



Arthur Griffith: Reactionary Father of the Free State

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In 1910, Arthur Griffith's *Sinn Féin* carried a review of James Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, repeating the well-rehearsed criticism of the material conception of history that in making sense of the past, one factor (class) cannot dominate the others since 'the skein of human affairs is too complex to be unravelled by any system so simple.' Griffith had 'no hesitation' in warning 'that class war in Ireland,' as promulgated by Connolly, 'would destroy every vestige of the possibility of restoring our nationhood.' In short, for Griffith, Connolly's book strove not to 'present a scientific analysis of our history and its relation to the labour question,' but 'to propagate the socialistic idea.'¹ His criticism rang hollow, however, considering the dominant factor in his own worldview — the imagined community of an Irish nation, the irrational foundation for the castles in the air Griffith conjured across a quarter century of public life.

A century after his death, this article offers a necessary corrective to the analysis contained in two recent biographies of Griffith. The most recent, from Colum Kenny, labelled Griffith an enigma.² Yet the intellectual inconsistency that typified his prolific journalism make Griffith's politics mysterious only if we insist on situating him within the Enlightenment tradition rather than reactionary nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-humanism. Irish nationalism is commonly understood as a battle between moral and physical force, as defined by Daniel O'Connell in the early decades of the Union. But this is a false dichotomy, and one that obscures a far more fluid and appropriate definition. The Irish nationalism that emerged in the modern period as a reaction against colonialism encompassed not only the liberal and radical strands of the Enlightenment but also included the anti-humanist irrationalism of the right.

In an earlier and more problematic biography, Owen McGee positions Griffith as champion of a secular, French-style Irish republic promoting economic development; he's depicted as an heir to the lost Irish

Republican Brotherhood [IRB] tradition, the 'democratic and republican social ideal' outlined in McGee's earlier study of the IRB.³ For McGee, Griffith combined the French *code civile* and the German banking tradition to imagine a nation state that promoted the native entrepreneur at the expense of foreign profiteers. Pointing to Griffith's concern for the poor and promotion of self-improvement, McGee aims to redeem him from a reputation as a conservative. A problem emerges, however, when we read what Griffith actually wrote, assess where he ended up, and above all, when we delve into McGee's conspiratorial analysis, which contends that Ireland's private sector, with British connivance, fomented the civil war 'to ensure that the London-centred dynamics of the economy could not be altered. For a long time, many in Ireland suspected that this was a reason for the existence of so-called republican undergrounds in the country.' In McGee's vivid imagination, such British agents included Ernie O'Malley — whose 'escape to America' the British allegedly facilitated — and Erskine Childers, who apparently launched the tradition of IRA-Marxist analyses of labour politics in perpetual opposition to the idea of an Irish state-directed economy.⁴ Apparently, Childers and O'Malley were spies, and Griffith's republicanism was subverted by British intrigue!

While Kenny's more recent analysis doesn't require recourse to the tinfoil hat, its conclusions are equally questionable. For Kenny, Griffith emerges as a consistent democrat and a consummate pragmatist, hung out to dry by lesser men (de Valera looms large) who lacked the acumen and courage to concede on partition and the unattainable (but thrice democratically sanctioned) Republic. Griffith stands as the 'father of us all,' who laid the foundation of the successful Irish state that emerged from the imbroglio of civil war. Kenny seems oblivious to the problem that his homage to Griffith's ideological influence on Sinn Féin and Irish-Ireland implicates him as progenitor of the illiberal, chauvinistic, conservative authoritarianism that typified the narrow minds of the early Free State élite.⁵

Kenny goes to great pains to rehabilitate Griffith, excusing his racism, antisemitism, and antipathy to trade unions by pointing to his association with figures like James Joyce and Connolly and highlighting his support for Zionism and sympathy for the poor. Here, unfortunately, Kenny handles concepts of race and class like a child uses crayons. His lazy conclusion that a

supporter of Zionism couldn't be an anti-Semite might impress readers in British Labour Party HQ or Trump's embassy in Jerusalem but hardly convinces as historical argument. Griffith remained a national chauvinist and petit-bourgeois reactionary whose politics and social thought channelled the irrationalism and anti-humanist philosophy of the continental radical right through the prism of Ireland's colonial history.

In 1913—the year he sided firmly with Church and capital *against* Dublin's poor—Griffith penned the foreword to an edition of his hero John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, vociferously defending Mitchel's support for slavery by rejecting the 'inalienable right of every human being to life, liberty, and happiness.' Griffith credits Mitchel for pointing out 'to the dupes of this cant that no human being ever had or could have such inalienable right.' In his rendering, Mitchel stood tall in the nationalist pantheon as pioneer in 'the essential work of dissevering...Irish independence from theories of humanitarianism and universalism.' Irish nationalists, therefore, needed no excuse in 'declining to hold the negro his peer in right. When the Irish nation needs explanation or apology for John Mitchel,' he wrote, 'the Irish nation will need its shroud.' In short, Griffith rejected 'theories of human perfectibility and equality,' professing a hatred for 'the altruism which sees in the criminal a brother to be coaxed, not a rogue to be lashed.' He lionised Mitchel as 'a sane Nietzsche in his view of man,' adding that 'the right of the Irish to political independence never was, is not, and never can be dependent upon the admission of equal right in all other peoples. It is based on no theory of, and dependable in no wise for its existence or justification on the "Rights of Man".'⁶

Humanism represents a universalist position, acknowledging commonality in our shared nature: it holds that our rationality and sociability permit humanity to overcome the constraints of nature—to make progress. Modern science has of course confirmed this, with all of humanity sharing 99.9 percent of our DNA. There can therefore be no scientific justification for racism or, indeed, for any racial categorisation. Yet, Irish nationalism encompassed competing tendencies—from liberal and radical humanism on one side (each tracing its origins to the Enlightenment, but with very different emphases in terms of the thorny issues of progress, civilisation, or colonialism) to, on the other, a chauvinistic, occasionally racialised, and reactionary nationalism. 'Antihumanism rejected ideas of equality and

human unity, celebrating instead difference and divergence, and exalting the particular and the authentic over the universal.'⁷ It is not difficult to gauge where Griffith fell on this spectrum: he concluded his foreword by insisting that 'he who holds Ireland a nation...no more commits himself to the theory that black equals white, that kingship is immoral, or that society has a duty to reform its enemies than he commits himself to the belief that sunshine is extractable from cucumbers.'⁸

Early life, journalism, and anti-Semitism

Born into a mixed marriage in 1871, Arthur Griffith followed his father into the printing trade but was brought up in his mother's Catholicism. An autodidact, he joined the IRB and, like most, sided with the Parnellites during the split. Griffith moved to South Africa in 1897, where he worked as a newspaper editor and then in gold mining. There he developed a strong affinity for the Boers, before returning to Dublin in 1898 to co-launch the *United Irishman*, named after the paper of his idol. Like Mitchel and the Boers, Griffith was a racist. His role in the 1798 centenary and later associations with Fenians and socialists occluded the marked divergence in their politics. In 1897, for instance, James Connolly and Maud Gonne collaborated in protesting Queen Victoria's Jubilee by throwing a coffin inscribed with 'The British Empire' into the Liffey. This incident helped spark a revival of radical nationalism centring on protests surrounding the Jubilee, the 1798 Centenary celebrations, nationalist support for the Boers, and then opposition to two royal visits in 1900 and 1903. Here Marxist internationalist and reactionary populist sheltered under the separatist umbrella. Yet each held diametrically opposite views on a parallel controversy raging in the Third French Republic.

In 1899, Alfred Dreyfus, a former Alsatian artillery officer of Jewish descent, returned to France from imprisonment on Devil's Island to face his second trial for espionage. Dreyfus had been wrongly convicted five years earlier for passing secrets to the German Embassy in Paris. Then, after becoming aware of his innocence in 1896, the French Army suppressed new evidence and concocted false documents to maintain his prior false conviction. The new trial divided French society between pro-republican, anti-clerical Dreyfusards and the mostly Catholic, reactionary right.⁹ Griffith and Gonne stood firmly in the latter camp, while Connolly canvassed Jewish support in the 1902 Dublin municipal elections by publishing leaflets in Yiddish, which proclaimed,

You ought to vote for the Socialist candidate and only for the Socialist candidate. The Socialists are the only ones who stand always and everywhere against every national oppression. It is the Socialists who went out onto the streets of Paris against the wild band of anti-Semites at the time of the Dreyfus case.¹⁰

Griffith, however, gravitated to the populist, anti-Semitic, ultra-nationalism of the anti-Dreyfusard, Boulangist tendency, an outlook shared by his friend Gonne. Indeed, Griffith later horsewhipped Ramsay Colles, editor of the *Irish Figaro*, for insulting her.¹¹ His *United Irishman* sought to draw a distinction between the ‘Dublin reptile journals’ that tacitly sided with the Dreyfusards and its own ‘patriotic’ position, which labelled Dreyfus a Judas Iscariot with ‘the brand of traitor on his brow.’¹²

In one lurid description of a mass meeting in London’s Hyde Park, the *United Irishman* condemned the coalition of ‘wild, savage, filthy’ Jews that swarmed ‘from the Yiddish ghetto of Whitechapel’ and their ‘loving comrades’ in the ‘mob of blathering English agitators, non-conformist tub thumpers, and radical ranters.’ Noting the ‘phenomenal ugliness and dirt’ of the Jews, who came ‘out of their East End dens at the summons of their rabbis,’ the piece concluded that ‘if they hated France, it was also evident that they detested soap and water still more acutely.’ The tone and reactionary politics earned a rebuke from Connolly’s *Workers’ Republic*.¹³

The United Irishman consistently promoted an international conspiracy between the British Empire and Jewish finance. In a Boulangist vein, the paper lambasted France’s ‘rotten parliamentarianism,’ which bent to ‘the underhand diplomacy of England’ and the ‘corruption of the Jew.’ Griffith then turned his spleen to South Africa, where the former Liberal prime minister Rosebery acted the part of ‘a worthy son-in-law of Jew Rothschild, to hound on the dogs of war against the free [Boer] Republics, which bar the way to the Jew-Jingo brigands of the gold mines of Johannesburg.’ Such organs called for war ‘with the unanimity with which Iscariot and company called out for Barabbas.’¹⁴ Indeed, Griffith later confided to historian Alice Stopford Green that ‘I equally distrust and dislike the British Liberal with the British Tory.’¹⁵ In short, the paper consistently challenged the influence wielded by ‘the innumerable Anglo-Jew organs of London’ and the wider press ‘throughout Europe and America, wherever the Jew capitalist has got a grip.’ All swelled ‘the chorus of the Jingo blood cry against the free republics of South Africa’ in a ‘universal outburst of the

Jew swindledum [sic.] in the service of the pirate empire.’¹⁶ Griffith’s paranoid fantasies would shortly fuel a public defence of anti-Semitic violence in Ireland itself.

In 1903, Michael Davitt published *Within the Pale*, which detailed the Kishinev Pogrom, when predecessors of the notorious Tsarist black hundreds murdered over three thousand Jews. Fleeing the pogrom and its aftermath, around 150 Lithuanian refugees settled in Limerick. Griffith had already condemned Jewish peddlers in Ireland, but he unleashed a torrent of anti-Semitic tropes in January 1904, when a sermon by local Redemptorist priest, Fr. John Creagh, incited two hundred of his flock to attack Jewish families concentrated in present-day Wolfe Tone Street. Davitt accused Creagh of ‘preaching a cowardly vendetta of anti-Semitic prejudice,’¹⁷ but Griffith immediately leapt to Creagh’s defence, asking how any patriotic Irish person can view without apprehension the continuous influx of Jews into Ireland and the continuous efflux of the native population, the stalwart men and bright-eyed women of our race pass from our land in a never ending stream, and in their place we are getting strange people, alien to us in thought, alien to us in sympathy, from Russia, Poland, Germany and Austria, people who come to live amongst us, but who never become of us... Mr Davitt’s sympathy for the Jew is credible to his good heart, but our sympathy—insular, perhaps, it may be—goes only to our countryman the artisan whom the Jew deprives of the means of livelihood, to our countryman the trader whom he ruins in business by unscrupulous methods, to our countryman the farmer whom he draws into his usurer’s toils and drives to the workhouse or across the water. In short, our sympathy is so much drained by that dreary weekly procession of our flesh and blood out of Ireland that we have none left to bestow on the weekly procession of aliens coming in.¹⁸

Creagh intervened again in March, and in April Limerick’s Jews suffered a further forty attacks. The same month, Griffith applauded Limerick citizens’ efforts to free ‘themselves from the octopus grip of the Jewish usurers, who were swarming into this country to prey upon its people.’¹⁹ Creagh then called for a boycott, which lasted until October, when only six Jewish families remained.²⁰ Once more, Griffith offered whole-hearted support for the boycott, asking what ‘greater “persecution” could be inflicted upon the Jew as to prohibit him taking his pound of flesh?’ For Griffith, ‘in all countries and in all Christian ages,’ the Jew was a ‘grinder of the poor,’ ‘usurer and parasite of industry,’

who ‘produces no wealth himself,’ but ‘draws it from others.’ The only exception was the ‘honest and patriotic’ Zionist, who did not propagate the ‘great Jewish humbug of “persecution,”’ which went ‘merrily and profitably on since the coward fear of the Jewish money bags restrains the journalist and the politician from exposing the fraud.’²¹

In the next issue of the *United Irishman*, regular contributor Frederick Ryan—an anti-imperialist journalist and a founding member of Connolly’s ISRP—took exception to Griffith’s previous claim that if you ‘attack a Jew—other than a Zionist Jew—all Jewry comes to his assistance,’ denouncing it as ‘the very spirit of race prejudice’ since it condemned ‘conduct in another race which we applaud in our own.’ In line with Connolly’s previous criticism, Ryan drew a parallel between Griffith’s position and

that of continental reactionary parties. It may seem good tactics on the part of corrupt militarists and capitalists to set [the world’s problems] at the heels of the rich Jews. But the cause of true liberty has nothing to gain by being associated with such tricks, and the very personnel of the parties who resort to them ought to warn us of their objects.

Ryan preferred to ‘fight for liberty as liberty and put down capitalist greed as capitalist greed but let us resolutely shut our eyes to questions of race and creed, which are only raised by these reactionaries to create disorder in the camp of progress.’²²

Griffith retorted that he had not attacked the Jew for ‘his creed or his beliefs—it has solely to do with his character and actions.’ He repeated his defence of Creagh, arguing that both Ryan and Davitt had quoted the priest selectively, before adding that ‘we heartily commend his advice to Irish men to keep the Jewish moneylender, the Jewish peddler with his deferred payment system, and the Jewish sweater with his cheap wears at arm’s length.’

The first Sinn Féin

While Griffith exposed his reactionary politics during the Limerick pogrom, he was also formulating the Sinn Féin policy for which he would become famous. Griffith founded the National Council in 1903 to campaign for an independent Irish legislature under a dual monarchy—a deliberate throwback to Grattan’s Parliament and the Act of Renunciation of 1782, which, Griffith argued inaccurately, meant that Britain had no right to legislate

for Ireland. In late 1904, his *Resurrection of Hungary* (based on a series of articles earlier that year) cited the equally spurious continental precedent for dual monarchy in the Budapest parliament of 1867. The book, however, sold five thousand copies and sparked a lively national debate. More practically, Griffith outlined a policy of passive resistance, which would see abstentionist Irish MPs taking up positions in a native assembly while boycotting all British judicial and state institutions, and which advocated the purchase of Irish manufactured goods and the demand to burn everything English but their coal.

When a libel action forced the *United Irishman*’s closure in April 1906, Griffith immediately launched *Sinn Féin*, which would receive financial support from the IRB and Joseph McGarrity, the treasurer of the Clan na Gael, in particular. Indeed, the Clan effectively financed *Sinn Féin* as a daily paper between August 1909 and the fateful January 1910 General Election that handed the balance of power at Westminster to Redmond’s Home Rulers. Not for the last time, Griffith’s location within the separatist milieu allied him with republicans whose universalist outlook and aspirations for a democratic republic made for uncomfortable bedfellows. While McGarrity and a cohort of young Northerners looked to Tone and 1798 as their point of origin, Griffith harkened to Grattan, Flood, and 1782. When these neo-Fenians championed Fintan Lalor’s demand to undo the conquest, Griffith lionised Mitchel, and while they emphasised Davitt and Devoy’s input into the New Departure, for Griffith, Parnell remained the uncrowned king.

McGarrity and Devoy directed the IRB’s attempt to subvert constitutional nationalism through the Dungannon Clubs, formed by Denis McCullough and Bulmer Hobson in 1905 in Belfast. Both believed the National Council had declined into a mere electioneering body in municipal politics and the ‘Dublin crowd’ needed to be driven ‘back onto the advanced nationalist track.’²³ Pessimistic about the chances of armed struggle, this generation of young republicans (which also included Seán Mac Diarmada) adopted *Sinn Féin* as a vehicle for achieving a republic through passive resistance, endorsing its call for Irish MPs to abstain from Westminster in favour of a national parliament. Thus they stripped Griffith’s programme of its monarchical baubles, concentrating on the policy as a non-insurrectionary means for achieving complete independence.

By April 1907, the Dungannon Clubs merged with another separatist group to form the Sinn Féin League, while Griffith's National Council remained aloof. Indeed, Belfast Quaker and Dungannon Club founding member Hobson later described the Hungarian policy as Fintan Lalor's moral insurrectionary 'policy of 1847 come home with a foreign dress and a foreign prestige.'²⁴

We were violently attacked by...parliamentarians, who accused Griffith of falsifying Hungarian history. I was much too busy to find out if Griffith's account was entirely accurate or not, but I declared at public meetings that the issue was not one of accuracy or inaccuracy about Hungarian history, but whether the policy of abstention was the right one for the Irish people to pursue.²⁵

In fact, the National Council did not amalgamate with the Sinn Féin League until August 1907, under pressure from Clan na Gael and two months after the Irish Party MP for North Leitrim, Charles Dolan, converted to Griffith's programme. Dolan sought re-election, and the resulting contest exposed Griffith's political limitations. Writing in retrospect, Fermanagh Sinn Féiner Cahir Healy claimed that during the 1908 by-election, when Dolan only secured a quarter of the vote, Griffith's dry account of economic statistics and Hungarian history at an election rally led one local Sinn Féiner to advise Healy to 'send home the wee bloke with his goggles and his figures.'²⁶

As the Sinn Féin policy's architect, Griffith's racist attitudes also undermined republican solidarity with non-White anti-imperial movements, particularly in India and Egypt. Richard Davis argues that, like Mitchel, Griffith over-reacted to 'the popular nineteenth-century English and American nativist belief in the Irishman as a white nigger' and, in response, adopted 'an aristocratic conception of Irish liberty akin to that of the Greek, Roman and American slaveholders.'²⁷ Similarly, Griffith's attachment to '82ism—the reintroduction of the Lords and Commons of Ireland under the British crown—embarrassed Northern republicans. Griffith may have felt a keen sense of 'affronted proprietorship' at the Sinn Féin League's use of *his* brand name, even though the term originated in the Gaelic League. He had a poor relationship with Hobson, which deteriorated further when McGarrity chose the young Belfast man as spokesperson on the 1907 American tour. As late as April 1909, Patrick McCartan—McGarrity's Irish 'eyes and ears' and a fellow Carrickmore man—remarked that 'Griffith has no *gradh* for any of us northerners or the Americans.'²⁸

While republicans sought to remain outside parliamentary politics, Griffith's faction attempted to come to an arrangement with William O'Brien (whom Griffith had previously criticised for his attachment through marriage to Jewish gold). O'Brien had left the Irish Parliamentary Party, politically and physically bruised by attacks from Belfast Hibernians at the February 1909 'Baton Convention.' He established the Cork-based All-for-Ireland League (AFIL), with Tim Healy the political mouthpiece of the Catholic hierarchy and business elite led by William Martin Murphy. Griffith's initiative was defeated at the December 1909 Sinn Féin Convention, but he had clearly signalled both his attraction to the Healyites and his alienation from the republicans in Sinn Féin.²⁹ In 1910, McCartan directly linked Griffith's 'intrigues with O'Brien and the moderate men' with his earlier resentment at opposition from the Young Turks: 'You see everything was directed to carry off the O'Brien deal and Hobson was supposed to be in the way just as the Dungannon Clubs were in the way of the new Repeal movement.'³⁰

By 1910, with Redmond holding the balance of power at Westminster, the Irish Party could easily rebuke calls for abstention. For the IRB, the Sinn Féin policy was dead. The young cadre then staged a coup against the ageing Fenian leadership, receiving financial support from McGarrity and guidance from Tom Clarke, who had returned to Ireland from the USA in December 1907. Between 1910 and 1912, this group took over the IRB and initiated a decidedly republican (and eventually insurrectionary) strategy. This takeover revolved around control of the new Fenian paper, *Irish Freedom*, an explicitly republican and anti-imperialist challenger to Griffith's ailing *Sinn Féin*, which McGarrity had stopped funding. *Irish Freedom* carried Fintan Lalor's famous invocation in every issue: Not to repeal the Union, then, but to repeal the Conquest—not to disturb or dismantle the empire, but to abolish it forever—not to fall back on '82 but act up to '48—not to resume or restore an old constitution, but to found a new nation, and raise up a free people.³¹ The contrast with Griffith's dual monarchy and his fetishisation of Grattan's Parliament could not have been clearer.

The first Sinn Féin fractured due to tensions between universalist republicans and 'creatures' in Dublin prepared to 'grovel at the feet of Arthur Griffith.'³² By 1910, McCartan predicted that 'the men who make movements a success' in Ireland 'will not in the future

have confidence in Griffith on account of his intrigues with O'Brien.³³ The evidence suggests that 1910 also marked Griffith's final estrangement from the IRB. McCartan wrote McGarrity in October that Griffith had 'resigned from the Family Business' as 'he would not confer with his brothers' and 'was getting a swelled head and thought he carried all the brains in the country. He was rude to everybody and was always quarrelling.'³⁴

Griffith's violent chauvinism, his Anglophobia, and petit-bourgeois irrationalism conjured the febrile dream of a twenty-million-strong, Gaelic-speaking autarky that underpinned his politics across two decades of public life. This irrational basis to his separatism facilitated the breach with republicans, but his elevation of indigenous capital as the bedrock of his future nation state meant that alongside breaking with the 'men who make movements a success' in the IRB, Griffith viciously attacked and slandered the emerging trade union movement as a threat to social harmony and future national prospects—a convenient position for any propagandist attempting to form an alliance with the political representatives of William Martin Murphy and the Catholic hierarchy.

Labour, Larkin, and lockout

The same year as the Leitrim by-election (1908), the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) emerged as an indigenous general union for Ireland's army of 'unskilled' workers. Griffith responded by waging an incessant propaganda war against its leader, 'Big' Jim Larkin. Writing from the US ahead of his return as ITGWU organiser in 1910, James Connolly publicly dismantled the platform of his 'friend' Arthur Griffith. Shortly after the Leitrim by-election, Connolly 'heartily agreed' with the Sinn Féin doctrine which teaches the 'Irish people to rely upon themselves, and upon themselves alone, and teaches them also that dependence upon forces outside themselves... will ever be disastrous in its results.' Indeed, Connolly criticised some doctrinaire socialists (like his colleague Frederick Ryan) for their antipathy to the language revival on the grounds of internationalism: 'Nations which submit to conquest or races which abandon their language in favour of that of an oppressor do so, not because of altruistic motives, or because of a love of the brotherhood of man, but from a slavish and cringing spirit.' Connolly went on to dismantle Griffith's '82ism, arguing that legislative independence 'left untouched the power of oppression, political and economic.' Grattan's Parliament had been 'as alien to the Irish people as the Council of the

Governor-General of India is alien to the Indian people.' He paraphrased 'Fintan Lalor's masterly argument upon this subject'—namely that "'this is not 1782, this is 1908," and every political or social movement which hopes for success must express itself in terms of present conditions, or on the lines of future developments.'³⁵

The following year, Connolly again praised Sinn Féin's policy of self-reliance but criticised Griffith's economic platform for 'appeal[ing] only to those who measure a nation's prosperity by the volume of wealth produced in a country, instead of by the distribution of that wealth amongst the inhabitants.'

Hence, when a Sinn Féiner waxes eloquent about restoring the Constitution of '82, but remains silent about the increasing industrial despotism of the capitalist; when the Sinn Féiner speaks to men who are fighting against low wages and tells them that the Sinn Féin body has promised lots of Irish labour at low wages to any foreign capitalist who wishes to establish in Ireland, what wonder if they come to believe that a change from Toryism to Sinn Féinism would simply be a change from the devil they do know to the devil they do not know!³⁶

As Emmet O'Connor has succinctly put it, 'The root of Larkinism lay in employer hostility to the unionisation of unskilled workers.'³⁷ This had been the crux of the Belfast Dockers' and Carters' strike in 1907, and—despite the appalling backdrop of Dublin's tenements and the titanic personality clash between Larkin and Martin Murphy—the right to combine remained the core issue in the monumental 1913 Lockout. In response, Griffith promoted a corporatist position akin to the continental radical right, which ignored the employers' intransigence and characterised the emerging ITGWU as foreign anarcho-syndicalists driven by an English dictator. In his lurid rendering, Larkin simultaneously promoted red ruin and his own financial well-being, all at the expense of Irish dupes.

As in the Limerick pogrom, Griffith positioned himself as the radical voice of truth, castigating the 'thousands too timid... no matter where the merits lay, to speak to the men with any voice but the voice of commendation for all their actions, lest they be denounced as a capitalists and supporters of capitalistic tyranny.' He insisted that *Sinn Féin* was 'the one journal in Dublin that capital has never been able to influence nor power to silence.' Nevertheless, 'as we have spoken to the capitalist, we shall speak to the working man and tell him that his duty to his class can

never transcend his duty to his country—the interests of Ireland are above the special interest of any of its classes.’ Within this conception,

the name of Irishman will never be secondary to the name of aristocrat or democrat, capitalist or labour, Catholic or Protestant, unionist or home ruler, while we live with a hand to write or a tongue to speak. This country shall never be divided into hostile camps of employer and employee... That they should be subject to the dictatorship of any man from England or elsewhere who sets up in business as a ‘labour leader’ is impossible if this country is to go on and prosper.³⁸

Griffith’s vitriolic denunciations of Larkin predated the lockout, and an analysis of his early editorials sheds light on his subsequent position. The 1911 Ironmongers’ Lockout in Wexford and a simultaneous ‘powerful and contentious demonstration of class solidarity’ on the railways had offered compelling evidence of the antagonism between universalists and chauvinists in the ranks of Sinn Féin. Like the Belfast employers, Wexford bosses refused to permit association between ‘unskilled’ workers. This time, however, rather than the British based National Union of Dockworkers, Larkin and his deputy—the leading Fenian P. T. Daly—promoted the ITGWU, which aimed for ‘an industrial commonwealth’ that would ‘obliterate poverty and help realise the glorious time spoken of and sung by the Thinkers, Prophets, and the Poets.’³⁹

Bridling under rampant inflation and stagnant wages, many Irish workers responded to the militant strike wave in Britain and across Europe by swelling the ranks of Larkin’s new union. When the ITGWU arrived in Wexford in August 1911, employers decided that ‘Larkin’s union had to be destroyed in its embryo stage.’⁴⁰ By the end of the month, almost seven hundred foundry men were locked out in a violent conflict that would last six months. In September, Griffith poured scorn on Larkin, whom he claimed demanded ‘no surrender on the question of the recognition of the Irish Transport Workers’ Union—that is the recognition of himself.’ In relation to calls by the British-based National Union of Railwaymen for sympathy strikes in Ireland, and with Larkin’s Liverpool origins in mind, Griffith concluded that ‘an Englishman whether he calls himself Tory or liberal, capitalist or socialist, is anything but an Englishman first and last—one for whom a ni**er is a ni**er, and an Irishman is only an Irishman.’⁴¹

In the following issue and, again, commenting on the railway strike, Griffith crowed that some Irish railwaymen had refused to go out on sympathy strikes, noting that ‘the English allies of Mr. James Larkin have shot their bolt and missed.’ In typical form, he continued that ‘the political union of Ireland with England was defined by a witty man as the union of the shark with its prey. The union of the Irish railwayman with the railwayman of England supplies another illustration for the definition.’ In short, like everything else that emanated from England, trade unionism was wicked: ‘The green flag has a lot of English fists shaken at it but waves today over the rout of the Auld enemy in his new dress.’⁴²

In a subsequent, important issue, Griffith rejected criticism from a correspondent that the Wexford dispute hinged on the men’s right to combine. Rather, Griffith stated that they should not join any union in which ‘Larkin is the boss and the prophet’ because the ITGWU ‘is intended to comprise *all* the unskilled workers of Ireland without distinction.’ Larkin hid behind the ‘mask of trade unionism...to cover the introduction of the syndicalism’ whose ‘weapon is a sympathetic strike’ and ‘methods terrorism’. The ITGWU, therefore, would ‘paralyse all trade and commerce and hold up all the activities of the country.’

As an alternative, Griffith promoted conciliatory native craft unions which would advance ‘the interests of Irish workingmen,’ thereby ‘maintaining harmony between employer and employed.’ This would also ‘form a solid barrier against the exploitation of this country by adventurers and doctrinaires whose ultimate message to man is to give up his God, his country, his family.’ In short, ‘against the red flag of communism,’ Griffith proposed that ‘we raise the flag of an Irish nation. Under that flag there will be protection, safety, and freedom for all. Tyranny, whether it be the tyranny of the capitalist or of the demagogic terrorist will find no shelter beneath the folds of the Irish nation’s flag.’⁴³ The depths of Griffith’s Anglophobia can be measured in his concurrent opposition to the National Insurance Act, since it ‘placed Irish mothers on the same level as English harlots’ and ‘virtuous Ireland’ should not ‘have to pay for English bastardy.’⁴⁴

The correspondent alluded to by Griffith was Éamonn Ceannt, who, ‘as an individual Sinn Féiner,’ sought to ‘disassociate’ himself ‘from the general tone of your recent pronouncements on the Wexford labour trouble.’ Ceannt criticised *Sinn Féin* for giving the ‘cold shoulder’

to 'the so-called lowest class in the social scale, the unskilled workers,' judging that Griffith agreed that the 'employers of Wexford have the right to dictate whether their men shall or shall not join a particular union.' Indeed, he noted that Griffith offered 'no condemnation of the employers' federation or is there one law for them and another for their servants?' Ceannt then admitted that his 'sympathies go out unreservedly to the men' who had an 'unquestioned and unquestionable right to organise', adding that 'neither the editor of *Sinn Féin* nor the employers have the right to dictate to them on that point.'

In answer to Griffith's chauvinism, Ceannt drew lines of affinity between Larkin and the Gaelic League, mentioning support for the ITGWU leader from fellow future 1916 leader Pádraig Pearse before arguing that Larkin was 'an Irishman who has founded in Ireland an Irish union governed by Irish men.' In a veiled attack on Griffith himself, he concluded that the ITGWU's 'methods may seem strange to those who are up in the clouds and give not half a thought to the cause of the labour volcanoes that are bursting forth all over the continent of Europe. But practical politics cannot afford to wait while these dreamers are awakened.'⁴⁵

The Wexford Lockout eventually ended in February 1912, with a partial victory for the ITGWU organiser, James Connolly. However, Griffith falsely maintained that the settlement resulted from the 'good work' of the Wexford priests, who in fact had consistently sided with the employers.⁴⁶ He then criticised Larkin, who sought to 'crown himself the dictator of the Irish working classes,' falsely claiming that the 'Wexford dupes' had abandoned the ITGWU and returned to work.⁴⁷ In fact, Connolly addressed a five-thousand-strong crowd on February 17th to celebrate the employers' concession allowing the formation of the Irish Foundry Workers' Union as an associate of the ITGWU: 'Despite the objections from the pulpit, the wielded baton, the political cold shoulders and the alien scabs. The Wexford lockout marked a victory for workers over the established pillars of Irish society.'⁴⁸ Rather than stand in solidarity with the workers, Griffith clearly lined up with the pillars.

As Ceannt's letter demonstrated, Griffith's hostility to Larkin and tacit support for the employers during the 1913 Lockout marked him out from other separatists who publicly backed the workers. In one piece, Griffith railed against claims that Larkin, 'the dictator of the Irish transport union,' was related to one of the Manchester Martyrs, before totally stripping the Fenian movement of

its socially radical and universalist content (so apparent in the 1867 Proclamation) by characterising Michael Larkin (Jim's namesake) as 'a simple Irish artisan who lived and died in the faith that the enemy' Ireland 'had to fight was not any section of itself, but the foreign government that has exploited, oppressed and impoverished this island.' He concluded that

Irish workingmen will be more exalted through the fact that they give the nation such men as Michael Larkin than they could be through all the shibboleths and fallacies of the Internationals whose conversion to admiration for Irish patriotism, when they found the sentiment too strong even in their own honest followers to be derided or ignored, is as sincere as the tears of the famous Carpenter for the fate of the oysters on whom he designed to sup.⁴⁹

Across his long journalistic career, Griffith promoted a corporatist outlook akin to future fascist models that propagated ideas of harmony among social classes, but which, in any country where it ever operated, ignored the reality of existing exploitative class relations, subordinated labour to capital, and typically fostered widespread corruption and cronyism. In short, Arthur Griffith was a reactionary.

The second Sinn Féin and the Irish Counter-Revolution

Griffith watched the Ulster Crisis and the rise of the Irish Volunteers from the political sidelines, content to oversee a moribund party, circulate his gad-fly journalism to an ever-diminishing readership, and pontificate on all matters political to an even smaller coterie of acolytes and drinking partners. His prior association with many within the IRB led some to label the Irish Volunteers the Sinn Féin Volunteers, a moniker many resented because of Griffith's politics and personality. When war broke out, Griffith opposed Redmond's recruiting call and the authorities banned *Sinn Féin*, which he replaced with the ingenious *Scissors & Paste*, which republished material that passed the war-time censor in different form. While he may have attended a meeting in September 1914 when Tom Clarke announced that a rising would take place before the end of the war, Griffith remained a revolutionary non-entity, apparently sent home from the GPO after volunteering at the beginning of Easter Week.⁵⁰

Yet, his internment and changing popular attitudes to the inaccurately named 'Sinn Féin Rising' once again brought Griffith to public prominence. Nevertheless, he had to

step aside as president in favour of de Valera at the new party's Ard Fheis in October 1917, because the first Sinn Féin now constituted a reactionary rump within a wider national liberation movement pledged to Easter Week. His earlier policy of passive resistance and abstention retained its prominence, however, but it was now linked to the enormous hostage to fortune that was Ireland's appeal to the Peace Conference. British victory in the war stripped the Peace Conference idea of any efficacy and Griffith himself recognised that its chief strength lay in assuaging popular anxiety about abandoning attendance at Westminster, envisaging that Sinn Féin would be permitted to do little more than 'stand on the stairs [of the conference] and harangue the world outside.'⁵¹

This begs the question as to why Griffith was allowed to regain prominence after his virtual exclusion from the 1916 Revolution. The first reason appears obvious: the post-Rising executions effectively eliminated the leadership cadre. A second is that the labour movement essentially excluded itself. Peadar O'Donnell recalled that at the establishment of Sinn Féin, 'nobody noticed that Connolly's chair was left vacant, that the place Connolly purchased for the organised labour movement in the independence struggle was being denied.'⁵² Through the abstention of the Irish Labour Party, under Tom Johnson and William O'Brien, the quarter-of-a-million-strong Irish trade union movement effectively abdicated its role within the revolutionary leadership. Yet, from 1917 to 1921, a genuinely popular mass mobilisation emerged, largely organic and island-wide (except for two and half northern counties), which exhibited regional variations and levels of intensity but was clearly directed towards full independence infused with concepts of social equality and revival. The 'great men' version of history ignores the reality that what emerged as the second Sinn Féin responded to rather than directed popular politics. Similarly, the Irish Revolution was 'ignited by international as well as national forces, [and] its outcome must also be assessed in terms of the arid postwar settlement that contributed to interwar fascism and authoritarianism.'

Various tendencies struggled to fill the post-1916 leadership vacuum, among them Griffith's rump. With a keen sense of the direction in which the political wind was blowing, the Healyite tendency also quickly jumped on the second Sinn Féin bandwagon. By early July 1917, with Sinn Féin's steady progress evident, the leading Healyite politician in Tyrone, George Murnaghan,

revealed to George Gavan Duffy that he favoured 'friendly co-operation with the advanced section' but was unsure if it was 'politic to ask for the establishment of an Irish Republic.' Nevertheless, he believed that his tendency should be 'on a controlling body as a steadying factor.'⁵³ Both men would subsequently serve, with Griffith, on the Irish delegation to London during the treaty talks. None ever lost a sense of where their class interests lay.

Both conservative factions (the dominant elitist and cynical Healyites and the supplicant chauvinistic and populist Graffities) were lifted and carried on a wave of mass republican enthusiasm that swept across the island. Indeed, Sinn Féin scored a landslide victory at the 1918 General Election, its manifesto leaving little doubt as to its anti-imperialist and republican intentions. Yet, the Griffith-Healyite incubus sowed the seeds of counter-revolution: their social status, education, existing profile, and prior record of collaboration meant that when the British came to negotiate, it was with elements of militant republicanism and an effective fifth column. Lord French recognised as much when he told the British cabinet in early 1919 that 'Sinn Féin itself was breaking into two parties,' moderates, and extremists, with Griffith the most prominent figure in the former grouping and the man with whom they should cut a deal.⁵⁴

Griffith was still in jail, due to the spurious post-conscription German Plot of May 1918, when the first Dáil met on January 21st, 1919. His release on March 8th permitted him to assume a role in the cabinet as minister of home affairs when Dáil Éireann met again on April 1st. De Valera's departure to the USA meant that Griffith acted as president in his absence. The largely symbolic nature of Sinn Féin's counter-state can be gauged by the fact that Griffith continued with his journalism and conducted much of his government business from snugs in his two favourite pubs.⁵⁵ While he remained tight-lipped on the IRA's developing guerrilla campaign, Griffith did not overtly call for violence against the British. His reticence regarding political violence subsequently changed, however, after republicans refused to recognise the treaty, when he bridled under Michael Collins's attempts to avert a conflict.

The system of Dáil courts represented one area where Sinn Féin's theory was put into practice, however. Griffith appointed the Tyrone Healyite Kevin O'Shield's as land commissioner, when 'eastbound trains brought to Dublin large numbers of terrified [unionist] landowners, who

came beseeching the Dáil Government for protection.’ In line with his own social conservatism, many of O’Shield’s judgements favoured the original proprietors.⁵⁶ The development typified the reactive nature of the Dáil ministry, exposing it as little more than a paper administration. The court system, like initial IRA activity, relied on local initiative. With courts already in existence in twenty-eight counties by June 1920, ‘the Dáil government, viewing developments with something like injured dignity covering neglect of duty, was forced to act.’⁵⁷

With de Valera's return at the end of 1920, Griffith, who had been imprisoned under very lenient conditions in Mountjoy after Bloody Sunday, resumed his subordinate role. Nevertheless, after the truce of July 11th, 1921, and a series of preliminary talks with Lloyd George, de Valera notoriously appointed Griffith in his stead as head of the Irish delegation for talks in London that eventually led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Two key issues loomed large in the negotiations: the Crown and partition, or as Lloyd George quipped to his cabinet, ‘Men will die for Throne and empire. I do not know who will die for Tyrone and Fermanagh.’⁵⁸

Griffith had conceded on Crown and empire two decades previously, and de Valera privately admitted that he had ‘no doubt’ Griffith would again yield ‘under pressure.’⁵⁹ Furthermore, despite his election as MP for North-West Tyrone the previous May, Griffith was unlikely to allow the issue of partition to scupper the prospect of an independent Irish state (no matter how truncated). A meeting with Northern nationalists prior to the treaty negotiations exposed the impracticality of his politics, confirming Ceannt’s description of Griffith as a dreamer with his head in the clouds. Griffith told anxious delegates that with a third of the population ‘utterly opposed to Partition and thoroughly organized,’ the Belfast ‘Parliament could not function.’⁵² Yet, the Dáil’s campaign of passive resistance hardly met with universal success even in areas where it could claim unquestioned electoral support. Griffith’s ruminations about a third of the population passively rendering Craig’s Orange government inoperative, backed by a formidable military capacity financed from London, were naïve and laughable.⁵³

After the first plenary phase of negotiation, between the 5th and 16th of November, Lloyd George cornered Griffith in personal talks, disingenuously claiming that he could convince Craig to compromise on essential Irish

unity. The overture, nevertheless, engineered Griffith’s acceptance of partition. Armed with this concession, the prime minister pressed a settlement on the Irish delegation, ultimately threatening war if an agreement was not reached. John Regan argues that Griffith ‘played a remarkably maladroit game in London and in the process compromised the entire position of the Irish delegation.’⁶⁰ His aptitude was surely impaired, moreover, since Erskine Childers reported how Griffith arrived each morning ‘muzzy with whisky’ with ‘the fate of Ireland being settled higger-mugger by ignorant Irish negotiators and A. G. in genuine sympathy with many of the English claims.’⁶¹

On November 12th, after Craig’s rejection of essential unity, Griffith unilaterally promised not to obstruct the Boundary Commission idea. Kenny places unnecessary weight on the nature of this undertaking, but, in one stroke, Griffith nullified the option of breaking on partition, although Lloyd George did disingenuously promise a significant territorial transfer.⁵⁴ When the Dáil cabinet met in Dublin on December 3rd, de Valera claimed that the proposed settlement required amendment on the oath and on Ulster. They were to return to London, ‘prepared to face the consequences—war or no war’; Griffith left with instructions to ‘try and put the blame on Ulster.’⁵⁵ At the crucial conference on December 5th, however, Lloyd George, ‘with the air of a conjuror pulling a rabbit out of a hat,’ revealed ‘Griffith’s earlier undertaking regarding the Boundary Commission’ and the Irish negotiators caved in.⁵⁶

Arguably, Collins and Griffith shelved the partition issue to reach terms, a decision hastened by Lloyd George’s threat of ‘immediate and terrible war.’ There is, therefore, an inexorable logic to Regan’s conclusion that

“Griffith and Collins became, through the advocacy of the treaty and the threat of renewed British violence, the arbiters of British policy in Southern Ireland. The treatyite army fought the civil war as the proxy of the British state whatever about its aspirations towards a stepping-stone republic or freedom to achieve freedom.”⁶²

There was significant discrepancy, however, between Griffith’s agreement on November 16th that the redrawn border be ‘in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants’ and the actual proviso in Article 12 that such wishes be ‘compatible with economic and geographic conditions.’⁶³ At a cabinet meeting on December 6th, Lloyd George hailed ‘Ulster—the rock upon which all

previous efforts had been shattered' as the central triumph because 'the extremists had accepted a situation in which it was open to Ulster to contract out of a united Ireland.' Significantly, he suggested that the Boundary Commission 'would possibly give Ulster more than she would lose.'⁶⁴ The British then gave public and private assurances to outraged Ulster Unionists that the boundary change would not exceed minor rectification, especially after the treaty had passed through Dáil Éireann.⁶⁵

A bitter nationalist chauvinist to the end, Griffith responded to a question from Childers during the Dáil treaty debates by thumping the table and refusing to 'reply to any damned Englishman in this Assembly.'⁶⁶ In terms of partition, Griffith argued that 'the Treaty recognizes the essential unity of Ireland' and that government policy reflected de Valera's previous admission that 'he would not coerce Unionist Ulster, but equally we shall not permit Nationalist Ulster to be coerced.'⁶⁷ The leader of the constitutional nationalists, John Dillon, wrote that 'Collins and Griffith are in a desperate difficulty...If they give in, the Catholics of Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry &c will be furious,' but, 'if they commit themselves to a fight with Craig on this question, it will destroy the Provisional Government and the Treaty.' He concluded that 'their position is so weakened by the Republicans that they are afraid to quarrel with.'

Collins would struggle to avoid fratricidal conflict until June, and, ultimately, power lay with the young Corkman, not with his conservative cabinet colleagues. Dillon perceptively stated that 'without Collins, Griffith would not last a fortnight.'⁶⁸ In the months before the attack on the Four Courts, Collins vainly sought to write a republican constitution, implement an electoral pact between pro- and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin, secretly organise an IRA offensive against Craig's Orange government, and apply diplomatic pressure to help relieve the onslaught on the North's beleaguered Catholic minority.

In June 1922, Lloyd George claimed that 'there was only Griffith. Collins was just a wild animal—a mustang.'⁶⁹ Ultimately, however, Collins chose to quarrel with republicans and side with the Crown and empire, a decision which caused far more soul-searching for the 'Big Fellow' than for his colleagues in the Free State government. Indeed, after both men died, in August 1922, the British military admitted that 'Arthur Griffith was the only genuine Free Stater' and that Collins and his followers 'merely accepted the treaty as a stepping-stone

to the...republic' and in response to the 'universal desire' for peace.⁷⁰

The Anglo-Irish Treaty constituted the foundation document of the Irish counter-revolution, for it consummated the alliance between the Healyites and the populist chauvinists led by Griffith. The Healyites eventually dominated the new Free State, after the purge of 'revolutionaries, Irish-Irelanders and most especially the militarist-republicans' from the government.⁷¹ This élite singularly failed to challenge partition and, while consolidating the Free State (or the birth of Irish democracy, as revisionists would have it) carried out a proxy war on behalf of the British Empire against militant republicans and working-class radicals.

Conclusion

In one respect, then, Kenny's recent biography contains some merit—'father of us all' marks a fitting and accurate subtitle for the biography of a man who embodied the contradictions of those who reaped the Free State counter-revolutionary harvest (that is, of all the worst characteristics of the Free State, the pseudo-republic, and Irish capitalist society—and of their continued subservience to imperial power). Ultimately, Sinn Féin represented a nationalist, petit-bourgeois revolution that drew support from across Irish society and included various shades of nationalism, including republicanism and socialism—Ireland's heirs to the radical Enlightenment. Nevertheless, many who sheltered under the post-Rising Sinn Féin umbrella were socially conservative and lukewarm on the republic, including Griffith. As outlined previously, the first attempt to implement the Sinn Féin policy ended in acrimony before the 1910 elections, when the young Northern cohort in the IRB criticised Griffith's monarchism and his attempted rapprochement with the AFIL, the party of Catholic conservatism and political pet of William Martin Murphy.

Yet the false dichotomy that lies at the heart of Irish nationalist common sense does a disservice to more fundamental ideological divisions. The IRB under Clarke and Mac Diarmada after 1907 were not unreconstructed physical-force men. At that stage, they sought to adopt Griffith's passive resistance policy to further a republican agenda based on civic virtue, anti-sectarianism, and anti-imperialism. Griffith's vitriolic opposition to Larkin and working-class politics prior to and during the lockout marked a clear line of distinction between his orientation and that of colleagues in Sinn Féin like long-time trade

unionist Éamonn Ceannt, other Gaelic Leaguers like Pádraig Pearse, and the leadership of the IRB, who, while unsure of Larkin, expressed consistent public sympathy for the workers. On the one hand, the ‘constitutionalist’ John Redmond clearly had no objection to imperial violence. On the other hand, the radical humanist coalition of 1916 operated not solely or even primarily out of a tradition of physical force, but, as Connolly outlined just before his famous ‘interview’ with the IRB military council: ‘We believe in constitutional action in normal times; we believe in revolutionary action in exceptional times. These are exceptional times.’⁷²

The fact that the Rising gained the retrospective and inaccurate Sinn Féin label spoke to the persistence of the constitutional-versus-physical-force dichotomy within popular understanding. Yet, as Griffith’s earlier anti-Semitic tirades demonstrated, the humanist-versus-anti-humanist divergence appeared more fundamental. By the time of the Limerick pogrom, Michael Davitt, former Fenian and lifelong socialist, was a (rather unconventional) constitutionalist, while Griffith sat firmly outside the ‘constitutionalist’ fold. It should, however, be noted that while Griffith espoused naked racism against the ‘Kaffirs,’ Davitt’s obvious sympathy for Black South Africans did not extend to rejecting their definition by the Boers as ‘savages.’⁷³ The distinction between separatist and constitutionalist, or between constitutional and physical-force nationalism, obscures the more fundamental divergence along a nationalist spectrum encompassing humanist and anti-humanist thought.

Griffith stood out as the mouthpiece for a chauvinistic petit-bourgeois nationalism prepared to subordinate the rights of every citizen to the interests of the nation state, interests ultimately identical with those of its captains of industries, priests, and paymasters. The dominant personality in the Free State counter-revolution and a relative by marriage of Tim Healy, Kevin O’Higgins, dismissed the 1919 Democratic Programme as ‘mostly poetry’—there are no grounds to suggest that Griffith would have challenged the perspective of his cabinet colleague had he lived. This represents the legacy of Griffith and of the Blueshirts. Michael McDowell, the grandson of Free State grandee Eoin MacNeill offers a weekly dose in his *Irish Times* column—the nationalism of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum. Yet this is also the legacy of another Limerick anti-Semite reactionary, Seán South, who died on an IRA raid on Brookeborough led by Seán Garland, and who would end up as general secretary

of the Workers’ Party! The false moral-versus-physical-force dichotomy persists, but it is a reductive and redundant tool in understanding Irish nationalism yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

The paint-by-numbers history which posits Free Staters versus Republicans, or Redmondites versus 1916 Rebels, or Constitutionalism versus Provisionals as a democrats-versus-dictators polarity is detrimental to historical understanding and replicates perhaps Griffith’s most fatal flaw—the reification of irrational concepts which then operate as the idealised basis for ideological positioning and political action. This article has presented Irish nationalism as a spectrum conditioned by the country’s colonial history. Irish nationalism encompasses anti-humanist reaction, liberal humanism, and radical humanism. Rather than reified, mutually exclusive poles, a dialectical relationship exists between these three tendencies.

Griffith, it has been argued, exhibited a form of anti-humanism that marked him out from other significant historical agents within the radical and separatist milieu. He may well have been a radical, but his worldview mirrored much of the reactionary character of the continental, petit-bourgeois right. That he is now lionised by many who position themselves (and the twenty-six-county state) within the tradition of the liberal Enlightenment reminds us of the Frankfurt School’s famous dialectic of the Enlightenment, which recognised the contradiction between European emancipation and the road to Auschwitz, between human progress and colonial domination for those subject to Europe’s civilising mission. This permits the political heirs of the Blueshirts to masquerade as democrats while they fawn before the US hegemon in similar fashion to their predecessors donning top hat and tails and paying homage to the King Emperor. A drunken crank, Griffith gave populist ideological cover to the material reality of class politics in Ireland. He represents a fitting father to the Free State and a cautionary reminder that nationalism of any variety remains constantly vulnerable to the fleshpots of the radical right.

If any tendency within Irish nationalist history can act as a lamp at our feet, it is not Griffith’s xenophobic atavism, which sought constant ‘inspiration from the smouldering records of the past.’ Nor is it, for that matter, some general physical-force tradition, although many worthy of consideration have been shoehorned into this redundant category. Rather, those set on fulfilling the ‘glowing hopes of the living present’ and ‘vast possibilities of the mighty future’ can only follow the trajectory of the radical humanist universalism of Tone, McCracken, and Russell, the

Fenians, Davitt, and Connolly.⁷⁴ Under different historical conditions, we are faced with the same dilemma. As Liam Mellows outlined in his *Notes from Mountjoy*, shortly before his extra-judicial murder at the hands of the Free State,

In our efforts to win back public support for the Republic we are forced to recognise, whether we like it or not, that the commercial interests and the gombeen man are on the side of the

Treaty. We are back to Tone—which is just as well—relying on that great body, ‘the men of no property.’ The ‘stake in the country people’ were never with the Republic. They are not with it now and they will always be against it—until it wins! We should recognise that definitely now and base our appeals upon the understanding of those who have always borne Ireland’s fight.⁷⁵

¹ *Sinn Féin*, 3 Dec. 1910.

² Colum Kenny, *The Enigma of Arthur Griffith: Father of us all* (Kildare, 2020).

³ Owen McGee, *The Irish republican Brotherhood* (Dublin, 2007) p. 357.

⁴ Owen McGee, *Arthur Griffith* (Merrion, 2015), p. 348.

⁵ Kenny, *The Enigma of Arthur Griffith*, *passim*.

⁶ Arthur Griffith, Foreword to *Jail Journal* (Gill, Dublin, 1913, 3rd edition 1918), pp xi-xiii.

⁷ Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race* (Macmillan, 1996), pp 236–237.

⁸ Foreword *Jail Journal* (Gill, Dublin, 1913, 3rd edition 1918), p. xv.

⁹ Richard Barret, ‘The Dreyfus Affair in the Irish Nationalist Press, 1898–1899’, in *Études Irlandaises*, 32, 1, 2007. pp 77–89.

¹⁰ Quoted in *Saothar*, vol. 13, 1988, p. 130.

¹¹ Colles claimed that Gonne lied when she claimed that Irish soldiers in the British Army were transported to the Boer War with manacled wrists (Senia Pašeta, ‘Nationalist responses to two royal visits, 1900 and 1903’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, 31, 124 (Nov 1999), p. 493.

¹² *United Irishman*, 23 Sept 1899.

¹³ *United Irishman*, 23 Sept 1899; *United Irishman and Workers’ Republic* pieces also cited in Richard Barret, ‘The Dreyfus Affair in the Irish Nationalist Press, 1898–1899’, in *Études Irlandaises*, 32, 1, 2007. pp 77–89.

¹⁴ *United Irishman*, 21 Oct 1899.

¹⁵ Griffith to Stopford Green, 7 Apr 1906 (NLI, Alice Stopford Green papers, MS 15,077/5/11/2).

¹⁶ *United Irishman*, 14 Oct 1899.

¹⁷ Kevin Haddick Flynn, ‘The Limerick pogrom, 1904’ in *History Ireland*, vol. 12 (summer, 2004).

¹⁸ *United Irishman*, 23 Jan 1904.

¹⁹ *United Irishman*, 30 Apr 1904.

²⁰ Kevin Haddick Flynn, ‘The Limerick pogrom, 1904’ in *History Ireland*, 12 (summer, 2004).

²¹ *United Irishman*, 23 April 1904.

²² *United Irishman*, 28 May 1904.

²³ Marnie Hay, *Bulmer Hobson and the Nationalist Movement in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), p. 47.

²⁴ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Tralee, 1968), p. 19.

²⁵ Bulmer Hobson, BMH WS, 82, pp 5–6.

²⁶ ‘Reminiscences on people I Knew’, undated (PRONI, Cahir Healy Papers, D/2991/B/140/31); elsewhere McCartan admitted that Griffith wouldn’t ‘be in it with Hobson as a speaker’ (McCartan to John Devoy, 13 June 1909, NLI, John Devoy papers, MS 18,007/19/2).

²⁷ Richard Davis, *Arthur Griffith and Non-violent Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1974), pp. 107–9.

²⁸ McCartan to McGarrity, 7 April 1909 (NLI, McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/79).

²⁹ For a good, private outline of the tensions, see Peter Devoy to John Devoy, 17 Oct 1910 (NLI, John Devoy papers, MS 18,004/6/21).

³⁰ McCartan to McGarrity, 21 January 1910 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/92).

³¹ *The Irish Felon*, 24 June 1848.

³² McCartan to McGarrity, 18 Sept. 1909 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/86).

³³ McCartan to McGarrity, 21 Jan 1910 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/92).

³⁴ McCartan to McGarrity, 27 Oct 1910 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/118).

³⁵ James Connolly, *Harp*, Apr 1908.

³⁶ James Connolly, ‘Sinn Féin, Socialism and the Nation’, *Irish Nation*, 23 Jan 1909.

³⁷ Emmet O’Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland* (UCD, 2011), p. 78.

³⁸ *Sinn Féin*, 16 Sept 1911.

³⁹ O’Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ K. S. Roche, ‘The forgotten labour struggle: the 1911 Wexford lockout’ in *History Ireland*, 4, 21 (July–August 2013).

⁴¹ *Sinn Féin*, 23 Sept 1911.

⁴² *Sinn Féin*, 30 Sept 1911.

⁴³ *Sinn Féin*, 30 Sept. 1911.

⁴⁴ Michael Laffan, ‘Griffith, Arthur Joseph’, 2009, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁴⁵ *Sinn Féin*, 30 Sept 1911.

⁴⁶ *Sinn Féin*, 10 Feb 1912.

⁴⁷ *Sinn Féin*, 24 Feb 1912

⁴⁸ Roche, ‘The forgotten labour struggle.’

⁴⁹ *Sinn Féin*, 20 Sept 1913.

⁵⁰ Laffan, ‘Griffith, Arthur Joseph’, 2009.

⁵¹ Quoted in Fergal McCluskey, *Fenians & Ribbonmen* (Manchester, 2011), p. 257.

⁵² Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be Another Day* (Dublin, 1963) p. 14.

⁵³ George Murnaghan to Gavan Duffy, 6 July 1917 (NLI, Gavan Duffy papers, MS 5581/170).

⁵⁴ General Officer Commanding in Ireland, 15 May 1919 (The National Archives, London, CAB 24/79).

⁵⁵ Arthur Mitchel, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-21* (Dublin, 1994), p. 51.

⁵⁶ Kevin O'Shiel, BMH WS 1770/7, p. 933.

⁵⁷ Mitchel, *Revolutionary government*, p. 139.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland* (Dublin 1993), p. 78.

⁵⁹ De Valera to McGarrity, 27 Dec. 1921 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers MS 17,440).

⁶⁰ John M. Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution, 1921-1936* (Dublin, 2001), p. 22.

⁶¹ Childers' diary, quoted in Paul Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission and Its Origins, 1886-1925* (Dublin, 2011), p. 75.

⁶² Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution*, p. 374.

⁶³ "Tentative suggestions" for a Treaty presented by Thomas Jones to Arthur Griffith', 16 Nov. 1921

(NAI, DÉ 2/304/1); Anglo-Irish Treaty, 5 Dec 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/131).

⁶⁴ Cabinet conclusions, 6 Dec 1921 (TNA, CAB 23/27/17).

⁶⁵ *HC*, 8 Feb. 1922, vol. 150, c. 205; *An Phoblacht*, 14 Feb. 1922.

⁶⁶ Dáil Éireann debate, Tuesday, 10 Jan 1922, Vol. T No. 17.

⁶⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Feb 1922.

⁶⁸ John Dillon to T. P. O'Connor, 23 Mar 1922 (TCD, Dillon papers, MS 6744/880).

⁶⁹ Quoted in Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission*, p. 76.

⁷⁰ GOC Ireland, 5 Sept 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/138).

⁷¹ Regan, *Counter-revolution*, p. 259.

⁷² *Workers' Republic*, 4 Dec 1915.

⁷³ Carla King, *Michael Davitt* (UCD, 2009), pp 66-7.

⁷⁴ Quoted passages from James Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 13 Aug 1898.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Conor McNamara, *Liam Mellows, Soldier of the Irish Republic: Selected Writings, 1914-1922* (Dublin, 2019), p. 142.