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POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT

& THE IRISH, 1912–1921

William Murphy

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To C

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Contents

Abbreviations

AFIL	All-for-Ireland League
AOPB	Art Ó Briain Papers
BMH	Bureau of Military History
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CAI	Cork Archives Institute
CBS	Crime Branch Special
CE	*Cork Examiner*
CI	County Inspector
CO	Colonial Office
CPM	Cork Public Museum
CSO	Chief Secretary's Office
CSORP	Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers
DDA	Dublin Diocesan Archive
DE	Dáil Éireann
DIB	Dictionary of Irish Biography
DJ	Department of Justice
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
DT	Department of the Taoiseach
FJ	*Freeman's Journal*
FSS	Francis Sheehy Skeffington
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GOC	General Officer in Command
GPB	General Prisons Board
GPBDORA	General Prisons Board Defence of the Realm Act
GPBHS	General Prisons Board Hunger Strikers
GPBSF	General Prisons Board Suffragette Files
HO	Home Office
HSS	Hanna Sheehy Skeffington
IB	*Irish Bulletin*
IC	*Irish Citizen*
IGMR	Inspector General's Monthly Report
II	*Irish Independent*
ILPTUC	Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress
INAA	Irish National Aid Association
INRF	Irish National Relief Fund
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
IRPDF	Irish Republican Prisoners' Dependents Fund
ISDL	Irish Self-Determination League
IT	*Irish Times*
ITGWU	Irish Transport and General Workers Union
IVDF	Irish Volunteer Dependents Fund
IWFL	Irish Women's Franchise League

IWM	Imperial War Museum
KG	Kilmainham Gaol
MG	*Manchester Guardian*
MO	Medical Officer
NAI	National Archive of Ireland
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PCOM	Prison Commission
PDDÉ	Parliamentary Debates Dáil Éireann
PDSÉ	Parliamentary Debates Seanad Éireann
PORC	Prison Officers' Representative Council
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RJD	Rosamond Jacob Diaries
RMCCII	Report of Military Censor on Correspondence of Irish Internees
SFSCM	Sinn Féin Standing Committee Minutes
SSP	Sheehy Skeffington Papers
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TD	Teachta Dála (Member of Dáil Éireann)
UCDA	University College Dublin Archives
WO	War Office
WS	Witness Statement
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WSSI	Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland

Introduction

In Ireland, 1912 to 1921 were years of extraordinary political foment. Nationalists, female suffragists, and labour activists, impatient at their condition, all sought to hurry change through actions that brought them into conflict with other members of Irish society and with the state. One of the ways in which the state responded was to imprison or intern thousands of them in prisons and camps, in Ireland and in Britain. In his study of *Political Prisoners in India,* Ujjwal Kumar Singh wrote that 'Imprisonment became the major bulwark of the colonial state's strategy for harnessing recalcitrant subjects'[1] and this is also true of Ireland in these years. Some of the prisoners are famous, at least in Ireland. Terence MacSwiney and Thomas Ashe occupy central positions in the prison martyrology of Irish republican culture while Kilmainham Gaol has become one of the most popular tourist sites in Dublin since its restoration began in the 1960s, primarily as a monument to nationalist political prisoners.[2] Yet a comprehensive history of political imprisonment focused on these years does not exist. This book is an attempt to provide such a history.

The history of political imprisonment is a sparse, albeit growing, field. It remains startling, however, that this book has not been written before. In 1922 every member of the first Executive Council (cabinet) of the Irish Free State had been to prison during the preceding decade, several of them several times. More than that, imprisonment was one of the most common experiences shared by activists and suspected activists during this period. On 30 June 1921—just days before the declaration of the truce that ended the Irish War of Independence—6,129 men and women were either interned or imprisoned as a direct result of the unrest.[3] Using the tools of the historian to reconstruct, imagine, and assess the actions and experiences of the prisoners, but also those of their families, communities, and political movements, as well as the attitudes and reactions of the state and those charged with managing the prisoners, is a vital step towards a better understanding of Ireland in those years.

[1] Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

[2] Eric Zuelow, 'Enshrining Ireland's Nationalist History Inside Prison Walls: The Restoration of Kilmainham Jail', *Éire-Ireland*, 39:3&4 (2004), 180–201.

[3] *Manchester Guardian* (*MG*), 1 July 1921.

The historiographies of the Irish revolution, Irish female suffragism, and Irish labour have not ignored political imprisonment. Given the extent to which imprisonment was a feature of activists' lives, credible histories of these movements could not entirely disregard the issue. Many of the key texts on the revolution to emerge over the past thirty-five years have, to a greater or lesser extent, incorporated information or insights relevant to political prisoners and imprisonment. For example, recent biographical studies have cast significant light on the role of imprisonment in the development of individual careers.[4] The literature on Frongoch internment camp, where almost 2,000 suspected rebels were held in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, includes two popular histories and a scholarly chapter by Seán McConville in his *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848–1922*.[5] That book is by far the best on Irish political prisoners published to date. McConville's chief purpose was an analysis of the reactions of the Home Office and the Commissioners of Prisons in England (and to a lesser extent the War Office) to the problems posed by Irish political prisoners; a task carried out to illuminating effect. On the other hand, prisons and camps in Ireland were not McConville's concern and the voices of prisoners, though certainly not absent, were muffled by his reliance on official sources. Further, the subtle relationship between political imprisonment and political radicalism in Ireland, the way in which political imprisonment both reflected and affected the rhythm of revolution, has yet to be thoroughly delineated.

It is not immediately clear why this should be so. In a study of imprisonment in colonial Vietnam, Peter Zinoman pondered the neglect of his subject and suggested that it may be 'that the capacity of prison walls to convey an illusion of isolation and separation from the wider community' had 'discouraged historical investigations of political developments within colonial prisons'.[6] This seems an improbable explanation in the Irish case. A false sense of familiarity rather than an imposing distance seems a more likely answer. Stories of particular hunger strikes and prison escapes are embedded in the collective popular memory of the revolutionary period. In such circumstances, even those of us who should know better sometimes believe we understand a subject when, in truth, we have formed that impression through the unfocused assimilation of the fragments to hand.

Another factor contributing to the subject's neglect may be the sources: not their scarcity but the sheer scattered and disparate volume of these, and their sometimes difficult nature. The historian of Irish political prisoners of this period can find the type of sources that historians tend to privilege—conveniently archived institutional records. The files of the British Home Office, War Office, and Colonial

[4] Margaret Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: A Life* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1997); David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland's Irish Revolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003); Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (London: MacMillan, 2005); Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[5] Seán O'Mahony, *Frongoch: University of Revolution* (Dublin: FDR Teoranta, 1987); Lyn Ebenezer, *Fron-goch and the Birth of the IRA* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2005); Seán McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848–1922: Theatres of War* (London: Routledge, 2003), 466–97.

[6] Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 3.

Office are eminently accessible and invaluable. The relevant Irish administrative and institutional records are admittedly more awkward to use. Although accessible, the overwhelming majority of the records of the General Prisons Board of Ireland and the Chief Secretary of Ireland's Office has not been catalogued by an archivist, and must be worked through box by raw box. Then, if one is not satisfied with an administrative history of political imprisonment, one must move on to the thousands of letters sent in and out of prisons and camps that are preserved in tens of collections in various repositories. In this book these sources are augmented by material from hundreds of first-hand accounts (including witness statements from the Bureau of Military History, collected between 1947 and 1957 and released in 2003), by diaries, and by published memoirs (including underutilized autobiographies in the Irish language). It is primarily through these letters and first-hand accounts that this book sets out to achieve Nikolaus Wachsmann's ideal of weaving 'many individual experiences . . . into the narrative' so as to avoid presenting the prisoners 'as a faceless and nameless mass'.[7] In this way the book seeks to detail what it was like to be a political prisoner; how it smelled, tasted, and felt. Neither are the staff of the bureaucracies and institutions that tried to manage these prisoners nor the members of the relevant political movements presented here as undifferentiated. In ensuring that this did not happen, evidence was mined from the papers of the British and Irish executives (colonial and rebel), political parties, prisoners' support groups, politicians, soldiers, civil servants, and various other contemporary observers and busy-bodies. Parliamentary debates, newspapers, propaganda, and censors' records offered further, alternative perspectives.

The book is organized into eleven chapters that broadly bring the reader through the story of political imprisonment in the period from 1912 to 1921 in chronological order. This approach is a logical consequence of the neglected nature of the subject. The book offers assessment and analysis, but the establishment of a clear narrative of the developing conflicts in Irish prisons and camps was necessary. In his study of *The Political Criminal*, Stephen Schafer described his subjects as 'methodological kleptomaniacs'.[8] This is certainly true of the prisoners studied here and a chronological approach emphasizes this. It also facilitates the making of another key argument: that aggressive revolution was launched in the prisons of Ireland before it was embarked upon in other phases of Irish life.

The study opens in 1912 because this was the year in which suffragette prison protest, and with it a new approach to political imprisonment, began in Ireland. It explores only those prisoners incarcerated prior to the signing of the Treaty of December 1921 that ended British rule in the twenty-six counties that became the Irish Free State. This ensures that it is a coherent study of the treatment of Irish political prisoners by the British government, including the British government in Ireland. The comparatively narrow chronological span was also necessary if the

[7] Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1–2.

[8] Stephen Schafer, *The Political Criminal: The Problem of Morality and Crime* (New York: Free Press, 1974), 5.

many-faceted story of political imprisonment in the period was to be established in the desired detail. There are disadvantages to stopping with the Treaty. The study does not explore the prisoners of the Irish Civil War (1922–3) or subsequent groups of political prisoners held in the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland), Northern Ireland, or Britain; fortunately some of these prisoners have received attention and further work is ongoing.[9]

All of this, of course, raises an obvious question: what is a political prisoner? It is a question to which there is no single answer. All breaking of the law could be construed as a form of resistance to power and therefore political, but this is not a practical working definition. It simply renders the category redundant. Individuals are often described as political prisoners because the state has been politically motivated when incarcerating them. Frequently, states have facilitated such actions by the enactment of special laws or powers. Many, but not all, of the prisoners discussed here were imprisoned for such purposes and under such laws. Alternatively, advocates have attempted to define political imprisonment by ascribing positive values to the prisoner. Acts inspired by political rather than criminal motivations, they argue, are of a different, moral, nature; the perpetrators, they insist, are of a superior character and therefore deserve to be treated more favourably than those described as 'common criminals'. This argument was made on behalf of many of the prisoners discussed in this book, but it is one that is obviously problematic in its subjectivity.

Governments and jailers have never enthusiastically embraced the concept. States prefer to deprive political malcontents of legitimacy and therefore prefer to deny that their actions are anything but criminal, while jailers, who have to manage the institutions, dislike the disruption that such distinctions bring. Even when they acknowledge, implicitly or explicitly, that some prisoners are political, states often draw distinctions between prisoners inspired by the same cause on the basis of the type of crime that they have committed. So, for instance, some states have afforded political activists convicted of non-violent crime privileged regimes while denying these to activists convicted of violent crimes.[10] Nonetheless, and despite the objections of the state, the label 'political prisoner'—if not always a developed concept or status in law—has persisted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth

[9] David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (London: HarperCollins, 1987); Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); George Sweeney, 'Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxviii (1993), 421–37; Denise Kleinrichert, *Republican Internment and the Prison Ship Argenta 1922* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2001); Kieran McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Anna Bryson (ed.), *The Insider: The Belfast Prison Diaries of Eamonn Boyce 1956–1962* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2007); John Maguire, *IRA Internments and the Irish Government: Subversives and the State 1939–1962* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008); Ruán O'Donnell, *Special Category: The IRA in English Prisons Volume One: 1968–1978* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011); Mary Rogan, *Prison Policy in Ireland: Politics, Penal-Welfarism and Political Imprisonment* (London: Routledge, 2011); F. Stuart Ross, *Smashing H-Block: The Rise and Fall of the Popular Campaign against Criminalization, 1976–1982* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

[10] For an informative discussion of these debates and the relevant literature see McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 1–7.

centuries. And while the label has existed there have been men and women who have claimed to embody it. The concept is a particularly potent one when prisoners (or their supporters) can generate enough pressure to force the state to take notice and recognize (if only tacitly) their difference, most often, though not always, by attracting sufficient public attention. Then, even if a separate penal status is still denied, the prisoner has become a political prisoner because he or she has acquired political power in and through the prison. It is very rare that prisoners (irrespective of their motivations) receive recognition as political unless their incarceration involves this potential for political effect. For Padraic Kenney, it is a greater awareness of this capacity to make prisons sites of politics, and an increased intent to do so, that distinguishes the modern 'political prisoner' from earlier 'imprisoned politicals'. This modern 'political prisoner', whose origins Kenney traces to 'the half-century before World War I', stands in contrast to the 'imprisoned political' because he or she, Kenney argues, 'imposes his or her politics onto the prison and uses the institution as an instrument of political activity'.[11]

With the emergence of modern prisons in Britain and Ireland from the late eighteenth century, and modern prison systems a little later, incarceration became a typical rather than an atypical punishment for crime. Interpretations of many aspects of this development vary, but scholars agree that the nature of imprisonment changed as those incarcerated were subjected to ever more homogenous bodies of rules, designed to control, segregate, and (perhaps) reform them.[12] In Britain and Ireland as in the rest of Europe and beyond, these new large penal institutions became important facilities for the control of political troublemakers. The setting aside of special, often 'notorious', prisons for this purpose, which happened in many countries, implied an acknowledgement that political prisoners were different, and in some states the law openly recognized this.[13] In Britain and Ireland, however, the law did not make explicit provision for the separate or

[11] Padraic Kenney, '"I felt a kind of pleasure in seeing them treat us brutally." The Emergence of the Political Prisoner, 1865–1910', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54:4 (2012), 865–7.

[12] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London; Allen Lane, 1977); Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750–1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Seán McConville, *A History of English Prison Administration: Volume 1 1750–1877* (London: Routledge, 1981); David Garland, *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies* (Aldershot: Gower, 1985); Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (eds), *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: The Making of the Irish Convict System* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999); Alyson Brown, *English Society and the Prison: Time, Culture and Politics in the Development of the Modern Prison 1850–1920* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003); Clive Emsley, *Crime, Police, & Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[13] Robert J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1983), 80–1; Barton L. Ingraham, *Political Crime in Europe: A Comparative Study of France, Germany and England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 124–5 and 144–5; Carlos Aguirre, 'Prisons and Prisoners in Modernising Latin America (1800–1940)' in Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (eds), *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), 42; Kenney, 'Emergence of the Political Prisoner', 870.

ameliorated treatment of political prisoners,[14] as the idea of the 'political offender' struggled to triumph over the ideals of uniformity and regulation which underpinned the developing prison systems. Barton L. Ingraham has argued that there was an 'informal adoption of a policy of leniency with respect to the political offender' in Britain and Ireland,[15] and the clearest evidence of this is the emergence in English law of a new class of prisoners, 'first-class misdemeanants', under the Prisons Act, 1840. Although this was a direct response to controversy surrounding the prison treatment of Chartists, the Act did not clearly define the grounds upon which a prisoner might be deemed first-class (and therefore entitled to an ameliorated regime) and did not mention political motivation as a reason.[16] In 1843 a model regime for first-class misdemeanants was drawn up; nevertheless, uncertainty continued as to who was entitled to ameliorations and what those ameliorations should be.[17]

By then penal reform had advanced in Ireland with several acts that 'brought a significant extension of central authority, regulation and inspection', but stopped short of creating a centralized or homogenous system.[18] When, in 1844, Daniel O'Connell and seven other prominent members of the Repeal Association were imprisoned at Richmond penitentiary, Dublin, the Lord Lieutenant forwarded a copy of the newly minted English model rules for first-class misdemeanants to that institution's board.[19] The regime they adopted trespassed far beyond those guidelines and has justifiably been described as 'martyrdom-de-luxe'.[20] There was then little clarity, and consequently little consistency, in this area, but it is clear that prisoners were more likely to achieve privileged conditions (whether under first-class misdemeanant regimes or otherwise) if their political motivations were combined with status, influence, or notoriety.

Scholars have devoted more attention to Irish political prisoners in the second half of the nineteenth century.[21] Again prisoners' treatment varied, but on the whole it was harsher than earlier in the century, particularly in the English prison system. As that system became more centralized and a class of prison administrators emerged whose job it was to protect the regulations, there emerged a drive towards what Martin Wiener has characterized as 'certainty, uniformity, and severity' in the years 1835–65.[22] This was perhaps less marked in Ireland, although the

[14] Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, *A History of English Criminal Law, 5: The Emergence of Penal Law* (London: Stevens, 1986), 461.

[15] Ingraham, *Political Crime*, 165.

[16] An Act to amend the Act for the better ordering of Prisons, 1840, 3&4 Victoria.

[17] Seán McConville, *English Local Prisons, 1860–1900: Next Only to Death* (London: Routledge, 1995), 370; Radzinowicz and Hood, *English Criminal Law, 5*, 413.

[18] Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline*, 49.

[19] Earl de Grey to Board of Richmond Penitentiary, 5 June 1844, G8278/44, CSORP.

[20] Oliver MacDonagh, *The Emancipist* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 247.

[21] McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*; Beverly A. Smith, 'The Irish Prison System, 1854–1914: Prisons and Political Prisoners' (PhD, Miami University, 1977); Beverly A. Smith, 'Irish Prison Doctors—Men in the Middle, 1865–90', *Medical History*, xxvi (1982), 371–94; Beverly A. Smith, 'William O'Brien, Mr Balfour's Prisoner', *Éire-Ireland*, xviii (1983), 72–96; Laurence M. Geary, 'John Mandeville and the Irish Crimes Act of 1887', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv (1987), 358–75.

[22] Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, 309.

1850s also saw the construction there of the legal and administrative framework of a modern prison system,[23] while 1853 saw the introduction to both English and Irish law of the severe regime of penal servitude.[24]

It was in these environments that a series of Irish Fenian convicts (including Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa and Michael Davitt) and dynamitard convicts (including John Daly and Tom Clarke) found themselves in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. At the time, these men and their supporters contended that not only was their treatment not ameliorated, it was 'exceptionally worse than the worst criminals of society'.[25] While in no way minimizing the harsh regime that these prisoners experienced, and acknowledging that some (particularly O'Donovan Rossa) were subjected to unusually ill treatment, Seán McConville has argued in convincing detail that in general the Fenian prisoners were not singled out for exceptional punishment.[26] According to McConville, the Fenian convicts of the 1860s eventually achieved a *de facto* 'political status—niggardly, extracted piecemeal, and with some suffering—but political none the less', whereas in the case of the dynamitards 'the full crushing experience of convict life awaited' because they were 'without the restraint of policy, friends and influence'.[27] Of the men in these groups O'Donovan Rossa was unusual in his active and persistent protest while in prison, placing him in the vanguard of the evolution of political imprisonment.[28] Most of them tended instead to rely on amnesty campaigns outside to advocate on their behalf.

In Irish prisons the Fenian convicts of the 1860s were subjected to the full rigours of penal servitude prior to their transfer to Britain. Again, in 1887, in response to the organized agrarian protest of the 'plan of campaign', the authorities in Ireland not only introduced a Coercion Act, but Arthur Balfour, the Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1887 to 1891, determined that those convicted should 'be treated in every respect like ordinary prisoners'.[29] Just as the Fenians and the dynamitards had, the 'plan of campaign' prisoners adopted the pose of martyr with some credibility[30] and again the publicity dividend was considerable.[31] Although these prisoners did not pursue a coordinated policy of disobedience, over the next several years some individuals—including William O'Brien, David Sheehy, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and John Mandeville—adopted disruptive, publicity-seeking tactics such as the refusal to wear prison clothes, to perform menial tasks, or to associate with criminals at exercise.[32] Balfour acknowledged that at one level issues such as the wearing of prison clothes seemed 'absurdly trifling', but he did not want

[23] Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline*, 95–130.
[24] McConville, *English Local Prisons, 1860–1900*, 385–92; Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline*, 95.
[25] Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, *Irish Rebels in English Prisons* (New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1882), 73.
[26] McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, 140–213 and 361–404.
[27] McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, 194 and 361.
[28] Kenney, 'Emergence of the Political Prisoner', 873–8.
[29] Smith, 'William O'Brien', 75.
[30] William O'Brien, *Recollections* (London: Macmillan & Company, 1905), 393.
[31] *The Times*, 7 February 1889.
[32] Smith, 'William O'Brien', 93; David Sheehy, *Prison Papers* (Dublin: Weldrick Brothers, 1888); Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Land War in Ireland* (London: Swift, 1912).

to concede even 'the smallest triumph to the wrong side'.[33] Eventually, he made concessions as worries grew about the consequences for the prisoners' health of persistent punishments following infractions of the rules. Despite this, the authorities suffered a significant propaganda setback when Mandeville died shortly after release from Tullamore prison and an inquest jury ascribed his death to 'the brutal and unjustifiable treatment he received'.[34]

Maintaining regimes that strictly conformed to the prison rules proved more difficult in Irish prisons, for the obvious reason that staff members were often sympathetic to Irish political prisoners.[35] In addition, Balfour's approach placed normally loyal prison staff in extraordinarily difficult positions. Prison doctors, especially, became 'men in the middle', empowered to ameliorate the prisoners' regimes on health grounds but aware that they would attract the ire of their superiors if they did this too readily, while they would come under tremendous attack from the prisoners' supporters if they did not. James Ridley, the doctor who had overseen Mandeville's regime in Tullamore, failed to find an answer and committed suicide during the inquest.[36] By March 1889 the government had retreated, introducing a new regulation that gave the General Prisons Board (GPB) discretion to exempt prisoners who so desired from having to wear prison clothes and from having their hair clipped. As with the introduction of the first-class misdemeanant category, although the context for this regulation was the protests of political prisoners (and their advocates), the existence of such a being was not acknowledged in the new regulation.[37]

When prisoners were interned without trial, rather than convicted, the authorities did acknowledge this by affording them a greatly ameliorated regime. For example, under the direction of William Forster, Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1880 to 1882, the GPB—which had been established in 1878—afforded an extraordinarily liberal regime to 995 Land League activists interned in twelve prisons between March 1881 and September 1882.[38] Martyrdom-de-luxe was attainable once more, leading to the apparently perverse protest of E.J. Hoare that it 'was no fault of the men arrested . . . that their imprisonment was not so irksome or severe as that which most Irish political prisoners before their time had to experience'.[39] Under these conditions, which included free association, it seemed to William O'Brien that the prisons—in a phrase that would become a cliché—became 'so many colleges of a National University'.[40]

The Prisons Act of 1877, which established the GPB, did provide for the category of first-class misdemeanants while restricting it to all those convicted of sedition, seditious libel, or contempt of court.[41] This remained the only class in Irish penal

[33] Geary, 'John Mandeville', 364.
[34] *Mandeville Inquest: Copy of Transcript of Shorthand Notes of Proceedings* (1888).
[35] O'Donovan Rossa, *Irish Rebels*, 73; Geary, 'John Mandeville', 363–6.
[36] Smith, 'Irish Prison Doctors', 371–94.
[37] *Eleventh Report of the General Prisons Board of Ireland, 1888–89* (1889), 7–8.
[38] *Fourth Report of the General Prisons Board of Ireland, 1881–2* (1882), 5–6.
[39] E.J. Hoare, *The Legion of Honour* (Dublin; John F. Fowler, 1883), 25.
[40] O'Brien, *Recollections*, 393–4.
[41] An Act to Amend the law relating to Prisons in Ireland, 1877, 40&41 Victoria.

law that catered for those convicts who might be regarded as political prisoners. In practice it facilitated the separation and better treatment of very limited numbers of respectable people who had committed respectable crimes; these rare prisoners were almost always men of status and influence, often MPs. An example is P.A. McHugh, a journalist MP for North Leitrim, jailed for six months in 1901 for seditious libel. He wrote from Kilmainham Gaol to John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, that 'it would be quite impossible to make me more comfortable than I am'.[42]

As the printed word became more prevalent and accessible in the second half of the nineteenth century, political prisoners and their experiences occupied an impressive share of this. In the case of Irish political prisoners this took the form of newspaper campaigns, government reports, propagandistic pamphlets and tracts, fictionalized representations, and prison memoirs.[43] The most influential of these were prison memoirs. Indeed, David Arnold's comments on India after 1890, where it 'became as much a nationalist convention for political prisoners to write their prison memoirs as it was a patriotic duty for newspaper editors and book publishers to put them into print', could apply to Ireland, but from an earlier date.[44]

In this way prison was transformed into a pulpit, a soapbox, a stage and, providing one survived, time served as a political prisoner became an important qualification for public life in Ireland, as in many European countries.[45] Political prisoners came to be seen as models of patriotic self-sacrifice. Their prison records, alone or in large part, saw O'Donovan Rossa[46] and John Daly[47] elected to parliament, while Michael Davitt's record was crucial to his emergence as a significant player on the Irish political scene.[48] The lesson was not lost on ambitious men. By early March 1889 twenty-four sitting Irish MPs had been imprisoned at least once,[49] and this trend continued. In 1912 James Swift MacNeill told parliament that twenty-two sitting Irish MPs had been imprisoned at some point during their careers.[50]

Factions used amnesty campaigns or campaigns to improve the conditions of political prisoners to boost their profile, mobilize the Irish public, or demonstrate their credentials to particular constituencies.[51] Isaac Butt's presidency of the Amnesty Association, established in 1869 to campaign for the release of

[42] McHugh to Redmond, 18 May 1901, Ms15,203(6), John Redmond Papers.

[43] William Murphy, 'Narratives of Confinement: Fenians, Prisons and Writing 1867–1916' in Fearghal McGarry and James McConnel (eds), *The Black Hand of Republicanism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 160–78.

[44] David Arnold, 'The Self and the Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories' in David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (eds), *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 30.

[45] Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 87.

[46] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland 1832–1885* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 465.

[47] McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, 392.

[48] Francis Sheehy Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader* (London: Unwin, 1908), 57.

[49] Smith, *Irish Prison System*, 304.

[50] *Hansard 5 (commons)*, xxxiv, 997, 26 February 1912.

[51] McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, 214–75; Matthew Kelly, '"Parnell's Old Brigade": the Redmondite-Fenian Nexus in the 1890s', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxiii (2002), 209–32.

Fenian prisoners, provided him with the base from which to launch the Home Government Association in 1870 and to become an MP in 1871.[52] In 1892, the IRB combined with the Parnellite wing of the sundered Irish Party to establish the Irish National Amnesty Association. Through this they pressed for the release of dynamitard prisoners while vying to boost their respective popularity and to ensure that neither side claimed absolute ownership of the prisoner issue.[53] By 1912, of course, prisoners' releases were well established as opportunities not only for raucous celebration, but also for political demonstrations.[54]

It is evident then that political imprisonment did not arrive in Ireland in 1912, innocent and mewling. Again and again, as we shall see, patterns appeared in the twentieth century that were shadows or amplifications of patterns established during the nineteenth century. The prisoners who are the focus of this study adapted the lessons of earlier generations. They also borrowed from elsewhere and developed new methods of exploiting political imprisonment. In a study of prisoner resistance in South Africa, Fran Lisa Buntman argued that 'political imprisonment plays a vital role in shaping resistance movements and their methods',[55] and this is true of Ireland in the period under study here. For a revolutionary generation, imprisonment became one of the fundamental ways in which they identified themselves as rebels and demonstrated their resistance. Imprisonment provided them with an identity, with status, with publicity. More than that, imprisonment provided Irish activists with another opportunity to rebel, turning the sites that were supposed to 'quell political dissent' into places where resistance, even revolution, was nurtured and enacted.[56] In this way, as we shall see, they consistently and significantly influenced the course of the revolution as they challenged the legitimacy of the law and undermined a key state institution, the prison system. This study also analyses the conundrums and dangers that confronted the prison governor, medical officer (MO), and warder—all of whom often lived in Ireland—and the difficulties faced and attitudes adopted by their political masters—who, for the most part, did not. Further, it explores these issues as they arose in the military-managed internment camps established in the aftermath of 1916 and again in 1920. These prisoners posed an enormous political problem for the politicians, police, soldiers, and prison officials who were tested by the dilemmas of whether to jail or not to jail, to acknowledge as special or to insist otherwise, to forcibly feed or release, to starve or release. Contests such as these were the very marrow of revolution, shaping the experience for all concerned.

[52] David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964), 68; Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, 464–8; Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800–2000* (London: Phoenix, 2004), 30–1.

[53] Kelly, '"Parnell's Old Brigade"', 214–23; Owen McGee, *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 219–24.

[54] MacDonagh, *The Emancipist*, 247; Geary, 'John Mandeville', 368; Ide ní Liathain, *The Life and Career of P.A. McHugh A North Connacht Politician 1859–1909: A Footsoldier of the Party* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 51–2.

[55] Fran Lisa Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

[56] Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*, 4.

1

'What is Good Enough for the Suffragettes'

Ireland, 1912–14

Ireland's brief militant suffrage campaign occupies a conspicuous space in the story of the Irish female suffrage movement.[1] Given this, one would expect suffragette prisoners to have received significant attention. June Purvis's assertion that the prison experiences of suffragettes in Edwardian Britain 'have been discussed as a part of a broader account of the suffrage movement rather than focused upon in depth'[2] is, however, also true of Ireland.[3] The prison campaign, and its subsequent influence, has received some recent, limited examination,[4] but it has not been accorded the pivotal place it deserves in the narrative of political imprisonment in Ireland.

Historians of hunger strike in particular countries have tended to think within national boundaries and to emphasize 'essentialist visions', viewing 'modern hunger strikes as legacies of deep-seated, national traditions'.[5] In much of the writing on hunger strike in Ireland, the suffragettes—and other potential influences, such as the campaigns of Russian anarchists or Indian nationalists—have been elided or downplayed in favour of a predominately national and nationalist lineage. Tim Pat Coogan has described the hunger strike as 'peculiarly Irish', while Sean O'Mahony has written of *The First Hunger Striker—Thomas Ashe*.[6] Even those, including George Sweeney, who have acknowledged that the hunger strike 'is not peculiar

[1] The quotation in the chapter title is from WS919 (Ina Heron), BMH.

[2] June Purvis, 'The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review*, 4:1 (1995), 103–4.

[3] Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1984); Cliona Murphy, *The Women's Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington*.

[4] William Murphy, 'Suffragettes and the Transformation of Political Imprisonment in Ireland, 1912–1914' in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds), *Irish Women and the Vote: Becoming Citizens* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 114–35; Barry Flynn, *Pawns in the Game: Irish Hunger Strikes 1912–1981* (Cork: Collins Press, 2011), 8–10.

[5] Kevin Grant, 'The Transcolonial World of Hunger Strikes and Political Fasts, c.1909–1935' in Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy (eds), *Decentering Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World* (London: Sangam Books, 2006), 246–7.

[6] Tim Pat Coogan, *On The Blanket: The H Block Story* (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1980), 15; Sean O'Mahony, *The First Hunger Striker—Thomas Ashe* (Dublin: Elo Publications, 2001).

to Irish politics' have preferred to seek the roots of modern Irish hunger strikes in early Irish law and long-abandoned Gaelic tradition.[7] Joseph Lennon, on the other hand, has almost certainly overstated the case for mutual transnational influence in arguing that Marion Wallace Dunlop, the first English suffragette hunger striker, merged Irish and Indian fasting 'traditions', 'giving birth to the hunger strike as a strategy for anti-colonial and dissident movements across continents'.[8] Despite the attractions of Lennon's claim, the influence upon Ireland of Marion Wallace Dunlop's initiative is a good deal more clear-cut than Ireland's influence upon Marion Wallace Dunlop. Kevin Grant's account of the lineage of the modern hunger strike, which emphasizes British suffragettes' awareness of hunger striking among Russian revolutionary populists, is more convincing.[9]

This chapter assesses the pattern of suffragette prison protest in Ireland and begins to chart its influence. A total of twenty-seven suffragettes were imprisoned on thirty-five separate occasions between 1912 and 1914. These women moved well beyond the patchy protest of nineteenth-century political prisoners and upset the sedate atmosphere that prevailed in Irish prisons during the first decade of the twentieth century, employing levels of prison militancy (including hunger strike) that were unprecedented in an Irish context. Their adoption of the hunger strike engendered a period of intense conflict with the authorities, but also sparked fundamental disagreement within Irish suffragette circles. It was both despite and because of the controversial nature of the suffragettes' attitudes and tactics that these proved influential. They soon attracted attention and imitation, firstly from a small number of trade union activists imprisoned during the Dublin lockout of 1913.This chapter will explore the extent and effectiveness of their prison militancy, along with that of the suffragists.

I

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the English prison system became a political battleground as the state jailed suffragettes, who were mounting a militant campaign in favour of 'Votes for Women'.[10] Quickly, the status and treatment of suffragette prisoners began to receive attention. The judiciary, penal administrators, and politicians dithered when considering these women's prison classification;

[7] George Sweeney, 'Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxviii (1993), 421–37; George Sweeney, 'Self-Immolative Martyrdom: Explaining the Irish Hunger Strike Tradition', *Studies*, 93 (2004), 337–48.

[8] Joseph Lennon, 'Fasting for the Public: Irish and Indian Sources of Marion Wallace Dunlop's 1909 Hunger Strike' in Eóin Flannery and Angus Mitchell (eds), *Enemies of Empire: New Perspectives on Imperialism, Literature and Historiography* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 39.

[9] Kevin Grant, 'British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 53:1 (2011), 113–43.

[10] Approximately 1,050 suffrage campaigners were jailed in Britain between 1905 and 1914. See Martin Pugh, *The March of Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 212; June Purvis, '"Deeds, not words": Daily Life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain' in June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (eds), *Votes For Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), 135–6.

some were designated first-class misdemeanants, while many were associated with regular convicts in the second or third divisions. This facilitated the suffragettes in bringing militancy into the prisons, providing a cause around which they generated conflict and publicity. The conflict escalated when, in July 1909, various members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)—the most important militant suffragist organization in Britain, led by the Pankhurst family—followed the example of Wallace Dunlop and began to hunger strike. In September, the authorities responded by beginning to artificially feed (as the authorities would have it) or forcibly feed (as the suffragettes presented it) many of those on strike.

Upon his appointment as Home Secretary in February 1910, Winston Churchill attempted to defuse the conflict. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt—a former Home Rule MP and 'plan of campaign' prisoner who was related through marriage to the leading English suffragette Lady Constance Lytton—encouraged Churchill to create in law a status of 'political prisoner' to provide for the separate and ameliorated treatment of these women.[11] Instead, following the advice of Home Office officials, Churchill broadened the scope for affording some prisoners privileged treatment by empowering the Home Secretary to grant first-class misdemeanant conditions to 'prisoners (in the Second Division) who are persons of good antecedents, and who have been convicted of offences which do not involve dishonesty, cruelty, indecency, or serious violence'.[12] Prison rule 243a, or the 'Churchill rule' as it became known, facilitated the improved treatment of many suffragettes, but failed to neutralize prison treatment as a suffragette cause because it did not apply to prisoners given sentences in the third division or with hard labour.

Although the Irish executive did not then face a suffragette campaign, in October 1910 they introduced a similar rule.[13] The first prisoner afforded its benefits was Helena Molony, a nationalist, trade unionist, and suffragist. On 4 July 1911, Molony protested the visit of George V to Dublin by throwing a stone at a portrait of the King and Queen displayed in a shop window.[14] When she refused to pay a fine, she was sentenced to a month in prison but allowed the privileges available under the Churchill rule.[15] James McArdle and Walter Carpenter, also jailed as a consequence of actions associated with this protest, were not afforded the benefits of the new rule, although Carpenter appeared to qualify.[16]

Militant suffragism emerged somewhat later in Ireland than in Britain. In November 1908, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins, and their husbands Francis Sheehy Skeffington and James Cousins, founded the Irish Women's

[11] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Winston Churchill, 10 and 25 February 1910, CHAR12/4/1-12A, Churchill Papers.

[12] Edward Troup, Permanent Under Secretary of State, HO, to Churchill, 4 March 1910, HO144/20098.

[13] Copy of new rule, 24 October 1910, GPB1913/7451.

[14] WS391 (Helena Molony), BMH.

[15] J.S. Gibbons, chairman of GPB, to Major A.F. Owen Lewis, governor of Mountjoy, 6 July 1911, Folder 26, Box 4, GPBSF; John Mulhall, vice-chairman of GPB, to Sir James Dougherty, Under Secretary of State for Ireland, 24 June 1912, File A, Box 1, GPBSF.

[16] *Irish Times* (*IT*), 6 July, and 7 and 28 August 1911.

Franchise League (IWFL) to pursue a more assertive suffrage agenda in Ireland. A small vanguard of committed activists gradually emerged and in November 1910 six IWFL members, including Margaret Cousins, were imprisoned in England for their participation in protests organized by the WSPU.[17] On that occasion Leila Gertrude Cadiz and Rosalind Cadiz[18]—otherwise known as Margaret and Jane Murphy—excused themselves at the last moment and were not jailed, causing friction with the IWFL for the first, but not the last, time.[19] During 1911 further IWFL members were imprisoned in England[20] and 'Prisoners' Nights', when IWFL women recounted their experiences, became a regular feature of the organization's programme of events.[21]

Early in the summer of 1912, the IWFL resolved to take militant action in Ireland, prompted by the contribution of Irish Party MPs to the defeat of the Conciliation Bill (which would have provided for a limited female parliamentary franchise) and the Irish Party's failure to insist that the Home Rule Bill include provision for the female franchise.[22] On the morning of 13 June 1912, eight women—Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Margaret Murphy, Jane Murphy, Marguerite Palmer, Marjorie Hasler, Kathleen Houston, Maud Lloyd, and Hilda Webb—threw stones through the windows of various government offices in Dublin and were arrested.[23] The Irish prison system now faced the pressing prospect of suffragette convicts. On 20 June 1912, Sheehy Skeffington, Palmer, and the Murphys were sentenced to one month's imprisonment, and a further month on refusal to pay a fine. The press reported that Sheehy Skeffington stated 'she would personally like to go to Mountjoy Prison, because she wanted to see how political prisoners were treated there, and she would insist on her rights in that respect'.[24]

In passing sentence, Judge Ernest Goodwin Swifte indicated that he would have liked to place the women in the first division, but felt that their status was a question for the prison authorities. The authorities' primary impulse was to avoid conflict and, without delay, the Irish administration at Dublin Castle sanctioned those privileges allowed under the Churchill rule.[25] Indeed, despite some qualms on the part of the GPB, the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Aberdeen, went beyond the Churchill rule, sanctioning further ameliorations for the group as a whole and for individuals within the group. These included extended rights to visits and association, freedom to practise their professions, the repainting of cells, the installation of new gas burners, and access to a 'lady doctor'.[26] A reluctance to submit to the care of

[17] James and Margaret Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1950), 178.
[18] Interesting, as yet unpublished, work on the Cadiz sisters has been carried out by Simon and Jill Muggleton.
[19] Statement by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington (HSS), undated but likely from early 1913, Ms21,639(i), SSP.
[20] *Irish Citizen* (*IC*), 25 May and 22 June 1912; Index of Suffragette Prisoners in England, 1906–14, HO45/24665.
[21] IWFL Programme of Events, October–December 1911, Ms21,639, SSP.
[22] Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times*, 50–3.
[23] Prisoner Record Sheets, File A, Box 1, and File C, Box 1, GPBSF.
[24] *Daily Mail*, 21 June 1912.
[25] Memo by Mulhall, 27 June 1912, File A, Box 1, GPBSF.
[26] Murphy, 'Suffragettes and the Transformation of Political Imprisonment', 117.

male medical officers was common among English suffragettes of this period.[27] The Irish authorities' approach was politic and pragmatic rather than rule-bound and the prisoners, especially those who had been jailed in Britain, were impressed. Palmer wrote that 'in Ireland the prison officials seem to have found the art of tempering necessarily strict discipline with kindness'.[28] The suffrage newspaper the *Irish Citizen* was generally complimentary, noting that 'Irish Officialdom' had 'come well out of this first test' and speculating that 'public opinion is better trained in these matters in a country many of whose foremost politicians passed through prison to prominence'.[29] While there may have been truth in this, the *Irish Citizen* almost certainly flattered Irish public opinion and Irish authority with the aim of maintaining an atmosphere conducive to continuing ameliorations.

On 12 July 1912 Hasler, Houston, Lloyd, and Webb received harsher sentences of six months, but the judge specified that they should be treated as first-class misdemeanants.[30] An order that must have seemed helpful became a complicating factor when the new prisoners sought association with their suffragette colleagues.[31] Under prison rules, first-class misdemeanants should not have been associated with those classified as ordinary prisoners, even very privileged ones benefiting from the Churchill rule. Again Aberdeen proved willing to bend the rules, approving the association of all eight women. In general the authorities were publicity-conscious and sought to avoid the political difficulties involved in defending any seemingly harsh treatment.[32] This is emphasized by Aberdeen's repeated interventions, while the Chief Secretary's Office insisted on daily reports from the prison.[33]

A stream of petitions submitted on the suffragettes' behalf encouraged the authorities toward leniency,[34] while the impact of social standing cannot be ignored when considering the treatment of these women. In the past, social status and influence had been key to a prisoner's treatment. This had become less pronounced in the more regulated and uniform prisons of the nineteenth century, but it remained a factor as the Churchill rule made explicit with its reference to 'persons of good antecedents'. All of the IWFL prisoners were middle class and this certainly affected attitudes toward them. That Sheehy Skeffington was the daughter of David Sheehy MP further heightened sensitivities, although he was not well inclined toward female suffragism.[35] A final factor contributing to the authorities' approach was the attitude of the suffragettes. These prisoners—with the occasional exception of the Murphys—were not confrontational. Major A.F. Owen Lewis, governor of Mountjoy, described them as 'quiet and orderly',[36] while the *Irish Citizen* reported that prison officials had been

[27] Alyson Brown, 'Conflicting Objectives: Suffragette Prisoners and Female Prison Staff in Edwardian England', *Women's Studies*, 32 (2002), 634.
[28] *IC*, 7 September 1912.
[29] *IC*, 6 and 13 July 1912.
[30] Max S. Green, chairman of GPB, to Dougherty, 7 November 1912, File C, Box 1, GPBSF.
[31] Hasler, Houston, Lloyd, and Webb to Aberdeen, 14 July 1912, Folder 10, Box 2, GPBSF.
[32] Murphy, 'Suffragettes and the Transformation of Political Imprisonment', 118.
[33] T.P. Le Fanu, private secretary to the Chief Secretary, to Edward O'Farrell, Assistant Under Secretary, 26 June 1912, Folder 27, Box 4, GPBSF; O'Farrell to GPB, 26 June 1912, File A, Box 1, GPBSF.
[34] *Freeman's Journal* (*FJ*), 25 June 1912.
[35] Ward, *Sheehy Skeffington*, 90.
[36] Owen Lewis to Gibbons, 27 June 1912, File A, Box 1, GPBSF.

'agreeably surprised' to find them 'calmly determined to insist on their right as political prisoners' but 'perfectly reasonable and perfectly courteous'.[37]

II

Everything seemed under control until the WSPU intervened, disrupting life for the authorities and the IWFL. On 18 July 1912, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith visited Dublin to address a Home Rule meeting at the Theatre Royal. Irish suffragist groups organized a number of gentle protests—the IWFL prisoners, for example, wore black rosettes[38] —but three members of the WSPU, Mary Leigh, Gladys Evans, and Lizzie Baker (whose real name was Jennie Baines),[39] followed Asquith to Ireland with more radical intentions. They succeeded in throwing a hatchet at him and John Redmond, and attempted to set the venue ablaze.[40] These women appear to have acted on their own initiative without sanction from WSPU headquarters or direction from Christabel Pankhurst, the WSPU's chief strategist who was then in hiding in Paris,[41] and from the moment they were remanded to Mountjoy, on 19 July, the prison authorities and the IWFL feared the consequences. The next day, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington informed Francis, 'they've got a bad name already. Houston & Hasler know them & say they are very troublesome & want to hunger strike etc for trifles'.[42] Some days later, B.J. Hackett, assistant MO at Mountjoy, wrote to his equivalent in Birmingham, who had forcibly fed Mary Leigh in the past, seeking information and advice.[43]

These anxieties proved well founded: the confrontational relationship that emerged between the authorities, who took a sterner approach with these protestors, and the WSPU prisoners, who proved more obdurate than their IWFL colleagues, did lead to hunger strike and forcible feeding in an Irish prison. This had significant consequences for the IWFL, exposing deep divisions within the organization as their prisoners, and other members, debated the extent to which they should support the WSPU women. Later groups of suffragette prisoners in Ireland would develop and maintain what Purvis has characterized as 'supportive networks and a culture of sharing'[44] but on this occasion, the group's sense of collective purpose disintegrated, leading a disillusioned Marjorie Hasler to write from Mountjoy: 'I wish we could get out—it is so difficult not to be soured by all this—it's like trying to keep clean in a muddy ditch.'[45]

[37] *IC*, 6 July 1912.
[38] *IC*, 27 July 1912.
[39] Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 24–6; Judith Smart, 'Jennie Baines: Suffrage and an Australian Connection' in Purvis and Stanley Holton (eds), *Votes for Women*, 246–66.
[40] Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times*, 57–8.
[41] Francis Sheehy Skeffington (FSS) to HSS, 21 July 1912, Ms40,463(3), SSP; June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002), 191.
[42] HSS to FSS, 20 July 1912, Ms40,466(5), SSP.
[43] B.J. Hackett to J. Mahern, 27 July 1912, File C, Box 1, GPBSF.
[44] Purvis, 'The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes', 124.
[45] Marjorie Hasler to HSS, undated, Friday morning, Ms33,608(13), SSP.

The IWFL had been aware of the potential for division within their ranks prior to the intervention in Ireland of the WSPU. This had become evident in the deterioration in the relationship between the Murphy sisters and their colleagues, a development which sundered the group's brittle unity very early in their imprisonment. From the beginning, the authorities noted that the Murphys were more aggressive, a characteristic that they ascribed to 'neurotic tendencies'.[46] The pathologizing of the Murphys' radicalism reveals a certain attitude toward outspoken women among male bureaucrats, but the sisters also made their suffragette colleagues nervous. Although it had not been publicly announced, in June 1912 it was IWFL policy that their prisoners should not hunger strike if afforded 'political' treatment.[47] Once in prison, however, it emerged that the Murphys were prepared to breach this policy. On 19 June over seventy WSPU members held at Holloway prison, London, embarked on a mass hunger strike.[48] Hanna later complained that in response, in Mountjoy the Murphys renounced the IWFL and its policy and communicated with the WSPU, offering to strike in sympathy with those at Holloway.[49] The WSPU declined the offer,[50] but as a result cooperation ceased between the Murphys and the other IWFL prisoners. Sheehy Skeffington described the state of the relationship unambiguously when she wrote: 'No Murphys ever any more!...We all regard them as crazy. They never speak to anyone now & the others wonder how we ever could have put up with them.'[51]

In the days after the attack on Asquith, Francis Sheehy Skeffington warned Hanna in Mountjoy that the 'popular feeling' was one of 'rage' and that 'if the hunger strike must come in Ireland, it had better be postponed till a more favourable moment'.[52] By 23 July, however, as a consequence of communication with Geraldine Lennox and Jessie Kenney, senior WSPU figures who had arrived in Dublin, it was clear to the Sheehy Skeffingtons that Leigh, Evans, and Baines, who were as yet on remand, would hunger strike if they received hard labour sentences that excluded them from the privileges available under the Churchill rule. Given that such sentences seemed certain in the prevailing atmosphere, Francis's response was to seek an agreement with the WSPU that in that event the IWFL prisoners would not be expected to launch a sympathetic strike and that this would be communicated by the WSPU to the Murphys. By 28 July this prospect had disappeared. Then, Kenney reported that Christabel Pankhurst believed the Irish prisoners ought to join a hunger strike started in defence of the principle of political treatment in Irish prisons. Pankhurst did concede that if the WSPU prisoners were given political treatment then 'they ought not to hunger strike in sympathy with prisoners in English jails'.[53]

[46] Jane Murphy to Aberdeen, 21 June 1912, and memo by John Mulhall, 27 June 1912, File A, Box 1, GPBSF.
[47] HSS to Margaret Cousins, 27 July 1912, Ms41,177(11), SSP.
[48] Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up, Women!* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 166.
[49] Statement by HSS, undated but likely from early 1913, Ms21,639(i), SSP.
[50] FSS to HSS, 21 July 1912, Ms40,463(3), SSP.
[51] HSS to FSS, 25 July 1912, Ms40,466, SSP.
[52] FSS to HSS, 21 July 1912, Ms40,463(3), SSP.
[53] FSS to HSS, 23, 24, and 28 July 1912, Ms40,463(3), SSP.

Even among suffragettes, hunger strike was a controversial tactic. Senior figures within the WSPU wondered whether the energy devoted to it and disputes around prison status might not be more advantageously expended. For a small organization like the IWFL, with limited resources and relatively few committed activists, adopting the tactic would have significant consequences for the focus of its activities. On 23 July, the IWFL's committee met under pressure from several members who wanted hunger strike explicitly ruled out. The Sheehy Skeffingtons were against this, favouring a more flexible strategy. Hanna was prepared to hunger strike, but the key argument she made in opposing the move to publicly rule out its use was that the very threat of a hunger strike by Irish suffragettes, even if never realized, was a valuable weapon. There was so little sympathy for the English women that a strike in their own cause was not likely to influence the authorities in their treatment of them, but the danger of a strike by Irish women might, she hoped, convince the authorities to afford some form of political status to the English. In the event, the committee affirmed that they were against hunger strike, but were prevailed upon to keep the decision secret on the grounds that 'if it got out that no trouble from Irish prisoners was to be expected, they [the authorities] could do as they liked with the English'.[54]

Inside Mountjoy, Hanna's thinking continued to evolve. By 27 July, and before Pankhurst's message from Paris, she had reached the conclusion that if the WSPU women launched a hunger strike for political status, the IWFL prisoners would have to mount a sympathetic protest. She wrote to the IWFL committee, asking that they rescind their decision of four days earlier. She did this recognizing that, whatever the IWFL might prefer, the Murphys would certainly join a strike and that if a façade of IWFL unity was to be maintained, then at least some of the others would also have to act. Hanna's proposal was discussed at a meeting of the committee on 31 July which seems to have reversed the earlier decision.[55] Certainly, on 3 August, the *Irish Citizen* warned that although the Irish and English prisoners were members of different organizations and did not always agree as to tactics, 'there neither is nor can be any difference of opinion as to the political status of the women who have been arrested' and the Irish prisoners 'will therefore associate themselves with any protest which the English suffragists in Mountjoy may find it necessary to make in order to assert their rights as political prisoners'.[56]

This seemingly unambiguous statement masked continuing differences on the IWFL committee and inside Mountjoy. There, the eight IWFL women had come to comprise four distinguishable groups; the Murphys, Sheehy Skeffington and Palmer, Lloyd and Webb, and Hasler and Houston. As Sheehy Skeffington, supported by Palmer, became an open advocate of hunger strike in support of political status, Lloyd, backed by Webb, became a vehement opponent. On 28 July, Sheehy

[54] FSS to HSS, 23 and 24 July 1912, Ms40,463(3), SSP.

[55] HSS to FSS, 25, 28 and 31 July 1912, Ms40,466(5), SSP; HSS to Margaret Cousins, 27 July 1912 and undated (but from this period), Ms41,177(11), SSP; FSS to HSS, 30 July 1912, Ms40,463(3), SSP.

[56] *IC*, 3 August 1912.

Skeffington complained that 'Miss L[loyd] is a bad influence. Now she & Miss W[ebb] don't want to do anything in the way of protest, even refusing exercise & of course a split in the camp will be bad'.[57] In general during this period, Houston and Hasler sided with Sheehy Skeffington. Both were in poor health, however, and, unlike Sheehy Skeffington and Palmer, they could not embark upon a hunger strike safe in the knowledge that the imminent completion of their sentences would cut the protest short. There was a good deal of discussion among the prisoners, but by 5 August the divisions remained despite the bullish tone of the *Irish Citizen*. In fact that very tone had inflamed the situation, Sheehy Skeffington wrote:

> Miss L[loyd] has got W[ebb] to repudiate all strike & she is fighting with Hasler-Houston. . . . Miss L[loyd] says she'll write to Citizen to repudiate & blames me for par[agraph] . . . . She now takes the line . . . that whole hunger strike & fight for political rights was wrong & says she'd have worn clothes &c if required.[58]

These differences were reinforced by non-prisoner activists who, through letters or while on visits, urged each set of prisoners to stand by their position.

The WSPU women were convicted on 6 and 7 August and the sentences were severe. Baines was convicted of conspiracy and given seven months with hard labour. Leigh and Evans were convicted on conspiracy, arson, and explosives charges. They were given five years' penal servitude each.[59] On 8 August all three sent memorials to Aberdeen, seeking to be treated as political prisoners. On the same day the eight IWFL prisoners sent memorials, asking to be associated with the WSPU women.[60] Of course, as hard labour and penal servitude prisoners, Leigh, Evans, and Baines qualified for a special status under neither the first-class misdemeanant rule nor the Churchill rule. While the authorities vacillated, all three went on hunger strike on 14 August.[61] That evening the Murphys joined them. Then, on the afternoon of the second day, Sheehy Skeffington and Palmer—who, like the Murphys, were due for release in any case on 19 August—joined, but the other IWFL women—who still had four months to serve—did not: Lloyd and Webb because they refused, Houston and Hasler because of their health.[62]

Once the strike began, the authorities removed the privileges of the four striking IWFL prisoners, but simultaneously sought a compromise. On 17 August Owen Lewis offered concessions to the English women: if they ceased to strike while the government considered their memorials, they would be allowed to associate, wear their own clothes, and remain in the prison hospital on a hospital diet. Leigh and Evans refused, Leigh saying: 'If the Government will undertake to give votes to women, I will take my food, and I will gladly do my sentence of 5 years or longer, but under no other circumstances. You can kill me if you like, and I will gladly die, but I won't give in.' Baines proved less resolute. She stated that her strike had the

[57] HSS to FSS, 25 and 28 July 1912, Ms40,466(5), SSP.
[58] HSS to FSS, 5 August 1912, Ms40,466(5), SSP.
[59] Record of suffragette crimes and sentences, Folder 2, Box 2, GPBSF.
[60] All suffragette prisoners to Aberdeen, 8 August 1912, Folder 12, Box 2, GPBSF.
[61] Report of Dowdall, 20 August 1912, File C, Box 1, GPBSF.
[62] *IC*, 24 August 1912.

attainment of treatment as a political prisoner as its purpose. At once Owen Lewis offered her association with the IWFL women and the privileges of a first-class misdemeanant if she stopped, while stating he could not make this offer to Leigh and Evans as they were penal servitude prisoners. Momentarily, Baines relented, taking some tea and jelly, but she 'then dropped the plate on the floor and burst into tears, saying she was a traitor to the cause, and would take no more'. She vomited most of the food and returned to the strike with renewed determination.[63] At this point the IWFL were unaware of the offers made to the WSPU women and the basis upon which they had rejected these. Such knowledge would certainly have exacerbated divisions within IWFL. On the same day these disagreements became public when the *Irish Independent* published a letter by Mrs E.M. O'Keeffe, a member of the IWFL committee, accusing their strikers of acting contrary to the policy of the organization and breaching 'a contract' with the authorities who had afforded them political treatment.[64]

On 19 August Baines was released on health grounds along with the four IWFL strikers who had completed their sentences.[65] Margaret Ward argues that the authorities delayed the forcible feeding of Leigh and Evans until the Irish hunger strikers departed Mountjoy, 'dreading the public furore if Irish women were known to be undergoing forcible feeding'.[66] It was the norm in England and Scotland to begin forcible feeding within two or three days of the commencement of a strike,[67] but this had not happened at Mountjoy. Instead, the GPB sought an outside medical opinion from Dr Joseph O'Carroll. He first examined the women on 17 August and did not advise forcible feeding then; however, following a second visit, on 20 August, O'Carroll altered his opinion.[68] As Ward suggests, it was surely not an accident that his second visit was delayed until 20 August. Writing of the role of doctors in Britain in such circumstances, Jennian Geddes has accused the medical profession of 'culpable complicity' with the Home Office in the representation and management of forcible feeding of suffragettes.[69]

This hunger strike generated considerable publicity and the Irish administration received numerous petitions on the prisoners' behalf from Ireland and Britain.[70] In response, it defended its actions. Privately, Augustine Birrell, the Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1907 to 1916, informed John Dillon, a key figure in the Irish Parliamentary Party, that he was 'dead against' forcible feeding and would rather 'feed them with Priests [sic] Champagne and Michaelmas Geese', but the 'wretched hags. . . . are obstinate to the point of death'.[71] The administration also sought to

[63] Owen Lewis to Green, 17 August 1912, Folder 17, Box 3, GPBSF.
[64] *Irish Independent* (*II*), 17 August 1912.
[65] Owen Lewis to Green, 19 August 1912, Folder 9, Box 2, GPBSF.
[66] Ward, *Sheehy Skeffington*, 95.
[67] Professor Thomas R. Fraser to the Scottish Prison Commissioners, 2 December 1909, HH35/5, Minutes of the Prison Commissioners, March 1909–December 1919, NAS.
[68] Joseph Carroll to GPB, 20 August 1912, File C, Box 1, GPBSF.
[69] J.F. Geddes, 'Culpable Complicity: The Medical Profession and the Forcible Feeding of Suffragettes, 1909–1914', *Women's History Review*, 17:1 (2008), 79–94.
[70] Petitions in Folder 14, Box 3, GPBSF.
[71] Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times*, 64.