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The organisation and activism of Dublin's Protestant working class, 1883–1935

Protestant working-class loyalists have been found not only in Belfast, behind the painted kerbs and muralled gables of the Shankill Road and Ballysillan. Recent research has found working-class loyalism in the Ulster hinterland of mid-Armagh.¹ However, most of what has been written on southern Protestantism, beyond Belfast and Ulster, has been on the gentry class.² Yet Dublin was once the centre of organised Protestant opinion in Ireland and had, in the early nineteenth century, an assertive and exuberantly sectarian Protestant working class.³ This paper is based on a study of the Protestant working class of Dublin,⁴ and examines its organisation and activism as revealed in the City and County of Dublin Conservative Workingmen's Club (henceforth C.W.C.).⁵ The club owned a substantial Georgian house on York Street, off St Stephen's Green where the modern extension to the Royal College of Surgeons now stands. The club was sustained by a core of activists numbering around three hundred, the usual print-run for the ballot papers at the annual general meeting. The Protestant working class numbered 5,688 in the city in 1881. The county area numbered 4,096, making a total of 9,784 Protestant working-class men. The city and county total of about 10,000 remained stable up to the census of 1911. Combined with the Protestant lower middle class of clerks and shopkeepers, the potential to be mobilised by the C.W.C. numbered over 20,000.⁶ The club records are used to relate the experience of the Dublin Protestant working class firstly to the more familiar working-class loyalism of Ulster, and secondly to working-class Toryism and the concept of the labour aristocracy.

¹Alvin Jackson, 'Unionist politics and Protestant society in Edwardian Ireland' in *Hist. Jn.*, xxiii, 4 (1990), pp 839–66.

²Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism 1: The Anglo-Irish and the new Ireland, 1885–1922* (Dublin, 1972); Ian d'Alton, *Protestant society and politics in Cork, 1812–1844* (Cork, 1980).

³K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society, 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 312; Jacqueline Hill, 'The Protestant response to Repeal: the case of the Dublin working class' in F. S. L. Lyons and R. A. J. Hawkins (eds), *Ireland under the union: varieties of tension* (Oxford, 1980), pp 35–68; idem, 'Artisans, sectarianism and politics in Dublin, 1829–48' in *Saothar*, vii (1981), pp 12–27.

⁴Martin Maguire, 'The Dublin Protestant working class, 1870–1932: economy, society, politics' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University College, Dublin, 1990).

⁵The club's records are now deposited in the Representative Church Body Library, Dublin (MS 485). They consist in the main of the minute books of the management committee, 1900–10 and 1921–35; the minute books of the political committee, 1885–95, 1899–1914 and 1919; the honorary secretary's copy-out letter book, 1884–95; annual reports for the years 1883, 1886–8 and 1893; and various accounts, subscriptions and membership ledgers.

⁶Martin Maguire, 'A socio-economic analysis of the Dublin Protestant working class, 1870–1926' in *Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist.*, xx (1993), pp 35–61.

I

The appearance in 1883 of Gladstone's Registration of Voters (Ireland) Bill (intended to end corrupt electoral practices) made the mobilisation of voluntary workers indispensable. These volunteers were to ensure the registration of voters and to assist in the annual compilation of the electoral register.⁷ That this was to be the primary objective of the C.W.C. was made clear at the inaugural meeting in the Leinster Hall, Molesworth Street. The members would endeavour to have 'all Conservatives who are entitled to the franchise placed upon the register whether they be freemen, householders or lodgers'.⁸ Since the 1867 reform act the Conservative Party had used the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (N.U.C.C.A.) to advance Conservatism amongst the masses by encouraging workingmen's clubs and other such vehicles of social integration.⁹ In Britain the leadership of the N.U.C.C.A. tended to be noblemen and gentlemen.¹⁰ Although the Dublin C.W.C. was a working-class club, it actively sought the patronage of the leaders of the Conservative Party, and the roll of its honorary vice presidents confirms that it received the support of the most influential Conservatives in Britain and Ireland.¹¹ At the founding of the C.W.C., of the honorary vice-presidents, nine were titled, seven were M.P.s, and eleven were legal professionals.¹² The honorary president of the club was Edward Cecil Guinness, a major employer in Dublin and associated through his family with philanthropic activity in the city. The titled honorary vice-presidents included the earl of Bandon; Viscount Crichton (later earl of Erne), a leader of the Orange Order; and the earl of Meath, another notable philanthropist. Political figures who lent their prestige to the club included Arthur Edward Guinness, M.P. for the city in the 1870s; Lord Arthur Hill, M.P. for County Down (another leading Orangeman); and David Plunket and Edward Gibson, the M.P.s for Dublin University. Both Randolph Churchill, the champion of Tory democracy (for a while at least), and his rival, Sir Stafford Northcote, were patrons. The most significant element in the club patrons, however, consisted of legal professionals, many of them associated with the 'Howth circle' which grouped around Randolph Churchill on his visits to Dublin.¹³ Both David Plunket (later Baron Rathmore) and Edward Gibson (later Lord Ashbourne and lord chancellor of Ireland) were of that circle, as were Hugh Holmes, Q.C., and Dunbar P. Barton, both very active patrons of the C.W.C. At the inaugural meeting in Leinster Hall the legal notables from the Tory establishment were prominent on the platform, including M. E. Walsh, registration agent of the Conservative Party in Dublin.¹⁴ Later, when new leaders such as Colonel Saunderson appeared, their patronage too was sought.¹⁵ The initial impulse to organise a Conservative working-class

⁷Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884–1911* (Oxford, 1989), p. 200.

⁸*Irish Times*, 22 July 1883.

⁹Martin Pugh, *The making of modern British politics, 1867–1939* (Oxford, 1982), p. 16.

¹⁰Robert McKenzie and Alan Silver, *Angels in marble: working-class Conservatives in urban England* (London, 1968), p. 39.

¹¹Conservative Workingmen's Club (henceforth C.W.C.) Annual Report, 1883–5, 1892; C.W.C. Letter Book, 20 Oct., 8 Dec. 1885.

¹²C.W.C. Annual Report, 1883.

¹³R. F. Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill: a political life* (Oxford, 1981), p. 41.

¹⁴*Irish Times*, 22 July 1883.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1889.

club in Dublin was part of the general Tory response in both Britain and Ireland to changes in electoral law.¹⁶ The C.W.C. can be seen as part of the process of Conservatism's adaptation to mass politics. The year 1883, in which the C.W.C. was launched, also saw Churchill launch the Primrose League. The league, the premier expression of popular Conservatism in Britain, had several habitations in Dublin, the earliest founded in 1885.¹⁷

However, the prestige of a name was not all that the C.W.C. expected from its patrons; generous funding was vital to the successful launch of the club.¹⁸ Although the club in its initial phases was successful in raising money, the success was transient. As the sense of crisis waned the club had no alternative but gently and persistently to milk the Guinness connexion. The failure of those 'for whom we are assisting to do battle' to come up with financial support was a disappointment to the club.¹⁹ As has been observed for the Ulster Unionists, while the masses provided the muscle in resisting home rule, the rich, it was assumed, would supply the hard cash.²⁰

The equation of party with religion was assumed by the C.W.C., and it never subscribed to the notion that the union was an issue that transcended sectarian boundaries. Members remained highly suspicious of Catholics, though this was a low-intensity political sensitivity about 'Catholics' in the abstract and often broke down in social contexts. The constitution of the C.W.C. limited membership to 'Protestant men of good character holding constitutional and Conservative opinion'.²¹ Candidates for membership had to be proposed and seconded by members. Their names, addresses and occupations were posted on the club notice-board. Objections to proposed members were almost entirely on the grounds of their being Catholics and were carefully investigated.²² However, the very frequency of this sort of objection suggests that though members did not want Catholics to join, they were often unaware of the religious affiliation of workmates or neighbours they had proposed as members. Catholics did frequent the club, and though this was objected to, the constant recurrence of complaints about Catholics at the bar, the lotto games and the dances indicated that Catholics continued to frequent these occasions despite the complaints.²³

The most pressing need and interest of the Protestant working class in late nineteenth-century Dublin was employment. Within six months of the organisation of the C.W.C. a register had been opened for 'Conservative workingmen who are out of employment' and a meeting with both the Conservative Club and the Constitutional Club was demanded to present the views of the club on the matter.²⁴

¹⁶Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the people, 1880–1935* (Oxford, 1985), p. 13; Jackson, *Ulster party*, p. 196.

¹⁷Pugh, *Tories and the people*, pp 12, 215.

¹⁸C.W.C. Annual Report, 1883.

¹⁹C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 15 Oct., 4 Nov. 1904.

²⁰Jackson, *Ulster party*, pp 204–5.

²¹*Dublin City and County Conservative Workingmen's Club constitution and rules* (privately printed, n.p., n.d.), rule no. 1.

²²C.W.C. Letter Book, 7 Nov. 1891; C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 12 Dec. 1902, 12, 18 Aug. 1904, 9, 19 Mar. 1906.

²³C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 2 Nov. 1900, 3 Nov. 1905, 2 Oct. 1906.

²⁴C.W.C. Letter Book, 23 Feb. 1884.

Unemployment remained an issue, and complaints about Protestant contractors employing Catholics were frequently made by members.²⁵ The club itself always patronised 'Protestant houses' for its own supplies.²⁶ Dublin's Protestant working class as organised by the C.W.C. was naturally conservative, that is it readily accepted a conservative historical perspective which saw social conflict as artificially stimulated and unnecessary.²⁷ It also shared a deep suspicion of the motives and intentions of political opponents. The firm hand of Balfour which stayed 'murder, moonlight, boycotting and every species of disorder and outrage', together with his generous employment projects for the west, were contrasted with the 'wild and illusory language which the people of Ireland were accustomed to hear from those self-dubbed patriots the so-called "Nationalist" agitators'.²⁸

By the end of 1883 the C.W.C. had 318 members organised by a management committee and a political committee whose role was to 'keep a strict watch over all political matters, organise ward committees and generally look after parliamentary, municipal and poor law elections and secure the franchise for all Conservatives entitled thereto'.²⁹ In this the C.W.C. was part of the Conservative response, in an era of franchise reform, to the task of identifying and mobilising Tory voters in the whole of the United Kingdom.³⁰ The C.W.C. was, however, also a continuation in a tradition of popular Protestant organisation in Dublin city, a key area for maintaining the viability and integrity of Protestant opinion outside Ulster. Earlier organisations like the Aldermen of Skinners' Row and the Protestant Servants' Registration Office had elevated 'religious identity above class distinction'.³¹ There are striking similarities in the beginnings of the C.W.C. and of the Dublin Protestant Operatives' Association (D.P.O.A.) in the 1840s. Both sprang from a sense of crisis brought about by economic depression and in reaction to a liberalising of the franchise which threatened the Protestant ascendancy. Both sought the patronage of the Tory establishment, and both unquestioningly assumed an identity between the Protestant cause and the cause of the Conservative Party.³² However, while the D.P.O.A. remained a pressure group outside the establishment, the C.W.C. was largely a creation of that establishment and relied on it for patronage. Both the D.P.O.A. and the C.W.C. saw organisation as a function of sectarian solidarity and demanded Protestant cohesion in employment and patronage in return for Protestant cohesion at the ballot box. As in the manufacturing towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, so in Dublin: deference was expected to deliver the economic goods.³³ That this bargain was honoured by both sides in Belfast was due to the organisational and numerical strength of working-class Protestantism. That it was dishonoured in Dublin was

²⁵C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 19 Jan. 1885; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 11 Mar., 18 Aug. 1887, 23 Jan. 1889.

²⁶C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 28 Aug., 6 Sept. 1901.

²⁷McKenzie & Silver, *Angels in marble*, p. 137.

²⁸C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 29 Oct. 1891.

²⁹C.W.C. Annual Report, 1883.

³⁰Pugh, *Tories and the people*, p. 8.

³¹Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society*, pp. 287–8.

³²Hill, 'Protestant response', p. 47.

³³Patrick Joyce, *Work, society and politics: the culture of the factory in later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980), p. 93.

due to the fact that working-class demands for security of employment were being eclipsed by middle-class demands for security of property. The ascendancy of the middle classes in Dublin was perhaps inevitable as the city de-industrialised through the nineteenth century, but it was not achieved without resistance from a Protestant working class drawing on its own tradition of ultra-Protestant agitation. The tensions between the popular Protestantism and a more middle-class Conservatism became apparent in the social and recreational activities of the C.W.C. and spilled over in its political activism.

II

In its social activities the C.W.C. was strongly reminiscent of the Primrose League, though the benefits it offered its membership were typical of the workingmen's clubs then being established throughout Britain.³⁴ The Dublin Conservative Workingmen's Club was conceived as an agent for the improvement and education of the working class through providing for its membership 'the means of social intercourse, mental and moral improvement and rational recreation'.³⁵ This patrician ambition had constantly to accommodate itself to the more populist taste of the membership. The library featured popular classics of Dickens and Scott and, of course, Disraeli. Quality daily newspapers such as the *Irish Times* and the *Belfast Telegraph* were provided for members. Owing to demands from the members, however, more populist and Orange newspapers like the *Dublin Daily Express*, *Dublin Evening Mail* and Lindsay Crawford's *Irish Protestant* were kept. Popular weeklies like *Punch*, *Judy*, *John Bull* and *England* as well as trade journals were also subscribed to by the library.³⁶

The great festival of popular Toryism, Primrose Day, was celebrated by smoking concerts at which members performed a turn in a programme that featured sentimental parlour ballads and patriotic music-hall songs.³⁷ The summer season of social activities had as its high point a day excursion by chartered train or charabanc to a country estate. On the first excursion a party of four hundred adults and fifty children travelled to the demesne of Lord Cloncurry at Lyons Hazelhatch in Newcastle, County Dublin. A pleasant day was passed in athletic competition and in viewing the estate under the guidance of the land steward. Such days were intended to challenge the nationalist characterisation of the gentry as absentee and profligate rackrenters.³⁸ Although the 1886 excursion at the height of the first home rule crisis was particularly successful, later excursions suffered from declining interest and occasionally had to be cancelled owing to low numbers.³⁹

³⁴Pugh, *Tories and the people*, pp 8, 28–32.

³⁵*Dublin City and County Conservative Workingmen's Club constitution and rules*, rule no. 2.

³⁶C.W.C. Annual Report, 1888; C.W.C. Letter Book, 24 May 1893; C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 23 Apr., 30 July, 27 Oct. 1909, 10 June 1910.

³⁷C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 11 Mar. 1885, 6, 8 Apr. 1902; *Irish Times*, 3 Nov. 1885.

³⁸C.W.C. Letter Book, 7 May, 4–22 June 1886.

³⁹C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 24 May 1901, 7 July 1902, 21 Aug. 1903, 15 June 1906.

The intentions of the Conservative establishment, the original sponsors of the C.W.C., to 'improve' the working class were subverted by the unapologetic attachment of members to more popular forms of culture. For the majority of members social and recreational activities meant beer and billiards. Billiards were highly popular, though the game tended to erode the Protestant exclusiveness of the club through contact with other, mainly Catholic, workingmen's clubs. These contacts were never without opposition, usually from the political committee. Inter-club billiard tournaments between the C.W.C. and the Trade Hall, James Street Workmen's Club, York Street Workmen's Club, Wellington Quay Club and Inchicore Workmen's Club were popular though contentious events.⁴⁰ In 1904 discussions on the billiards tournament led to William Dobbs, a member of the political committee totally opposed to contact with Catholics, being ejected from the annual general meeting for unruly behaviour.⁴¹

This willingness by the members to socialise with Catholics should not, however, be interpreted to mean a relaxation of the C.W.C.'s Protestant exclusiveness. A proposal in 1903–4 by the management committee to affiliate with the other workingmen's clubs in the city to mount a joint response to the Registration of Clubs (Ireland) Bill was rejected by the members. Instead it was believed that by remaining aloof from any formal links with Catholic clubs they could use the influence of their patrons to overcome any problem caused by the legislation.⁴²

The realisation that the working class, far from being the revolutionary class, could be conservative and even reactionary, has resulted in the concept of the 'labour aristocracy'. According to this concept, some skilled workers, the natural leaders of a working-class movement, were neutralised by a marginal economic privilege and identified with capital rather than with labour.⁴³ The labour aristocracy adopted an ideology of respectability which emphasised sobriety, thrift and self-reliance, and, as the superior section of the working class, dominated the co-operatives, benefit societies and workmen's clubs.⁴⁴ This concept has been applied in Ireland to explain the rejection of revolutionary nationalism in favour of reactionary Unionism by the Protestant working class.⁴⁵ The skilled working-class and lower middle-class profile of the Protestant population of Dublin and of the membership of the C.W.C., along with the expectation that the club, as a political organisation, would attract articulate and self-consciously 'Protestant' workingmen, would strongly suggest that the Protestant working class of Dublin and of the C.W.C. would be of a sturdy bowler-hatted respectability. However, the Protestant workingmen of the club, while showing traits of respectability, were definitely a 'rough' working class. The club itself always insisted that it was a working-class club and dependent on the prosperity of workingmen for its success.⁴⁶ Financial

⁴⁰Ibid., 26 Feb. 1904, 24 Mar. 1905, 19 Mar. 1906.

⁴¹Ibid., 4 Mar. 1904.

⁴²Ibid., 3 Apr. 1903, 9, 13 May, 4, 11 Nov., 2, 9 Dec. 1904.

⁴³John Foster, *Class struggle and the Industrial Revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns* (London, 1974), pp 203–4.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp 237–8; Robert Q. Gray, *The labour aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976), pp 136–43; Geoffrey Crossick, *An artisan élite in Victorian society: Kentish London, 1840–1880* (London, 1978), pp 61, 134–64.

⁴⁵E. Strauss, *Irish nationalism and British democracy* (London, 1951), p. 234; Geoffrey Bell, *The Protestants of Ulster* (London, 1976), pp 17–23.

⁴⁶C.W.C. Letter Book, 12 May 1886, May 1888; *Irish Times*, 22 July, 3 Sept. 1883; C.W.C. Annual Report, 1886, 1892.

acumen and ability in managing money, virtues particularly associated with respectability, were markedly lacking in the running of the club. Discrepancies in accounts had emerged within a couple of years.⁴⁷ Although these recurring financial crises were occasionally, as in 1900, a result of dishonesty, they were more often a result of incompetence.⁴⁸ The most common cause of financial crises was the house steward supplying members with drink 'on the slate'. The dismissal of such a house steward was, not surprisingly, unpopular with the members.⁴⁹ One mark of respectability in the working class was an abhorrence of gambling and drink. Gambling, however, was common in the C.W.C. As well as a weekly lotto, the club regularly ran profitable sweepstakes on horse-races, an illegal practice which brought them under police notice.⁵⁰

The club did, however, function as a mutual aid and benefit society (albeit informally), one hallmark of sturdy self-sufficiency in working-class organisations. The frequency of benefit demands on the club underlines the insecurity of the working classes and the catastrophic consequences of unemployment and sudden death for even the Protestant working class, supposedly the most skilled and secure.⁵¹ Members who could not meet the expense of sudden death in their family turned to the club for assistance.⁵² The widows and children of deceased members were a frequent focus of aid. Usually a member of the management committee raised a collection from members, though sometimes money was paid direct from club funds.⁵³ Unemployment was another source of distress and demands for aid. Members out of work were excused their annual subscription, and if the club were organising a special event, they were also then excused payment.⁵⁴ Even unruly members were given assistance during periods of unemployment.⁵⁵ Where possible, any work to be done on the premises was given to out-of-work members.⁵⁶ Even when one member pocketed the bagatelle table funds and then looked for further assistance to tide him over a continuing period of unemployment, he was helped.⁵⁷ Emigrating members were given a gratuity on departure.⁵⁸

The mutual assistance the club provided illustrates a strong sense of social solidarity which was non-judgemental: even the reprobate were helped. The club never approached its patrons in these matters and displayed a self-reliance which could be accounted 'respectable'. However, the very spontaneity and disorganised aspect of the assistance suggests not so much a 'respectable' insurance as a 'rough' loyalty and camaraderie.

⁴⁷C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 1 Jan. 1885.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 13 July 1900, 20 June 1901, 14 Sept. 1906.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 1 Apr. 1885, 21 Apr. 1905.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 27 Apr., 11 May 1906.

⁵¹C. S. Andrews, *Dublin made me* (Dublin, 1979), p. 20.

⁵²C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 15 Jan. 1904.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1903, 14 Oct. 1904, 6 Feb., 22 Sept., 17 Nov. 1905.

⁵⁴C.W.C. Members' Subscriptions Book, 1923–5; C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 23 May 1902, 22 Sept., 17 Nov. 1905.

⁵⁵C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 4 Mar. 1904.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 18 Mar. 1904.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 14 Sept. 1906.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 4 Sept. 1904.

For Irish Protestantism, and in the ethos of the lower middle classes, the great symbol of the unregenerate life was drink. The annual accounts published in the C.W.C. reports and the weekly account that has survived for the period 1898–1900 show bar receipts at the turn of the century running at about £15 a week, between £700 and £800 a year. This indicated a considerable quantity of alcohol, somewhere between 900 and 1,800 pint bottles of stout per week or equivalent, reckoning a bottle at between 2*d.* and 4*d.* This made the club a particular target of the Church of Ireland Temperance Society, which in 1888 decided, in addition to its campaign for Sunday closing, to extend the campaign for temperance to the working classes.⁵⁹ The club at first ignored a resolution of censure against it which had been passed by the Dublin, Glendalough and Kildare branch of the Temperance Society, but, worried by the publicity the resolution attracted, looked to Paul Askin, a club patron and a justice of the peace, to refute the ‘false and malicious charges’.⁶⁰ The club was again attacked by the Rev. Professor Joseph Allen Galbraith in 1889 and later became a particular target of the Rev. Gilbert Mahaffy, a member of the Representative Church Body and the Dublin diocesan synod and a strong temperance campaigner.⁶¹

Dublin Protestantism was evangelical, and a Protestant *drinking* club that remained open on Good Friday and Easter Sunday and every Sunday of the year was an extreme provocation.⁶² Disorderly conduct outside the pub was frowned upon, particularly if it attracted the attention of the police.⁶³ Within the club, however, disorderly conduct, often with violence, was common and took up most of the time of the weekly management committee meetings. In an effort to prevent members ‘taking the law into their own hands’, all complaints were investigated. As a result, the minutes of these meetings are filled with graphic accounts of fights and disagreements.

In November 1887 six members, including the vice-chairman, Thomas May, were expelled after a riot in the club.⁶⁴ Fights and punishments on this scale were rare, however. Expulsion was also rare and usually only followed particularly serious aggression. Thus Christopher Burgess, who had served on previous management committees, was expelled for using ‘very obscene and filthy language’ and throwing a tumbler at another member in the bar.⁶⁵ An apology and a gesture of contrition were all that was usually demanded, though if none were forthcoming, a suspension of membership was usual. Thus, in a four-cornered fight in the bar in 1901, three of the belligerents were contrite and no further action was taken, but the fourth, a Mr Martin, said he would do the same again and ‘would drive any man’s head through the window who should interfere with him’, and got a suspension for his persistence.⁶⁶ Allegations of cheating at cards were extremely provocative

⁵⁹Church of Ireland Temperance Society Minutes, 1879–88 (Representative Church Body Library, Dublin, MS 146). ⁶⁰C.W.C. Letter Book, 30 Oct. 1888.

⁶¹C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 17 July 1889; C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 12 Sept. 1902, 23 Oct. 1908; *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 23 Oct. 1908.

⁶²C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 27 May 1904, 21 Apr., 31 July 1905, 2 Mar. 1906.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1904, 27 Jan., 25 Sept. 1905, 10 Sept. 1909, 15 Apr. 1910.

⁶⁴C.W.C. Letter Book, Nov. 1887.

⁶⁵C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 29 June 1900.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1901.

and sparked off serious fights.⁶⁷ The usual course was a warning from the committee to be of good conduct, so unless they were especially dangerous individuals whom it was seen fit to expel altogether from the club, the same 'hard cases' recur frequently. William Dobbs, an officer of the club, a political activist and the man who vehemently opposed any contact with Catholic clubs, was a persistent offender, though his aggression was usually verbal.⁶⁸ Another was Mr Purdie, who was reprimanded for attacking the house steward, cheating at cards, bad language, calling an English member 'a bloody English scut', molesting the house steward's wife 'in the absence of her husband', and calling the management committee 'a lot of swindlers', all within a fourteen-month period.⁶⁹ The aggression and hard drinking run counter to the ambitions of the club for 'mental and moral improvement and rational recreation'. While the C.W.C. was often 'respectable' in its rhetoric, the members must be placed at the 'rough' end of the spectrum, and this roughness and volatility they carried into their politics.

III

The chief vehicle for improving and enlightening the Conservative workingmen in the club was lectures. The first really successful public event of the club was a Primrose Day lecture in April 1884 at Molesworth Hall when Dunbar P. Barton spoke on 'The life and times of Lord Beaconsfield', one of Barton's favourite topics.⁷⁰ The propagandising role of the club faced two major problems: the apathy of the members and the dearth of willing speakers. The frequency and content of the lectures are a barometer of the sense of threat within the Dublin Protestant working class. As the first home rule crisis developed, lectures were frequent and highly political. Following the introduction of the Redistribution of Seats Bill, a paper was read on 'The Redistribution Bill and our duty in the future' by Mr H. R. Elliott in February 1885.⁷¹ The 1887 programme included Professor Aulad Ali of Trinity College, Dublin, on 'The evils of free trade'; William Moore of the College Philosophical Society on 'Lord Beaconsfield's Irish policy'; William Morrow, J.P., on 'The Primrose League'; and two lectures on Castlereagh, one by T. S. Moffat of Trinity College, and the other by Fitzgibbon Brunskill.⁷² The 1888 course of lectures continued in an unrelenting political and patriotic mode: 'Lord Salisbury'; 'Our national interests'; 'Irish loyalists and English parties or the duty and wisdom of self-reliance'; 'The taxation of Dublin'; 'The difficulties, disadvantages and dangers of home rule'.⁷³ Not surprisingly, the unrelentingly ponderous and propagandist

⁶⁷Ibid., 20 Sept. 1901, 12 Sept. 1902, 17 Mar. 1905.

⁶⁸Ibid., 15 Mar. 1901, 16 May, 7 Nov. 1902, 31 July, 7 Aug. 1903, 6 May 1904.

⁶⁹Ibid., 1 Nov. 1901, 2, 16, 23 May 1902, 13 Feb. 1903.

⁷⁰*Irish Times*, 21 May 1884. Barton recycled this speech to quell dissent when he was imposed on the mid-Armagh constituency in 1891 (Jackson, 'Unionist politics', p. 843).

⁷¹C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 4 Feb. 1885.

⁷²C.W.C. Letter Book, 3 Jan. 1887; C.W.C. Annual Report, 1887. William Moore was later one of the leaders in the reconstruction and militarisation of Ulster Unionism and ended his career as Northern Ireland lord chief justice.

⁷³C.W.C. Annual Report, 1888; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 27 Jan., 10 Feb. 1888.

nature of the lectures, once the crisis of home rule had passed, provoked a diminishing response. The political committee, which was responsible for the lectures, demanded a commitment that there would be an end to the apathy displayed by the members generally during the preceding course before organising the 1889 programme.⁷⁴ There are no records of any further course of lectures until the revival of the home rule question in 1892. The problem was that the political committee conceived of the lectures as educational and propagandist, whereas the members preferred to think of them as entertainment. Hence the popularity of historical themes like Paul Askin's lecture in 1892 on 'Queen Elizabeth and her times', which painted a vivid picture of the Spanish Armada and its fate and which proved so popular it was printed and sold at 3d. a copy.⁷⁵ What the members preferred in politics was the cut-and-thrust of debate and a good harangue. A proposal to start an active debating class within the club, in place of passive lectures, while not actually opposed, was not supported either.⁷⁶ In fact the amusement sub-committee explicitly equated lectures with entertainments in later years and proposed to provide 'entertainments such as debates' in 1904, though this innovation lost steam rather quickly. Paul Askin again lectured in 1893 on 'Alfred the Great and his times', but his proposed lecture in 1895 had to be cancelled, ostensibly because of the house steward's illness but really because the political committee was not confident that it could ensure good attendance.⁷⁷ Although the second home rule crisis inspired lectures on the theme of how well the working classes had done under six years of Unionist government, the problem of maintaining interest in the lecture course continued.⁷⁸ The political committee at first resisted the idea of lectures that were purely entertaining, but eventually it had to relent and allow lectures like 'From Cairo to Cape illustrated by limelight views', 'Ancient Egypt' and 'The riddle of the Sphinx'.⁷⁹ With the revival of an invigorating sense of crisis in 1906, the political committee again insisted on political themes.⁸⁰ C. L. Matheson, K.C., the Unionist candidate for the St Stephen's Green division in 1904, spoke on 'The present political situation'.⁸¹ As the sense of crisis grew during 1911 and 1912 and tension increased among Unionists the lectures became once again well-organised, well-attended and militant in tone. Captain James Craig, M.P. for East Down, spoke on the home rule crisis: 'We Unionists stand upon our ground but do resolve by the blessing of God rather to go out to meet our fate than to await it' — a theme calculated to set loyalist hearts alight.⁸²

The functions of constituency political organisations were raising finances, maintaining the electoral register, and the selection and running of election candidates. The Dublin C.W.C. was formed very much with registration work as its primary function, though it did later demand some part in the selection and running

⁷⁴C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 23 Jan. 1889.

⁷⁵C.W.C. Annual Report, 1892.

⁷⁶C.W.C. Letter Book, 27 Feb. 1886.

⁷⁷C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 1 Apr. 1895.

⁷⁸C.W.C. Annual Report, 1892.

⁷⁹C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 4 Apr. 1899, 2 July 1902, 19 Jan., 15 Feb., 22 Apr. 1904.

⁸⁰Ibid., 19 Feb. 1906.

⁸¹Ibid., 7 May 1907.

⁸²Ibid., 15, 30 Sept. 1911, 15 Jan. 1912.

of candidates. For Dublin the key franchise qualifications for registration battles were the householder, occupier, lodger and service franchises, and after 1884–5 registration became an important and quite lengthy procedure.⁸³ To introduce his name on the register, a potential occupier, householder, service or lodger voter had to demonstrate continuous residence for twelve months at a given address from July of one year to June of the next year. On this basis his name could be entered on the preliminary electoral list in the summer. If it survived running the gauntlet of the revision courts in the autumn, it would appear on the new register in December. This new register became effective in January of the next year. For most voters, therefore, eighteen months was the minimum period necessary to secure a vote; the average was claimed to be two years and one month. Votes were lost by moving out of a borough, or by switching from one qualification to another, for instance from householder to lodger, or by a lodger changing address, a common event in working-class urban areas and usually prompted by defaulting on rent. In English towns and cities up to thirty per cent of the population moved each year. Electoral success, therefore, was often determined by the ability of party agents in the registration courts.⁸⁴ In the first year of its operation the C.W.C. concentrated on contesting Nationalist lodger claims for the city wards.⁸⁵ The club accepted direction from the Conservative and Constitutional Clubs and concentrated on intelligence-gathering for the revision courts. The Constitutional Club provided information on the necessary qualifications for the poor law and municipal and parliamentary franchise. John Godley of the Constitutional Club gave a lengthy explanation of the recent changes in electoral law and how it affected behaviour at the polling booths and especially emphasised the necessity of not treating voters in any way.⁸⁶ The reference to 'behaviour' at the polling booths emphasises the gulf between the patrician ethos of the Constitutional Club and the robust electioneering traditions of the plebian, albeit Protestant, workingmen.

The wariness of the Constitutional Club in its treatment of the Conservative Workingmen's Club was due to a high priority attached by the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union (I.L.P.U.) to avoiding a sectarian identity, particularly after the failure of Irish Conservative negotiations over redistribution.⁸⁷ The Workingmen's Club, on the other hand, was part of an older tradition of Irish Toryism which found its identity in uncompromising Protestantism and 'no popery'. The core of the C.W.C. sense of identity was not Britishness, Conservatism or even Unionism, but Protestantism. The attempt by the I.L.P.U. gentry to form a non-sectarian 'Unionist' identity would be hampered by any association with the urban and popular tradition of Irish Toryism with its links to Orangeism and evangelical Protestantism, deriving its vigour and nature from the working classes.⁸⁸ The Dublin Protestant working class provided elections with sporadic riots during the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ As

⁸³Brian M. Walker, 'The Irish electorate, 1886–1915' in *J.H.S.*, xviii, no. 71 (Mar. 1973), pp 359–406.

⁸⁴Pugh, *Modern British politics*, p. 7; Neal Blewett, 'The franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885–1918' in *Past & Present*, no. 32 (1965), pp 27–56.

⁸⁵C.W.C. Annual Report, 1883.

⁸⁶*Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1885.

⁸⁷Jackson, *Ulster party*, p. 41.

⁸⁸Buckland, *Irish Unionism 1*, app. A, pp 302–8.

⁸⁹Hoppen, *Elections, politics & society*, pp 386–7.

the political temperature rose during the campaigns of 1885–6 the exuberant and volatile tradition of pre-1884 electioneering ‘behaviour’ asserted itself in party processions and riots. During the election campaign on the night of 28 November 1885 only the swift movement of police units prevented confrontations between rival gangs parading up and down between the Rotunda, where a loyalist rally was taking place, and College Green, where Trinity College students and Parnellites baited each other.⁹⁰ The C.W.C. had always made a point of draping the club in buntings and hanging a large Union Flag out its upper storey windows — an act of considerable audacity considering that a few doors down the street was the nationalist York Street Club. On the election night the members of the York Street Club, having demanded and having been refused the removal of the Union Flag, attacked and completely wrecked the club premises.⁹¹ The repair of the damage made considerable inroads on the club’s resources.⁹² As the vote on home rule drew near the club became a target of intimidatory displays by nationalist crowds and marching bands, and on the night of the vote the club appealed to the chief commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police for protection.⁹³ The club successfully rode out the storm of the home rule vote, but during the ensuing general election in July 1886 the club was at the centre of a riot which rivalled those of Belfast in its intensity if not its duration. Once again the C.W.C. premises were decorated with bunting and the large Union Flag was raised. This time, however, the C.W.C. was prepared. As a large crowd of nationalists milled around demanding the removal of the flag, they were trapped in a barrage of bottles, tumblers, bricks and cobbles from the upper windows of the club, many of them sustaining serious injuries, including fractured skulls and shoulders. As the riot escalated an attempt was made to set fire to the premises. William Cruikshank, a member of the political committee, opened up with revolver fire from the upper windows of the club, wounding several in the crowd. When the police regained control, everybody in the C.W.C. was arrested.⁹⁴

The gusto with which the members of the C.W.C. joined in the rioting underlines the gap between them and the respectable Unionists of the I.L.P.U. Both the nationalist crowd and the *Freeman’s Journal* treated the club as an extension of the Orange lodge which occupied neighbouring premises. The *Irish Times* was appalled. The *Dublin Daily Express*, on the other hand, supported the club fully and linked the C.W.C. and the local Orange hall directly. While the *Irish Times* gave great insight into the tone of the Unionist establishment, and was often more accurate in matters of fact and detail, the *Dublin Daily Express* undoubtedly gave a fuller and more complete reflection of the concerns, mood and tone of Dublin working-class Protestantism. The riots undoubtedly focused attention on the club, and the 1887 report noted that new members were joining in considerable numbers.⁹⁵ The membership was apparently quite exhilarated by the confrontation with the nationalists and celebrated the 1887 jubilee with gusto in a grand ‘jubilee ball’,

⁹⁰*Freeman’s Journal*, 30 Nov. 1885.

⁹¹Letter from William Merry, *Irish Times*, 30 Nov. 1885; C.W.C. Annual Report, 1886.

⁹²C.W.C. Annual Report, 1886; C.W.C. Letter Book, 19 Mar. 1886.

⁹³C.W.C. Letter Book, 6 June 1886.

⁹⁴This account is based on C.W.C. Annual Report, 1886; *Irish Times*, 6–10 July, 11–12 Aug. 1886; *Freeman’s Journal*; *Dublin Daily Express*.

⁹⁵C.W.C. Annual Report, 1887.

though they took the precaution of securing police protection for the duration of the celebrations.⁹⁶ The club was again the target for a rather casual attack during the 1888 St Stephen's Green by-election in which windows were smashed.⁹⁷ The club did make a point after 1886 of securing special police protection on any occasion which called for the 'decoration of the house', but the possibility of a more discreet display of loyalism was never contemplated.⁹⁸

The club, after the riots and after the 1886 defeat in the St Stephen's Green division, which it blamed on the 'apathy of Conservatives',⁹⁹ was more forceful in its politics and spearheaded an attempt to organise militant Protestant opinion in a new organisation. In a 'Manifesto to the Irish people' the C.W.C. proposed that the club would act as a co-ordinating body for all Protestant and loyalist organisations in Ireland. Loyalists were already organised but dispersed in many bodies such as Orange lodges, the Young Men's Christian Association and various party registration associations. The club therefore proposed a federation of loyalism under the name of the 'Union and Industries Defence Federation' because the defence of one was the defence of the other. The working class through the C.W.C. would co-ordinate direct action by loyalists because the time had arrived when 'loyal Dublin should hold the reins of a great system pitted against anarchy'.¹⁰⁰

The significance of the manifesto lay in its echoes of the traditional response of Protestant working-class loyalism to political crisis. This was usually a call to mass militancy rather than to electoral campaigning, a tradition which finally triumphed in Ulster in 1912. William Hastings, a member of the political committee, during his address to the C.W.C. said that organisation by loyalists would be more effective in discrediting Nationalist agitation than 'all the bayonets of Britain', thus expressing the readiness for militant action which was to be the objective of the federation.¹⁰¹ The militant language with its echoes of Orangeism was an embarrassment to the more constitutional Conservatives. The scheme of 'federalising' loyalism brought reminders of the Orange Order's organisation of anti-boycott brigades in 1880–81. This organisation had been an initiative of the York Street Orange lodge. It formed a committee to collect money for the purchase of arms and ammunition and to supply labour under the protection of armed men to boycott victims.¹⁰² The C.W.C., because it was so close to the Orange lodge on York Street, undoubtedly had a considerable shared membership. It is likely that the Conservative Party saw the manifesto as an infiltration by the Orange lodge of the workingmen's club. Athol J. Dudgeon, solicitor to the club, had been one of the honorary secretaries to the York Street Orange lodge emergency committee, and R. M. Fowler, an M.P. from whom the club sought support for the manifesto, had been London treasurer of the anti-boycotting committee.¹⁰³ When

⁹⁶Ibid.; C.W.C. Letter Book, 11 July 1887. ⁹⁷C.W.C. Letter Book, 10 May 1888.

⁹⁸C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 20 June, 19 Sept. 1902, 14 Jan. 1910.

⁹⁹C.W.C. Annual Report, 1886.

¹⁰⁰C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 2, 21, 26 Oct. 1887; *Dublin Daily Express*, 4, 10 Oct. 1887.

¹⁰¹C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 2 Oct. 1887; *Irish Times*, 4 Oct. 1887; *Dublin Daily Express*, 7 Nov. 1887.

¹⁰²*The state of Ireland, being sketches of the operation of the emergency committee of the Grand Lodge of Ireland* (Dublin, 1881).

¹⁰³Ibid.; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 16 Nov. 1887.

Cruikshank had been charged in connexion with the riots of July 1886, he had given the York Street Orange lodge as his address. The manifesto of the C.W.C.'s Union and Industries Defence Federation was directed in particular at the 4,000 Orangemen of Dublin.¹⁰⁴

The defeat of the 1886 home rule bill had been achieved by British supporters of the union, not by Irish efforts. Such a victory immediately generated fears of a decline in English interest in the plight of Irish Protestants. The necessity of stimulating the English people to 'keep them from going back on us' was an urgent problem.¹⁰⁵ Irish Toryism was much more than the Conservative Party. The Land League, with its mobilisation and organisation of the Catholic masses, was, even before the advent of home rule, installing a sense of crisis into Irish Protestantism. Home rule had created a platform upon which the defence of Irish Protestantism could be linked to the defence of imperial interests and hence enlist the support of the English people, but what made Irish Protestants turn towards English Conservatives was not affection for Conservatism but fear of Catholic tyranny. With the passing of the home rule crisis, southern Irish Protestants experienced no relief. Facing into the storm of the Plan of Campaign and fearful of Ulster exclusiveness, the response of the workingmen of the C.W.C. was to federate militant loyalism to unite 'every loyal man in Ireland, North, South, East and West . . . with a central mouthpiece in the metropolis of Ireland'.¹⁰⁶ The negative reaction to the manifesto is not surprising.¹⁰⁷ There was no support from the landlords, who were quite sanguine about Conservative intentions as embodied in the 1887 land act, and the proposed federation was still-born. Thereafter the 1887 political committee returned to the drudgery of trawling through the voters' lists.¹⁰⁸ No mention of the manifesto or the federation appears in the annual report for 1887.

The reorganisation of Irish Unionism was energetically promoted by the Irish Unionist Alliance in 1891. Within the urban centres of southern Unionism the reorganisation was based on the municipal wards.¹⁰⁹ The C.W.C., with its unrivalled access to local ward intelligence, could be invaluable in registration work. The secretary of the City of Dublin Unionist Registration Association (U.R.A.) who had formerly ignored the efforts of the club to get more actively involved in political work, now sent the political committee the registration lists for the lodger claims for the Mansion House ward.¹¹⁰ An intensive drive on registration in the South County Dublin and St Stephen's Green divisions in 1891 created the conditions in which the Unionists in Dublin could exploit the split in the Parnellites to win the seats in the 1892 election fought on the 1891 register.¹¹¹ The members of the club worked closely with the Conservative Party in supporting and canvassing for William Kenny in St Stephen's Green and Sir Henry Cochrane in College Green.¹¹² The

¹⁰⁴*Dublin Daily Express*, 14 Nov. 1887.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 12, 14 Nov. 1887.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 27 June 1887, 'C.W.C. meeting'.

¹⁰⁷C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 16, 25 Nov. 1887.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1888.

¹⁰⁹Ian d'Alton, 'Cork Unionism: its role in parliamentary and local elections, 1885–1914' in *Studia Hib.*, xv (1975), pp 143–65.

¹¹⁰C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 16 Sept. 1891.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 29 Oct., 21 Nov. 1891; C.W.C. Annual Report, 1892.

¹¹²C.W.C. Letter Book, 21 Nov. 1891; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 10 Feb., 19 Apr., 24 Aug. 1892.

municipal elections were also targeted by the political committee, and it could proudly record that although Mr Askin was unsuccessful in the Fitzwilliam ward 'owing to the supineness [*sic*] of Unionists', those members of the club resident in the ward 'pulled to a man'.¹¹³

After the 1892 election results William Merry of the political committee urged the members not to be dispirited but to redouble their efforts to prove to Great Britain that 'there exists in the city of Dublin a loyal band of Conservative workingmen ready to do battle for their God, their country and their Queen'.¹¹⁴ But having put so much effort into electioneering and so much emotional energy into maintaining the union, the rejection by the English electorate of that union by returning the Liberals seemed a betrayal; the English had 'gone back on them'. Irish Toryism had always had a suspicion of English commitment to Protestantism, the core of Irish Tory identity, hence the constant oscillation between a United Kingdom constitutional Unionism and a self-reliant militant Irish Toryism. These were not merely rhetorical extremes but reflected real tensions between modern and traditional patterns of activism. The York Street Orange lodge's organisation to fight the Land League, and the Conservative Workingmen's Club 'Union and Industries Defence Federation' had their roots in an older tradition of Protestant solidarity and reflected a fear of a Catholic peasant tyranny implicit in the levelling philosophy of the Land League. It was not simply that demonstrations were easier and more entertaining than electioneering; it was also that demonstrations reinforced self-sufficiency and solidarity and the belief that Irish Protestantism could defend itself should the English betray it.

The C.W.C. sent William Merry to the 1892 Ulster Convention, carrying a resolution of support from the club.¹¹⁵ At the convention for the other three provinces held in Dublin, among the representatives of Dublin city were William Kingsman, Frederick Guest, William Merry, Frederick French, Edward Vaughan, Joseph Christian and W. J. Doherty of the C.W.C. political committee.¹¹⁶ As opposition to home rule was mobilised in 1893 the C.W.C. co-operated not only with the Unionist Party but also with the Orange Order.¹¹⁷ The club organised a demonstration in opposition to home rule and drew up an address to Balfour.¹¹⁸ The second home rule crisis also brought the club into the centre of respectable Unionism when the Irish Unionist Alliance asked the club to add its name to a register of Irish Unionists.¹¹⁹ As the opposition to home rule in 1893 focused on the threat it represented to economic security Unionism developed an ideology which stressed the indissoluble link between union and economic development.¹²⁰ The resolution of the club congratulating the House of Lords on their rejection of the bill

¹¹³C.W.C. Annual Report, 1892.

¹¹⁴Ibid.; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 4 Jan. 1893.

¹¹⁵C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 19 May 1892; C.W.C. Annual Report, 1892.

¹¹⁶*The Unionist Convention for Provinces of Leinster, Munster, Connaught, June 1892: report of the proceedings, lists of delegates, etc.* (Dublin, 1892).

¹¹⁷C.W.C. Letter Book, 24 Feb., 3 Mar. 1893.

¹¹⁸C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 6 Mar. 1893; C.W.C. Letter Book, 24 Feb. 1893.

¹¹⁹C.W.C. Letter Book, 13 May 1893.

¹²⁰Peter Gibbon, *The origins of Ulster Unionism: the formation of popular Protestant politics and ideology in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Manchester, 1975), p. 136; Henry Patterson, *Class conflict and sectarianism: the Protestant working class and the Belfast labour movement, 1868–1920* (Belfast, 1980), p. 29.

said that as workmen the members of the club believed that home rule would be 'ruinous to the trade and commerce of Ireland and consequently to them'.¹²¹

Nevertheless, the fact remained that home rule had been defeated not by Irish efforts but at the last ditch by the House of Lords. Once again the C.W.C. was marginalised by the establishment in the Conservative U.R.A., who apparently did not agree that the club was an important factor in electioneering tactics.¹²² Participation by the Protestant working class of Dublin in Conservative Party structures was, even at the height of the first and second home rule crises, very limited. The club did, however, affiliate to the Unionist Clubs' Council, the Ulster-based popular political movement, sending Henry Sevenoaks, William Merry and James Stewart as representatives.¹²³ Despite the efforts of George Crothers of the political committee to generate interest in a debating class, apparently independent of outside speakers, the club's political activism was sapped by apathy and absenteeism.¹²⁴ The political committee was unable to provide a section for the 1894 annual report.¹²⁵ Having recorded no activities in the 1895 election, the political committee sent resolutions of congratulations to William Kenny in St Stephen's Green and Horace Plunkett in South County Dublin and then resolved to stand adjourned until some further occasion for business.¹²⁶

IV

After the fragmentation of the Parnellites and the defeat of the second home rule bill the politics of Irish loyalism moved from a merely negative opposition to home rule to a positive expression of popular economic and denominational concerns. The high points in the development of this diversity within northern Unionism, namely Russellism, the Independent Orange Order, the Ulster Clubs and the Ulster Unionist Council, are familiar and well mapped.¹²⁷ Threatened by 'Balfourian amelioration' which impartially treated Irish Protestants as just another colonial class, Dublin loyalists in their criticisms of the Conservative Party and its policies showed many affinities with northern loyalists, which suggests that popular loyalism in Dublin was qualitatively very similar to that in Belfast. In the eyes of Protestant loyalists, the Balfourian policy of constructive Unionism was a betrayal of the fundamental principle of the union; in their view, as Catholics rose, Protestants inevitably fell. In response to this betrayal, loyalism redirected its energies away from Westminster into the localities, leading in Ulster to a vigorous local Unionism which was unashamedly parochial, populist and responsive to working-class

¹²¹C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 9 Oct. 1893.

¹²²Ibid., 17 Feb., 10 Mar. 1894.

¹²³C.W.C. Letter Book, 6 July 1894.

¹²⁴C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 9 Oct. 1893, 14 Apr. 1894.

¹²⁵Ibid., 11 Feb. 1895.

¹²⁶Ibid., 4 June, 22 July 1895.

¹²⁷J. W. Boyle, 'The Belfast Protestant Association and the Independent Orange Order, 1901-10' in *I.H.S.*, xiii, no. 50 (Sept. 1962), pp 117-52; Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism 2: Ulster Unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1973); Alvin Jackson, 'Irish Unionism and the Russellite threat, 1894-1906' in *I.H.S.*, xxv, no. 100 (Nov. 1986), pp 376-404; idem, *Ulster party*; Patterson, *Class conflict*.

demands for sectarianism and solidarity in employment and patronage. Without home rule as an immediate issue, Unionism was utterly dependent on older Irish traditions of militant Protestantism. The crucial development within Irish Unionism was the organisation in Belfast of a consciously proletarian and urban loyalism within the skilled working class which could effectively challenge the Conservative Party and the landed gentry for the leadership of loyalism and thus force a realignment of forces within northern loyalism which gave due status to militant Protestant opinion.¹²⁸ The Dublin Protestant working class, unlike its Belfast counterpart, was in fact experiencing decline as the de-skilling and de-industrialisation of Dublin continued.¹²⁹ But whereas the Dublin Protestant working class could not articulate a class-based criticism of Conservative policy in Ireland, it could share with Belfast a critique based on reaffirmation of Protestant first principles. The primacy of Protestant ideology is the essential element of commonality between Dublin and Belfast.¹³⁰ The political struggles of Edwardian Ireland, usually described as a conflict of nationality, was experienced by contemporaries as a religious conflict. There is a need, as Henry Patterson suggests, to take the sectarian issue seriously.¹³¹ The first opportunity to give voice to loyalist discontent in Dublin was the general election of 1900. Horace Plunkett was driven from his South County Dublin parliamentary seat by a split vote created by a rival Unionist candidate, Francis Elrington Ball. The Unionist vote in the constituency encompassed a spectrum of militant Protestants and loyal Catholics and had been well husbanded by Plunkett. He had, however, become a target for alienated Protestant loyalism because of his support for the amnesty campaign and his stand on a Catholic university, but especially because he was identified with a Conservative government which had abandoned its friends to placate its enemies.¹³² Plunkett had already been targeted at the 12 July demonstration of the Dublin Orange lodge at which the Irish policy of the government had been condemned as a betrayal of the union and at which a resolution had been passed pledging 'by every means in our power only to support parliamentary candidates who will place Protestantism before party'.¹³³

The Dublin Orangemen then circulated a questionnaire to the candidates in the parliamentary constituencies. The questionnaire attempted to force the candidates to commit themselves to the defence of Protestantism, a tactic later adopted by the Belfast Protestant Association's Richard Braithwaite to expose 'sham Protestants'.¹³⁴ In early July the management committee of the C.W.C. was approached by the manager of the *Dublin Daily Express*, recently acquired by Lord Ardilaun, to circulate a memo among the members objecting to Plunkett's policies.¹³⁵ There the matter lay within the C.W.C. until the launch of Elrington Ball's rival candidature

¹²⁸Jackson, *Ulster party*, pp 222–9.

¹²⁹Maguire, 'Socio-economic analysis', pp 36–40.

¹³⁰Alvin Jackson, 'The failure of Unionism in Dublin, 1900' in *I.H.S.*, xxvi, no. 104 (Nov. 1989), pp 337–95.

¹³¹Henry Patterson 'Independent Orangeism and class conflict in Edwardian Belfast: a reinterpretation' in *R.I.A. Proc.*, lxxx (1980), sect. C, p. 4.

¹³²Jackson, 'Failure of Unionism', p. 380.

¹³³*Irish Times*, 13 July 1900.

¹³⁴Patterson, *Class conflict*, p. 60; Robert Lindsay Crawford and Richard Braithwaite, *Orangeism: its history and progress: a plea for first principles* (Dublin, 1904).

¹³⁵C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 6 July 1900.

in September, when the political committee of the club resolved to support Ball, 'a bona fide Unionist', condemning the 'vacillating' Plunkett.¹³⁶

The personal and ideological affinities between popular loyalism north and south are underlined by the activities of Robert Lindsay Crawford and M. J. F. McCarthy. Crawford was a leading ideologue in Dublin loyalism. He had led Orange opposition in Dublin to Plunkett's re-election.¹³⁷ Founder and editor of the *Irish Protestant and Church Review* newspaper, he had a particular animus against the growth of ritualistic practices in the Church of Ireland. McCarthy, a Catholic, had been a Parnellite home ruler in the 1880s, but by the new century had ceased to be one. In his many writings he analysed Ireland's economic backwardness as being due to the dominance of the Catholic clergy and their values, especially in education.¹³⁸ His rejection of home rule was because of the growth in sacerdotal autocracy and of a parasitical clergy; 'Rome rule' was already a problem, so home rule should not be added to it. Patterson credits McCarthy with being a powerful influence on Crawford, and with originating the ideology of Independent Orangeism as expounded in the 'Magheramorne manifesto'.¹³⁹ The 1904 by-election caused by the death of James McCann in the St Stephen's Green parliamentary division created the opportunity for Crawford and McCarthy to inject Independent Orangeism into Dublin Unionist politics.

During 1903–4 sectarian tension had been rising in Dublin, owing to the activities of the Catholic Association. The Catholic Association was organised by the Dominicans along with William Dennehy, editor of the *Irish Catholic* and *Independent* newspapers, both controlled by William Martin Murphy.¹⁴⁰ The objectives of the Catholic Association were to promote 'exclusive dealing' by Catholics, meaning a boycott of Protestant businesses and tradesmen. It pledged its informants to secrecy and sought information on employment practices in Protestant-owned businesses and in branches of the administration.¹⁴¹ The C.W.C. membership was very alarmed at the lethargy within loyalism in Dublin in the face of this sectarian threat to employment and offered its support to Crawford's militant Protestant Defence Association.¹⁴² For Crawford the activities of the Catholic Association were part and parcel of the attempt to exterminate Irish Protestantism which the perceived sacerdotal and reactionary policy of the Conservative government and ritualistic sympathisers in the Church of Ireland and Orange Order were aiding and abetting. It was as a revolt against this 'scandalous betrayal of Irish Protestants' that the Independent Orange Order was formed. One of the speakers brought out by the Protestant Defence Association to attack the Catholic Association was McCarthy.¹⁴³

It had been felt that the lack of a Unionist candidate for the city parliamentary seats had been a weakness in Dublin Unionism, and Frank Daly was happy to report to the political committee of the C.W.C. that the Dawson Street headquarters of

¹³⁶C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 18 Sept. 1900; *Irish Times*, 18 Sept. 1900.

¹³⁷Jackson, 'Failure of Unionism', p. 387.

¹³⁸Patterson, 'Independent Orangeism', p. 5.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, pp 2–3.

¹⁴⁰David W. Miller, *Church, state and nation in Ireland, 1898–1921* (Dublin, 1973), pp 110–11.

¹⁴¹*Irish Times*, 22 Dec. 1903.

¹⁴²C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 4, 15 Dec. 1903, 7 Jan. 1904.

¹⁴³Crawford & Braithwaite, *Orangeism*, p. 7.

the Unionist Party were 'active in their endeavours to secure a suitable candidate for St Stephen's Green Division' to be ready to contest the seat in the next general election.¹⁴⁴ However, the decision of the U.R.A. to mount a challenge against James McCann, a 'good' Nationalist, was strongly disapproved of by many of the most prominent Unionists, and the selection of Norris Goddard, a crown solicitor, led to a mass resignation of the wealthiest, including Jonathan Hogg, Sir J. Nutting, W. J. Goulding, J. T. Pim, F. W. Pim, J. Elrington Ball and J. W. Meredith. The resignations were explained away as being simply and solely a question of finance. The upkeep of the register cost £800 per annum, a cost borne by the wealthy few, who therefore felt entitled to call the tune. These wealthy few wanted a candidate capable of financing the work of registration and of clearing the accumulated debt of £600. Norris Goddard, they believed, was not the man.¹⁴⁵

It was at this point, late in November 1903, that McCarthy announced his intention of running in the St Stephen's Green constituency as a Unionist.¹⁴⁶ McCarthy had been an intending candidate since J. H. M. Campbell's defeat in the constituency in 1900. The decision of the U.R.A. to select not him but Goddard, which threatened to split the vote in the division, may have been resolved with time, but the sudden death of McCann in December 1903 turned a problem into a crisis. Goddard, because he held a crown position, was not eligible to stand for a parliamentary seat. The executive of the U.R.A. recommended C. L. Matheson, another lawyer, to contest the seat. This selection was endorsed by the full U.R.A. of the division at a general meeting. Matheson spoke at the general meeting, though what should have been a rousing launch to his campaign turned into a lament on the divisions within Unionism. He attacked McCarthy as a religious controversialist and crusader who could never gain Catholic Unionist votes and defined the real issues as the fiscal question which threatened to split Unionism, the university question, regarding which he held a fervent belief in non-sectarian education, and temperance.¹⁴⁷ McCarthy, on the other hand, had only one issue: 'whether Ireland was to be a priest-ridden land hastening to senility and decay with no prospect of regeneration'.¹⁴⁸ In this he had not only Lindsay Crawford's support but also the support of the earl of Charlemont, James Henderson of East Belfast, and of Edward Saunderson, M.P. for North Armagh, all prominent Orangemen and leaders of Ulster Unionism.¹⁴⁹ Saunderson came under a barrage of criticism from establishment Unionists in Dublin for opposing the U.R.A. candidate. Before beating a retreat, Saunderson added to the controversy by two letters which he sent to McCarthy, who published them. In these letters Saunderson unambiguously backed McCarthy and regretted that he was not getting the support of the U.R.A. 'in view of the excellent work you have done in the cause of religious liberty in Ireland in the past years'.¹⁵⁰ Because of his association with Independent Orangeism, McCarthy, not surprisingly, was condemned by Frank Donaldson of the Dublin Grand Orange Lodge, even though Donaldson was, as the *Irish Times* noted, a 'controversialist of the same ilk'.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 3 Nov. 1903.

¹⁴⁵*Dublin Daily Express*, 20 Nov. 1903; *Irish Times*, 20, 21 Nov., 9 Dec. 1903.

¹⁴⁶*Irish Times*, 23 Nov. 1903.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 27 Feb., 1 Mar. 1904; *Dublin Daily Express*, 1 Mar. 1904.

¹⁴⁸*Dublin Daily Express*, 2 Mar. 1904.

¹⁴⁹*Irish Times*, 7 Mar. 1904.

¹⁵⁰*Dublin Daily Express*, 1, 3 Mar. 1904.

¹⁵¹*Irish Times*, 1 Mar. 1904.

As Matheson accumulated support from the various ward associations and from leading Dublin Unionists, McCarthy was forced to withdraw from the contest.¹⁵² Within the C.W.C. a bitter dispute developed between supporters of McCarthy and of Matheson after a meeting in the club had been rigged to second the U.R.A. endorsement of Matheson. Matheson had attended the club and had appealed for its support. Frank Glover, a member of the U.R.A., then proposed that the C.W.C. endorse Matheson's candidature. Glover, however, was not entitled to put resolutions before the club, and the management committee were incensed at his insensitivity. But with the withdrawal of McCarthy, the club endorsed Matheson and pledged to work to secure his election.¹⁵³ On polling day the Nationalist L. A. Waldron defeated Matheson by a margin of 636 votes, virtually the same result as in the 1900 general election.¹⁵⁴

Following the McCarthy episode, the political committee of the C.W.C. was reorganised in July, William Dobbs, the veteran anti-Catholic campaigner, being dismissed from the chair. The committee pledged itself to assist the U.R.A. in the coming revision of the electoral register.¹⁵⁵ The U.R.A. meanwhile was in the process of remodelling itself. Now solvent, it aimed to consolidate all Unionist interests in the city, including the ward associations.¹⁵⁶ The municipal elections of 1905 were fought by a united and well-organised City of Dublin U.R.A. with no significant dissent.¹⁵⁷ It was therefore utterly demoralising when not one single Unionist candidate was returned in the city, though they swept the middle-class suburbs.¹⁵⁸ The success of the Unionists in the suburbs reflects the growth of the Unionist Municipal Reform Party. This party, part of the upsurge of localism within Irish Unionism, attempted to reshape Dublin municipal politics away from Conservative Party control. It was a middle-class revolt, led by Unionist councillors, which attempted to gain for the Protestant middle class the leadership of local politics by articulating an unswervingly local programme of value for money in municipal administration.¹⁵⁹

With the resurgence of home rule agitation after the Liberal victory in the 1906 general election, the parochialism of Irish Unionism led to a growing Ulsterisation of resistance to home rule, accompanied by an increasingly shrill southern Unionism demanding that its voice be also heard. The continuing commitment to mainstream party politics of southern Unionists during the third home rule crisis warrants investigation, particularly when compared with the militant activism of northern Unionists. Part of the explanation must lie in the dominance within Dublin Unionism of the middle classes and the failure of the Dublin Protestant working classes, unlike their Belfast counterparts, to assert their own interests and identity

¹⁵²Ibid., 5, 9 Mar. 1904.

¹⁵³*Dublin Daily Express*, 1 Mar. 1904; C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 4, 7, 11 Mar. 1904; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 11 Mar. 1904.

¹⁵⁴Brian M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 160, 164.

¹⁵⁵C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 20 May 1904; C.W.C. Political Committee Minutes, 25 June, 26 July 1904.

¹⁵⁶*Irish Times*, 20 May 1904.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 18 Jan. 1905.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹Maguire, 'Dublin Protestant working class', pp 158–76.

within Unionism. The Belfast Protestant working class turned the union into a labour question and succeeded where the C.W.C.'s 'Union and Industries Defence Federation' had failed. The commitment to mainstream party politics in southern Unionism also reflects a waning of the tradition of militant populist Protestantism in Dublin as it waxed in Belfast, underlined by Lindsay Crawford's migration to Belfast in 1906. But although it waned in Dublin, it did not cease to exist. A vigorous resolution condemning the dilution of the Protestant character of the formal declaration of accession to the throne was passed by a general meeting of the members of the C.W.C. on the succession of George V.¹⁶⁰ The distinction between southern and northern Unionism should therefore be understood as primarily a question of the balance of class and class forces. In Dublin the particular genius of the middle class for compromise eclipsed the working-class instinct for pan-Protestant banding.

V

With the end of the First World War the C.W.C. revived its activities. It is striking that there is no sense of panic or even crisis in the club records right through the period of the War of Independence or the Civil War. In the spring of 1919 the political committee organised a lecture on the theme of the connexion between Bolshevism and Sinn Féin.¹⁶¹ After the July 1921 truce a number of proposals to revert to the pre-curfew hours for committee meetings were passed. The only committee meetings cancelled were during the siege of the Four Courts, when no meetings were held 'owing to rebellion'. The C.W.C. had supported the strike called for 24 April 1922 by the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress as a protest against militarism, and had remained closed all day.¹⁶²

The club continued to seek the patronage of prominent Unionists. When the earl of Iveagh died, the committee asked the new earl to take his father's position as president of the club. Major Bryan Cooper, on becoming a T.D. in 1923, was asked to become vice-president of the club. As the negotiations which ended the Anglo-Irish War progressed, and the creation of the Free State was negotiated, the C.W.C. general meetings were dominated by the issue of the price of drink in the club.¹⁶³ Moreover, the committee reviewing 1922 reported that membership was satisfactory and that 'the work of the amusements committee have [*sic*] in the past year done a great deal to raise the status of the club, . . . our lady friends who heretofore looked upon our club as a mere drinking saloon now look forward with the greatest of pleasure to all our social functions'.¹⁶⁴ Protestantism remained a central part of the club's sense of identity, though it became less fervently evangelical. Complaints about the annual charabanc outings being held on a Sunday were voiced, and noted, but the outings continued to take place on the Sabbath. The usual complaints were voiced about laxity in allowing Catholics in the club as visitors.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 7 June 1910.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 20 Apr. 1919.

¹⁶²C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 29 July 1921, 21 Apr., 30 June 1922.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 27 July, 12 Aug. 1921, 26 Apr. 1922.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 31 Oct. 1923, 4 July 1924.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 16 Nov. 1923, 28 Nov. 1924, 24 Apr. 1925.

Politically the move to quietism was neither as dramatic nor as total as Patrick Buckland suggests, nor was the sense of betrayal amongst Dublin Unionists so complete that the emotional bond between them and Great Britain was irrevocably severed, as Buckland also suggests.¹⁶⁶ Bonar Law and Baldwin were sent telegrams of congratulation on the British general election victories of the Conservatives in 1922 and 1924.¹⁶⁷ General meetings of the whole club concluded with 'God save the king' until 1933.¹⁶⁸ The C.W.C. supported the Seanad campaign of Edward Coey Bigger and the Dáil campaign of John P. Good in Dublin.¹⁶⁹ These politicians illustrate the drift of the club away from its working-class origins. Bigger was a member of the independent group led by Senator Jameson;¹⁷⁰ Good stood, successfully, for the Businessmen's Party in the County Dublin constituency from 1923 to 1937.¹⁷¹ However, the meticulous registration work which had been the original *raison d'être* for the club was unnecessary after the post-war electoral reforms. Gradually the political function of the club was eclipsed by its social function, and after 1927 the political committee was, by annual resolution, deemed to be the officers of the management committee and soon faded out of existence.¹⁷² At the heart of this social function was a sense of social solidarity based on Protestantism and on the memory of the First World War. Armistice Day was always faithfully observed by flying the Union Flag, laying a wreath at the cenotaph, and by a social evening prolonged by a bar extension in the club.¹⁷³

Because the standard history of Irish Unionism by Patrick Buckland is in two thematic volumes, Irish Unionism has been treated as two distinct and different entities, northern and southern. In fact Irish Unionism north and south was qualitatively similar, and the difference that emerged in 1912 was a result of differences in the strength of their respective working classes. The Protestant working class of Belfast, an industrial proletariat, was capable of organising a mass movement of resistance to home rule which became the core of northern Unionism. The Dublin Protestant working class, however, was the remnant of an artisanate loosely organised and dispersed in their workplaces. The core of Dublin Unionism constituted the middle classes of the comfortable and respectable suburbs, who effectively eclipsed the militant Protestantism of the loyalist working classes, and for whom Protestantism was a retreat into social exclusiveness. The Protestant middle classes had indeed much to be grateful for. The 'Bolshevik' Sinn Féiners had been defeated, Ireland was still a royal dominion, and loss of privilege was cushioned by a régime that respected property.

¹⁶⁶Buckland, *Irish Unionism 1*, pp 272, 282.

¹⁶⁷C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 17 Nov. 1922, 31 Oct. 1924.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 27 July 1921, 14 Jan. 1922, 26 July 1933.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 11 Sept., 16 Oct. 1925, 3 June 1927.

¹⁷⁰Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its Senate: a study in contemporary politics* (London, 1940), pp 155, 428–9.

¹⁷¹Brian M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918–1992* (Dublin, 1992), p. 51.

¹⁷²C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 5 Jan. 1927, 11 Jan. 1928, 16 Jan. 1929, 15 Jan. 1930.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 6 Nov. 1925, 1, 8 Nov. 1929, 7 Nov. 1930, 6 Nov. 1931, 4 Nov. 1932, 27 Oct. 1933, 19 Oct. 1934.

What was the appeal of the C.W.C. to Dublin's Protestant working class? It was highly improbable that they would have voted Nationalist, hence the political activity was less to win allegiance than to fight apathy. But the club was shaped more by the demands of the membership than by the ambitions of its patrons, and those demands were headed by beer and billiards. Whatever the usefulness of the concept of a labour aristocracy as an explanatory mechanism, it clearly did not apply to Dublin's Protestant working class; the Unionist appeal was not based on a marginal economic privilege. Protestantism in Ireland was a 'total' ideology, and Irish Unionism, based on that total world-view, was more a feeling than a programme.¹⁷⁴

In 1927 the C.W.C. dropped the word 'workingmen's' from its title, it being the wish of the committee that it should cater for all social classes.¹⁷⁵ In 1935 a new rule was added that the membership of any member should be terminated in the event of his becoming a bankrupt,¹⁷⁶ which illustrates the distance the club had travelled from its inception in 1883, when it determined to make the Protestant workingman a power in the land.¹⁷⁷

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¹⁷⁴Jackson, 'Unionist politics', p. 866.

¹⁷⁵C.W.C. Management Committee Minutes, 23 Nov. 1927.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 24 Apr. 1935. The City and County of Dublin Conservative Workingmen's Club survives today as an amiable social venue, the Conservative Club, which forbids any song or discussion of a political nature.

¹⁷⁷My thanks go to Professor Mary Daly, Dr Alvin Jackson and Dr Fergus D'Arcy for their assistance and encouragement, and to the board of the Lord Edward Fitzgerald Memorial Bursary for a generous research grant.