

Just who wanted dominion home rule?: ‘moderates’ and the Irish War of Independence

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ABSTRACT. *This article discusses political ‘moderates’, those individuals who reacted to the turmoil of the War of Independence by coalescing around a vision of a dominion of Ireland within the British Empire, with appropriate safeguards for minorities. It will consider how reformist gentry, parliamentary and former unionist elements came together to bring about their preferred settlement. Through statistical examination of the membership of the Irish Dominion League, the leading moderate movement, it will establish the political backgrounds, religion and social class of supporters, and demonstrate the various means by which moderates worked as intermediaries between British forces and the rebels. Southern unionists made efforts to avoid working with moderates and to retain a distinct political identity, and, ultimately, divisions within the movement, and the changing structure of Irish politics, inhibited the creation of an effective moderate party.*

Horace Plunkett called them the ‘moderate men of Ireland’ or the ‘moderate section’;¹ David Lloyd George referred to ‘the moderate opinion of Ireland’;² Stephen Gwynn to ‘Moderate thinkers’ or the ‘middle public’;³ Henry Harrison, ‘moderates’ and ‘middle elements’;⁴ Lord Monteagle, ‘moderate men’;⁵ Sir Stanley Harrington, ‘moderate business and professional men in Ireland’;⁶ senior members of the British administration, ‘Moderate opinion’, ‘The Middlemen’, or

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¹ Horace Plunkett diaries (H.P.D.), 2 June 1918 (National Library of Ireland, hereafter N.L.I.); Horace Plunkett, *Home rule and conscription* (Dublin, 1918), p. 12.

² David Lloyd George, quoted in ‘All Ireland uniting’, memorandum from Irish Dominion League, n.d. [Aug. 1920] (N.L.I., Lord Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/5).

³ Colin Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn: Irish constitutional nationalism and cultural politics, 1864–1950* (Manchester, 2011), p. 165; Stephen Gwynn, cited in Senia Pašeta, ‘Ireland’s last home rule generation: the decline of constitutional nationalism in Ireland, 1916–30’ in Mike Cronin and John M. Regan (eds), *Ireland: the politics of independence, 1922–49* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 21.

⁴ Henry Harrison, *The kingdom of Ireland and dominion status: a removal of misapprehensions* (Dublin, 1920), n.p.; idem, *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and its betrayal: does the government want a genuine peace?* (Dublin, 1921), p. 4.

⁵ Lord Monteagle to Lord Burnham, 26 June 1920 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/1).

⁶ Sir Stanley Harrington to Lord Monteagle, 28 June 1920 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers MS 13,417/1).

the ‘Middle Party’;⁷ others referred to ‘moderate political thought in Ireland’, ‘middle opinion in Ireland’, the ‘party of moderation’, ‘moderate men’, or, simply, ‘we poor moderates’.⁸ We have grown accustomed to viewing the politics of the Irish War of Independence as a binary: Irish nationalists versus the British state, or sometimes, a three-way dispute, with the incorporation of Ulster unionists within the narrative. This article will assess another dimension of politics during this era — the moderates, a group which resulted from the fusion of disparate networks and ideologies to create a new movement, which sought an all-Ireland dominion home rule settlement within the empire.

Although moderate politics has been neglected in most accounts of the Irish Revolution, this work is indebted to scholars who have highlighted the afterlife of constitutional nationalist politics after 1918. Senia Pašeta has described the lives of the last generation of constitutional nationalists and shown how they could gravitate towards organisations such as the Irish Dominion League (I.D.L.).⁹ Colin Reid, in reconstructing the career of Stephen Gwynn, has highlighted some of the divisions which would undermine moderate politics.¹⁰ Recently, Martin O’Donoghue has traced the influence of former Irish Parliamentary Party (I.P.P.) members after 1922.¹¹ Michael Hopkinson has described the numerous murky peace initiatives during the War of Independence and argued that a settlement may have been achieved sooner had Britain offered dominion home rule.¹² Meanwhile, Paul Bew has shown how, with the split in Sinn Féin, ‘the eventual resolution of the Anglo-Irish conflict represented not a triumph of the middle ground, but rather its radical displacement’.¹³

Who were the ‘moderates’? Much of the activity discussed in this article had its origins in networks that were formed in the aftermath of the Land Purchase (Ireland) Act 1903, which revolutionised land ownership by greatly expanding peasant proprietorship. In 1904, the earl of Dunraven, believing that the principal differences between landlord and tenant had been resolved, founded a new organisation, the Irish Reform Association. He hoped to lead the gentry away from unionism and towards détente with home rulers on the basis of devolution.

⁷ Royal Irish Constabulary Inspector-General Byrne, quoted in Eunan O’Halpin, *The decline of the union: British government in Ireland, 1892–1920* (Dublin and Syracuse, New York, 1987), p. 191; Mark Sturgis quoted in Michael Hopkinson (ed.), *The last days of Dublin Castle: the Mark Sturgis diaries* (Dublin, 1999), 28 Aug. 1920; Chief Secretary Edward S. Short, quoted in O’Halpin, *The decline of the union*, p. 179.

⁸ Irish Peace Conference memorandum, 7 Oct. 1920 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,415); Warre B. Wells, *Irish indiscretions* (Dublin, 1923), p. 98; A. M. Sullivan, *Old Ireland: reminiscences of an Irish KC* (New York, 1928), p. 273; George Fitzhardinge Berkeley to Edmond J. Frewen, 19 Aug. 1920 (Cork City and County Archives (C.C.C.A.), George Fitzhardinge Berkeley papers); Elisabeth Mary Fingall, *Seventy years young, memories of Elizabeth, countess of Fingall, told to Pamela Hinkson* (London, 1937), p. 394.

⁹ Pašeta, ‘Ireland’s last home rule generation’.

¹⁰ Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*; Colin Reid, ‘Stephen Gwynn and the failure of constitutional nationalism in Ireland, 1919–1921’ in *Historical Journal*, liii, no. 3 (2010), pp 723–45.

¹¹ Martin O’Donoghue, *The legacy of the Irish Parliamentary Party in independent Ireland, 1922–1949* (Liverpool, 2019).

¹² Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), esp. pp 176–7.

¹³ Paul Bew, ‘Moderate nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916–1923’ in *Historical Journal*, xlii, no. 3 (1999), p. 748.

Although only a minority of gentry joined the new group, and hopes for consensus on limited self-government were dashed amidst the ‘devolution crisis’, Dunraven’s venture is not without importance.¹⁴ The association brought together a group of well-connected individuals who were no longer hostile to Irish self-government, were eager to retain a strong link with Britain and for whom partition was anathema: its members would be active in numerous later initiatives. Although reformist gentry shared some ideological sympathies with the Redmondite wing of the I.P.P., direct collaboration with the party leadership was limited. Instead, figures such as Lord Dunraven, Lord Monteagle and Sir John Keane became associated with William O’Brien’s renegade All-for-Ireland-League, founded in 1909 with the aim of achieving consensus between Catholics and Protestants on a scheme for Irish self-government.¹⁵ Reformist gentry networks were bolstered during the home rule crisis, as members of the southern Protestant upper middle classes, fearful of partition and eager to retain some influence in a changing Ireland, joined organisations such as the Irish Protest Committee and Protestant Home Rule Committee.¹⁶ With the outbreak of war in 1914, most Irish political factions (advanced nationalists aside) supported the war effort.¹⁷ During the war, members of the emerging moderate group were prominent in recruiting and efforts at cross-community cooperation. In the aftermath of the Easter Rising, the Irish Conference Committee was formed to advocate for what became the Irish Convention. This was largely an initiative born of networks which had now operated, under changing guises, for about a decade and a half.

As the quotations which open this article suggest, contemporaries made frequent reference to a moderate bloc in Irish politics. (Other terms were also used, such as ‘centrist’, ‘middlemen’ or ‘dominionist’). For some, such as Horace Plunkett, the deal struck at the Irish Convention (which is discussed below) inaugurated the group: he spoke of the ‘Moderate party that was born at the Convention’, in referring to reformers such as himself who had been moving to home rule since the turn of the century, the Parliamentary Party, and those southern unionists who had finally conceded self-government out of fear of something worse.¹⁸ A major disadvantage for Plunkett and his supporters was that they could perceive a much larger group of Irish moderates than were willing to join their movement. The southern unionists were to refuse to re-form the alliance made at the convention. An even worse blow was the refusal of John Dillon, leader of the I.P.P., to allow his movement to combine with the I.D.L. In the aftermath of his party’s landslide defeat to Sinn Féin in 1918, Dillon was determined to remain aloof from politics, in the belief that the newcomers would be discredited and his movement could later return to power.¹⁹ But, this would not stop a group from the old Parliamentary Party from joining with others in an attempt to save constitutional politics.

¹⁴ See Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness: the experience of constructive unionism in Ireland, 1890–1905* (Cork, 1987), chapters 6–9.

¹⁵ See Joseph V. O’Brien, *William O’Brien and the course of Irish politics, 1881–1918* (London, 1976), chapter 8.

¹⁶ See Conor Morrissey, ‘Protestant home rulers and constitutional nationalism in Ireland, c.1900–1914’ in *English Historical Review*, cxxxvi, no. 582 (2021), pp 1224–56.

¹⁷ Catriona Pennell, *A kingdom united: popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), chapter 6.

¹⁸ H.P.D., 26 June 1918.

¹⁹ F. S. L. Lyons, *John Dillon: a biography* (Chicago, 1968), pp 453–4; O’Donoghue, *The legacy of the Irish Parliamentary Party*, pp 7–9.

This article, then, assesses the reformist gentry, parliamentary and former unionist elements which came together in around 1919 in an effort to prevent partition and secure a large measure of home rule within the empire. It offers the first sustained analysis of the membership and ideology of the Irish Dominion League, an important moderate minority voice during the revolutionary era. It will statistically examine the league's membership, as well as attendees at the associated Irish Peace Conference, to establish the political backgrounds, religious denominations and social class of active moderates, and will demonstrate the various means by which they worked as intermediaries between the British administration and the rebels. This is also a story of those who remained aloof, such as the southern unionists who attempted to avoid working with moderates and to retain a distinct political identity. This article demonstrates that networks forged during the closing years of Conservative reform continued to exert an impact on politics into the 1920s. It also expands our understanding of the decline of the I.P.P. by reconstructing how some members sought to reorganise in the aftermath of collapse. Moving away from a high political approach to the award of dominion status, it will show how a well-connected group of activists campaigned in favour of this solution. Seeing their influence recede amidst the War of Independence, they set up a new organisation in an effort to reshape the future of the country, only to find that divisions within the movement, and the changing structure of Irish politics, inhibited the creation of a successful moderate party.

I

In the spring of 1918, Sir Horace Plunkett seemed most likely to forge an association which would bring together Irish moderates. The younger son of an Irish peer, Plunkett had been responsible, through his Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (I.A.O.S.), for introducing co-operative agricultural organisation into Ireland. Although he had served as unionist member for South County Dublin from 1892 to 1900, his views slowly changed: by 1911 he privately supported home rule, and in 1914 he publicly suggested implementing home rule for the whole island, but allowing Ulster the right to secede after a stated period.²⁰ In the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, he came to support dominion home rule.²¹ Much of his time was devoted to efforts to reconcile political factions, religious groups and social classes through cooperation and economic development. Indeed, contemporaries argued that his career was defined by attempts to recapture the spirit of the 1895–6 Recess Committee, in which he brought together nationalists and unionists to suggest non-contentious domestic reforms.²² Plunkett was proud of his chairmanship of the Irish Convention (1917–18), during which, in a major realignment, southern unionists agreed to a far-reaching home rule scheme.²³ As Alvin Jackson has shown, even the Ulster unionist delegates appeared to be

²⁰ H.P.D., 19 Aug., 13 Sept. 1911, 1, 11 Apr., year-end summary 1912; Horace Plunkett, *A better way: an appeal to Ulster not to desert Ireland* (Dublin and London, 1914), pp 23–4.

²¹ Horace Plunkett to Dermod O'Brien, 21 Aug. 1916 (T.C.D., Dermod O'Brien papers, MS 4294/142–187).

²² See Carla King, 'The Recess Committee, 1895–6' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 30 (1998/99), pp 21–46; Wells, *Irish indiscretions*, p. 82.

²³ R. B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention, 1917–18* (London and Toronto, 1970), pp 129–30.

drawing towards a deal.²⁴ Nationalist desire for fiscal autonomy, and poor leadership by the chair, ultimately led to the failure of the Convention, but a sense that home rulers and southern unionists could work together would endure.

In May 1918, the government, seeking to overhaul the Dublin Castle administration, appointed John, Lord French, the former commander of the British Expeditionary Force, as lord lieutenant, on the understanding that he would lead a ‘quasi-military government’.²⁵ He intended to bring in conscription combined with home rule. Plunkett argued that tethering conscription with self-government was disastrous, and instead suggested that home rule should be immediately introduced on the lines agreed by a majority at the convention. A home rule parliament would be in a position to encourage recruitment, he believed. His proposal was that the moderate faction at the Convention should be reconstituted as a ‘middle party’ which would seek to persuade Sinn Féin to dilute their demands in order to gain government acceptance of dominion status and to persuade Ulster unionists to enter an all-Ireland parliament.²⁶ Plunkett spent much of 1918 trying to bring together influential figures in pursuit of such a solution. According to a close associate, he had decided to:

launch a new organisation more or less on Centre Party lines ... his idea roughly is that an organisation of moderate men should be formed who believe (a) that Ireland should have self-gov[ernment]. (b) but not separation nor (c) partition and (d) that she should maintain cordial relations with the people of Great Britain.²⁷

Plunkett, in common with many Protestant unionists who came to endorse home rule, had a horror of partition, believing the division of the island would damage commerce and industry, undermine Protestant and landed influence in the south, increase sectarianism on both sides and lead inevitably to a republic. To meet Ulster’s concerns, he suggested a special administrative council for four or six northern counties, or else the initial implementation of home rule, with the right of secession later. The division of the island was unthinkable: ‘while there may be many solutions, there is but one Ireland.’²⁸ Plunkett may not have fully understood Ulster unionist fears, but he showed real prescience about the dangers of northern resistance. In late 1921 he would write: ‘the only thing which puzzles me about the attitude of the new rulers in Ireland ... is the little attention paid to the Ulster difficulty.’²⁹

That Plunkett was suited to leading a national movement is dubious. Although well-connected, and much admired within his own circle, contemporaries recognised that he could be vain, obstinate and pedantic. He could overestimate his ability to convince others and often believed he enjoyed more popular support than was

²⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Home rule: an Irish history* (London, 2003), pp 208–12.

²⁵ O’Halpin, *The decline of the union*, p. 158.

²⁶ Plunkett, *Home rule and conscription*, pp 19, 25, 30–31. See also H.P.D., 3 May 1918; *Cork Constitution*, 25 Nov. 1918; *Ulster Guardian*, 30 Nov. 1918.

²⁷ Francis Cruise O’Brien to Lord Monteagle, 18 Nov. 1918 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/4).

²⁸ Plunkett, *Home rule and conscription*, pp 27–9; Horace Plunkett, *Dominion self-government: a copy of a letter to ‘The Times’* (Dublin, 1919), p. 8.

²⁹ Horace Plunkett to James Bryce, 27 Oct. 1921, cited in Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett, co-operation and politics: an Irish biography* (Gerrards Cross, 1986), p. 195.

truly the case. In 1904, he badly damaged his reputation among nationalists when he publicly criticised Catholic clergy.³⁰ His conversion to home rule alienated southern unionists, whose support he would need to build a broad-based moderate movement. Plunkett's chairmanship of the Convention has been strongly criticised. Inauspiciously, Lord Midleton, the southern unionist leader, blamed him for derailing a vote on a home rule solution in January 1918, thus, he believed, destroying any hope for a settlement.³¹ In the words of one authority, Plunkett 'had, in truth, no talent whatsoever for politics'.³² Furthermore, his health was poor. The aftereffects of an X-ray burn left him in constant pain, dependent on morphine and afflicted with insomnia when he tried to abstain.³³ It was with a sense of obligation that he entered politics: 'It was a heavy strain on me but I have no option but to do my best ... to arouse the dormant majority of Irish citizens to do their part in saving their country from the threatened Bolshevism.'³⁴

Plunkett was not the only Protestant home ruler planning to launch a moderate movement. With the Ulster Unionist Council's endorsement of partition, the Irish Convention compact on self-government and Sinn Féin's enormous victory in 1918, there was a sense that southern unionists would cease independent activity and combine forces with representatives of the parliamentary tradition, to campaign for all-Ireland home rule with minority safeguards. Stephen Gwynn, the writer and former Irish Parliamentary Party member, wrote to Lord Midleton seeking his support for a party which would unite moderates and wavering unionists. Gwynn, a member of the Church of Ireland, advocated granting generous concessions to Ulster to avert partition.³⁵ Midleton rejected Gwynn's advances and, instead, precipitated a split within the Irish Unionist Alliance (I.U.A.), forming a new organisation, the Unionist Anti-Partition League (A.P.L.).³⁶ The rank-and-file majority, known as the 'die-hards', retained the I.U.A. name. Most prominent southern unionists defected to the new group: the A.P.L.'s first meeting was attended by two marquesses, nine earls, three viscounts, three barons, four baronets and numerous country gentlemen.³⁷ The A.P.L.'s policy, to 'maintain the Legislative Union of Great Britain and Ireland; to secure Ireland against partition; to safeguard the liberties and interests of Irish Unionists', resembled the policy of the I.U.A. However, Midleton's split from the die-hards implied acceptance of home rule as part of an arrangement to avoid partition.³⁸ Undeterred, in January 1919, Gwynn founded the Irish Centre Party. It advocated a self-governing Ireland within the empire, with a central parliament managing national affairs and provincial assemblies for local affairs.³⁹ It also outlined domestic policies in

³⁰ See Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century* (London, 1904), pp 94–121.

³¹ The earl of Midleton, *Records & reactions: 1856–1939* (London, 1939), p. 242.

³² Jackson, *Home rule*, p. 184. See also West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 179.

³³ See West, *Horace Plunkett*, pp 157, 199; Margaret Digby, *Horace Plunkett: an Anglo-American Irishman* (Oxford, 1949), pp 202–03, 241, 246–7.

³⁴ H.P.D., 8 June 1919.

³⁵ Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*, p. 172.

³⁶ *Irish Times* (IT), 25, 27 Jan., 1 Feb. 1919. For internal divisions, see memorandum from Lord Midleton and others to members of the Irish Unionist Alliance, 15 Apr. 1918, pp 3–4 (T.N.A., Lord Midleton papers, PRO 30/67/38).

³⁷ IT, 28 June 1919.

³⁸ IT, 1 Feb. 1919; Patrick Buckland, *Irish unionism, I, The Anglo-Irish and the new Ireland, 1885–1922* (Dublin, 1972), p. 183.

³⁹ IT, 24 Jan. 1919; Irish Centre Party, *Objects of the Party* (n.p. [Dublin], n.d. [1919]).

health, housing and education, as well as protections for minorities.⁴⁰ Gwynn received support from several public figures, including the economist C. H. Oldham, the landowner Sir Algernon Coote and General Sir Hubert Gough, former commander of the British Fifth Army.

In June 1919, Plunkett founded his own organisation, the I.D.L.⁴¹ The party's name reflected the growing post-general election consensus among moderates that the Liberal home rule idea was dead, and that only a degree of independence similar to that of Canada or Australia would be accepted by nationalists. Some senior British parliamentarians had come to recognise this. Lord Haldane argued in November 1919 that Ireland would never be satisfied with mere home rule and that dominion status, similar to Canada, should be the basis for settlement.⁴² Plunkett's advocacy of dominion home rule was based on political and electoral calculation, rather than ideological commitment; as he put it, he was 'advocating the only solution of that eternal Question — the largest measure of autonomy consistent with the military safety of the British Isles and the safeguarding of the Protestant minority in the NE corner'.⁴³ He acknowledged an intellectual debt to Erskine Childers' *The framework of home rule* (1911) for expounding the benefits of this solution: Plunkett was merely the 'godfather' of dominion status; Childers was the father.⁴⁴

The victory of Sinn Féin and the destruction of the I.P.P. may have perturbed moderates, but the fact that the old party still took 220,000 votes suggested a new movement had potential. For Plunkett, the collapse in law and order and the potential victory of 'Northern & Southern extremes'⁴⁵ informed his decision: 'A moderate party must I think be formed on progressive Home Rule lines'.⁴⁶ Describing a discussion with a friend, Plunkett wrote: 'He says, and I agree, that the chief thing to do at the moment is to show that an Irish Parliament would not be dominated by Sinn Féiners. That's the job of the Irish Dominion League.'⁴⁷ Other moderates could see the potential for a new movement. Gwynn wrote: 'The vast majority of those who voted for Republicans at the last election did not understand what they were doing. They thought [?] they were putting up a bargaining demand ... They did not foresee war, [and] did not want war.'⁴⁸ Warre B. Wells, a Dublin-born journalist who was prominent in moderate circles, hoped to 'detach the right wing of Sinn Féin' while impressing 'the Englisher with our sweet reasonableness'.⁴⁹

The creation of the I.D.L. prompted negotiations with Gwynn and Midleton about joining forces. Gwynn, delighted with the boost for moderate politics, subsumed his Irish Centre Party into the I.D.L. However, differences of opinion

⁴⁰ Pašeta, 'Ireland's last home rule generation', p. 21.

⁴¹ *Irish Independent*, 28 June 1919; *IT*, 28 June 1919.

⁴² *IT*, 29 Nov. 1919.

⁴³ H.P.D., year-end summary, 1920.

⁴⁴ Horace Plunkett, *The Irish Peace Conference and after: memorandum to members of the Irish Dominion League*, p. 2 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/5); Erskine Childers, *The framework of home rule* (London, 1911).

⁴⁵ H.P.D., 16 Jan. 1920.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 Apr. 1919.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 June 1919, quoting James Bryce. See also *ibid.*, 2 June 1918.

⁴⁸ Pašeta, 'Ireland's last home rule generation', p. 23.

⁴⁹ Warre B. Wells to Lord Monteagle, 18 July 1919 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS13, 417/4).

between the two men became apparent over Ulster. Plunkett disliked Gwynn's proposal that Ulster should be given special status under home rule. This disagreement prefigured Gwynn's later split from the I.D.L.⁵⁰ Lord Midleton's supporters, although they entered discussions, ultimately declined to merge the A.P.L. with the League.⁵¹ He hinted at constitutional flexibility, but there was an air of unreality about Lord Midleton's actions. Splitting southern unionism and forming a new organisation reduced, rather than enhanced, his influence. However, Midleton was unwilling to declare his adherence to the home rule principle and make common cause with the moderates. This decision contributed to the sidelining of non-Sinn Féin and Ulster unionist voices in negotiations with the British government in 1921. Moderates, who had much in common socially with Midleton's supporters, and shared many of their perspectives, were dismayed by Midleton's actions, and the Irish Dominion League would be consistently critical of the A.P.L. They were particularly scathing about their continued communications with Ulster unionists:

Are the Southern Unionists disposed to lick the hand that spurns them [the Ulster unionists], to listen to the voice which can offer them no comfort than that they abandon their homes, their professions, their industries, and flee into the safety of the Ark of the broken Covenant from the deluge to come? ... [The] Anti-Partition League tells us unnecessarily what [Lord Midleton] and his friends are against.⁵²

The Irish Dominion League was the culmination of the old dream of a moderate party that would unite former unionists (such as Plunkett) and constitutional nationalists (such as Gwynn) in a single vehicle that would seek rapprochement with Ulster unionists and negotiate self-government. In June 1919, the I.D.L. issued its manifesto, which sought dominion status within the empire with the degree of self-government enjoyed by Canada. Ireland would be represented in the League of Nations and at imperial conferences, and would send no representatives to Westminster. It would have control of customs and excise and would seek a free trade agreement with Britain. Military and naval defence 'of the whole of these islands would remain, as now, under a single central control', but only the Irish parliament could impose conscription. Minority, signifying Protestant and unionist, rights would be safeguarded, and the Ulster unionists were exhorted to state their terms for agreeing to an all-Ireland parliament.⁵³ Ultimately, the league sought 'to afford the means for Irish people of all shades of political convictions and antecedents to combine in advocacy of Dominion status for Ireland as the only possible arrangement by which the antagonisms between Ireland and Great Britain and between North-East Ulster and Ireland could be amicably adjusted'.⁵⁴

Reaction was negative and suggested neither unionists nor Sinn Féiners were, as yet, open to a dominion settlement. The Ulster unionist *Belfast News Letter* described Plunkett as an 'altogether impracticable [*sic*] politician' and a 'miserable

⁵⁰ Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*, p. 177.

⁵¹ Wells, *Irish indiscretions*, pp 90–91.

⁵² *Irish Statesman*, 13 Mar. 1920.

⁵³ Manifesto of the Irish Dominion League, June 1919, printed in Irish Dominion League, *Official report setting forth a summary of the results achieved together with the proceedings on dissolution* (Dublin, 1921), pp 12–15.

⁵⁴ Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 7.

weathercock of a public man'.⁵⁵ Plunkett recorded that Edward Carson, in a 12 July speech, 'made a violent attack on the Irish Dominion League & on me personally which I think will be helpful'.⁵⁶ In the south, the die-hard I.U.A. condemned the league.⁵⁷ Éamon de Valera, who was touring the U.S., alleged that the league was inspired by Lloyd George.⁵⁸ Arthur Griffith denounced Plunkett and his associates as 'British agents'.⁵⁹ Representatives of the parliamentary tradition were less hostile. John Dillon, leader of the defeated I.P.P., had grown to respect Plunkett and his support would have been a coup for the league. But, for reasons already noted, he declined to sign the manifesto.⁶⁰ Joseph Devlin, the northern nationalist leader, was friendly when he met with Plunkett, but was privately scathing about the new organisation's chances.⁶¹ The league made some concession to advanced nationalist opinion by declaring its manifesto represented the 'irreducible *minimum*' of the Irish national demand.⁶² However, as Colin Reid states, this formulation put the movement in a poor bargaining position in contrast to Sinn Féin, who demanded a republic.⁶³ Plunkett, who was in contact with moderate-minded figures within Sinn Féin, believed that the majority of the party would accept dominion status if it embraced the whole of Ireland.⁶⁴

The league did not develop a conventional party structure and it never sought to build a national branch network. Indeed, following Sinn Féin's election victory, and with much of the country under growing republican control, they would have been ill-advised to do so.⁶⁵ Instead, the organisation took on two related tasks: first, by means of private persuasion, to convince the British government to concede dominion home rule; and secondly, through propaganda, to convince the British and Irish public to support such a scheme.⁶⁶ Their intention, ultimately, was to place themselves in a position to act as an intermediary between government and Sinn Féin. In pursuit of these goals, the league published at least thirteen different pamphlets, and Plunkett sought to convince influential figures to support a dominion scheme.

⁵⁵ *Belfast News Letter*, 29 June, 14 July 1919, quoted in West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 184.

⁵⁶ H.P.D., 12 July 1919.

⁵⁷ *IT*, 5 July 1919.

⁵⁸ H.P.D., 15 Aug. 1919.

⁵⁹ *Irish Statesman*, 2 Aug. 1919.

⁶⁰ Lyons, *John Dillon*, pp 455, 461–3; Horace Plunkett to John Dillon, 16 June 1919 (T.C.D., John Dillon papers, MS 6746).

⁶¹ H.P.D., 8 July 1919; Joseph Devlin to John Dillon, 10 Nov. 1919 (T.C.D., John Dillon papers, MS 6729–30/242).

⁶² *IT*, 7 Feb. 1919 (emphasis in the original).

⁶³ Reid, 'Stephen Gwynn and the failure of constitutional nationalism in Ireland', p. 732.

⁶⁴ West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 182.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, executive committee of I.D.L., n.d. [after 16 Aug. 1919] (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/4) (discussion relating to Limerick).

⁶⁶ See, for example, Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 7; Memorandum, 'Remarks arising out of Mr Berkeley's comments on my suggested manifesto', n.d. [1920], by Edmond J. Frewen (C.C.C.A., Berkeley papers, PR12/146).

II

The demand for dominion home rule represented a halfway house around which moderates of varying political backgrounds could coalesce. Two of Plunkett's leading associates were Thomas Spring Rice, 2nd baron Monteagle of Brandon, and Captain Henry Harrison. Lord Monteagle was a popular Limerick landowner and close associate of Plunkett in the I.A.O.S. Harrison, a former Irish Party M.P., had fought in the war and had recently, alongside Stephen Gwynn, organised a military officers' petition to the king, which called for Ireland's claim to self-determination to be referred to the Paris conference.⁶⁷ From 1920, he served as secretary to the league.⁶⁸ Prominent figures who supported the party included the landowner Sir Nugent Talbot Everard, surgeon Sir Thomas Myles, artist Dermot O'Brien, historian and women's rights campaigner Mary Hayden, army officer and writer Richard Pope-Hennessy, and lawyer A. M. Sullivan. The league had about 200 members.⁶⁹ Using newspaper reports and other sources, I have identified 165 members or active supporters, representing a substantial survey of the movement (table 1). Where possible, the table also indicates religious background and primary occupation.

Raw figures for profession suggests that the largest category of members were in business. However, when one accounts for landed gentry background, a different pattern emerges. With a total of forty-one, the largest representation came from the southern gentry and aristocracy, a group of which had slowly come to endorse Irish self-government since the turn of the century. There were five peers and six baronets, at least sixteen members were magistrates, and five were deputy lieutenants of counties. There were twenty-one retired or serving military officers. The presence of twelve Catholic gentry, including Lords Fingall and French, underlines the disproportionate sympathy for self-government this group showed by comparison with their Church of Ireland counterparts. The league sought the support of the well-to-do and professional classes, and approached business for funds.⁷⁰ A total of twenty businessmen (quite evenly divided between Catholic and Protestant) joined, perhaps due to fears about the breakdown of law and order and a sense that partition would damage trade. The higher professions, such as barristers, physicians and professors, were well represented, with neither Protestants nor Catholics predominating (although there were far more Catholic solicitors).

As seen in table 2, the religious denomination of 132 members has been traced. The sixty-four Catholics were a slight minority of identifiable members, amounting to about 48 per cent. Anglicans predominated among the 67 members of Protestant churches, and there were small numbers of Methodists, Presbyterians and others. With about half of all members, Protestants were overrepresented in relation to their numbers in the three southern provinces. Indeed, from 1919, the league became the principal vehicle for those Protestants who had come to support self-government within the empire, although its public statements generally avoided

⁶⁷ Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*, pp 174–5; typescript copy of text of petition with list of signatories (British Parliamentary Archive, ST/207/17/817a).

⁶⁸ Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ George Fitzhardinge Berkeley to unknown, n.d. [c.1921] (C.C.C.A., Berkeley papers, PR12/149).

⁷⁰ Pašeta, 'Ireland's last home rule generation', p. 23.

Table 1 Occupation of members of the Irish Dominion League

Occupation	#	Has gentry background	Religion		
			Protestant	Catholic	Unknown/refused
Barrister	12	1	4	8	-
Business or trade	20	-	8	9	3
Catholic priest	2	-	-	2	-
Engineer	4	-	1	2	1
Farmer	4	1	2	2	-
Landowner	16	16	7	9	-
Military officer	21	14	10	5	6
Physician	15	-	8	5	2
Professor	11	1	5	6	-
Protestant clergy	3	-	3	-	-
Senior political or administrative	6	2	4	1	1
Solicitor	8	-	1	7	-
Teacher	2	-	1	1	-
Writer or journalist	8	1	4	2	2
Other occupation	12	5	9	2	1
TOTAL	144	41			

Source: Members of I.D.L. derived from: *Irish Statesman*, 28 June, 5, 19 July, 9 Aug., 11, 25 Oct., 29 Nov., 20 Dec. 1919, 17, 20, 31 Jan., 28 Feb., 13 Mar. 1920; *Freeman's Journal (FJ)*, 30 June, 1 July, 27 Nov. 1919, 6 Sept. 1920, 31 Mar. 1921; *Irish Independent*, 11 Feb. 1921, 21 Apr. 1924; *IT*, 5 Mar., 24 Nov. 1920. Members of the Irish Centre Party have also been included in this analysis, as Stephen Gwynn stated that 'few, if any' members of the Irish Centre Party refused to join the I.D.L. following the merger (*Irish Statesman*, 5 July 1919); and a substantial proportion of former Centre Party members (including most prominent figures) have been verified as later being active in the I.D.L. Members of Irish Centre Party (43 in total) derived from: *IT*, 24, 25 Jan., 3, 17 Feb., 18 Mar. 1919; *Weekly Irish Times*, 1 Feb. 1919. Further biographical data derived from a variety of sources, including: census of Ireland, 1901, and census of Ireland, 1911 (www.census.nationalarchives.ie/); civil birth, marriage and death records (irishgenealogy.ie); J. McGuire and J. Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2009); *Thom's Irish almanac and official directory* (Dublin: published annually); *Thom's Irish who's who* (Dublin, 1923); Bernard Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry of Ireland: new edition* (London, 1912); and press obituaries.

reference to safeguards for their community, instead referring more vaguely to 'minorities'.⁷¹

I.D.L. members had an average age of 52 years in 1919. Members who were younger than 30 were a distinct rarity, and there were many septuagenarian supporters. This is slightly older than members of the I.P.P., who had an average age of

⁷¹ See, for example, *Irish Statesman*, 28 June 1919, 24 Jan. 1920. This, of course, also had the effect of highlighting the dangers of partition to northern Catholics.

Table 2 Denomination of members of the Irish Dominion League

Denomination	#
Anglican	50
Catholic	64
Presbyterian	5
Methodist	7
Protestant (unidentified church)	2
Other Protestant	3
Refused to disclose	1
TOTAL	132

Note: For the sources and method used to generate this data, see table 1

43.2 in 1892, rising to 50.4 in 1910.⁷² A more instructive comparison may be with members of the first Dáil, 33 per cent of whom were aged under 35, a considerably younger profile than that of the I.D.L.⁷³ The failure of the moderate movement to attract many younger members militated against it, and demonstrates the extent to which the initiative had moved towards advanced nationalism. Geographically, about 50 per cent of members resided in Dublin, with the rest spread quite evenly throughout Connaught, Munster and non-metropolitan Leinster: Ulster-domiciled members were very rare. There were fourteen women members, amounting to about 8 per cent of total, including the novelist Katharine Tynan, the artist Sophia St John Whitty and Margaret Cunningham, the first warden of Trinity Hall, the Trinity College Dublin women's hall of residence.

Although the failure of John Dillon to declare for the league was a severe setback, the party did gain some support from the right of the old Parliamentary Party. A total of nine former home rule M.P.s joined.⁷⁴ However, four of these members predated the Edwardian party, with George Browne leaving parliament as far back as 1880. Of those who served more recently, few had been influential: for example, John Lymbrick Esmonde had served for only three years (1915–18) and P. J. Brady had never achieved prominence. Only Stephen Gwynn had been a significant figure in the Redmond era, although he had recently broken with the party. Dillon's desire that the party should remain strategically aloof from politics appears to have been persuasive. However, among Catholic supporters of the I.D.L. at least ten had been I.P.P. supporters or activists, including Francis Cruise O'Brien, formerly a leading figure in the Young Ireland branch of the United Irish League, Arthur William Conway, a party candidate in 1918, and Mary Sheehy Kettle, the widow of Tom Kettle.

There was substantial membership from the overlapping networks of reformist gentry and Protestant home rulers that had been active since the turn of the

⁷² F. S. L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890–1910* (London, 1951), p. 158.

⁷³ Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party, 1916–1923* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 191.

⁷⁴ Patrick Joseph Brady, George Browne, Sir George Errington, John Lymbrick Esmonde, Stephen Gwynn, Henry Harrison, Vincent Kennedy, James Lardner and Pierce O'Mahony were former home rule M.P.s.

century.⁷⁵ Nine members, including Lord Monteagle, Sir Algernon Coote and Major Gerald Dease, were former members of the Irish Reform Association (Lord Dunraven does not appear to have joined). Twelve had been active in the main Protestant home rule organisation, the Irish Protest Committee, founded in late 1912.⁷⁶ A total of seven had been members of the Irish Conference Committee.⁷⁷

There is a common belief that many, or most, members of the I.D.L. were former unionists. An impression has emerged of southern unionists slowly coming to realise the vulnerability of their position, and drawing towards dominion home rule. There is some truth in this — Plunkett and Monteagle, for example, had been active in unionist politics — but the extent of side switching should be re-evaluated. The Irish Unionist Alliance published an annual list of national and local office holders. Of the *c.*950 office holders in 1912–13, only two — Sir George Errington and Major George B. O'Connor — defected to the Irish Dominion League in 1919–20.⁷⁸ The lack of defections between the home rule crisis and beginning of the War of Independence is striking. There were former unionists in the league, but it appears that the point at which individuals changed sides in any numbers was *c.*1904, with the creation of the Irish Reform Association. The evidence suggests that southern unionism, although divided between die-hards and Lord Midleton's more pragmatic supporters, retained a distinctive political culture, whose members were unwilling to cooperate with even conservative-minded advocates of self-government.

The league included many well-known individuals whose long-standing support for home rule within the empire is well-documented. The views of ordinary members are more difficult to discern. For many, support for dominion home rule appears to have been a pragmatic response to parliamentary arithmetic, the threat of partition and republican violence. Agnes Martin, a housewife from Dublin, may have been typical. She supported dominion home rule, she said in the league's official journal, the *Irish Statesman*, as the best way to avoid succumbing to the 'forces of anarchy and disorder which are threatening the stability and almost the civilisation of the country'. Fidelity to the crown was paramount in determining her politics: Martin said her loyalty is 'in the foreground'.⁷⁹

The appointment of Lord French as lord lieutenant in May 1918 coincided with the continued progression of Walter Long to a position of unique authority, as the cabinet's expert on Ireland. French and Long were of a like mind: they were both federalist home rulers, albeit with a conviction that self-government could only be yielded once law and order had been restored. They held that disorder was provoked by a small group of troublemakers and that a stern policy would lead to the tranquil conditions required to implement home rule. French applied a hard-line, ultimately self-defeating policy of coercion. The I.D.L. played a key role in publicising what they saw as misgovernment in Ireland.⁸⁰ Plunkett argued against reprisals, stating that 'Nothing but disaster lies this way' and that the 'remedy is worse than the

⁷⁵ Morrissey, 'Protestant home rulers and constitutional nationalism in Ireland'.

⁷⁶ Including Rev. J. O. Hannay, Sir Thomas Myles and Sir William Hutcheson Poë.

⁷⁷ Among them Dermot O'Brien, Francis Cruise O'Brien and Wilbraham Fitzjohn Trench.

⁷⁸ I.D.L. members checked against *Irish Unionist Alliance: Twenty-eighth annual report, 1912–13* (Dublin, 1913).

⁷⁹ *Irish Statesman*, 17 Jan. 1920.

⁸⁰ Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 9.

disease'.⁸¹ The League's journal, the *Irish Statesman*, publicised its views. Edited by Warre B. Wells, its contributors included Stephen Gwynn, George Bernard Shaw and Lennox Robinson. The *Statesman* consistently denounced British policy in Ireland.⁸² It was also critical of republican violence, especially attacks on police, but shrewdly implied that these actions were a reaction to British misrule.⁸³ As the war dragged on, Plunkett feared the *Statesman* was beginning to flirt with Sinn Féin: this, alongside the paper's financial losses, unnerved him, and he stopped subsidising it, leading to the paper's collapse in mid 1920.⁸⁴ Indeed, by this year there was a sense that some league members were drifting towards a more radical solution to the Irish situation. One prominent member proposed the league should sponsor a 'public protest, putting the Protestant nationalists in evidence', which would present a petition on dominion home rule to the king. Henry Harrison was receptive to the idea and stated that he had considered instituting such a protest, but feared Protestant supporters had been radicalised: 'in the present temper of our people I doubt whether a petition to the King would unite all our possible signatories.'⁸⁵

In October 1919, Walter Long was deputed to draw up plans for self-government. Long, a former chief secretary and leader of the I.U.A., was close to southern unionists. He disliked the dominion idea, which he felt would lead to a republic, and preferred to implement a federal scheme. The Government of Ireland Bill proposed the partition of Ireland into two states, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland, joined by a common council. By mutual consent, the new parliaments could grant greater power to the Council of Ireland, eventually leading to reunion, for which Long, with the southern unionists in mind, was hoping. Irish representatives would continue to sit in Westminster, allowing for the future reorganisation of the United Kingdom on federal lines.⁸⁶ The league reacted with horror to the bill. Partition meant the 'casting off by the Ulster Protestants of their co-religionists in the South and West'.⁸⁷ Plunkett believed the bill would lead to rebellion.⁸⁸ At an A.P.L. meeting in mid April 1920, members continued their desultory progress towards an endorsement of home rule: Midleton outlined amendments including the replacement of the proposed Council of Ireland with an all-Ireland second chamber composed of nominated members. The *Irish Statesman* welcomed this development, seeing it as a move towards the endorsement of dominion home rule.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Horace Plunkett, *England's Irish policy during and after the war* (Dublin, 1920), p. 3.

⁸² *Irish Statesman*, 13 Sept., 18 Oct. 1919, 3 Jan., 7 Feb., 13, 27 Mar. 1920.

⁸³ *Irish Statesman*, 20 Sept., 6 Dec. 1919.

⁸⁴ West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 187; Digby, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 249. For the *Irish Statesman* generally, including its revival from 1923–30, see Ian d'Alton, 'In a "comity of cultures": the rise and fall of the *Irish Statesman*, 1919–1930' in Mark O'Brien and Felix M. Larkin (eds), *Periodicals and journalism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2014), pp 106–07.

⁸⁵ Henry Harrison to George Fitzhardinge Berkeley, 14 May 1920 (C.C.C.A., Berkeley papers, PR12/136).

⁸⁶ John Kendle, *Walter Long, Ireland, and the union: 1905–1920* (Montreal, 1992), pp 181–5.

⁸⁷ *Irish Statesman*, 30 Mar. 1920. See also *IT*, 29 Apr. 1920; Henry Harrison, *The Irish case considered: a remonstrance addressed to the British public* (London, 1920).

⁸⁸ H.P.D., 20 Nov. 1919.

⁸⁹ *Irish Statesman*, 17 Apr. 1920.

I.D.L. unanimity was fractured when Stephen Gwynn declared in favour of the Government of Ireland Bill.⁹⁰ Gwynn argued that in creating two home rule parliaments, it removed the British government from Irish affairs, which could lead to eventual reconciliation.⁹¹ He took the chairmanship of the Government of Ireland Bill Amendment Group, a small body which sought to suggest amendments to make it more acceptable to southern Irish opinion. It attracted well-known moderates such as Lord Dunraven, Sir William Hutcheson Poë and Sir Hubert Gough. Although the group was tiny, and its attempts to improve the bill were a failure, Gwynn's defection weakened the already-faltering league. The *Irish Statesman* was appalled, stating that Gwynn was 'prepared, with pathetic eagerness, to assent to the proposition not merely that half a loaf is better than no bread, but that half a loaf is better even if it is poisoned'.⁹²

In response to the bill, the league argued for the election of a constituent assembly under proportional representation, charged with drawing up a constitution for a dominion home rule state, with safeguards for Ulster and minorities.⁹³ Plunkett stated that the government should 'drop their insane proposal to force their scheme upon us and give us, in a democratically elected assembly, full authority to frame the Constitution we want — which to-morrow would not be a Republic, even if it is today'.⁹⁴ Even if this proposal could gather sufficient support in the south, it ignored the Ulster unionist refusal to enter an all-Ireland settlement, safe in the knowledge that the Conservative members in cabinet would continue to support them.⁹⁵ When cabinet support for partition became clear, Plunkett considered closing the league, but ultimately decided to continue, in the hope that opinion could be swayed and the government would realise that only an all-Ireland dominion settlement would endure.

The crisis in moderate politics prompted an emotional appeal from Bolton Waller, a war veteran who was active in the I.D.L.⁹⁶ In a letter to the press, Waller outlined five groups that desired an all-Ireland settlement and that, he said, should combine under one leader: the I.D.L.; the remnants of the Irish Party; the A.P.L.; moderate elements in the Irish Labour party; and the Government of Ireland Bill Amendment Group. He argued that 'past controversies and minor disagreements' were keeping them apart and that only by combining could the unity of the country be preserved. He addressed his own people directly: 'Especially to the South of Ireland Protestants would I appeal. We have been too late again and again. This is perhaps our last chance. Are not we ready to sink a great deal for the sake of Ireland?'⁹⁷ However, few seemed to listen to Waller's appeal and no such union came about.

⁹⁰ *IT*, 5 Mar. 1920.

⁹¹ Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*, pp 180–83.

⁹² *Irish Statesman*, 27 Mar. 1920.

⁹³ See, for example, *Irish Statesman*, 14 Feb. 1920. See also Harrison, *The Irish case considered*, p. 17.

⁹⁴ Plunkett, *England's Irish policy*, p. 11.

⁹⁵ See, for example, D. G. Boyce, 'How to settle the Irish question: Lloyd George and Ireland, 1916–21' in A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: twelve essays* (New York, 1971), pp 141–2, 160–61.

⁹⁶ For Waller's career, see Conor Morrissey, 'Peace, Protestantism, and the unity of Ireland: the career of Bolton C. Waller' in Ian d'Alton and Ida Milne (eds), *Protestant and Irish: the minority's search for place in independent Ireland* (Cork, 2019), pp 51–66.

⁹⁷ *FJ*, 6 Aug. 1920; *IT*, 4 Aug. 1920.

Much of the league's publicity work was carried out by its London branch. Its supporters there were drawn from Irish moderates, such as Waller, who were resident in London, British Liberals, some members of the Labour party and some Conservatives. Pragmatism rather than ideology appears to have informed the politics of some: according to one prominent member, 'We, Dominion Home Rulers, exist [in London] only because people are afraid of Sinn Féin. No one here *wants* to have [dominion home rule]. It is merely the lesser of two evils.'⁹⁸ Monteagle chaired the branch, whose most active members alongside Waller included George Fitzhardinge Berkeley, Dame Una Pope-Hennessy and Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentinck.⁹⁹ Its activities were supported by various women's organisations across England and Wales, as well as some Nonconformists, with the Quakers proving most helpful.¹⁰⁰ Members criticised British misrule, especially reprisals, and publicised the league's manifesto. They were closely associated with the London-based Peace with Ireland Council, many of whose members were also in the I.D.L., and whose prominent supporters included Oswald Mosley, G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc.¹⁰¹ The council, which had a couple of hundred members, held nearly 200 meetings throughout England.¹⁰² However, official indifference and a mostly-hostile press limited both groups' impact.

In an effort to overturn the government's bill and substitute an all-Ireland dominion solution, Plunkett sought to bring together Liberal, Labour and Independent Tory M.P.s.¹⁰³ When this strategy failed, he decided to focus his efforts closer to home: 'I must take a rest & go to work *in Ireland*.'¹⁰⁴ Plunkett's leadership was partially to blame for the lack of success in this period: his health remained poor, the I.A.O.S. still took up much of his time and two visits to the U.S. were of less benefit to the party than he imagined. Furthermore, the organisation's finances were consistently in a dismal state.¹⁰⁵ But, a real problem was Plunkett's inability to control his colleagues. With few 'grassroot' members, and many big personalities in the movement, he had difficulties maintaining consensus on partition. These divisions publicly re-emerged when Monteagle brought his Dominion of Ireland Bill before the Lords. The London branch was responsible for drafting the bill, with Fitzhardinge Berkeley stating that, during this period, 'Poor Lord Monteagle was almost worked off his feet'.¹⁰⁶ The bill proposed dominion status with full fiscal powers, and defence reserved to Westminster. The six north-eastern counties could be excluded, via plebiscite.¹⁰⁷ The acceptance of partition angered

⁹⁸ George Fitzhardinge Berkeley to Edmond J. Frewen, 19 Aug. 1920 (C.C.C.A., Berkeley papers, PR12/146).

⁹⁹ George Fitzhardinge Berkeley, Bureau of Military History, witness statement 994, p. 8 (Military Archives of Ireland); *IT*, 24 Nov. 1920.

¹⁰⁰ George Fitzhardinge Berkeley, incomplete draft letter to unknown, n.d. [1921?] (C.C.C.A., Berkeley papers, PR12).

¹⁰¹ Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 9.

¹⁰² George Fitzhardinge Berkeley, 'My experience with the peace with Ireland Council, 1920–21', chapters 6, 8 (N.L.I., George Fitzhardinge Berkeley papers, MS 10,924).

¹⁰³ *H.P.D.*, 26 Feb. 1920.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 Mar. 1920.

¹⁰⁵ Horace Plunkett circular, 9 Aug. 1921 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS13,417/2); minutes, I.D.L. London branch, 14 Mar. 1921 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS13,417/3).

¹⁰⁶ Berkeley, 'My experience with the peace with Ireland Council', chapter 1 (NLI, Berkeley papers).

¹⁰⁷ See drafts and correspondence in Monteagle papers (N.L.I., MS 13,417/1).

Plunkett, who still seems to have hoped for an all-Ireland constituent assembly at which the Ulster unionists would be induced to come in. Plunkett ‘Sent Harrison to London to try and get Monteagle not to play the devil with the Irish Dominion League by introducing a Bill with Two Nation theory as its basis’.¹⁰⁸ The bill was thrown out after about five hours when Birkenhead, the lord chancellor, made clear that the government was opposed.¹⁰⁹

Following this, Sir Stanley Harrington, a Cork businessman and member of the I.D.L., proposed a direct approach to the prime minister.¹¹⁰ In early August, Harrington led a delegation of prominent figures, many from business, to Lloyd George, in which they pressed for the withdrawal of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Bill and the immediate grant of dominion home rule.¹¹¹ Lloyd George, who met the delegation alongside senior members of the cabinet, offered some encouragement, and asked to hear from a more representative body of moderates.¹¹² It seemed like an opportune time for a peace initiative. In July, Dublin Castle officials urged the prime minister to offer dominion status: though Lloyd George did not reject the idea, it was vetoed by Conservative colleagues.¹¹³ During this period, prominent Catholic clergy, as well as influential newspapers (including the previously unionist *Irish Times*), had declared for dominion home rule.¹¹⁴ In mid-August, Lloyd George publicly invited Sinn Féin to enter talks so long as the six north-eastern counties were treated separately, there was no republic and the security of the United Kingdom was guaranteed. In response, the Irish Peace Conference assembled in Dublin at the end of the month.¹¹⁵ This was an assembly of moderates, which was not held under I.D.L. auspices, although Henry Harrison and the I.D.L. office organised it. Sir Nugent Everard was chairman, and speakers included Harrington, Stephen Gwynn and George B. O’Connor, one of the few recent defectors from unionism. Catholic gentry and aristocracy were especially prominent among the speakers, including Lord French, Sir Thomas Esmonde and the O’Conor Don. The conference passed resolutions stating that British government policy was inevitably leading to civil war and that a full measure of self-government within the empire should be implemented. A fear of further deterioration leading to open war informed a resolution calling for the release of Terence MacSwiney, the lord mayor of Cork, who was then on hunger strike in Brixton Prison. Although the speakers, and large majorities in favour of the resolutions, gave the appearance of consensus, divisions over Ulster were apparent. The earl of Shaftesbury, an Ulster landowner, argued that partition would need to take place. Plunkett, in response, repeated his belief that the government should set

¹⁰⁸ H.P.D., 21 June 1920.

¹⁰⁹ *Hansard 5 (Lords)*, xl, cc 1113–62 (1 July 1920); Berkeley, ‘My experience with the peace with Ireland Council’, chapter 1.

¹¹⁰ See Sir Stanley Harrington to Lord Monteagle, 6 July 1920 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/5); circular re. Cork meeting, 30 July 1920 (*ibid.*).

¹¹¹ *IT*, 5 Aug. 1920; Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 8.

¹¹² Plunkett, *England’s Irish policy*, p. 3; Berkeley, ‘My experience with the peace with Ireland Council’, chapter 2; Harrison, *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and its betrayal*, pp 4–5.

¹¹³ Boyce, ‘How to settle the Irish question’, p. 151. For more on these discussions, see below.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Hopkinson, *Irish War of Independence*, p. 64.

¹¹⁵ See reports in *FJ*, 25 Aug. 1920; *IT*, 25 Aug. 1920; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Aug. 1920.

up a constitutional convention, at which Ulster delegates would negotiate entry to a united Ireland.

Delegates frequently made the dubious claim that the conference was ‘representative’.¹¹⁶ It was mostly representative of the well-to-do who supported home rule, either through conviction or because they were fearful of advanced nationalism. The names of 312 attendees have been preserved and basic biographical information for just over half of them can be traced.¹¹⁷ Analysis of 163 attendees’ occupations suggests that the conference attracted a similar profile to the I.D.L.: the landowning class, business, and the professions (though, of course, members of these groups can most easily be found in available sources such as the census). The gentry and aristocracy were well-represented, with twenty-six landowners (including seven peers and four baronets), and there were twenty-seven military officers. The single largest category, about 20 per cent of attendees, were engaged in business, which may have been a sign that the breakdown in law and order was causing concern for this group.¹¹⁸ Protestants (mostly Anglicans) dominated among the 168 attendees whose religious denominations have been traced, with almost 59 per cent of attendees, to 38 per cent Catholics.¹¹⁹ The forty women listed as attending (about 13 per cent of the total) was a slight increase by comparison with the I.D.L. It is noteworthy that only thirty-one attendees, or about 10 per cent of members, can be identified as having joined the I.D.L., suggesting that moderate politics was then expanding. However, as we will see, the prime minister did not believe the movement had sufficient momentum to act as a protagonist in negotiations.

Midleton’s supporters were conspicuously absent. Indeed, only three conference attendees had held Irish Unionist Alliance office in 1912–13.¹²⁰ The complete refusal of the A.P.L. to work with the I.D.L. surprised some, considering the former’s recent statements. Less than two weeks prior to the peace conference, the A.P.L. unanimously resolved that while their preference remained for an unreformed union, as the government had ‘lost the confidence of all classes’, the Government of Ireland Bill should be scrapped and Ireland should be granted self-government within the empire, with control of taxation.¹²¹ It was, in effect, dominion home rule. By now moderates were simply bewildered by the A.P.L.’s refusal to collaborate; Monteagle, in a letter to Shaftesbury, stated: ‘Surely the Peace Conference platform is wide enough to include [Midleton] and his friends?’ He probably had Plunkett in mind when he suggested the divisions between the I.D.L. and the A.P.L. was ‘largely a matter of names or personalities’.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, p. 8; *FJ*, 25 Aug. 1920; Harrison, *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and its betrayal*, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ See lists in *FJ*, 25 Aug. 1920; *IT*, 25 Aug. 1920. The biographical data used here comes from a variety of sources, especially the census of Ireland for 1901 and 1911; McGuire and Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*; and *Thom’s Irish almanac & official directory*.

¹¹⁸ The occupation of 163 attendees has been traced.

¹¹⁹ The religion of 168 attendees has been traced.

¹²⁰ Major G. B. O’Connor; Viscount de Vesci; and J. C. Percy.

¹²¹ Copy of A.P.L. resolution, 13 Aug. 1920 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/5). See also Buckland, *Irish unionism*, i, pp 227–8.

¹²² Lord Monteagle to the earl of Shaftesbury, 11 Sept. 1920 (N.L.I., Monteagle papers, MS 13,415). For the refusal of the A.P.L. to take part, see Harrison, *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and its betrayal*, p. 9.

Plunkett, for his part, was well aware of how much the Irish aristocracy hated him.¹²³

The conference appointed a standing committee, which included Plunkett, Gwynn and Harrison, to make representations to the government and meet the prime minister. Dublin Castle officials were unimpressed when they met; Mark Sturgis wrote that ‘they said little on any subject except the Hunger Strikers’ and claimed ‘if the Hunger Strikers are let out the Golden Age will begin. If any of them die it is damnation for ever.’¹²⁴ Indeed, if the moderates and the government appeared to be coming together in August, by October their positions were seemingly irreconcilable. At a speech in Carnarvon, Lloyd George rejected dominion status as impossible and endorsed the policy of reprisals against what he called ‘the real murder gang’.¹²⁵ This represented a triumph for cabinet hardliners and a disaster for moderates. Then, adding further insult, the prime minister declined to receive the peace conference deputation. Speaking in the Commons, he admitted encouraging moderate opinion to come forward, but stated ‘I do not think any advantage is to be gained by receiving them’.¹²⁶ This further blow to moderate politics met with angry responses from Plunkett, Harrison and others. Plunkett believed the moderates were dispensed with when they could not ‘deliver the goods’.¹²⁷ Harrison spoke of betrayal.¹²⁸ George Fitzhardinge Berkeley may have been correct in claiming that Lloyd George sought to build up the moderate movement as a way of softening Sinn Féin before negotiations.¹²⁹ Ultimately, the passing of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act, the death of Terence MacSwiney and the endorsement of reprisals ensured that even if the moderates had been more united, by the autumn of 1920 there was little to discuss with the government.

By the end of 1920, the pattern of raids and reprisals had taken its toll on the entire country, among them supporters of the Irish Dominion League. Elizabeth, countess of Fingall, a close friend of Plunkett’s, recalled: ‘We poor moderates [in] those days had a bad time, walking in the middle of the road and likely to get hit by the bullets from either side.’¹³⁰ Plunkett’s life was threatened by republicans.¹³¹ Two attempts were made on the life of A. M. Sullivan, a barrister and outspoken critic of Sinn Féin, who prosecuted Volunteers in court.¹³² Major George B. O’Connor was less lucky. On 10 July 1921, the I.R.A., acting on the belief that he was providing information to the British authorities, took him from his house and shot him. A label was attached to his body bearing the words ‘Convicted Spy’.¹³³ George Hamilton

¹²³ See H.P.D., 25 Nov. 1918.

¹²⁴ Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, 25, 31 Aug. 1920.

¹²⁵ Boyce, ‘How to settle the Irish question’, p. 149. For the speech, see *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Oct. 1920.

¹²⁶ *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, xxxiv, cc 2061–62 (18 Nov. 1920).

¹²⁷ Plunkett, *England’s Irish policy*, preface.

¹²⁸ Harrison, *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and its betrayal*.

¹²⁹ Berkeley, ‘My experience with the peace with Ireland Council’, chapter 2.

¹³⁰ Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 400.

¹³¹ West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 186. See also Horace Plunkett to John Dillon, 2 Dec. 1919 (T.C.D., Dillon papers, MS 6746).

¹³² Sullivan, *Old Ireland*, pp 263, 279.

¹³³ *Cork Constitution*, 12, 13 July 1921; *IT*, 12 July 1921. See also Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc, *Truce: murder, myth, and the last days of the Irish War of Independence* (Cork, 2016), pp 88–90.

Johnston, a County Donegal landowner and advocate of dominion home rule, was killed in his house during an I.R.A. arms raid.¹³⁴

III

Throughout the conflict, a sense that the belligerents could be brought towards a middle ground induced many individuals to act as intermediaries. Lord Haldane and Lord Derby, senior British parliamentarians, both led unsuccessful peace initiatives in 1919 and 1921 respectively. The Catholic hierarchy, labour representatives, southern unionists and, to a great extent, political moderates would all make efforts to bring Sinn Féin and the British government together. Plunkett was in contact with individuals within Sinn Féin, whom he hoped would influence the leadership towards accepting dominion status.¹³⁵ However, as the war drew on, he grew marginal to peace initiatives. At the end of November 1920 Shane Leslie and Æ (George Russell), both well-known moderates, offered themselves as intermediaries between the government and Sinn Féin.¹³⁶ Earlier that month, the efforts of two I.D.L. members, Major General Robert Wanless O’Gowan and Dr William Crofton, led to some optimism. O’Gowan and Crofton, who were in touch with members of the Dáil, claimed that a substantial body of republicans would accept the exclusion of the north-east in return for full fiscal powers. Lloyd George was hopeful, and even Bonar Law was sanguine about the plan, which collapsed in the midst of Bloody Sunday and the arrest of Arthur Griffith.¹³⁷ In December, there was another initiative, by Patrick Joseph Clune, the archbishop of Perth, who sought to bring both sides together. While in Dublin, Clune stayed in the home of the prominent solicitor Sir John O’Connell, a member of the I.D.L.¹³⁸ There were several discussions with Arthur Griffith, whom moderates rightly perceived was open to a negotiated settlement.¹³⁹ However, nothing came of these initiatives and it would be a member of the Dublin Castle administration who did the most to promote a dominion solution.

In July 1919, William Wylie, a barrister from an Ulster Presbyterian background, was appointed law advisor to the government of Ireland. Wylie was a committed proponent of dominion home rule and had been a member of the Irish Centre Party. In mid 1920, the castle administration was reinvigorated by the appointment of experienced British civil servants: Sir John Anderson as joint under-secretary, Andy Cope, as assistant under-secretary, and Mark Sturgis as effective joint assistant under-secretary.¹⁴⁰ Wylie helped convince the new arrivals to oppose coercion and endorse dominion home rule. Other important figures were coming to the same conclusion, notably Sir Nevil Macready, who was appointed general officer

¹³⁴ Eunan O’Halpin and Daithí Ó Corráin, *The dead of the Irish Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 2020), p. 168.

¹³⁵ H.P.D., 1 Dec. 1918, 18 Apr., 23 Nov. 1920. See also West, *Horace Plunkett*, pp 179, 183.

¹³⁶ Hopkinson, *Irish War of Independence*, p. 181.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*; Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, 9, 12 Nov. 1920.

¹³⁸ John T. McMahon, *‘The Cream of their Race’: Irish truce negotiations December 1920–January 1921* (Ennis, n.d.), p. 6.

¹³⁹ Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, 26 Sept. 1920; Berkeley, ‘My experience with the peace with Ireland Council’, chapter 5.

¹⁴⁰ Hopkinson, *Irish War of Independence*, p. 62.

commanding in Ireland in late March 1920.¹⁴¹ On 23 July 1920, Dublin Castle officials met with the prime minister and the rest of the cabinet to review the situation in Ireland. In the words of Mark Sturgis, Wylie ‘gave it to them hot and strong’, arguing that the security situation had severely deteriorated, that Sinn Féin, who had built up a ‘marvellous organisation’, was capable of governing and that settlement was possible on the basis of county option in Ulster and reservation of defence. Anderson and Cope agreed but General Tudor, the head of the police in Ireland, disagreed, arguing that the rebels should be crushed: in this he was supported by the cabinet hardliners Churchill and Birkenhead. Ultimately, Lloyd George was unwilling to break the coalition over Ireland and the government implemented coercion.¹⁴² This policy was tempered by continued Dublin Castle approaches to potential moderates in Sinn Féin. Cope, with the prime minister’s secret agreement, even met Michael Collins, an important step towards a truce.¹⁴³

There was no role for Plunkett in these discussions. His public and private criticisms of British forces exasperated Dublin Castle officials; Sturgis was angered when Plunkett publicly complained about reprisals against his ‘blasted milk shops, with particular accusations against soldiers’.¹⁴⁴ On another occasion, he recorded: ‘Horace Plunkett in again this morning — he is getting quite gaga — if true it’s a nasty silly case of stripping and painting some young Shinns — but no reason Horace should call every morning for a report which I keep telling him must take some days.’¹⁴⁵ Plunkett’s proposed solution was unchanged. He told Sturgis:

we should summon a Constituent Assembly and give it a Dominion promise and gunning would stop at once — but it’s not quite so simple as that [replied Sturgis]. I told him the worst way for ‘his friends’ [Sinn Féin] to get a further advance out of L[loyd] G[eorge] was to go on stiffening English backs by gunning policemen etc.¹⁴⁶

By the spring of 1921, it was becoming obvious that the cabinet had wearied of coercion and were seeking a way out. The replacement of the now-marginalised Lord French emphasised the change in approach.¹⁴⁷

During this period, both southern unionist and moderate leaders made final efforts to regain the initiative. Lord Midleton decided that March 1921 was the opportune time to reach beyond southern unionists and broker an agreement.

¹⁴¹ Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, p. 4; Nevil Macready, *Annals of an active life* (2 vols, London, 1924), ii, 405.

¹⁴² Cabinet memorandum: the situation in Ireland: notes of a conference with the officers of the Irish Government’, 23 July 1920 (T.N.A., CP 1693 CAB24/108); Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, 23 July 1920, and appendix 1; Hopkinson, *Irish War of Independence*, pp 64–5.

¹⁴³ León Ó Broin, *W. E. Wylie and the Irish revolution, 1916–1921* (Dublin, 1989), pp 68–9. For Lloyd George’s ‘double policy’, see Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The political diaries of C. P. Scott, 1911–1928* (London, 1970), 15 Dec. 1920, p. 389.

¹⁴⁴ Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, 7 Sept. 1920.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 June 1921.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 Sept. 1920.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Townshend, *The British campaign in Ireland: the development of political and military policies* (London and New York, 1975), p. 173.

Having declined a few days earlier Stephen Gwynn's suggestion that he lead a new centre party and contest the upcoming elections, Midleton suggested that:

there may be a middle way by means of two parties with whom I have been in contact, (a) commercial men, (b) the Catholic Church. There may be some hope if these two could form a small conclave and could be met in Ireland by some member of the cabinet ... It is strongly believed that Sinn Féin would appoint someone to this conclave.¹⁴⁸

This unlikely plan foundered when the Catholic hierarchy declined to take part.¹⁴⁹ In May, Plunkett organised the 'Memorial of Certain Irishmen', an open address by well-known moderates to the prime minister calling for the convening of a constituent assembly to draw up a constitution for dominion government, at which the signatories were confident the Ulster unionists would unite with the south.¹⁵⁰ Midleton declined to sign and divisions among I.D.L. supporters remained apparent. Plunkett recorded: 'All day at Memorial. The 'Moderates' are hopeless.'¹⁵¹ The memorial had no impact, for the government had realised that the useful moderates were in Sinn Féin.

Michael Hopkinson has argued that dominion home rule was not a viable solution until late June/July 1921. The Conservatives were opposed to the measure, as was Lloyd George himself since he believed dominion status implied the right of secession.¹⁵² However, the successful establishment of the parliament of Northern Ireland provided an opening. The key intermediary was Jan Smuts, the South African prime minister, who arrived in London on 11 June. Smuts advised Lloyd George publicly to offer dominion status to de Valera, stating that 'the establishment of the Northern Ireland Parliament definitely eliminates the coercion of Ulster, and the road is now clear to deal on the most statesmanlike lines with the rest of Ireland'.¹⁵³ Although Lloyd George remained fearful of the impact of dominion status on security and trade, the king's conciliatory speech at the opening of the Northern Ireland parliament generated enough goodwill that a settlement became possible.¹⁵⁴ In early July, Midleton and A.P.L. colleagues met de Valera and a truce was brokered. Unsurprisingly, Plunkett believed that de Valera had made a mistake in not seeing himself and Devlin as well.¹⁵⁵ When de Valera met Lloyd George in the middle of the month, the prime minister offered dominion status, with no coercion of Ulster and safeguards for the security of the United Kingdom.¹⁵⁶ Although de Valera rejected this offer, British officials understood that Sinn Féin was a complex coalition and that some were moving towards

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall diary*, iii, *Ireland, 1918–1925*, ed. Keith Middlemas (London, 1971), 8 Mar. 1921, p. 54; resumé of a meeting at 103 Grafton St., Dublin, 5 Mar. 1921 (T.N.A., Midleton papers, PRO30/67/44).

¹⁴⁹ John Blake Powell to Lord Midleton, 12 Apr. 1921 (T.N.A., Midleton papers, PRO30/67/44).

¹⁵⁰ For text, see Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, pp 21–3. For signatories, see *The Times*, 12 May 1921.

¹⁵¹ H.P.D., 25 Apr. 1921.

¹⁵² Hopkinson, *Irish War of Independence*, p. 178.

¹⁵³ Jan Smuts, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁴ Boyce, 'How to settle the Irish question', p. 156.

¹⁵⁵ H.P.D., 29 June 1921.

¹⁵⁶ Alan O'Day, *Irish home rule: 1867–1921* (Manchester, 1998), pp 301–02.

compromise. In late August, Wylie reported that senior figures in the party, including Griffith and Collins, wanted a settlement.¹⁵⁷

Utterly marginalised, there was no room for Plunkett or the I.D.L. in these discussions. In mid August, Smuts wrote to de Valera advising him to accept partition. Senior moderates, such as Lord Monteagle and Lord Dunraven, endorsed division; consequently, in response, Plunkett wound up the league.¹⁵⁸ The prime minister himself understood the potential of partition to cause havoc. During the negotiations which led to the Treaty, Lloyd George was able to neutralise the Irish delegates' unwillingness to agree to partition using the ruse of a boundary commission.¹⁵⁹ The Anglo-Irish Treaty which created the Irish Free State offered dominion status in the south in all but name. In an insert placed within the league's *Final report* that extolled the benefits of the Treaty, Harrison wrote: 'In its provisions ... is to be found the most conspicuous vindication of the Irish Dominion League and the Irish Peace Conference of 1920.'¹⁶⁰ Plunkett welcomed the agreement, believing that the boundary commission would ultimately lead to unity: 'The terms of the Irish Treaty were published today. They were, in substance, the Irish Dominion League's policy, the word Dominion being shunned and the method of morally coercing Ulster being camouflage of a high order.'¹⁶¹ Of course, the Treaty would do no such thing. Far from coercing Ulster, it would ultimately consolidate partition. Summarising the year 1921 in his diary, Plunkett would write: 'A sad year for the old in Ireland — perhaps sadder for the young! Ireland will be theirs and the emptiness thereof.'¹⁶² The coming years, far from bringing peace and the foundations for unity, would bring more bloodshed, and personal sadness for Plunkett: during the civil war which followed, Plunkett's house was among those that went up in flames. He would spend his last years in England.¹⁶³

IV

With the creation of the Irish Dominion League, Irish political development reached a turning point and failed to turn. In bringing together previously disunited reformist gentry, Protestant home rulers, old parliamentarians and former unionists, the party's leadership believed they had forged a movement which represented a sizable body of opinion. Why, then, did the movement fail? Much of the blame can be ascribed to Horace Plunkett. He may have simply lacked the skills required to form a successful new party, especially amidst war. A man who in 1921 could write that "'Ulster" must be sick of its Parliament now that the Constitutional & Sinn Fein Nationalists have agreed to boycott it' may have been too naïve for leadership.¹⁶⁴ However, much was beyond his control. Plunkett, more than many other figures of his generation, understood the threat posed by partition. Conservative

¹⁵⁷ Hopkinson (ed.), *Mark Sturgis diaries*, 22 Aug. 1921.

¹⁵⁸ See West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 194. The organisation officially closed in Nov. 1921: *IT*, 4 Nov. 1921.

¹⁵⁹ Charles Townshend, *The partition: Ireland divided, 1885–1925* (London, 2021), pp 200–04.

¹⁶⁰ Irish Dominion League, *Official report*, insert, dated 7 Dec. 1921 (n.p.).

¹⁶¹ H.P.D., 7 Dec. 1921.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, year-end summary 1921.

¹⁶³ For Plunkett and the Irish Civil War, see West, *Horace Plunkett*, chapter xi.

¹⁶⁴ H.P.D., 11 Apr. 1921.

cabinet support for Ulster unionists precluded any serious efforts to compel the northerners into a Dublin parliament. The divisions this fundamental political fact engendered undermined the ability of I.D.L. members to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, leading a new, minority movement during wartime, and while suffering significant health difficulties, was brave. Nor do Plunkett's shortcomings in politics undermine his reputation as Ireland's greatest rural reformer.

The decision of Lord Midleton and his supporters not to cooperate with — let alone merge with — the I.D.L. damaged moderate politics. Many southern unionists disliked Plunkett as a defector and Midleton's experience at the convention made him unwilling to work with him again. However, Midleton was unable to see that his movement had, despite the past, much in common with the moderates, and that a rival movement, still eulogising the union but grudgingly endorsing home rule, was pointless in the context of Sinn Féin landslides. It is noteworthy that in his memoirs, Midleton regretted the split with the diehards, which he felt side-lined southern unionist voices in negotiations and led to unsatisfactory safeguards in the Treaty; he gave no sense of wishing moderate politics had been put on a broader basis.¹⁶⁵ However, as the I.D.L. understood, only a larger movement could have compelled the British government to listen.

There may be a third reason for the failure of the movement. In 1922, there were no shortage of members of the A.P.L. and the I.U.A. who advocated reorganising, and contesting elections in the Free State as a conservative opposition.¹⁶⁶ The decision of both organisations, then, to wind down, only a year after the I.D.L. did the same, points to a change in structural conditions. Members may have seen that under the coming dispensation, political power would belong to Sinn Féin and its successor organisations: there would be little room for other perspectives. In independent Ireland, they would inhabit a shrinking sphere of political influence.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Midleton, *Records & reactions*, pp 253–4, 263–4; the earl of Midleton, *Ireland—dupe or heroine* (London, 1932), pp 159–60.

¹⁶⁶ Buckland, *Irish unionism*, i, pp 274–96.

¹⁶⁷ I would like to thank the Irish Research Council and the Oxford University John Fell Fund for their support. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers.