensation for southern Irish loyalists.²⁰

William Cavendish-Bentinck, sixth duke of Portland, served as a titular but inactive president until his death in 1943. Far more important were the successive chairs of the London executive. After Linlithgow was appointed civil lord of the admiralty he resigned as chairman and was replaced in March 1923 by Alan Ian Percy, eighth Duke of Northumberland.²¹ Described by one historian as ‘an eminently respectable representative of the interwar political right’, Northumberland was an enormously wealthy landowner, novelist and publisher. Among a number of prominent SILRA members to have signed the diehard ‘manifestos’ in March and June 1922, he was a fiery orator and propagandist ‘on the extreme right wing’ of the Conservative Party, ‘often at variance with the policies of its leaders after the War’.²² Neil Fleming has recently suggested that ‘for all his ubiquity’ in these circles, Northumberland ‘never amounted politically to anything more than a county councillor’. This is perhaps unsurprising given Northumberland’s widely published controversialist views and distrust of the political élite, but he was, for a period after 1920, a significant figure amongst the diehard leadership whose views held weight with disenchanted Conservatives. As Fleming suggests, the cause of the southern Irish loyalist might be his most notable success, with Northumberland and SILRA prominent in lobbying for a new compensation scheme and again later when limits set on the payment of the awards it granted were reversed.²³

¹⁵ Wilson was assassinated by two London-based republicans a month after the SILRA meeting.

¹⁶ Minutes of meeting, 30 May 1922, PRONI, D989/B/1/1.

¹⁷ Minutes of meeting of provisional committee, 13 June 1922, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

¹⁸ *Irish Independent*, *The Times*, *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 May 1920; *Daily Mail*, 17 May 1920; *Irish Times*, 5 July 1922; McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 132.

¹⁹ McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 112, 132; Minutes of SILRA Executive Committee, 20 June 1922, PRONI, D989/B/1/3; Minutes of Ladies’ Executive Committee, PRONI, D989/B/1/4.

²⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 Oct. 1922; Minutes of a meeting of the general committee, 7 Dec. 1923, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

²¹ Minutes of SILRA General Committee, 1 Mar. 1923, 4 May 1923, 18 May 1923, PRONI, D989/B/1/3. Linlithgow remained as a trustee.

²² Markku Ruotsila, ‘The Antisemitism of the Eighth Duke of Northumberland’s *The Patriot*, 1922–1930’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39, 1 (2004), 71–2; C. M. Headlam, ‘Percy, Ian Alan’, in J. H. R. Weaver, ed., *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922–1930* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 662–3. The diehard ‘manifestos’ were statements of ‘Conservative and Unionist principles’, specifically in defiance of the coalition government and leadership of Austen Chamberlain (a signatory of the Anglo-Irish Treaty).

²³ N. C. Fleming, *Britannia’s Zealots: Volume 1: Tradition, Empire, and the Forging of the Conservative Right* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 114, 151; Philip Williamson, ‘Percy, Ian Alan, eighth Duke of Northumberland (1880–1930)’,

Northumberland had taken an interest in revolution in Ireland before 1922, promoting conspiracy theories (in public and to government) about a wider Bolshevik plot to smash the British Empire.²⁴ He was also a president of the executive of the IUA from May 1920, which in turn supported the ‘Duke of Northumberland’s Fund’.²⁵ One pamphlet for the fund, published by his Boswell Printing and Publishing Company, was titled ‘The plight of southern Irish loyalists’. It described ‘Sinn Fein Terrorism’, the ‘Murder of Protestants’ and issued an ‘Appalling List of Victims’. In a flourish later adapted by SILRA, readers were reminded that southern Irish loyalists (Catholic and Protestant) had ‘always stood by the Empire. Will the Empire desert them now?’²⁶ Beginning in February 1922, Northumberland’s *The Patriot* sought to supply what it described as ‘striking facts and arguments’ about surreptitious movements ‘threatening the safety and welfare of the British Empire’.²⁷ The first issue included an ‘Irish Supplement’, highlighting ‘peril to the Empire’ as ‘the fate of Russia awaits Ireland if left to herself’.²⁸ The journal continued to warn of a Bolshevik plot and Soviet interference in Ireland financed by German Jews.²⁹

Fears of revolution and the spread of Bolshevism – ‘Bolshevism as fantasy’ – animated counter-revolutionaries across Europe after 1917.³⁰ Lawrence has argued that the Great War convinced some in Britain that militarism and overwhelming force could solve any problem, domestic or imperial. By 1921, however, the ‘militarist spirit’ (a pejorative term) had been ‘banished to the margins of political life, the preserve of an ultra-right-wing rump epitomised by the *Morning Post* and Bolshevik conspiracy theorists’ like Northumberland. This was demonstrated in significant opposition, including from conservatives, to British counterinsurgency in Ireland in 1920 and 1921.³¹ Anti-Bolshevik sentiment was evident early in SILRA’s existence, as members used its meetings to not only plead the case of the southern Irish loyalist but also to advance broader political agendas and attack perceived enemies.³² It was much less common, however, in SILRA’s publications, and became increasingly so in speeches over time, while *The Patriot*’s racialised anti-Irish and anti-Semitic rhetoric remained absent.³³ Northumberland had been a vocal advocate for stern measures in Ireland in 1921, but SILRA’s lobbying and its wider context suggests that – as far as Ireland went – there was little interest in encouraging armed counter-revolution after 1922.

The ‘diehards’ who came together in the association ranged from those closer to government – like the fourth marquess of Salisbury³⁴ and Linlithgow – to backbench MPs Sir John Gretton and Captain Charles Foxcroft and those further to the fringes of the right. What they had in common was their

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online (ODNB); Niamh Brennan, ‘A Political Minefield: Southern Loyalists, the Irish Grants Committee and the British Government, 1922–31’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 30, 119 (1997), 406–19. In 1927 the Treasury resolved to limit payments to 60 per cent of the excess of any award over £1,000, but this policy was reversed in Feb. 1929.

²⁴ D. M. Leeson, ‘British Conspiracy Theories and the Irish War of Independence’, *Éire-Ireland*, 56, 1/2 (2021), 188–91.

²⁵ *Irish Times*, 29 May 1920; Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism I: The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885–1922* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1972), 291, n. 49.

²⁶ *Plight of Southern Irish Loyalists. Sinn Fein Terrorism. Murder of Protestants. Appalling List of Victims during first four months of 1921, 1921*, PRONI, D989/C/1/40.

²⁷ Ruotsila, ‘Antisemitism of *The Patriot*’, 71.

²⁸ *The Patriot*, 9 Feb. 1922.

²⁹ Stocker, *Lost imperium*, 63–9.

³⁰ John Horne and Robert Gerwarth, ‘Bolshevism as Fantasy: Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence, 1917–1923’, in Horne and Gerwarth, eds., *War in Peace*, 40–51.

³¹ Lawrence, ‘Forging a Peaceable Kingdom’, 558; Edward Madigan, ‘“An Irish Louvain”: Memories of 1914 and the Moral Climate in Britain during the Irish War of Independence’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 44, 165 (2020), 91–105.

³² See for example, *Morning Post*, 1 June 1923 [‘From the very start of the business in Ireland there has been a large Bolshevik element. We know perfectly well what were the relations between Sinn Fein and the Third International, and between them and the Germans during ... the war’]; *Watchman*, 20 Sept. 1923 [‘before long Ireland would be a “Workers” or Bolshevik Republic. The Treaty had started the disintegration of the British Empire’.]

³³ For anti-Irish sentiment in *The Patriot* see Ruotsila, ‘Antisemitism of *The Patriot*’, 73–6. See also McMahon, *British Spies, Irish Rebels*, 167–72.

³⁴ Salisbury was lord privy seal and leader of the House of Lords in the 1920s.

firm opposition to David Lloyd George's coalition government and to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The diehards remained a concern for successive Conservative leaders in the 1920s and 1930s, but, with Salisbury their only representative in Cabinet and no distinct, coherent strategy, their influence was limited after the demise of the coalition in 1922. While surviving as a lobby, they remained, as Fleming points out, within the party.³⁵ SILRA thus reflected diehard and IUA circles, rather than contemporary far-right groups like the Britons, the Imperial Fascist League, or the British Union of Fascists – though its members (and Northumberland in particular) shared many of the same obsessions.³⁶ The most obvious link beyond Northumberland was controversialist and conspiracy theorist Nesta Webster, who attended the founding meeting and served as honorary secretary of the ladies' committee until ill-health led to her resignation in April 1924.³⁷

Some others were Irish or had close links to Ireland. Henry Wilson's widow, Lady Cecil Wilson, ran the association's clothing department with Webster (who wrote about her youthful travels in Ireland).³⁸ Co. Kerry-born MP for York Sir John Butcher had been a member of the IUA's London committee and was elevated as 1st Baron Danesfort in 1924. Marie Clothilde Guinness, wife of Ernest Guinness of the brewing dynasty and daughter of Sir George Russell, was chair and president of the ladies' executive and elected to the general committee in March 1923 (Lady Cynthia Mosley, wife of future leader of the British Union of Fascists Oswald Mosley, was elected at the same meeting).³⁹ Sir Edward Carson was not an official committee member but an active public spokesman. Ulster Unionists and diehards had taken different positions on partition during the third 'home rule crisis' between 1912 and 1914, prompted by the government's efforts to introduce a limited form of legislative independence for Ireland. One of the issues unresolved by the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 surrounded either temporary or permanent exclusion from 'home rule' for some of the unionist-majority north-east of the island. While the diehards continued to share southern unionist opposition to any form of partition, it was accepted by Unionists in the six counties that became Northern Ireland. By 1923, this divergence was seemingly forgotten as Northumberland and Carson dominated press coverage of SILRA events.⁴⁰

Founding secretary and vice-chair I. W. Raymond later admitted to Denis Gwynn, the London correspondent of the Dublin-based, nationalist *Freeman's Journal*, that a circular had been issued to all members of both houses of parliament but no 'English Liberal accepted the invitation and the only M.P. who was not a Die-Hard who accepted was Mr. Neville Chamberlain'. Raymond also suggested that the association was 'absolutely non-sectarian in administering relief'; 'not less than half' of those helped were Catholics. He added, with 'some bitterness' as Gwynn put it, that 'financial support from Catholics in England had been very small'.⁴¹ This narrow demographic may have been regretted publicly, but the association was immediately linked externally with the diehards who shaped it.⁴² Raymond essentially conceded as much, explaining that SILRA's departments were 'in charge of English people who are Die-hard, since no others have agreed to work with the association'.⁴³

³⁵ Fleming, *Britannia's Zealots*, 5–7, 121–9.

³⁶ See Stocker, *Lost Imperium*, 21–6.

³⁷ Minutes of a meeting of the Ladies' Executive Committee, 2 Apr. 1924, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

³⁸ Minutes of meeting, 30 May 1922, PRONI, D989/B/1/1; Minutes of a meeting of the General Committee, 31 Oct. 1922, PRONI, D989/B/1/3; Stocker, *Lost Imperium*, 64.

³⁹ Ladies' Committee Minute Book (PRONI, D989/B/1/4); Minutes of a meeting of the General Committee, 1 Mar. 1923, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

⁴⁰ Buckland, *Irish Unionism I*; Fleming, *Britannia's Zealots*, 61–72, 81–5, 111–13.

⁴¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Jan. 1924.

⁴² *Morning Post*, 5 July 1922 ['non-sectarian organisation ... we appeal to all men and women of British birth, without distinction of party']; *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 May 1923 ['campaign ahead is not intended to serve any political object. ... controversial politics will be taboo']. The Association's 1931 constitution and rules note the aim to 'keep before the Public without distinction of Party or Religion the great hardships endured by Loyalists and ex-Service men under conditions in Southern Ireland, and to take steps to minimise their sufferings' (PRONI, D989/B/5/6).

⁴³ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Jan. 1924.

The SILRA ladies' committees reflected gendered patterns of Conservative and Unionist women's grassroots activism in the period.⁴⁴ Women were elected to all of SILRA's committees and there was significant crossover between the most active members of the general committee and the ladies' committees, while the latter carried out the bulk of the grassroots fundraising.⁴⁵ In July 1923, for instance, Lady Violet Astor allowed 18 Carlton House Terrace to be used for a performance of 'some new monologues and several old favourites' by famed American actress Ruth Draper (tickets one guinea each) and raised £500.⁴⁶ Cynthia Mosley helped organise a fancy dress ball for children in 1925.⁴⁷ A showing of the 1916 film 'The Battle of the Somme' at the Chelsea Palace Theatre in 1927 subtly reminded its audience of shared British and Irish (if specifically Irish loyalist) sacrifice in the Great War.⁴⁸ Clothing branches were set up by women as far north as Aberdeen and Cupar in Scotland, with regular clothing appeals issued in the local and national Conservative press.⁴⁹

The majority of the women who sat on SILRA committees or assisted with fundraisers were married and titled. This afforded the space to engage in philanthropic work, the right connections in Conservative circles, access to suitable properties in Mayfair and Belgravia and enough pull to warrant inclusion in gossip and society columns.⁵⁰ Some had marital connections to prominent diehards involved in the association: Maud Gretton, daughter of the 4th baron Ventry, for example, and Ladies Linlightow and Salisbury, the latter two performing largely ceremonial duties (when available). Others had family connections or landholdings in Ireland, including Lady Bandon, whose Castle Bernard was burned in June 1921 while Lord Bandon was held hostage for three weeks.⁵¹ Almost all were from wider Conservative or Unionist circles, with Cynthia Mosley something of an outlier politically. She remained active in the association for at least a year after her conversion to the Labour Party in 1924. Her husband, who had been openly critical of the government's use of 'Black and Tans' in 1920, joined Labour at the same time.⁵² Indeed, Oswald Mosely was a co-founder of the Peace with Ireland Council in 1920, which sought to influence and demonstrate English public opinion in opposition to British conduct in Ireland. This set him apart from the Irish policy of Northumberland and other diehards, but they operated in some similar circles. In 1921, Salisbury

⁴⁴ For Conservative women's activism in this period, see David Thackeray, 'At the Heart of the Party? The Women's Conservative Organization in the Age of Partial Suffrage, 1914–1928', in Clarisse Berthezène and Julie Gottlieb, eds., *Rethinking Right-Wing Women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). The main exception in the Irish historiography is the work of Diane Urquhart on Ulster Unionist women. See Diane Urquhart, "'Open the Eyes of England": Female Unionism and Conservatism, 1886–1914', in Berthezène and Gottlieb, eds., *Rethinking Right-Wing Women*; Diane Urquhart, 'Unionism, Orangeism and War', *Women's History Review*, 27, 3 (2018), 468–84; Janice Holmes, *Coming into the Light: The Work, Politics, and Religion of Women in Ulster, 1840–1940* (Belfast: Queen's University, Institute of Irish Studies, 1994). Also Fionnuala Walsh, "'The Future of the Empire Will Depend More Largely on our Women and Girls": Southern Irish Women and the British War Effort in Ireland, 1914–1922', in Brian Hughes and Conor Morrissey, eds., *Southern Irish Loyalty, 1912–1949* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

⁴⁵ See minutes of ladies' general and executive committees, PRONI, D989/B/1/4.

⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1923; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 July 1922.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the ladies' general committee, 1 Apr. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/1/4.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the ladies' general committee, 28 Oct. 1927, PRONI, D989/B/1/4).

⁴⁹ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 3 Jan. 1923; *St. Andrew's Citizen*, 31 Mar. 1923. For an example of a clothing appeal to the editor of a conservative newspaper, see G. H. Preston to Leopold Maxse, editor of the *National Review*, 13 May 1929, West Sussex Record Office, Maxse Papers, Maxse Mss 480/f.229–230.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 July 1922; *Dundee Courier*, 28 July 1922; *Belfast News-letter*, 18 Nov. 1922; *Illustrated London News*, 25 Nov. 1922; *Daily Mail*, 9 Mar. 1923, 8 Dec. 1923, 11 Dec. 1923; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 Sept. 1923.

⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 8 Oct. 1921. For the assassination of Lady Wilson's Longford-born husband see Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 281–98.

⁵² Duncan Sutherland, 'Mosley [née Curzon], Lady Cynthia Blanche', *ODNB*; Robert Skidelsky, 'Mosley, Sir Oswald Ernald, sixth baronet', *ODNB*.

had invited Oswald Mosley to become secretary of his People's Union for Economy (an 'upmarket' version of the Anti-Waste League).⁵³

SILRA's activism followed well-established patterns for this sort of work. The clothing department was 'being run on the same lines, and largely by the same ladies' as the Marchioness of Lansdowne's Officers' Families Fund, which had provided relief for wives and mothers of soldiers during the Great War.⁵⁴ Appeals signed by Lady Wilson appeared in the newspapers and she held meetings with press representatives about publicity. While women usually organised local meetings and events, it was often men who did the public speaking.⁵⁵ Titled women were asked to open sales and bazaars, but if and when they spoke their words were rarely reported, with press focus instead directed at what was sold and bought at the stalls, those who helped (including some 'pretty girls' at one sale of work) and what they wore.⁵⁶ The extent to which individual women supported the more reactionary rhetoric or were motivated by humanitarian concerns is therefore less clear.

There was no separate women's committee in Dublin, but women shared equal chairing duties.⁵⁷ Reflecting a different, if similarly narrow, church, SILRA was populated in Dublin by barristers and clergymen and their relatives. These were representatives of pre-1922 middle-class unionism, and specifically the 'stern, unbending unionists' who had rejected Lord Midleton's moderate approach to the prospect of home rule for Ireland in 1919.⁵⁸ Most of the Dublin SILRA committee, including William Jellett, C. B. Moff and John E. Walsh, had been elected to the IUA executive when the association split in January 1919, with the moderates following Midleton into the Unionist Anti-Partition League. While the latter had accepted that home rule was an inevitability and that their best prospects lay with all-island dominion status, those who stayed in the IUA continued to reject any change to Ireland's position up to 1922.⁵⁹ Jellett was their most prominent public figure, sitting as MP for Dublin University between 1918 and 1922, and shared broadly similar views on the Irish Revolution and its consequences to Northumberland and the diehards. He told the House of Commons in 1920, for instance, that 'the dominant party in Ireland are in secret alliance with and are being financially supported by Russian Bolsheviks', with an independent Ireland the aim of an 'international conspiracy, worked from Russia, aided by Germany'.⁶⁰ In a speech to Dublin unionists a year later, Jellett declared that they faced a movement whose object was 'the destruction of the British Empire' and that they must either 'smash the conspiracy' or 'surrender to it'.⁶¹

After 1922, this defiant tone was replaced with a desire to carry on their relief work for 'necessitous' southern Irish loyalists 'unostentatiously'.⁶² That they were allowed to do so at all is worth noting. Patrick Buckland suggested that John E. Walsh – the SILRA Irish relief secretary whose world was 'centred narrowly on Dublin' – had believed his life and career prospects would be 'uncomfortably circumscribed' by the dissolution of the union. He was ultimately able to carry on his practice 'until the end', however, 'becoming a recognised authority on the Law of Real Property'.⁶³ Jellett

⁵³ Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in interwar England*, 53; Fleming, *Britannia's Zealots*, 109. The anti-waste movement advocated for reduced government spending amidst the post-war depression.

⁵⁴ *Illustrated London News*, 25 Nov. 1922.

⁵⁵ See, for example, meeting reported in the *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 July 1926 [Carson speaking at meeting of the ladies' committee]. Minutes of a meeting of the ladies' general committee, 22 Jan. 1926, PRONI, D989/B/1/4 [Lady Wilson meeting the press].

⁵⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 24 Feb. 1926.

⁵⁷ See minutes of Irish advisory committee, 1922–1928, PRONI, D989/B/1/2, and 1928–1936, PRONI, D989/B/1/5.

⁵⁸ McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 71–2.

⁵⁹ *Irish Unionist Alliance. First Annual Meeting of the General Council under the Amended Constitution held the 24th January, 1919*, National Library of Ireland, Ms. 49,708/6.

⁶⁰ Leeson, 'Conspiracy Theories', 191.

⁶¹ Padraig Yeates, *A City in Turmoil: Dublin, 1919–21* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012), 254. See also McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 71–2.

⁶² Walsh to White, 9 Mar. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/3/6; Walsh to White, 2 Oct. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/3/5.

⁶³ Buckland, *Irish Unionism I*, 139–40; *Irish Times*, 5 June 1941.

died in 1936 as ‘father’ of the Irish bar, having appeared in many of the most important cases in the state.⁶⁴

SILRA in Britain

SILRA was formed as part of a private response to an influx of southern Irish loyalist ‘refugees’ into Britain around spring 1922. In May, just before the association’s first meeting, the British government had been sufficiently concerned to set up an Irish Distress Committee with an initial budget of £10,000.⁶⁵ This later became the first Irish Grants Committee (IGC), with an expanded remit.⁶⁶ Both SILRA and the ICCA agreed on ‘closer co-operation’ with the IGC in June 1923, and Captain Charles Foxcroft was appointed as a SILRA representative to the committee in July.⁶⁷ SILRA also put questions on the issue to election candidates in Britain, and was a source of administrative assistance and information gathering for the diehard lobbying that resulted in the creation of the second IGC in 1926.⁶⁸ The association then published advertisements about the scheme in the IFS, offered to assist in preparing and submitting applications (essentially acting in lieu of a solicitor in a significant number of cases) and provided references and intelligence to the committee on the loyalist bona fides of individual applicants from its network of informants.⁶⁹

This was in addition to its original stated purpose of providing charitable relief. In 1930, Northumberland announced that since 1922 they had ‘expended over £72,000 in Relief and Loans’, assisted 800 people to emigrate, given 16,000 grants from ‘kind gifts of second-hand clothing received’ and spent over £1,600 on new clothes.⁷⁰ The association’s message about the fate of Irish loyalists, whether ‘refugees’ in Britain or ‘starving’ ex-servicemen in the IFS, was disseminated in public speeches, in circulars to subscribers and in pamphlets. Refugees arriving in Britain were ‘unhappy’, ‘ruined’ and ‘destitute’ solely on account of their loyalty to Britain; betrayed and abandoned by the government’s settlement over the Anglo-Irish Treaty.⁷¹ In May 1923, Northumberland appealed to employers to consider Irish loyalists:

They are of all classes, from the well-born lady to the rough farm hand – students, professional men, clerks, mechanics, grooms, and indoor and outdoor servants. They come to this Association for relief because they have to come, but always they say ‘It is work we want, not doles.’ And therefore I ask those who can do so to give these people a chance.⁷²

⁶⁴ Buckland, *Irish Unionism I*, 156. For more recent work on the relatively positive experiences of Protestants in the Irish Free State, see Daithí Ó Corráin, *Rendering to God and Caesar: The Churches and the Two States in Ireland, 1949–73* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 70–105; Ian d’Alton and Ida Milne, eds., *Protestant and Irish: The Minority’s Search for Place in Independent Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2019); Caleb Richardson, *Smyllie’s Ireland: Protestants, Independence, and the Man Who Ran the Irish Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

⁶⁵ *First interim report of the Irish Distress Committee*, HC, 1922; *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 July 1922.

⁶⁶ *Irish Grants Committee second interim report* [Cmd. 2032], HC, 1924.

⁶⁷ *Irish Times*, 28 June 1923, 16 July 1923.

⁶⁸ For election questions to candidates see, for example, *Morning Post*, 30 Oct. 1922; *Daily Mail*, 23, 24, 28 Nov. 1923. For lobbying for the second IGC, see Brennan, ‘Political Minefield’.

⁶⁹ Copies of claims submitted by SILRA on behalf of applicants are found in PRONI, D989/B/3/9–13. For examples of SILRA’s informants in the IFS, see James F. O’Donnell claim, The National Archives, Kew, TNA, CO 762/3/4, Nicholas O’Carroll, TNA, CO 762/7/9, R.W. Hosford claim, TNA, CO 762/27/1, Thomas W. Good claim, TNA, CO 762/32/18. SILRA also corresponded with the Belfast government on cases where southern loyalists had moved or made appeals there. See for example files on Martin Fahey, PRONI, PM2/6/1, Richard Williams, PRONI, PM2/23/159, William Armstrong, PRONI, PM2/1/145/1–7, Mrs Gore-Smythe, PRONI, PM2/20/185.

⁷⁰ SILRA circular, May 1930; pamphlet announcing a ball to be held in Hyde Park Hotel in aid of SILRA, 12 June 1930, PRONI, D989/5/2.

⁷¹ A selection of these pamphlets are available in PRONI (D989), the London School of Economics Archives (LSE) (COLL MS 0028), and in the NLI (ILB 300 p3).

⁷² *Daily Mail*, 16 May 1923; *Manchester Guardian*, 16 May 1923.

This is what SILRA suggested revolution in Ireland had meant for loyalists and former servants of the empire: respectable, successful types whose lives and livelihoods had been upturned through no fault of their own.

One typical pamphlet, entitled ‘Victims of the suspension of the law in southern Ireland’, described the case of ‘a young man’ with a ‘good and rapidly expanding business’ in Cork. ‘When the massacre of Protestants took place there he managed to escape, but had to abandon his house, shop, general store and goods, valued at a large amount. He was for a long time in a state of absolute penury, and has to start all over again, having lost all his capital’.⁷³ In another, an ex-soldier in a small country town had been ‘boycotted and threatened, and finally had to give up his shop and come to England, leaving his wife and children behind’. With SILRA’s assistance, this ‘destitute’ loyalist was able to ‘send for his wife and start a small shop in one of the suburbs in London’.⁷⁴ As Mo Moulton has pointed out, the rhetorical value of this tale is clear. With a small financial grant, a ruined refugee in England was put in a position to make an honest living and provide for his family, all while contributing to the metropolitan core.⁷⁵

Irish refugees were also presented directly to address British audiences. A Mrs Bullen spoke at a SILRA drawing room meeting in Bath, Somerset, in November 1922 and proved ‘a remarkably fluent raconteur’, narrating ‘a host of experiences which had befallen her and her relatives’.⁷⁶ At another meeting in February 1928, nine anonymous victims of the ‘great betrayal’ told a selection of journalists ‘harrowing stories of the sufferings which they had endured in the years immediately before and after the “so-called Treaty”’.⁷⁷ The politicised use of the words ‘refugee’ and ‘exile’ to describe southern Irish loyalists arriving in Britain is revealing. It has been suggested that Irish Protestant landowning elites and the professional middle class were assimilated into British society much more easily than Catholics. It might be assumed that, for those loyal to the Union, this was not movement to a ‘foreign’ country, but rather one with which they had a natural affinity – or even direct connection through school, work or family. To SILRA and its supporters they were thus at once ‘refugees’ and also ‘our own people’, ‘British citizens’, ‘fellow subjects’, ‘kith and kin’.⁷⁸

Moulton has pointed out that this ‘wave of Anglo-Irish “refugees” after the war has rarely been characterized as immigration at all’, while their own accounts instead ‘suggest that their processes of integration were not seamless’.⁷⁹ For those without private means, finding accommodation and employment proved challenging. As British police forces were reluctant to take on ex-Royal Irish Constabulary, for instance, SILRA placed advertisements in the British press highlighting the availability of these ‘loyal, trustworthy and willing’ men for a range of positions.⁸⁰ By the late 1920s, many were still living off pensions or creditors.⁸¹ By then, SILRA literature was focussed on loyalists remaining in the IFS – particularly ex-servicemen. But the same narrative of loyal servants of the empire forced into destitution by the cowardly surrender of the coalition government in 1922 remained. Readers of a report on a 1929 visit to Ireland by Major Ion White, SILRA’s London relief secretary, learned for instance of ex-servicemen eking out miserable existences, slowly dying of

⁷³ ‘Victims of the suspension of the law in southern Ireland’, n.d., LSE, COLL MS 0028.

⁷⁴ ‘Victims of the suspension of the law’, c. 1923, NLI, ILB 300 p3, Item 112.

⁷⁵ Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish*, 209–10.

⁷⁶ *Bath Chronicle*, 4 Nov. 1922.

⁷⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 Feb. 1928. This meeting was in the context of the demands that ultimately led to the creation of the second IGC. Reports of this meeting were also carried widely in the Australian press.

⁷⁸ See, for example, *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 May 1922; *Yorkshire Post*, 27 Sept. 1922.

⁷⁹ Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish*, 216–7.

⁸⁰ See, for example, *The Tatler*, 4 Oct. 1922, *The Sketch*, 29 Aug. 1923. For reluctance to take on ex-RIC in British police forces, see Horwood to Churchill, 25 Jan. 1922, TNA, HO 45/24754; Commandant, RIC Camp, Gormanston, to Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 28 Apr. 1922 and reply, 6 May 1922, TNA, MEPO 2/1814.

⁸¹ This is confirmed by ex-RIC applicants to the IGC when asked to account for their current circumstances on the application form. See also the case of Michael Flynn, an ex-sergeant who ultimately returned to Ireland and remained unable to find secure work, TNA, HO 144/22575.

starvation, with whole families living in ‘hovels’, ‘consumption rampant among them’ and children clothed in rags and sacks.⁸²

This allowed SILRA to avoid describing the conflict in Ireland in sectarian terms (in the way the *Morning Post* was willing to) and offered a more flexible, if no less damning, tale of the betrayal of the southern Irish loyalist – Catholic or Protestant.⁸³ In drawing attention to the ‘heroic refugee’ and ‘his victimized family’, SILRA also closely followed well-established and easily recognisable humanitarian narratives.⁸⁴ At a meeting hosted at the Mansion House in London in June 1923, Northumberland explicitly urged the audience to ‘fulfil an obligation and to discharge a duty to certain people whom you and I owe a very deep debt of gratitude, but whom you and I have sacrificed for the sake of our own peace and quiet’.⁸⁵ While SILRA represents a distinctly British form of counter-revolution, there are similarities here with charitable work in central Europe. As Julia Thorpe has found, the image of ‘homeless citizens, who had suffered much, but whose identification with empire depended on their being rescued’ was part of the efforts of civil society groups on behalf of German speakers displaced from the fringes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the Great War. This was framed as a ‘duty, rather than a collective act of empathy and reciprocity’.⁸⁶ Northumberland’s June 1923 speech thus highlights notions about refugees and victims of revolution that were widely shared beyond Britain.

The local and national Conservative press supported SILRA with sympathetic editorials.⁸⁷ One *Daily Mail* editorial in October 1923 prompted letters of thanks and was followed by a donation from the paper of 1,000 guineas to a SILRA appeal for Irish ex-servicemen.⁸⁸ But the association was not without its British critics. In June 1926, the *Times* acknowledged the ‘appalling conditions of peril and strain through which a whole class of Irish men and women has been passing’, and reasons they might not be fully grasped in London, but raised concern that SILRA only represented a ‘minority of Englishmen’. This was the minority who had opposed the ‘present attempt at an Irish settlement’ – a settlement accepted by ‘every responsible person in England’.⁸⁹ The association may also have been deemed provocative. In February 1926, the ladies’ committee considered it necessary to have two private detectives and a uniformed policeman present at a bazaar in London. Four years later, Northumberland complained that the BBC had refused to broadcast a SILRA appeal (‘another indication of the desires of certain powers to conceal the true state of affairs from the British public’).⁹⁰

SILRA’s early work took place in the context of a civil war in Ireland (ending in May 1923), a series of general elections in Britain and the uncertain outcome of the Boundary Commission proposed under Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty to reach a final settlement over the Irish border. Paul McMahan has suggested that ‘Southern Irish loyalists, Ulster unionists, and diehard Tories came together in 1924 to wage a venomous campaign against the Irish Free State’ based on secret ‘intelligence’ in an effort to scupper the Boundary Commission.⁹¹ A ‘venomous campaign’ was less explicit

⁸² ‘Report by the relief secretary on his visit to Ireland in March, 1929’, PRONI, D989/B/5/2.

⁸³ *Morning Post*, 31 May 1922 [‘IRISH SAVAGERY – Parish without a Protestant left’]. See also discussion on 1934 articles below.

⁸⁴ Caroline Shaw, *Britannia’s Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 72–86.

⁸⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 June 1923; *Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 27 June 1923; *Irish Times*, 27 June 1923; *Daily Mail*, 27 June 1923.

⁸⁶ Julie Thorpe, ‘Displacing Empire: Refugee Welfare, National Activism and State Legitimacy in Austria-Hungary in the First World War’, in Panikos Panayi and Pippa Verdee, eds., *Refugees and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 109–10.

⁸⁷ See, for example, *Morning Post*, 2 Feb. 1925, 1 June 1925; *Daily Mail*, 2 Feb. 1925; 5 Feb. 1929; *Yorkshire Post*, 27 Sept. 1922. Northumberland led the consortium that bought the *Morning Post* in 1924.

⁸⁸ *Daily Mail*, 24 Oct. 1923, 25 Oct. 1923; *Daily Mail*, 4 Feb. 1925.

⁸⁹ *Times*, 26 June 1923.

⁹⁰ Minutes of a meeting of the ladies’ general committee, 12 Feb. 1926, PRONI, D989/B/1/4.

⁹¹ McMahan, *British Spies and Irish Rebels*, 189–95.

in SILRA literature (as will be seen below). Conservative reactionaries did, however, notwithstanding earlier divergence over the issue of partition, share Ulster Unionist concerns about the preservation of Northern Ireland from ‘anarchy’ and ‘lawlessness’ on the other side of the border. In turn, the unionist press in Northern Ireland regularly reproduced diehard opinion on southern Irish loyalists, or reports of SILRA meetings and speeches, usually taken from the *Morning Post*.⁹² Connections between the diehards and Ulster Unionists were clear enough to Ernest Forbes, the cartoonist at the *Freeman’s Journal*, who produced several ‘Shemus’ cartoons of Northumberland (including two with Northumberland and Carson together and one in which the former is holding a copy of the *Morning Post*).⁹³

Highlighting alleged ‘lawlessness’ or ‘anarchy’ in the IFS was mutually beneficial. Ulster Unionists could justify their existence, while for diehards it served to highlight their continuing concerns about threats to the United Kingdom and the empire. But the diehards also found themselves in the ‘strange position’ of defending a settlement over the border that they had initially opposed. As Neil Fleming has outlined, with partition an established fact, those diehards who were previously split over support for southern or Ulster unionists could ‘unite around protecting Northern Ireland’s territorial integrity and constitutional status’.⁹⁴ An organisation like SILRA exemplified these overlapping concerns, which were based on maintaining the status quo rather than a return to the pre-war order (as motivated counter-revolutionaries elsewhere).

SILRA could also situate its rhetoric in a European context, making a point of contrasting support for southern Irish loyalists with sympathies for other minorities affected by the post-war redrawing of Europe. In one 1923 pamphlet, readers were reminded that:

Enormous sums of public money have been subscribed by the British public to victims of the Red Terror in Russia and for other foreigners in distress. It will ill become of us now if we fail those who are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and whose anguish is due solely to the fact that they have been loyal to the King, to the Empire, and to us.⁹⁵

Inspired by the foundation of SILRA’s clothing department, the *Belfast News-Letter*’s lady correspondent in London similarly lamented that it was

... difficult to persuade the majority of the people over here that refugees are arriving every day from Southern Ireland, some of them of the well-born and well-educated class, in just the clothes they stand up in. They have been either burned or forcibly turned out of comfortable and well-beloved homes for no crime save that of devotion and loyalty to our King and country.

‘Here we have appeal after appeal for Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Chilians and sufferers in Russia and other countries’, she continued. ‘These refugees are our own people, victims of our former Government.’⁹⁶ The *Daily Mail* went as far as to suggest (during Ramsey MacDonald’s first term as Labour prime minister) that had ‘the Loyalists been Germans or Bolsheviks the country would have been rung with appeals for help’.⁹⁷ Again, in these reactionary networks Irish

⁹² See, for example, *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 June 1923 [*Morning Post* editorial rejoicing that the cause of southern Irish loyalists was being taken up by Northumberland]; *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 June 1927 [comments from *Morning Post* on ‘loyal poor’ remaining in Ireland and ‘truly pitiful and heartrending account’ of ex-servicemen in the Irish Free State by Northumberland].

⁹³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 Nov. 1921 [‘The Dodo and the Die-Hards’], 17 May 1922 [‘In the Carlton Club’], 28 June 1923 [‘Heartbreak House’], 7 July 1923 [‘Yes? No?’], 9 Feb. 1924 [‘Ducal Dope’].

⁹⁴ Fleming, *Britannia’s Zealots*, 151–4.

⁹⁵ ‘The Plight of Irish Loyalists. Our Obligations. Terrible Cases of Victims. Terrible Suffering’, 1923, LSE, COLL MS 0028.

⁹⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Nov. 1922.

⁹⁷ *Daily Mail*, 6 Mar. 1924.

loyalists could at once be ‘refugees’ and also ‘British citizens’, ‘our people’, ‘bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh’.⁹⁸

Rather than any humanitarian concern for the fate of minorities in post-war Europe (the *Times* accused SILRA of ‘a campaign of disparagement directed against all kinds of other deserving appeals’), the diehards who populated SILRA remained concerned about threats to the empire.⁹⁹ As an article encouraging support for the SILRA clothing department in the *Illustrated London News* ‘World of Women’ column reminded its readers: ‘our Irish people are more to us than Greeks, Turks, and Armenians’.¹⁰⁰ References to other refugees or exiled minorities were thus primarily used to highlight the failure of successive British governments to recognise the service of Irish loyalists to king and empire. A *Daily Mail* editorial even suggested that Baldwin’s government was ‘not one whit better than the Coalition’.¹⁰¹ The significant lobbying for compensation for southern loyalists in the mid-1920s – a victory for the diehards – was similarly framed principally around British government failures.¹⁰²

This was ostensibly about securing the future of the empire, rather than saving what was lost. It also spread to the dominions. In August 1922, the Australian Protestant Defence Association’s organ in Sydney praised SILRA’s work in ‘clothing and feeding the wretched abandoned refugees’. The £4,000 it had spent was, the *Watchman* complained, ‘far less in money than the spectacular charity lavished upon those far away, for whose misfortunes we have no responsibility’. ‘The real responsibility for the miseries of Ireland rests not with the poor misguided Irish, who know no better, but upon Mr. Lloyd George and his colleagues’.¹⁰³ In mid-1923, I. W. Raymond wrote to the press in Australia and New Zealand (where he had been born and made his fortune) to ‘elicit the sympathy’ of its readers ‘for the loyalists of Southern Ireland who have endured many grievous wrongs and are now in dire distress and affliction’. Following a graphic depiction of ‘penniless refugees’, Raymond suggested that SILRA ‘could appeal to no more sympathetic people than its fellow Dominion compatriots’.¹⁰⁴ The *Otago Daily Times*’ London correspondent later described SILRA as ‘an immense boon to the refugees of the Free State’ and one of the most influential associations ‘in the kingdom’.¹⁰⁵

Though its influence was ultimately limited to sympathetic newspapers, in November 1926 the association appealed to the Imperial Conference on behalf of ‘60,000 unemployed British ex-servicemen’ whose only hope, they suggested, was a ‘comprehensive assisted migration scheme’ (the *Sydney Sun*’s decision to place this report immediately after a piece on a deluge of correspondence sent to the conference by ‘cranks’, ‘spelling reformers’ and ‘flat earth theorists’ was likely coincidental).¹⁰⁶ This was not the only time that SILRA suggested that loyal ex-servicemen supposedly struggling to survive in the IFS would be better off working elsewhere in, and for, the empire.¹⁰⁷ That the IFS remained in the Commonwealth under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty was never mentioned. Nevertheless, it is clear that SILRA had a transnational reach and that its members thought in these terms. Indeed, the association suggests the need for further examination of the transnational history of the Irish Revolution from Anglo-Irish and loyalist perspectives.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁸ See also *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 May 1922; *Yorkshire Post*, 27 Sept. 1922.

⁹⁹ *Times*, 26 June 1923.

¹⁰⁰ *Illustrated London News*, 25 Nov. 1922.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Mail*, 6 Mar. 1924.

¹⁰² Brennan, ‘A Political Minefield’, 415.

¹⁰³ *Watchman*, 30 Aug. 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *Argus* [Melbourne], 25 Apr. 1923; *Evening Star* [Dunedin], 5 May 1923.

¹⁰⁵ *Otago Daily Times*, 22 Dec. 1923.

¹⁰⁶ *Northern Standard* [Darwin], *The News* [Adelaide], *The Sun* [Sydney], *The Evening News* [Queensland], 15 Nov. 1926; *Evening Star* [Dunedin], *New Zealand Herald* [Auckland], *Evening Post* [Wellington], 16 Nov. 1926.

¹⁰⁷ Preston to Hamilton, 18 Nov. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/3/5; Walsh to White, 25 Oct. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/3/5; ‘Report by the relief secretary on his visit to Ireland in March, 1929’, PRONI, D989/B/5/2.

¹⁰⁸ Much of the most recent work on the Irish Revolution in a global context has focussed on radical rather than reactionary people and organisations. See, for example, the excellent special issue of *Irish Historical Studies* edited by Enda Delaney and Fearghal McGarry on ‘A Global History of the Irish Revolution’, 44, 165 (2020).

SILRA in the Irish Free State

As the arrival of so-called Irish ‘refugees’ slowed and some had begun to return to Ireland from 1924, SILRA pivoted towards appeals for those who had remained in the IFS. It then fell increasingly on the Dublin office to adjudicate on applications and allocate grants. The number of interviews with applicants in Dublin grew significantly, rising from 19 between 23 and 30 January 1924 to 163 between 29 April and 7 May 1924.¹⁰⁹ By 1925 the office was also devoting a significant proportion of its time to ex-servicemen resident in the twenty-six counties, earlier excluded from the association’s remit.¹¹⁰ Viewing SILRA solely through Northumberland and London misses important differences in the way it operated, and its perceived purpose, in the IFS. The southern unionists and loyalists who stayed on were, after all, in a very different position to their supporters among the London elites. As Walsh informed his counterpart in London, ‘We have to live in the country and will have to face the consequences’.¹¹¹

The association’s work drew early press criticism in the IFS. In August 1922, the provincial *Southern Star* dismissed SILRA’s claim to be ‘non-sectarian and non party’ as ‘delicious . . . Bottomleian in its fraudulent brazenness’ – a reference to former MP Horatio Bottomley, expelled from parliament in 1919 for an illegal ‘Victory Bonds’ scheme.¹¹² Denis Gwynn saw Northumberland and Lord Willoughby de Broke’s names as ‘at least presumptive evidence’ that a SILRA meeting was ‘little more than an English “Die-hard” stunt, the real objective of which is to blacken the character of Nationalist Ireland’.¹¹³ Scrutiny increased as SILRA began to disburse relief locally, and in February 1925 an *Irish Independent* report declared that SILRA’s ‘efforts to besmirch the Free State administration are notorious’.¹¹⁴ As will be seen, this was something of an oversimplification.

Gwynn produced a series of articles on the association in early 1924. Catholic son of a home rule politician, he was ‘nominally a Home Ruler, but felt little emotional connection with the Irish Party in which his father served’. Impatient with the home rule project before the war, in 1924 he was a Great War veteran who, by 1932, had ‘come full circle’ in publishing a sympathetic biography of John Redmond. ‘Falling between the two stools of constitutional nationalism and separatism’, Gwynn also had some sympathy for SILRA’s cause, and was willing to acknowledge that it had done some useful benevolent work.¹¹⁵ He was, however, wary of the association’s motivations and believed it had amassed a large surplus of unspent funds; ‘deliberately kept alive for political exploitation by Lord Carson and the Duke of Northumberland and other Die Hards’.¹¹⁶ Gwynn also claimed that ‘inquiries in well-informed quarters’ revealed that grants were given to wealthy landowners who ‘habitually come to London for winter’ while falsely claiming to have been driven out of Ireland, and that others described as ‘bordering on destitution’ were ‘by no means obliged to “live on charity”’ and ‘could not conceivably be described as necessitous, or even as poor’.¹¹⁷ Continued appeals for funds while SILRA supposedly had ‘at most a few score necessitous cases’ still on its books were thus framed as attacks on ‘the credit of the Irish Government’ and ‘diatribes . . . against Ireland and the Irish people’. These were in turn motivated by Northumberland’s ‘imaginary state of anarchy in Ireland’.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 30 Jan. 1924, 7 May 1924, PRONI, D989/B/1/2.

¹¹⁰ White to Walsh, 17 Apr. 1924, PRONI, D989/B/3/5.

¹¹¹ Walsh to White, 5 Mar. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/3/5.

¹¹² *Southern Star*, 5 Aug. 1922.

¹¹³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 June 1923.

¹¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 4 Feb. 1925.

¹¹⁵ Colin Reid, ‘Between the Redmondite and Revolutionary Generations: Denis Gwynn and Old and New Ireland’, in Senia Pašeta, ed., *Uncertain Futures: Essays about the Irish Past for Roy Foster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 133–4, 140.

¹¹⁶ *Freeman’s Journal*, 29 Jan. 1924. See also *Freeman’s Journal*, 5 Feb. 1924.

¹¹⁷ *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 Jan. 1924, 29 Jan. 1924.

¹¹⁸ *Freeman’s Journal*, 29 Jan. 1924, 5 Feb. 1924, 6 Feb. 1924, 9 Feb. 1924.

Raymond was allowed a right of reply to Gwynn's articles (which the latter deemed unsatisfactory), and an editorial argued that 'no Irishman of any party' had expressed criticism of SILRA while it 'confin[ed] itself to its legitimate work'. Nor was it denied that southern loyalists had 'suffered heavy losses'. The paper was, instead, critical of perceived 'attacks' on the IFS and attempts by SILRA to 'boost itself by decrying and maligning' its government. It also pointed to a failure to recognise 'the plight of thousands of Nationalist refugees who have been beggared and broken by the Orange pogromists . . . proof that in many parts of the Six Counties the Belfast Parliament hardly functions at all'.¹¹⁹ 'The Die-Hards who now talk glibly of the victimisation of Southern Unionists would never utter a word of protest against the maltreatment and plunder of Catholic workers and traders in the North by a bigoted faction'.¹²⁰ As much truth as there was in this, suggesting that southern Irish loyalists' demands for relief or compensation were gone by 1924 was similarly selective. While it should not be exaggerated, SILRA's records and applications for compensation to the IGC, among other sources, vividly demonstrate long-term personal and financial consequences of the revolution for some southern loyalists.¹²¹

There was, however, some justification for nationalist complaints. A *Morning Post* editorial in June 1923 supporting Northumberland and SILRA suggested that 'the Free State government laughs at the victims of its own misrule'.¹²² Later that month, Northumberland told a SILRA meeting in London that the IFS government and 'the insurgents' were 'at one' in having no desire for loyalists to stay. The state's National Army had 'proved little less destructive than the Republicans', he claimed, and even if the Irish government wished to redeem its pledges to loyalists 'he did not know that it lay in its power to do so' (dismissed as 'Die-Hard Hysteria' in the headline to Gwynn's report).¹²³ This rhetoric was, however, ultimately short-lived. As Ulster Unionists continued efforts to undermine the IFS in advance of the establishment of the Boundary Commission, SILRA – influenced by changes of government in Britain and, perhaps, by the criticism it had received – became more reluctant to openly criticise W. T. Cosgrave's administration. In January 1924, a few days after Ramsey MacDonald began his short first term as prime minister, Northumberland told a SILRA meeting in Hove that it was 'the Coalition Government which had betrayed the Loyalists', while 'a Socialist Government' coming to office was 'another step in that great attack upon civilisation in which the Irish Separatists and British Socialists each played their allotted part'.¹²⁴ There remained some suggestion that loyalists were in danger in the IFS in the mid-1920s, but the verdict on the Dublin government continued to soften.¹²⁵ In late 1926, for instance, the association acknowledged that prioritising members of the National Army over ex-British servicemen was understandable in a difficult economic climate.¹²⁶ And by February 1928, SILRA's relief secretary explicitly insisted that he was not criticising the Free State government 'in any form. . . . It is the British Government that have let these poor people down'.¹²⁷

The limits of what British opponents of the Anglo-Irish Treaty believed they could achieve after 1922 are also detectable through SILRA. Paul Stocker has found that calls for the reconquest of

¹¹⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Feb. 1924.

¹²⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Feb. 1924.

¹²¹ See, for example, testimony contained in claims to the Irish Grants Committee, 1926–30, TNA, CO 726/3–202, and individual accounts described in the minutes of the SILRA advisory committee, Dublin, 1922–1936, D989/B/1/2.

¹²² *Morning Post*, 1 June 1923.

¹²³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 June 1923; *Freeman's Journal*, 27 June 1923.

¹²⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 Jan. 1924. In an editorial in Oct. 1923, the *Daily Mail* had insisted that 'The matter is one for the British Government and not for the Irish Free State' and pressure was put on Stanley Baldwin to deal with the 'scandal' of the treatment of southern Irish loyalists at the National Unionist Association conference that month: *Daily Mail*, 25 Oct., 25 Oct. 1923.

¹²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1926 [speakers at a SILRA event still not safe in Ireland]; *Daily Mail*, 29 Jan. 1925 [Carson's brother returned to Ireland and was 'forced to come to England'].

¹²⁶ See *Irish Times*, 15 Nov. 1926.

¹²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1928. The article transcribed White's quote as 'left these poor people down', which is presumably a typo and has, for clarity, been silently corrected above.

Ireland were rare among the far-right, 'suggesting that while Irish independence from Britain was a tragedy, it was accepted and its reversal was not seen as realistic'.¹²⁸ Within the Conservative right, diehards similarly realised that room for manoeuvre was limited.¹²⁹ As Salisbury told the annual SILRA meeting in 1934, while the policies of statesmen 'produce the wrecks; it is our business, if we can, to provide the salvage'.¹³⁰ But the plight of abandoned Irish loyalists retained its potency in Britain because it served as a reminder of past treachery and a warning of what might come elsewhere. The association's work in Dublin suggests that the damage was considered done. Rather than a potential fifth column, its network in the IFS directed its energies towards financial aid to those impacted by the British withdrawal.

If opportunities were seldom lost to malign political enemies, there was again nothing overtly militant in SILRA's work or its rhetoric. Patrick Buckland described how the IUA 'abandoned its political activities' from early 1922 and adopted 'a new, harmless political role' as a SILRA advisory committee.¹³¹ The London committee's frosty relationship with the British Legion and the attention the association received on both islands, however, made that much more difficult in practice. There were also fundamental differences between the perceived purpose and aims of the association as its London organisation saw it and the Dublin committee's understanding of its own remit – or at least the remit it felt it could pursue. From the mid-1920s, Northumberland, Gretton and others were focussed on lobbying on the issue of compensation. By 1930, they had convinced the British government of its 'duty and responsibility' to its supporters and saw the resultant compensation scheme through its work.¹³² This effectively eliminated the southern Irish loyalist as a political threat in Britain.¹³³ The Dublin committee's work, meanwhile, was much more modest and had no obvious end result.

With no representatives in the Dublin government, SILRA's members in the IFS sought out necessary cases through private correspondence and a sympathetic network.¹³⁴ These contacts were mainly ex-officers of the British armed forces, Church of Ireland clergy and former local IUA representatives.¹³⁵ The Irish committee initially avoided hosting meetings or issuing advertisements in the press. When White wrote to Dublin in June 1923 (a month after the anti-Treaty IRA 'dump arms' that ended the civil war), suggesting the publication of a modified notice in the (ex-)unionist *Irish Times*, it was considered 'inadvisable, and that a better course would be to write to the secretaries of organisations such as the Protestant Orphans Society & Distressed Protestants Society, and Soldiers & Sailors organisations, drawing their attention to the objects of the S.I.L.R.A.'. ¹³⁶ As sensible as this might have been, it may not have been entirely about avoiding the unwanted attention of political rivals.¹³⁷ In October 1925, Walsh informed White that a public appeal on behalf of ex-servicemen in Dublin would 'mean an avalanche of undesirables'. A private appeal to large subscribers might instead 'be the means of securing the necessary funds to do some essential work unostentatiously'.¹³⁸

There was some complaint when Dublin believed regulations adopted in London were limiting the number of cases that could be helped in late 1923 and again in March 1925, highlighting the Irish committee's sense of its own primary purpose – the distribution of relief.¹³⁹ These differences were resolved but the purpose of the Irish committee was more firmly challenged in 1938, when

¹²⁸ Stocker, *Lost Imperium*, 61.

¹²⁹ Kevin Matthews, 'Stanley Baldwin's "Irish Question"', *The Historical Journal*, 43, 4 (2000), 1030.

¹³⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 June 1934.

¹³¹ Buckland, *Irish Unionism I*, 291.

¹³² Brennan, 'A Political Minefield', 412–15.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 419.

¹³⁴ Minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 23 Jan. 1924, PRONI, D989/B/1/2.

¹³⁵ Derived from minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 1922–1936, PRONI, D989/B/1/2.

¹³⁶ Minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 20 June 1923, PRONI, D/989/B/1/2.

¹³⁷ See, for example, advertisements offering assistance to IGC applicants in *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 3 Dec. 1926, 10 Dec. 1926, 7 Jan. 1927; and an appeal for widows of ex-RIC in *Irish Times*, 20 Apr. 1926.

¹³⁸ Walsh to White, 2 Oct. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/3/5.

¹³⁹ Minutes of the general committee, 7 Dec. 1923, PRONI, D989/B/1/3; Minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 23 Jan. 1924, PRONI, D989/B/1/2; Minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 11 Mar. 1925, PRONI, D989/B/1/2.

Salisbury sought to close the Dublin office and maintain 'a small association' to deal with a 'residue of appeals' and ex-Royal Irish Constabulary widows. Financial issues had been evident as early as 1931, when the London committee dispensed with the services of its secretary, while Anglo-Irish relations shifted with the end of the Anglo-Irish economic war (fought over the repayment of land annuities owed from earlier British land acts in Ireland) in April 1938. In the interim, W. T. Cosgrave's Cumann na nGaedheal party had been replaced in government by Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil, founded in 1926 and comprised of a large bulk of the republicans who had opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

But this was also about individual political priorities. On 5 April 1938, with Gretton in the chair, the general committee in London had resolved to make 'every effort' to carry on their work and to ask Salisbury ('when he was able to attend to business') to put their case before a meeting of 'a few prominent people'. Salisbury had some supporters (notably Clothilde Guinness and Constance Milnes Gaskell), but after a meeting in May, Gretton informed him that the majority present believed it would be 'unwise' to close the Dublin office. In November, Salisbury proposed to the annual meeting that in view of the difficulty in securing subscriptions and the ability of the British Legion to deal with ex-servicemen in the IFS, the association cease to provide relief to ex-servicemen in Ireland. This was rejected in favour of continuing as before 'by a large show of hands'.¹⁴⁰

The Dublin committee protested against efforts to close it down or limit its work, organising a petition and arguing that SILRA was needed for cases requiring immediate relief that it alleged the Legion – too burdened by 'red tape' – were unable to help. Salisbury ultimately resigned, and when efforts were again made some time later to wind the association up it was veterans of the Dublin committee that resisted. The London office was then first to close, in 1956.¹⁴¹ Dublin's own belief in its value is telling. It demonstrates the longevity of communal solidarity among the old unionist and loyalist class, and the ways in which they could maintain allegiances while finding accommodation in the new order. Indeed, the extent to which the loyalist minority, and Protestants in particular, suffered persecution at the hands of the majority remains a subject of debate. After Northumberland died in 1930 and meetings in London became increasingly infrequent, the Dublin committee continued to gather regularly and disburse relief. Over time, SILRA in London abandoned explicit references to the conspiracy theories and fearmongering that suffused the rhetoric of the British far-right, though continued to accentuate the material suffering of southern Irish loyalists. SILRA's more moderated (though not moderate) attitude to the IFS is reflected in a minor controversy provoked by the *Morning Post*.

In July 1934 a correspondent published a series of bombastic articles titled 'In Ireland To-day', describing a willing and cheerful descent into 'bankruptcy, ruin, and Communism', as Protestants suffered boycotting, antagonism, and suspicion and were secretly threatened by a 'sacred binding promise to exterminate Protestantism'. Much of what the correspondent had to say was sensibly dismissed as 'sheer nonsense' by the *Irish Times*.¹⁴² The Church of Ireland bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin similarly told a diocesan synod that there had been some 'instances of injustice and intolerance' ('as a famous statesman said, "minorities must suffer"'), but to say that most Protestants were 'ignored, despised, ill-treated in any way is entirely contrary to the facts'.¹⁴³ Bishop Day's intervention prompted a firm, if uncharacteristic, resolution from the SILRA Irish committee, stating that his remarks had given a 'wholly wrong impression of the true position'. Ignoring the more sensationalist claims of the *Morning Post* correspondent, Day was informed that:

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of the general committee, 5 Apr. 1938, 17 May 1938, 27 July 1938; Minutes of annual meeting, 22 Nov. 1938, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

¹⁴¹ Derived from minutes and correspondence contained in minute book of the London committees, 1938–1956, PRONI, D989/B/1/3; McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 133–4.

¹⁴² *Irish Times*, 14 July 1934. See also *Irish Times*, 18 July 1934 and *Kerryman*, 28 July 1934.

¹⁴³ *Irish Times*, 21 July 1934.

Numerous cases from almost every part of the country have come before this Committee, in which applicants for relief, including large numbers of members of the Church of Ireland, have been victimised on account of their loyalty. They include many cases from His Lordship's Dioceses . . . recurring statements of this kind largely nullify their efforts to help loyalists in distress, and especially loyal Protestants, and seriously interfere with the beneficial work of the Association. The continued necessity for the existence of an organisation such as is conclusive proof of the real state of affairs.¹⁴⁴

That surviving belief in its own purpose is perhaps the most important element of SILRA's history in this period. In 1938, with the future of the association under scrutiny, the Dublin committee rejected a suggestion that it would be more 'diplomatic' to remove the word 'loyalist' from their title.¹⁴⁵

Loyalism had not gone away in the IFS and if disappointment, disillusionment and economic struggle defined the post-revolutionary world of many nationalists and republicans, one could hardly expect the entire loyalist community to have fared significantly better.¹⁴⁶ While hardly nuanced, the SILRA Irish committee's reminder of this – even if it was perhaps unlikely to reach a wide or sympathetic audience – says something important about the long afterlife of the Irish Revolution. Those who found themselves amongst the (many) losers of the Irish Revolution had a wide range of experiences, and perceptions of those experiences. SILRA's moderation in Dublin and the fact that its work was not interfered with in any way by the state offers an important indicator of broader attitudes within and towards the loyalist minority.

Conclusion

R. B. McDowell suggested that with SILRA 'politics and charity' were inevitably 'interfused' and it would be a 'mistake to assume cynically that the distressed Irish loyalists were regarded by conservatives as simply a card in a political game. To many it was profoundly disturbing to see decent people, who had done their best to maintain British rule, harassed and reduced to penury'.¹⁴⁷ SILRA indeed provided valuable relief to large numbers of individuals and families, receiving some praise in the IFS for its good work and efficiency.¹⁴⁸ It is thus perhaps needlessly cynical to assume that this was achieved purely for electoral gain or moral supremacy. But contemporary British politics, Anglo-Irish relations, the empire and the conservative worldview of its members also profoundly influenced the association's charitable work.

For the elites who spoke at SILRA meetings, opened their houses for its events or sat on its committees, the association was only a small part of their public lives. Even in December 1926, when still at its peak, only three members were present at a meeting of the executive and relief committees in London, prompting Northumberland to draft a letter 'expressing his hope that the meetings in future would be better attended'.¹⁴⁹ There is an almost four-year gap in recorded minutes afterwards. The ladies' committees saw similar issues with attendance and a high turnover of members.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as this article demonstrates, SILRA had a wide reach. And when examined in its

¹⁴⁴ Minutes of the advisory committee, Dublin, 5 Oct. 1934, PRONI, D/989/B/1/5.

¹⁴⁵ Mary Greer to J. Gore-Hickman, 20 Sept. 1938, TNA, D989/B/1/3.

¹⁴⁶ For disillusionment among the revolutionary generation, see R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation, 1890–1923* (London: Penguin, 2014); Fearghal McGarry, *The Abbey Rebels of 1916: A Lost Revolution* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2015); Diarmaid Ferriter, *A Nation and Not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution, 1913–1923* (London: Profile, 2015); Marie Coleman, 'Military Service Pensions and the Reintegration of Guerrilla Fighters after the Irish Revolution', *Historical Research*, 91, 253 (2018), 554–72.

¹⁴⁷ McDowell, *Crisis and Decline*, 134–5.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, letters of thanks sent to Major White, PRONI, D989/B/3/19.

¹⁴⁹ Minutes of executive and relief committees, 17 Dec. 1926, PRONI, D989/B/1/3.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes of ladies' executive and general committees, 1924–31, PRONI, D989/B/1/4.

wider context, as part of a series of overlapping and complementary concerns and connections among British diehards, SILRA is an organisation worthy of some attention.

This was a non-violent, reactionary movement; British in its form but transnational by nature. That SILRA ultimately shied away from the more extreme rhetorical flourishes of the British far-right is also worth noting. The association's history highlights the need to examine complex minority experiences of revolution, and in particular Protestant experiences, in ways that move beyond (important but often cyclical) debates around sectarianism and 'Protestant exodus'. Indeed, SILRA demonstrates the range of contemporary opinion on the treatment of the loyalist minority during and after the Irish Revolution. Framing this in a wider British, right-wing and imperial context is a reminder, too, that transnational networks were not the preserve of nationalists or republicans. Patrick Buckland suggested that SILRA's survival in the late 1950s was 'not a testimony to the political courage of southern unionists' but 'a testimony to their sense of social solidarity'.¹⁵¹ The work of the Dublin committee after 1938 is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth noting that it was a cohort in the IFS who continued to keep the association alive when much of London had lost interest.

¹⁵¹ Buckland, *Irish Unionism I*, 291.