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The I.R.B. from the treaty to 1924

During the Irish war for independence from 1916 to 1921, there were three important groups involved on the Irish side against Britain. These were Sinn Féin, the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) and the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood).

Sinn Féin became in 1917 the political arm of the republican movement for an independent Ireland. In the December 1918 general election, Sinn Féin candidates won seventy-three of the 103 Irish constituencies and formed Dáil Éireann in January 1919. The dáil stood apart from the military side of the national struggle until March 1921, when it accepted responsibility for the activities of the I.R.A.¹

On Easter Monday 1916, when the Irish Republic was proclaimed by the military committee of the I.R.B., the I.R.A. was formed as the army of this republic.² This republic had not only been created by the I.R.B., but was also furnished by the I.R.B. with an army, the I.R.A., and a president, a government and constitutional powers of its own. In 1919 the I.R.B. relinquished to the dáil its governmental claims,³ and in 1921 the I.R.B. also dropped its claims to the presidency of the republic.⁴ But, until the dáil accepted responsibility for the activities of the I.R.A. in March 1921, the I.R.B. had provided the I.R.A. with its moral and, arguably, its legal authority.⁵

The I.R.B. was a constitutionally organised secret society which had influence in both Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. This society demanded absolute allegiance from its members, and ultimate control was held by its supreme council, which was partly elected and partly coopted. When the council was not in session, power was exercised by the

¹ *Dáil Éireann proc., 1919–21*, pp 264, 278–9.

² After 1916 the I.R.A. is frequently referred to as the Irish Volunteers.

³ 'The I.R.B. constitution as revised to date 1920' (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72), clause 20a.

⁴ Seán MacEoin to J. O'Beirne-Ranelagh (hereafter cited as J. O'B.-R.), 9 Nov. 1972 (statement in possession of J. O'B.-R.).

⁵ Henri Le Caron (Thomas Beach), *Twenty-five years in the secret service: the recollections of a spy* (London, 1892), p. 54; John A. MacDonald, *Troublous times in Canada: a history of the fenian raids of 1866 and 1870* (Toronto, 1910), pp 11–32; N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72.

executive, composed of the president, the secretary and the treasurer of the council. Since supreme councils met only from two to four times a year, the executive in practice dominated. It exercised control over the members of the I.R.B. through a strict hierarchy of divisional, city, county and local 'centres'. Members were required to obey all instructions from their superiors in the society without question. And, although claiming republican principles, the constitutions of the I.R.B. were careful to deny democratic procedures within the organisation.⁶

The majority of members of the I.R.B. were also members of the I.R.A. For instance, members of the supreme council were on the executive of the I.R.A.⁷ and on general headquarters staff of the I.R.A.⁸ from 1916 onwards, the single most important and influential being Michael Collins. Collins apparently considered the I.R.B. with its fenian traditions and principles to be more important than the I.R.A. or Sinn Féin.⁹ However, regardless of what Collins may have thought, his action and the actions of the supreme council over the 'Articles of agreement for a treaty between Great Britain and Ireland' (hereafter referred to as the treaty) in 1921 proved disastrous for the I.R.B.

The treaty of December 1921 divided the country and the I.R.B. Collins, newly elected president of the supreme council,¹⁰ was a dáil plenipotentiary at the London negotiations leading up to the treaty. He kept the executive of the I.R.B. informed of the progress of these negotiations. From the middle of November 1921 onwards, he appears to have sensed increasing difficulties.¹¹ He returned to Dublin more frequently for discussions with the dáil cabinet and with the

⁶ 'I.R.B. constitution as revised to 1920', clauses 2, 5, 10a, 21b, 24a.

⁷ Seán McGarry, Michael Collins, Diarmuid Lynch, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Michael Staines, Austin Stack, Eoin O'Duffy, Gearoid O'Sullivan and Larry Lardiner were all members of the executive and of the I.R.B. supreme council at various times during 1916-21.

⁸ Eoin O'Duffy, Gearoid O'Sullivan, Michael Collins and Diarmuid O'Hegarty were all members of the G.H.Q. staff in December 1921.

⁹ Richard Mulcahy, 'Commentary upon Piaras Beaslai's *Michael Collins and the making of a new Ireland*' (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/D/I/67), i, pp 12, 22-3; ii, p. 236.

¹⁰ The earliest date at which Collins could have been regularly elected or reelected president of the I.R.B. in 1921 was 15 October (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

¹¹ Seán Ó Murthuile, 'History of the Irish Republican Brotherhood' (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers; hereafter cited as Ó Murthuile), pp 166-7.

other members of the I.R.B. executive, Seán Ó Murthuile the secretary and Eoin O'Duffy the treasurer. On 3 December 1921 Collins was unable to attend the supreme council meeting called for that day to discuss the outstanding problems still facing the Irish delegation in London. At this meeting the council decided that there were three principle obstacles remaining: first, the oath of direct allegiance to the British king; secondly, the arrangements concerning control of Ireland's coastal defences; and thirdly the provisions allowing for partition and the opting out of the Northern Ireland government. Those present at this meeting of the supreme council concluded by agreeing to a substitute oath mentioning the king in a secondary paragraph only, and by rejecting partition absolutely. Ó Murthuile was deputed to see Collins and convey to him these conclusions. This he did in an extremely hurried fashion at Dun Laoghaire harbour that evening.¹²

The treaty was signed on 6 December. On 10 December the supreme council met to discuss it.¹³ Most members thought that it had been redrafted to Ireland's advantage, particularly noting that the form of the oath had assumed the change suggested, although there was no change in the clauses relating to the partition of Ireland and Ireland's coastal defences. Strong opposition, however, came from Liam Lynch, the south Munster divisional representative on the council, and the council finally decided that the I.R.B. should not take action for or against the treaty.¹⁴ Members of the I.R.B. who were also members of Dáil Eireann were immediately circulated by Seán Ó Murthuile with a note dated 12 December stating that the council had decided that the treaty should be ratified, but that dáil members were given freedom of action in the matter. This note was misleading because the council had not decided that the treaty should be ratified, but had in fact remained undecided. The decision not to support or to oppose the treaty actively was later circulated to all the centres of the I.R.B. in a duplicated document which at the same time restated the traditional policy of the I.R.B. to make use of all instruments, political and otherwise, which were likely to attain a

¹² Ó Murthuile, pp 168–9.

¹³ Florence O'Donoghue, *No other law: the story of Liam Lynch and the Irish Republican Army, 1916–23* (Dublin, 1954), p. 190; but compare Ó Murthuile, pp 168–9.

¹⁴ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, p. 190; Ó Murthuile, pp 172–3; F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine* (London, 1971), p. 438.

free and independent Ireland.¹⁵ However, both notes ignored the great opposition to the treaty which had already been heard within the ranks of the I.R.B. This opposition became more coherent as the treaty debates in the dáil progressed.

On 7 January 1922 the dáil accepted the treaty by a narrow margin. On 10 January an extraordinary meeting of I.R.B. city and county centres in conjunction with the supreme council was held in Dublin to consider this ratification. There was no provision in the constitution of the I.R.B. for such a meeting, but the executive considered that the political distress surrounding the treaty warranted this gathering. The majority of county and city centres present were opposed to the treaty, and no compromise or agreement was reached at this meeting between supporters and opponents of it.¹⁶ This was the moment of split within the I.R.B. Sinn Féin had already split during the debates on the treaty in the dáil.

The significance of these events seems to have escaped those involved at this stage. For the I.R.B., disintegration was the result. The supreme council had asserted directly its claim to monitor progress towards a free and independent Ireland when it met on 3 December 1921 and considered in detail the progress of the dáil's political representatives in their talks with the British cabinet in London. Yet within ten days of this meeting they had met again and decided *not* to act, *not* to intervene in the ensuing political progression of the treaty. This indecision on the part of the council was fatal to the I.R.B. By not giving a clear directive of support or of opposition to the treaty, the council fatally weakened the traditions of obedience and discipline that had been the hallmarks of the I.R.B., and this was emphasised by the extraordinary meeting in January.¹⁷

Liam Lynch led the opposition to the treaty within the I.R.B. Not only was he the south Munster divisional representative on the supreme council, but he was also the officer commanding the 1st southern division of the I.R.A., which provided the I.R.A. with more than one-quarter of its effective fighting strength.¹⁸ He had given warning of the civil war to come when on 10 December 1921 he sent to the I.R.A. chief of staff, Richard Mulcahy, a statement from all the commanding officers of the 1st southern division (all of them

¹⁵ Ó Murthuile, pp 173–5.

¹⁶ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 231–3.

¹⁷ Cork county I.R.B. centre to south Munster I.R.B. divisional secretary, 7 Jan. 1922 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

¹⁸ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 219, 334.

also members of the I.R.B.) saying that they found the treaty unacceptable. This was followed by Lynch personally refusing to obey the policy instructions of the I.R.B. and refusing to transmit I.R.B. directives throughout his division. Such disobedience was unheard of within the I.R.B.¹⁹ The speed with which the members of the 1st southern division made their opposition to the treaty known formally must have had its roots in the supreme council's discussions preceding the signing of the treaty, where Lynch from the outset had opposed it.²⁰ Of all the members of the council, apart from Collins, Lynch was possibly the most important. His 1st southern division was dominated by I.R.B. personnel under his supervision, and these men carried out more actions against the British than any other division from 1917 to 1921.²¹ When the supreme council met on 10 December 1921, the differences and suspicions among the members must already have been severe, so that their indecision over the treaty may well have been an attempt immediately to preserve the I.R.B.'s unity. If so, then at this time they obviously considered that their organisation's unity outweighed all else. However, the circular of 12 December to I.R.B. members in the dáil, which may have been conceived as an attempt to preserve the unity of the I.R.B., managed to increase divisions and suspicions instead. The majority of the supreme council's fifteen members were certainly in favour of the treaty, but not all. The 12 December circular to I.R.B. members in the dáil incorrectly claimed that the supreme council had decided in favour of the treaty. This can only have convinced I.R.B. opponents of the treaty that their opposition would now have to be expressed and conducted through the I.R.A. and the dáil. After the treaty was accepted by the dáil on 7 January 1922, only the I.R.A., of the three principal groups involved on the Irish side, was not yet officially led by pro-treatyites. Officers of the 1st southern division now spear-headed the republican attempt to gain control of the I.R.A., and the ensuing contest attracted the energies and the enthusiasm not only of the political and military nation, but also of the I.R.B. From this

¹⁹ Mulcahy, *Commentary*, ii, pp 233–5; Ó Murthuile, p. 175.

²⁰ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 190–1; Harry Boland to Sean McGarrity, 25 July 1922 (N.L.I., McGarrity papers); Macardle, *Ir. republic* (London, 1937), p. 653; Ó Murthuile, p. 224.

²¹ Bura Staire Mileata, *Chronology, 1913–21* (Dublin, Department of Defence, 1952), reveals that of thirteen actions in 1918 in Ireland, five occurred in what became the 1st southern division's area; in 1919, ten of forty-four; in 1920, 168 of 455; in 1921, 201 of 738.

time on, notwithstanding Collins's efforts to employ the I.R.B. as a mediating and unifying force during the prelude to the civil war, the I.R.B. disintegrated. This disintegration was the result of personal failings on the part of members of the supreme council, and the result of successive changes and compromises embodied in its constitution by the I.R.B.

The constitution which was in effect in 1921 had been adopted in 1917. In this constitution the I.R.B. reaffirmed its traditional objective: to establish and maintain a free and independent republican government in Ireland and to do its utmost to train and equip its members as a military body for this purpose. Through the I.R.A., the I.R.B. sought to implement this objective. I.R.B. members were successfully trained and equipped so that they tended by merit and experience alone to be promoted within the I.R.A. to positions of authority. In 1921, the vast majority of senior officers in the I.R.A. were active members of the I.R.B. Every one of the senior officers of the 1st southern division were members,²² and on the G.H.Q. staff of the I.R.A. eleven of the thirteen staff officers were members, four of these on the supreme council of the I.R.B.²³ Without doubt, the I.R.B. had the means absolutely to control the I.R.A. at G.H.Q. and in the field.

The 1917 constitution of the I.R.B. also advanced the society's traditional claims to possess in the supreme council the sole legitimate government of the Irish Republic, and that the president of the supreme council was also president of the republic.²⁴ Of course, this presidency and this republic were the creations of the I.R.B. in the first place, and were intended for the consumption of the organisation rather than as direct challenges to their public counterparts in 1921. These particular claims had been advanced by the I.R.B. since 1873.²⁵ Only after the creation of the 1916 provisional government of the Irish Republic under I.R.B. auspices did these claims take tangible political form, being developed in more detail in the 1917 constitution. In 1920 this development was such that the I.R.B. saw itself as the watchdog of the republic it had created, having acknowledged the dáil as the government of the republic in September

²² N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72.

²³ All except J. J. O'Connell and Seamus O'Donovan were members of the I.R.B. in 1921.

²⁴ I.R.B. constitution as revised to 1920, clauses 20, 22.

²⁵ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland yesterday and tomorrow* (Tralee, 1968), pp 103-7.

1919 and retaining only the claim to the presidency. The constitution was amended accordingly.²⁶

This amendment was a fundamental change for the I.R.B. They had lost their political initiative to the politicians in the dáil. It was not surprising, since, at the time, the I.R.B. was concentrating on the military struggle against Britain,²⁷ but it established a precedent. In August 1921 the claim of the I.R.B. to the presidency of the republic was also relinquished to the dáil when, on their instructions, de Valera was proposed formally, and for the first time, as president of the Irish Republic. Now the I.R.B. could only claim the I.R.A.

The I.R.B. and Sinn Féin split in January 1922 over the treaty. The I.R.A. did not split until later. From January 1922 until Collins's death in August that year, discussions and negotiations about unity flourished within the I.R.A. with Collins playing a central part. Throughout, he used the ties and the influence of the I.R.B. in his unsuccessful attempt to prevent the I.R.A. splitting too.²⁸ However, from February 1922 the I.R.B. as a national organisation ceased to function. There were no further meetings of the complete supreme council and only irregular meetings of circles throughout the country. The council, faced with a split in its own ranks, had decided in January 1922 to wait and see whether the proposed Irish Free State constitution would heal this rift. As barracks were vacated by British army and police units, Collins organised their occupation by Irish units, selecting personally Seán O'Hegarty, I.R.B. centre for Cork city and opponent of the treaty, to supervise such operations in Cork.²⁹ Nevertheless, effort after effort to maintain I.R.A. unity failed. After the dáil cabinet banned the I.R.A. convention scheduled for 26 March 1922, and after the convention was nonetheless held, the I.R.A. too had split irretrievably.³⁰

The I.R.A. split compounded the split in the I.R.B. Mulcahy, now minister for defence, implemented the dáil cabinet's instructions to ban the I.R.A. convention, but only four of the seventeen I.R.A.

²⁶ Florence O'Donoghue to Rev. F. X. Martin, 28 Mar. 1964 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

²⁷ 'I.R.B. supreme council, general orders to county centres', Apr. 1921 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

²⁸ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 231-46, 282-8.

²⁹ Ó Murthuile, pp 177-8.

³⁰ Joseph O'Doherty to J. O'B.-R., 22 Mar. 1974 (statement in possession of J. O'B.-R.).

divisions obeyed the ban.³¹ The strength of the I.R.A. at the time was approximately 112,000, and eighty percent of that strength was represented at the convention.³² On G.H.Q. staff, where all but two of the thirteen members were also members of the I.R.B., nine were pro-treaty. Of the seventeen divisional commandants at the time, nearly every one was a member of the I.R.B. Eight of these divisional commandants took the pro-treaty side, but the overwhelming majority of I.R.A. commanders and of I.R.A. strength was anti-treaty.³³ It followed directly, therefore, that outside the supreme council the vast majority of members of the I.R.B., frequently in circles corresponding to I.R.A. companies since 1916, were anti-treaty as well. On the other hand, of the fifteen members of the supreme council, only five opposed the treaty.³⁴ The arguments among the members of the council were again heard in March 1922 during the second meeting of the extraordinary convention of I.R.B. centres. Judging from Collins's notes of this meeting, even at that date those present were concerned most of all with the unity of the I.R.B. Collins held that the I.R.B. was still supreme; Liam Lynch and several others argued for a return to the 'old' constitution: presumably a demand that the I.R.B. reintroduce its claim to be the government of the Irish Republic and that its president be the president of that republic.³⁵ This meeting was held, under the shadow of the ban on the proposed I.R.A. convention and in the knowledge that the convention would be held despite the ban. It proved to be the last chance for Lynch and Collins, now the principal spokesmen for the different sides in the I.R.A. and the I.R.B., to come to some agreement before the I.R.A. split officially too. Unfortunately, the meeting only served to show once again that the majority of the members of the supreme council were pro-treaty, while the majority of I.R.B. county and city centres were anti-treaty.

On 19 April, at 41 Parnell Square, the extraordinary convention met again and for the last time. As in January and again in March, the majority of those present opposed the treaty. Discussion revolved around the possibilities presented by the coming Irish Free State

³¹ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 219-21, 334-5; Macardle, *Ir. republic*, pp 1001-2.

³² O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 219, 334.

³³ Macardle, *Ir. republic*, pp 1001-2; O'Donoghue, *No other law*, p. 334; the strength of the pro-treaty divisions was approximately 34,800 compared to anti-treaty divisions's strength of approximately 77,850.

³⁴ See above, n. 20.

³⁵ U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/D/I/13.

constitution. Lynch impatiently dismissed these speculations, saying that he could not wait three weeks for a constitution that might not alter the position in any way unless there was a guarantee that it would be a republican constitution. Under his influence and with Collins's agreement, it was resolved to continue discussions in a committee of six, three from each side. This committee of the I.R.B., with the exception of Lynch, decided during the next ten days that only senior I.R.A. officers were competent at this stage to attempt once again to obtain unity for the I.R.A. Lynch declared that he had waited too long already without any guarantee to maintain the republic and a republican constitution for the Free State, and that unless he obtained such guarantees he would act. On this note this last attempt on the part of the I.R.B. to bridge the widening rift came to an end.⁸⁶ Collins seems to have been attempting to meet I.R.B. colleagues in the south when he was killed at Béal-na-mBláth on 22 August 1922. With his death any remaining hopes of using the I.R.B. to end the civil war passed, and the I.R.B.'s disintegration was completed. However, members of the I.R.B. on both sides recognised the possibilities of reorganising the I.R.B. for their own purposes.

On the Free State side, many of the members of the supreme council still alive in 1923 were in positions of great military and political importance. Seán Ó Murthuile, while commandant of Kilmainham gaol, on 31 August 1922 called a meeting of Collins's senior I.R.B. colleagues to secure his I.R.B. papers.⁸⁷ Nothing more was done until the end of 1922, when reports reached Ó Murthuile that republicans were attempting to organise the scattered circles of the I.R.B. in order to obtain control of the organisation and use it against the Free State. In response to this threat, I.R.B. members who had become officers in the national army of the Free State asked Ó Murthuile if there were any plans to counteract this danger.⁸⁸ In December 1922 Ó Murthuile consulted senior I.R.B.

⁸⁶ O'Donoghue, *No other law*, pp 232–46.

⁸⁷ Richard Mulcahy, Statement to committee of inquiry into army mutiny, 29 Apr. 1924 (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/I/10); Seán Ó Murthuile, Statement to committee of inquiry into army mutiny, 29 Apr. 1924 (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/I/13); Richard Mulcahy to Peadar MacMahon, 15 May 1963, transcript of tape-recorded conversation (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers).

⁸⁸ Army committee of inquiry, Transcript of evidence of Lt-Gen Seán Ó Murthuile, 16 May 1924 (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/I/33), p. a3.

members in the national army and in the dáil. He obtained general agreement to the proposals that the organisation should be preserved from republican control; that the traditions of the I.R.B. should be handed on; that any reorganisation of the I.R.B. would have to come from old supreme council members even if in the national army, but that members of the I.R.B. in the Free State cabinet should not be compromised by direct involvement in such reorganisation.³⁹ The Free State minister for home affairs, Kevin O'Higgins, soon learnt of these proposals, and although it was being conducted with the knowledge of Richard Mulcahy, then minister for defence as well as commander-in-chief of the national army, O'Higgins objected, on the grounds that there was no longer any need for the I.R.B. and that the Free State had sufficient weapons to defend itself.⁴⁰

Ó Murthuile and his colleagues set aside these objections and began work on a new constitution for the I.R.B. In April 1923 the I.R.A.'s ceasefire ended the civil war, but this did not affect I.R.B. reorganisation within the Free State. The new constitution was completed in June. It reaffirmed once again the intention of the I.R.B. to establish a free and independent republican government in Ireland, and also arranged for the reorganisation of part of the I.R.B. within the national army in the form of clubs and divisions corresponding exactly to the army's formations.⁴¹ With this, the pro-treaty predilections of the majority of the members of the 1921 supreme council were recognised, as were their positions in the national army. Nearly every one of those involved in this I.R.B. reorganisation in 1923 held a senior staff position or divisional command in the national army. At the same time these provisions enabled these men to ensure that their I.R.B. would be loyal to the Free State. On the other hand, the intimate involvement of these officers in the I.R.B. could also provide a threat to the very government they claimed to protect, and at the least could (and did) prove to be a source of suspicion and division within the national army.

On the republican side, Liam Lynch, now chief of staff of the I.R.A., proposed in November 1922 that the I.R.B. be reorganised on a republican basis, and that the pro-treaty members of the supreme council be called to task by the county centres of the organisation.⁴²

³⁹ Ó Murthuile, pp 229-43.

⁴⁰ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, vii, 3124.

⁴¹ I.R.B. constitution, 1923, clause 13b.

⁴² Liam Lynch to Liam Deasy, 7 Nov. 1922 (N.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

This is obviously the suggestion that determined Seán Ó Murthuile and his colleagues to reorganise the I.R.B. on the Free State side. Florence O'Donoghue, the Cork county I.R.B. centre, had remained neutral during the civil war. Now, he began to consider Lynch's proposals. He rejected the suggestion that republican I.R.B. members attempt to meet the supreme council, pointing out that the council would reiterate that they had accepted the treaty only as a stepping-stone to Irish independence. Instead he proposed that the council (most of whom were now senior national army officers) be asked to call elections throughout the I.R.B., including elections to the council itself. If they ignored this demand, O'Donoghue argued, then republican members of the I.R.B. should ignore them in turn and proceed independently.⁴³ Lynch continued to toy with these ideas into 1923, noting that the I.R.B. organisation in the south was intact and that the I.R.B. in the national army was working.⁴⁴ However, nothing further was done.

Nevertheless, the ties of the I.R.B. remained strong and were seen by members of the organisation on both sides during the civil war as offering a means of honourable settlement. The first move in this respect came from Tom Barry, the noted I.R.A. guerrilla leader and an I.R.B. centre. On 26 May 1923, three and a half weeks after the republican ceasefire, Seán Ó Murthuile as secretary of the supreme council, received from Barry an appeal for the I.R.B. to use its influence to stop the continuing harrassment of republicans, so that the I.R.B. at least might settle its differences and continue to work for an Irish Republic.⁴⁵ Ó Murthuile immediately passed this appeal to Mulcahy. Mulcahy rightly concluded that Liam Lynch had failed to create a republican I.R.B. organisation, and that Barry's recognition of the supreme council was particularly important. It meant that the Free State had in the I.R.B. a body to whose wishes republican leaders might acquiesce in matters of disbandment and arms surrender without feeling humiliated. At the same time he saw that since the supreme council was composed nearly completely of senior national army officers, members of the Free State cabinet

⁴³ Liam Deasy to Florence O'Donoghue, 30 Nov. 1922; Florence O'Donoghue to Liam Deasy, 2 Dec. 1922; Florence O'Donoghue to Liam Deasy, 29 Dec. 1922 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

⁴⁴ Liam Lynch to Liam Deasy, 4 Jan. 1923 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72).

⁴⁵ Ó Murthuile, pp 220-3.

should be informed of Barry's appeal.⁴⁶ However, because of known opponents of the I.R.B. being in the government, those involved in the reorganisation of the I.R.B. felt it necessary to emphasise their loyalty to the Free State. The result of this last consideration was to relate part of the organisation of the I.R.B. in the 1923 constitution directly to that of the national army.⁴⁷ This ensured that the Free State through the I.R.B. would control any surrender of arms by the I.R.A. on the lines suggested by Barry's appeal.

Simultaneously, however, dissatisfaction and unrest were developing in the national army. Following Collins's death, Major-General Liam Tobin and other close associates of Collins during the pre-civil war period formed what they called the 'I.R.A. Organisation' in the national army. This new secret society was composed almost entirely of members of the I.R.B. and was organised on the same lines. Its declared purpose was to ensure that the treaty was used as a stepping-stone to a republic. To this end they had attempted to make contact with I.R.B. members on the republican side, some in Free State prisons.⁴⁸ On 15 May 1923 Major-General Michael Brennan, officer commanding Limerick, sent a letter to Mulcahy stating that Brennan and others were very worried by the prospect of finding that the Free State was the end for which they had fought, not the means to that end.⁴⁹ This feeling was widespread throughout the national army as events were to show, and was exacerbated not only by the presence in the national army of thousands of soldiers of all ranks without pre-1921 I.R.A. experience, but also by personal and political divisions in the Free State cabinet about the relationship of the army to the civil power.⁵⁰ With the end of the civil war, the principal concern of the national army's leaders was to develop an efficient, well-trained and well-disciplined army, responsive purely to the wishes of the government of the day. It had been obvious for some time that several senior officers with excellent I.R.A. records were not suited

⁴⁶ Mulcahy, Statement; Army committee of inquiry, Transcript of evidence of General Sean MacMahon, 16 May 1924 (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/I/33).

⁴⁷ U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/II/284.

⁴⁸ Pamphlet with a foreword, by Liam Tobin, *The truth about the army crisis* (Dublin, 1924); J. Bowyer Bell, *The secret army: a history of the I.R.A., 1916-70* (London, 1970), pp 46-7; Terence de Vere White, *O'Higgins*, pp 157-8, 161.

⁴⁹ Michael Brennan to Richard Mulcahy, 15 May 1923 (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/I/42).

⁵⁰ F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine*, pp 483-5.

to the formal discipline and manner of a conventional army, while several without any I.R.A. experience were. The ensuing tensions were released when the cabinet decided upon large reductions in the size of the national army following the end of the civil war. The reductions in numbers and in ranks were promulgated in February 1924 through G.H.Q. staff memorandum no. 12, which demoted or dismissed nearly every member of the I.R.A. Organisation. The memorandum also showed that Mulcahy and others involved in the I.R.B. reorganisation were not promoting members of the I.R.B. in the national army at the expense of others.⁵¹

The question of jobs sparked off the I.R.A. Organisation's army mutiny within days, and, as a result, both the I.R.A. Organisation and the I.R.B. in the national army were terminated. The first was terminated as a result of the events of the abortive mutiny, and the second following the inquiry by the dáil into the mutiny. This inquiry revealed the extent of the continued activity of the I.R.B. on the Free State side and drove home to those involved the overwhelming dangers the mutiny had illustrated. Seán Ó Murthuile and seven or eight others met in July 1924 in the 'private secretary's lodge' in Phoenix Park formally to wind up their reorganised Free State I.R.B.⁵² On 5 August 1924 the treasurer handed over the funds of the I.R.B. amounting to £3,809 14s. to two other members of the supreme council for safe keeping. Of this, Seán Ó Murthuile was given £2,059 14s. to pay outstanding debts and to write a history of the I.R.B.⁵³

On the republican side, attempts were also made to terminate the I.R.B. The I.R.A. executive decided on 27 and 28 January 1924 to instruct P. A. ('Pa') Murray, the adjutant-general of the I.R.A., to summon all I.R.B. county centres who were still in the I.R.A. to a meeting and to order them to disband the I.R.B. Eleven centres were summoned to this meeting, which was held on 2 November 1924 in Dublin, but only six attended. They were divided in their opinions, three favouring disbandment and three preferring reorganisation and revitalisation instead. However, since they had been ordered to disband by the I.R.A. executive, they agreed unanimously to obey this order and further agreed to inform their local centres

⁵¹ Department of general staff, 'Staff duties: appointments and discharges', memorandum no. 12, Feb. 1924.

⁵² Peadar MacMahon to Richard Mulcahy, 19 Aug. 1963, transcript of tape-recorded conversation (U.C.D., Mulcahy papers).

⁵³ Conlon papers in possession of J. O'B.-R.

accordingly. Pa Murray undertook to notify the organisation in Scotland, England and the United States. After this meeting he immediately reported this agreement to Frank Aiken, the I.R.A. chief of staff.⁵⁴

The nature of these attempts to end the I.R.B. in 1924 shows how firmly the organisation had become attached to the military formations of the I.R.A. and retained this attachment even during the civil war. At the same time, the death of Collins ended any autonomy the I.R.B. enjoyed, and all subsequent discussions about the I.R.B. and attempts to reorganise it on both the republican and Free State sides were initiated and controlled by the I.R.A. and national army leaders for military and political purposes. On the Free State side, this meant that the I.R.B. was directed in strict conformity with government policy, while on the republican side the I.R.A. executive exercised complete control over I.R.B. members and their remaining organisation. Having organised the I.R.A., and having acted as a watchdog of I.R.A. activity up to the truce of 1921, the I.R.B. by 1923 had become the servant and not the master of the military forces in the state.

JOHN O'BEIRNE-RANELAGH

⁵⁴ N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, f. 72.