

Irish narratives: Liverpool in the 1930s

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By the 1930s there had been a substantial Irish community in Liverpool for over a hundred years. Irish immigration into Liverpool grew steadily from the 1790s and expanded rapidly with the onset of famine in Ireland in the 1840s. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, years of economic depression, there was a renewed wave of Irish migration to Britain in general, and to Liverpool in particular, as migration into the United States was choked off. Relations between the Irish community, largely Catholic and poor and unskilled, and the majority community had been notoriously difficult in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the history of the city was scarred by incidents of sectarian violence.¹ The increase in migration in the 1930s was accompanied by growing tension between the majority and the Irish community. This article seeks to explore how the majority community in Liverpool viewed the Irish, how these views were articulated and what 'stories' were commonly told about the Irish. In recent years sociologists and cultural historians, referring to such 'stories' as 'discourses' and 'narratives', have seen them as 'providing models of social experience' as well as attempts to shape and control opinions.²

¹ F. Neal, *Sectarian violence: The Liverpool experience 1819–1914* (Manchester, 1988); P. J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: A political and social history of Liverpool 1868–1939* (Liverpool, 1981); J. Belchem, *Merseyside: Essays in Liverpool exceptionalism* (Liverpool, 2000).

² Christopher Sauer, 'Newspaper style and Nazi propaganda' in W. Van Peer ed., *The taming of the text: Explanations in language, literature and culture* (London, 1988), p. 82; Mary J. Hickman, *Religion, class and identity: The state, the Catholic Church, and the education of the Irish in Britain* (Aldershot, 1995); Máirhead NicGraith, *Plural identities-singular narratives: The case of Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 2002); Liam Harte, 'Somewhere beyond England and Ireland: Narratives of 'home' in second generation Irish autobiography', *Irish Studies Review*, 11 (2003), pp. 293–305.

In April 1937 the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, Albert David, was quoted in an interview in the Anglican monthly *Guardian*, which also appeared in the Liverpool diocesan journal, the *Liverpool Review*, which David edited.³ David said:

We are suffering from the generous migration policy of the British Government . . . Consequently, there are a quarter of a million Irish in Liverpool, and they continue to come every year for the higher dole. Ireland has discovered a way to make England support her surplus population. Their chief effect on church life is to drive our conservative evangelicals into extremism. The most serious effect is political. They may give control to the local Labour Party, which in turn may gain control of local government. In this event Liverpool will be dominated by Roman Catholics.

David articulated many of the fears that dominated popular opinion about the Irish in Liverpool in the 1930s, a period in which the city, dependent on the trade of the port, suffered greatly. Irish migration into Liverpool was increasing. David claimed the Irish came for the dole offered by public assistance; others that, if they did not come for the dole, they came to take jobs which should have gone to local English people and would in time exercise political control of the city. David explained what he meant when he said that Liverpool would be dominated by Roman Catholics: he was not referring to a majority in the City Council of Roman Catholics as such, nor of the Labour Party. Rather he was concerned about 'a civic administration controlled by members of that Church who have come (many of them in recent times) from Ireland'.

Quoting from *The Times* of 5 August 1936, David claimed that 87% of the yearly average amount of public assistance distributed in Liverpool in three recent years had been spent on people of Irish extraction, some of them born in Liverpool, others who had recently arrived. The Irish population in Liverpool, he argued, was 'homogeneous and compact'. It did not 'coalesce' with its neighbours and mixed marriages were discouraged. This Irish population was concentrated near the docks. In some areas the population was exclusively Irish: 'There it brings standards of life, economic and moral, differing from those of the surrounding population and continuously affecting them. But its most powerful influence lies in the field of politics'.

³ Quotations in the next few paragraphs are from the interview in *Liverpool Review*, April 1937, pp. 113–15.

David believed that with the dissolution of the Irish Nationalist Party in Liverpool the Irish [Catholics] had been encouraged to support and, if possible, dominate the local Labour Party. That aim, David argued, had now been almost achieved. If there were to be a general swing of opinion to the left, which he thought quite probable, the control of the city would pass into the hands of a party, the majority of whose members had 'not been truly absorbed into local life' and who did not accept the principles which guided the Labour Party in other British cities: 'Certain American models made this prospect highly unattractive'.

Before the publication of these views David had privately sought the opinion of the leader of the Conservative Party in Liverpool, Sir Thomas White. In March 1936 he sent White a draft of an article and asked his opinion as to whether he should have it published anonymously in *The Times*. After correcting David's account of the history of the Irish Nationalist Party in Liverpool, White agreed that the local Labour Party was dominated by Roman Catholics, that in the main it was 'charged with looking after Roman Catholic interests', and that it received every encouragement from the Catholic Archbishop, Richard Downey, to do so. He suggested that David should go ahead with anonymous publication. David eventually published in his own journal but omitted the final paragraph of the draft. In that draft paragraph David had argued that in principle there should be as few restrictions as possible on the free movement of people. However, there were 'fundamental distinctions of the human race which no policy of free intercourse and interchange can wholly ignore.' The three most divisive distinctions were 'race, religion and politics' and where these three coincided and 'a section of the population, growing in influence, is separated from the rest', the results could be dangerous.⁴

David's statement was not the result of a recent, suddenly discovered concern. The views he expressed in 1937 had had a long gestation. In May 1931, in the wake of a bruising public encounter with the Catholic Archbishop on the implementation by the Catholic authorities of the decree *Ne temere*, which forbade mixed marriages with non-Catholics, the *Liverpool Review* published an analysis by Canon Charles Raven of 'The Irish Problem'. Raven

⁴ Papers of Bishop Albert David, Lambeth Palace Library, Mss. 3579, ff. 183–86; 'Irish immigration and Lancashire' by a correspondent, Sir Thomas White to David, 6 Mar. 1936, ff. 189–90.

concluded that the religious and racial bitterness 'for which our city has been unpleasantly notorious' was increasing. However the causes of this were economic rather than 'theological'. There was a widespread belief that social progress was being hampered and the financial burden on the city being increased by 'the influx of immigrants' from Ireland.⁵

David himself had taken over as editor of the *Liverpool Review* by the time Raven's analysis was published. Commenting in the next issue on Raven's article, the *Review* highlighted public disquiet that Liverpool was receiving more than its fair share of Irish immigrants and that they were claiming more than their fair share of public assistance. The editorial conceded that this view might be 'unfounded' but the time had come to 'bring it to the test of fact.' However, it recognised that there would be a 'special difficulty' in doing this because the majority of these immigrants 'belong to the Roman Catholic Church'. But this was no reason why the issue should be avoided. David's opinion was that it was an economic not a religious question.⁶ Clearly David was concerned that his opposition to increased Irish immigration could be construed as anti-Catholic and sectarian, particularly as the assumed beneficiaries of any reduction in immigration would be working-class Protestants in Liverpool.

Raven's report was published in August 1931. All the evidence, he contended, indicated that the number of immigrants who had settled in Liverpool had grown and was growing rapidly. He had clear evidence, he claimed, that Irish gangsters were using their influence to give work to newly arrived immigrants in preference to resident English workers. At a time when southwest Lancashire could not provide work for its people, unrestricted immigration should not be encouraged or allowed. No citizen of Liverpool, regardless of political or religious affiliation, wanted to see the current state of affairs continued, as that would bring 'the certain prospect of increased depression and intensified bitterness'.⁷

The *Liverpool Review* did not return to the issue of Irish immigration until January 1934. Commenting on representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by Sir Thomas White, leader of the Conservative Party in Liverpool, on the cost of unemployment

⁵ *Liverpool Review*, May 1931, pp. 166–68.

⁶ *Liverpool Review*, June 1931, p. 189.

⁷ *Liverpool Review*, Aug. 1931, pp. 268–71.

and why 'distressed areas' should receive more generous help, it suggested that one reason for Liverpool's parlous situation had not been given sufficient weight: Liverpool's own unemployed were 'being reinforced by a continuous stream of immigrants from Southern Ireland'. It found it ironic that while the Irish Free State had repudiated its debts to Britain, Britain was accepting responsibility for its dependent poor. Britain had never begrudged 'hospitality' but as the 'tacit invitation to seek non-existent work here' came from the nation as a whole Liverpool should not be left to carry the burden alone.⁸

This comment acted as an introduction to a commissioned three-part article, 'The Irish immigration question' by G. R. Gair, described as the editor of the Scottish Anthropological Society.⁹ Gair's article was written in the pseudo-scientific style of the racial theorists who were influential, for example, in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰ He claimed that there were two racial types in the British Isles; one was a branch of the 'Mediterranean' race and the other of the 'Nordic'. Between the two there was a marked difference in mental outlook and culture. The Celts (Mediterranean) were fervidly sentimental and poetic. The Nordic were fundamentally realist. The restlessness and lack of obedience to prescribed order of the one, and the great respect for communal institutions of the other, were biological as well as cultural 'manifestations'. Both racial types had a contribution to make to the common path of 'world advancement'. However, this did not mean that the two 'systems' could be merged. Hybrid peoples were incapable of stability. 'Relative racial purity' was something to be desired if the two types were to develop to their best potential. Thus the attempts of Eamon de Valera, Prime Minister of the Irish Free State since 1932, to bring about a United Ireland of Celtic South and Nordic Ulster had to be condemned.¹¹ If peace and stability were to be achieved segregation was the only solution.

Unfortunately, in Gair's view, Ireland's problem was not unique. In the past century Britain and the United States had been subjected to intensive settlement by 'alien peoples'. In the United States the

⁸ *Liverpool Review*, Jan. 1934, p. 4.

⁹ The more usual spelling is Gayer.

¹⁰ Michael Burleigh, *Death and deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹¹ John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster Question, 1917-1973* (Oxford, 1982).

glaring lesson of the deleterious effects of 'Wops', 'Dagos' and Irish had been taken. Admirable courage had been shown. The United States had closed her doors and had adopted a policy aimed at maintaining the 'Nordic race-type'. Courageous legislation, based on sound scientific principles, had been introduced. Britain would do well to copy this example. In Britain there had been little or no attempt to maintain racial purity. There was a real alien menace as could be seen in Scotland where, while many Scottish miners were idle, Polish and other Central Europeans were employed in the pits. However, Gair argued that the greatest threat came from

The immigration into Britain during the last one hundred years of Irish of the Mediterranean stock. This is a definite menace, not because these people are undesirable in their own habitat, but because they are in that of a Nordic race. There, their presence can only bring a repetition of some of the worst features which we have experienced in Ireland.¹²

Gair argued that as result of the restriction of migration into the United States the 'influx' of Irish into Britain had begun again. He claimed that between 1927 and 1929, 18,000 Irish had come to Liverpool and that at a time of 'unprecedented breakdown in economic and industrial life' in North West England, the number of immigrants was 'considerable'. Thus when Britain had fewer of the former attractions for 'indigent migrants' they were coming in relatively greater numbers. Additionally there were the descendants of the previous migrants whose 'numbers were on the increase through natural fecundity'. It was only a matter of time before an 'alien Mediterranean race' entirely supplanted the 'native Nordic peoples'. A greater Ireland would be produced. There would be a 'warring of race factions', which would bring about the total collapse of Britain as a world and imperial power. Civilisation itself would be under threat:

These people, although they live in our midst, refuse (and naturally so from a racial point of view) to become one with us. We have here a people who maintain a different culture and religion, and around that build up a different moral sense and temperament . . . There has been a very definite lowering of social standards and a disruptive force placed within our midst, which cannot, and does not want to, assimilate our ideas.¹³

¹² *Liverpool Review*, Jan. 1934, pp. 11-13.

¹³ *Liverpool Review*, Feb. 1934, pp. 47-49.

The economic aspects of the question were also important. Gair claimed Irish migrants to Merseyside were almost entirely in the 'lower stratum' of society. They had larger families than other immigrants and the local population. They belonged to a class, which took from society but contributed little. They were in constant need of 'relief' and support by the rest of the population and were 'a financial as well as a social drag' on the rest. They were represented in disproportionately large numbers in 'our prisons, Borstal institutions and criminal lunatic asylums'. This 'Mediterranean stratum' formed the greatest proportion of the most undesirable part of the population. That might not be through any inherent criminal tendencies but simply because they could not racially, and therefore socially, become one with the 'Nordic' community. The Dominions reserved the right to deport undesirable migrants from Britain, but Britain had no powers to deport equally undesirable people to the Irish Free State. The United States and the Dominions had rejected the worst of the Irish. Britain had become the only refuge for those considered unfit and undesirable by others. This had led to

a lowering of social standards and an increase of reliefs, and therefore of taxation and the aggravation of unemployment among our own people, but it also means the propagation of a strongly tainted bloodstream.

Gair did not explain how this 'tainted bloodstream' could come about if, as he argued earlier, the Irish did not assimilate with the host population.

To Gair, these considerations, 'social, economic, medical and eugenic', showed that segregation was the only solution for the harmonious and beneficial development of both racial groups. Bearing in mind the experience of the United States it was possibly not too late to introduce some race legislation.

We could then do something to preserve the heart of the one Empire that can be of real world service for humanity free from a cancerous decay, which otherwise would shatter irretrievably its solidarity and virility. We could also give the people of 'Mediterranean' extraction in our midst the opportunity to develop their own culture instead of offering a large section of them accommodation in our institutions.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Liverpool Review*, Mar. 1934, pp. 86–88.

As the monthly *Liverpolitan* pointed out after David's 1937 interview, much of what he had said was part of the ordinary discourse of people in the city.¹⁵ *Liverpolitan*, a conservative journal, was prepared to continue this Irish narrative in rather blunter terms than those employed by the more circumspect David. *Liverpolitan* insisted that David had only said what 'hundreds of thousands of people are thinking.' It was wrong to allow Irishmen from the Free State to 'pour into Merseyside'. They 'swelled' the quarter of a million Irish already there. They were given preference 'for work over our own unemployed' and when out of work they became a burden on the public assistance system. Also they were given the right to vote, which might ultimately result in the 'triumph of the Socialist party' and in the Catholic domination of the city.¹⁶

An anonymous columnist, the 'Autocrat of the Lunch Table', further emphasised this last point. The Irish, by an alliance with Socialists, would gain control of the city and 'play the game of Tammany here to their heart's content'. The Irish, in this version of the narrative, were 'untrained medieval-minded peasants'. To maintain its prosperity and progress Liverpool must absolutely remain under 'English rule'. No distinction was made between those Irish who had been born in Liverpool, or whose families had been there for one or more generations, and the recently-arrived migrants. 'Catholic' also became interchangeable with 'Irish'. The standard allegation, that the local labour market had been flooded and that jobs had been preferentially allocated to newcomers from Ireland 'on account of their religion and country of origin', was also made. The writer called for a 'disclosure of all the ramifications of the system of preference for Catholics' in the matter of employment.¹⁷ A year earlier *Liverpolitan* had argued that there was a 'strong freemasonry' between Irish employers and workers and tradesmen and customers.¹⁸

This version of the popular discourse now drew upon another theme in the Catholic/Irish narrative. Following the 1936 Education Act, a proposed city council grant to the Catholic authorities to improve and build new schools, to accommodate the increased

¹⁵ For the common English discourse see Graham Davis, 'The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939' in A. Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish diaspora* (Harlow, 2000), p. 19.

¹⁶ *Liverpolitan*, May 1937, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Liverpolitan*, May 1937, p. 33.

¹⁸ *Liverpolitan*, Jan. 1936, p. 2.

numbers of pupils due to the raising of the school leaving age, became the most contentious issue in local politics. It dominated the local council elections of November 1937 in Liverpool, leading to a crushing defeat for the Labour Party, which supported the Catholic schools grant. Hogan, the Labour Party leader, was accused by one Conservative speaker during the campaign of 'seeing green', and that he 'wanted the green flag over the Town Hall'.¹⁹ In *Liverpolitan*, the 'Autocrat' demanded to know the social value to the community of the religious teaching in Catholic schools. If the majority of Liverpool's 'juvenile criminals' came from the Catholic schools, that fact ought to be broadcast. But, he claimed, it would not be. Catholic electoral power was already so strong that 'the bleeding of the non-Catholic public will be decreed without inquiry, without discussion, without knowledge, and without anybody in authority caring a d—'.²⁰ *Liverpolitan* continued campaigning vigorously against the Catholic grant and frankly admitted that there was 'popular antipathy to Catholics' in Liverpool, but argued that this was largely due to their 'own exclusiveness in matters religious'.²¹ Its line of argument is illustrated by its contribution to the schools grant debate in October:

For the best part of a century the priests of Rome have enjoyed the undivided reverence and obedience of the Irish Catholic community of Liverpool. Of the spiritual results we know nothing and say nothing, but before voting half of a million the ratepayers of Liverpool have, we contend, a right to be convinced that the output of Catholic schools, morally and socially considered, has been and will be at least equal in value to that of the council schools . . . If the Irish Catholics in Liverpool got a general credit and debit account from the Corporation they would be astonished at the big balance against them, even after a full allowance for their contributions to their schools . . . The rest of us owe nothing in cash to the Catholics.²²

The school grant continued to be a major issue in Liverpool politics until a compromise arrangement was reached in 1939, but it was a merely a subsidiary theme in the continuing Irish narratives. The dominant theme in those narratives was Irish immigration into Liverpool and its impact on employment. In October 1937, a week

¹⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 Oct. 1937.

²⁰ *Liverpolitan*, May 1937, p. 33.

²¹ *Liverpolitan*, June 1937, p. 1, Aug. 1937, p. 1, Oct. 1937, pp. 1, 3, Nov. 1937, p. 1; Aug. 1937, p. 3.

²² *Liverpolitan*, Oct. 1937, p. 1.

before the municipal elections, the Junior Imperial League, an affiliated organisation of the Conservative Party, held a conference in Liverpool for four hundred delegates from the northwest of England. Irish immigration was the conference's major concern.

A resolution called on the government to introduce legislation to restrict the movement of Irish labour to the 'real needs of these parts'. The mover of the resolution, the delegate for Wavertree, Liverpool, claimed that the north of England was faced with the 'complete strangulation of unskilled labour by the terrible influx of semi-civilised Irishmen.' They came with the sole aim of qualifying for 'our dole', which enabled them to live in what they called luxury as they were 'used to living at a slight remove from the pig-sty stage' and the public assistance they received when out of work in England was higher than the wages they could command in Ireland. The length of time the 'perfidious' Irish should be allowed to stay in England should be restricted and they should be regarded as aliens. One delegate from a rural area defended Irish labourers, stressing that they were largely agricultural workers and that farmers were finding it increasingly difficult to recruit English labourers. His, however, was a lone voice, brushed aside by the representative from Birkenhead who commented that there were a great many 'agricultural Irishmen' working in the Birkenhead shipyards. Even when out of work, he added, these Irishmen managed to get Corporation houses, while English people, after many years, were still waiting. The Irish, in his version of the narrative, contributed to the housing as well as to the employment problem. Such views dominated the conference and the resolution was passed with 'a very large majority'.²³

There was some objection, however, to the stereotyping of the Irish as 'semi-civilised'. A *Liverpool Daily Post* reader, admittedly with an Irish surname, Feely, doubted whether the Wavertree delegate, Simmons, had ever visited Ireland. Feely had travelled widely in Ireland but had never met the conference stereotype. Regrettably, however, in his time in Liverpool he had heard 'more uncharitable remarks about Irish people' than he had in twice that time in other places throughout the world. It would be better for all if such 'unwarrantable' bigotry were 'scrapped'.²⁴

²³ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 Oct. 1937; *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1937.

²⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 Oct. 1937.

More typical responses to the Junior Imperial League's resolution were those of some electors in Old Swan, Liverpool, and Sir Robert Rankin, Conservative MP for Liverpool Kirkdale. At an election meeting at Old Swan a much applauded questioner from the floor asked whether the four Conservative councillors present would support a resolution asking the government to 'stop the influx of Irishmen' into Liverpool.²⁵ A week later Rankin submitted a question to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. Rankin claimed that during the previous three years nearly 73,000 young people had left the Irish Free State to work in England. He wanted to know what steps the government would take to 'discourage this drift', which was contrary to the interests of both Ireland and England.²⁶

This persistent theme of increasing migration to England, and its attendant consequences, was the subject of a number of reports throughout the second part of the 1930s. The 1934 *Social survey of Merseyside*, carried out under the auspices of the University of Liverpool, attempted an objective analysis of 'the conflicting estimates' of the 'volume and importance of the Irish invasion of Merseyside'. It thought it desirable to produce an estimate of the actual numbers of Irish immigrants and their economic situation. It struggled with a lack of accurate statistics, as there was no official count of entries into England directly from the Irish Free State or via Northern Ireland. Using shipping company figures the *Social survey* estimated that in the three years 1927–1929 an average of 6,000 Irish migrants came to Liverpool. This figure was not as high as many of the estimates of popular discourse but certainly it was higher than the yearly average of the years leading up to the World War.²⁷ Many recent Irish immigrants lived in the Scotland parliamentary division 'in company with the solid block of their countrymen who settled here in the past.' The evidence suggested that there was 'continuous' intermarriage between recent migrants and the older established community.²⁸ The *Social survey* concluded, however, that Irish migrants, whether from urban or rural areas, were of a 'very different calibre' from other immigrants into Liverpool. It argued

²⁵ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 Oct. 1937.

²⁶ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 Nov. 1937.

²⁷ D. Caradog Jones, ed., *The social survey of Merseyside* (3 vols, Liverpool, 1934), 1, p. 69.

²⁸ Caradog Jones, *Social survey*, 1, p. 77.

that the pressure on land for smallholdings in Ireland was so great that the least successful and useful members of Irish villages were forced to move elsewhere. The natural increase of the Irish population made this a continuous process. The easiest place for the surplus population to reach was Merseyside, a tendency strengthened by the restrictions on immigration into 'the new countries overseas'.²⁹

A more populist approach than the *Social survey's* was adopted by the novelist, playwright, and social pundit, J. B. Priestley, in his *English journey*. Priestley was in Liverpool for a couple of days in the autumn of 1933 and spent an afternoon with two journalists in the 'very large Irish quarter in Liverpool'. On the basis of this short foray into Scotland Road, in the persona of a bluff Englishman, he articulated a popular narrative of the Irish.

If we do have an Irish Republic as our neighbour, and it is found possible to return her exiled citizens, what a grand clearance there will be . . . what a fine exit of ignorance and dirt and drunkenness and disease.

The Irishman might be a fine fellow in his own country, thought Priestley, but in England he cut 'a very miserable picture'. The Irish in England had lost their peasant virtues and had acquired no others. The working-class English, regardless of how bad living and working conditions were, made some attempt to live decently but the Irish never seemed to try. They settled in the poorest area and turned it into a slum and this despite the fact that being an Irish Roman Catholic was 'more likely to find a man a job than to keep him out of one.' At one time, no doubt, Liverpool had encouraged these Irish to come to supply cheap labour, but Priestley thought the city would now be glad to be rid of them. His brief tour had convinced him that if the Irish areas were to be cleaned up it would be a task for a latter day Hercules.³⁰

A further closely-argued report from an academic source was that of R. W. Walshaw in 1938. Walshaw's erstwhile mentor at Liverpool University, D. Caradog Jones, welcomed his 'dispassionate' approach. Walshaw argued that Liverpool's wide cultural and religious differences reflected the diversity of the individual elements, which had contributed to the whole. However, the absorption of newcomers had always been a social problem on Merseyside.

²⁹ Caradog Jones, *Social survey*, 1, p. 206.

³⁰ J. B. Priestley, *English journey* (London, 1934, rev. edn 1977) pp. 235-36.

During the previous ten years many people had left the area but at the same time there had been a considerable number of immigrants, many of them from Ireland. He carefully pointed out that when a newcomer found employment in the area it did not necessarily follow that a long-settled resident lost his job. However, unemployment figures indicated that in certain types of work the labour market was 'congested'. Recent migration movements did have an 'important bearing' on social problems but the Irish from Eire, along with Chinese from Hong Kong and Africans from South West Africa, as people born in the British Empire, counted equally as British nationals as if they had been born on Merseyside.³¹

Walshaw's estimate of the number of Irish migrants into Merseyside was very close to the earlier one of Caradog Jones, with an average annual figure for the period 1924–36 of 5,000. From 1924 to 1930 the annual figure was 4,000 but since 1930 immigration into the United States had virtually stopped. It was not surprising, therefore, that after 1930 the average movement from the Irish Free State to Merseyside was 6,000 per year.³² As to the question of the number of Irish seeking unemployment relief, Walshaw accepted the finding of the UK Government's Inter-Departmental Committee report on migration from the Free State to Britain. After an enquiry lasting nine months the report concluded in December 1937 that there was no evidence of any marked increase in the number of people from the Irish Free State applying for relief. There was clear evidence of a recent increase in Irish immigration but the immigrants were being absorbed into employment. Irish immigrants came seeking work and there was no evidence that they came specifically with the intention of seeking unemployment benefit at a higher level than was available at home. Many of the Irish migrants took heavy labouring jobs for which it was difficult to find an adequate supply of local labour.³³

Walshaw's conclusion was that during 1935 and 1936 there had been a rapid increase in the number of migrants from the Free State into Merseyside and that the likelihood in the near future was that

³¹ R. S. Walshaw, *Migration to and from Merseyside: Home, Irish and overseas* (Liverpool, 1938), pp. 5, 7.

³² Walshaw, *Migration*, pp. 18–19; Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain 1921–1971* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 45, accepts Walshaw's figures for Irish migration to Britain in the 1930s.

³³ Walshaw, *Migration*, p. 24.

this high rate would be maintained. This 'floating labour' would lead to 'congestion' in certain areas of work and, therefore, every effort should be made to encourage migrants to move on from Merseyside. He did, however, try to nail the myth, common to so many populist Irish narratives, that Irish immigrants had immediate access to welfare relief. Under the existing Poor Law regulations unless an Irishman had resided on Merseyside for at least three years he was not legally entitled to public assistance. If he failed to get work and was without the means to support himself the Public Assistance Authority could only help him by paying his return passage to Ireland.³⁴

However, Walshaw's carefully researched and closely argued pamphlet was scornfully dismissed by *Liverpolitan*, which claimed that it added little to public knowledge of 'the flooding of the labour market of Merseyside by unskilled men from the Irish Free State.' Walshaw's figures were 'just dry bones'. They said nothing of the social, economic and other values involved. For *Liverpolitan*, the 'rot' had already set in. If the existing rate of immigration continued, fifty years hence Liverpool would be a city 'predominantly Irish in race and Roman Catholic in religion'.³⁵

A similar response from the populist *Liverpolitan* greeted the 1938 report of the Pilgrim Trust's *Men without work*. Commenting on Liverpool, this national report on unemployment acknowledged that an important factor in the city's social problems was a deep religious and cultural difference caused by the 'influx' of Irish families. These Irish families had different expectations about their standard of living, 'different capacities and different customs'. These religious and cultural differences had contributed to the lack of working class solidarity in Liverpool and had militated against the development of strong trade unions. A more 'homogenous cultural tradition' would have produced greater solidarity.³⁶ *Liverpolitan* headlined its comment on the report 'Low-Grade Civilisation', and claimed that the citizens of Liverpool were all too familiar with 'all these tragic aspects of life' in their city. But the report still 'left [them] in the dark as to basic causes'. For example, what was the contribution of the 'Catholic Irish' to the slums, the poverty, drunkenness, gambling and crime of the city? The prospects for

³⁴ Walshaw, *Migration*, pp. 26–27.

³⁵ *Liverpolitan*, June 1938, p. 1.

³⁶ *Men without work: A report for the Pilgrim Trust* (London, 1938), p. 244.

improvement were bleak. 'If the stream of low-class immigrants remained unchecked the fight against slums, overcrowding and dependent poverty will in the long run prove to have been in vain'.³⁷

By 1939 there were a number of interlocking themes in Liverpool's Irish narratives. The dominant strand was that of the alleged influx of Irish into Liverpool to take local jobs. If these Irish migrants failed to find jobs or lost them they then became a charge on the Public Assistance Committee. These were the concerns raised by the right wing Economic League. In March 1939 it produced the first part of its report on unemployment in Lancashire. The tone of this report was distinctly more to the liking of those who blamed Liverpool's troubles on Irish immigration. The League 'found' that casual labour and the 'influx' of Irish labourers were the major causes of unemployment in Liverpool. It claimed that the unemployed in Liverpool were less willing to accept work than the unemployed elsewhere because many of them had been out of work for all or the greater part of their lives. There were, according to the report, over 75,000 registered unemployed in Liverpool. There were men aged between thirty and thirty-five who had not had a job since they were eighteen or nineteen. They had married and reared children on the dole and were likely to remain on the dole for the rest of their lives.

The 'curse' of Liverpool, it was argued, was the casual labour system. Although there had been attempts to regulate casual labour in the docks, there were workers who preferred casual labour conditions. They got paid for three days and this was supplemented by unemployment pay for the days they were 'idle'. This was enough for their needs and they would not 'change their habits.' The drift into Liverpool of unemployed workers from the surrounding region exacerbated the situation. Further there were the Irish labourers. These often arrived to work on contract jobs as navvies in Lancashire. The report claimed there were many such Irish employed on contract work in Lancashire at that time to the 'annoyance and indignation of the local unemployed workers'. When the contract was finished they stayed in England and drifted to Liverpool where many of them had friends and relatives among the Irish population. Their contract work had qualified them for unemployment benefit and if they could get some casual work on the docks they became

³⁷ *Liverpolitan*, Apr. 1938, p. 1.

'fairly regular recipients of the dole.' The *Daily Post* headlined its report of the Economic League's enquiry 'Living on the dole. Survey of Liverpool unemployment. The influx of Irish labour'.

There is little doubt that the dole provides them with a better standard of living here than they could obtain by wage labour in Ireland. In any case they appear to prefer remaining here on the dole with occasional jobs, to returning to their own country. Once here they tend to stay, and in many cases are said to bring their relatives over from Ireland to share their good fortune at the expense of the British taxpayers and ratepayers.³⁸

On 13 March in a House of Commons debate on unemployment the Conservative MP for Bootle, and former member of Liverpool City Council, Eric Errington elaborated on the issues raised by the Economic League. It was doubtful, he contended, how many local unemployed people had benefited from the government initiative of locating rearmament work in Lancashire. Important factories had been opened at Chorley and Speke, Liverpool, but he alleged that the labour employed there was not Lancashire labour. The government should produce precise information about unskilled Irish labour. This would 'allay the feelings, right or wrong, of people in Lancashire.' Rumours and allegations were circulating about these Irish labourers, which had 'a great deal of currency' among the unemployed. It was rumoured that a large number of Irish had been employed at the aircraft factory in Speke. During the Czech crisis in the autumn of 1938 they had left. Local people had replaced them but once the Irish returned after the crisis they had been re-instated and the local replacements dismissed.

A further allegation was that these Irish worked for six months in various parts of the country and then came to Liverpool where they claimed unemployment insurance or became a charge on the Unemployed Assistance Board (UAB) There was no check on their addresses and accommodation addresses were used. Errington had heard of one case in which twelve people gave the address of one common lodging house, and of another in which five or six gave the address of a café and were employed on the strength of that as local people. He also suggested that there was trafficking in unemployment cards.

Errington claimed that these allegations about Irish labourers were circulating in his constituency and on Merseyside generally.

³⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2 Mar. 1939.

The government should deal with the situation. He could not say whether these accusations were correct or not but there was a feeling among the unemployed that they were not getting 'a square deal'. Information should be made available by the government. He tortuously concluded that it would then be

time to consider whether the problem should be dealt with and if so, how, and then people would have no reason in my particular area, when the facts are known, to make complaints which are so difficult to substantiate.

The Conservative MP for Widnes, Colonel Richard Pilkington, supported Errington. He tackled head on the accusation that the allegations made were a direct attack on the Irish. There was no question of racial persecution of the Irish. It was merely a question of whether or not 'our own people should come first'. Just as a Dominion's (Eire) first responsibility was to its own citizens so England's was to its own people. The taxpayers had the right to know the number of people they were supporting who were not citizens of the country.³⁹

A parallel strand to the Economic League report in the Irish narratives of 1939 was provided by a group of Liverpool City Councillors who initiated the Anti-Irish Immigration Bureau. A protest meeting about the 'influx' of Irish labour was held in Liverpool's Picton Hall on 18 January 1939. The *Liverpool Daily Post* claimed that a thousand people had been unable to get into the meeting (the Picton Hall could seat 1,200). A resolution was passed almost without dissent calling on the government to take action. Claiming to be 'non-political' and 'non-sectarian', the resolution protested against the 'unrestricted entry' of Irish into England and particularly into Liverpool. There was alarm at the growing numbers of Irish employed on public and private projects in Liverpool. Many of them, when later unemployed, became a charge on national and local funds. The government should amend the immigration laws to ensure a 'fair deal for Liverpool born men' looking for employment and to prevent public funds being spent on those who were the responsibility of the Irish government.

The main speaker at this protest meeting was the Conservative councillor (Princes Park) David Rowan. He was particularly concerned with allegations surrounding the employment of Irish workers at the aircraft factory in Speke, their departure at the time of the

³⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 14 Mar. 1939.

Czech crisis, their replacement by local workers, and their subsequent re-instatement. Rowan claimed only to be reporting allegations that needed to be examined. It had been claimed that when the Czech crisis began telegrams were received from the Labour Exchange telling local men to report for work at Speke on 28 September. It had been alleged that at this time Irishmen had 'shot back' to Eire because although they did not mind earning money in England they were not prepared to fight. As soon as the crisis was over they came back in groups and the Liverpool men who had been taken on in their places were sacked.

Replying to Rowan's enquiry into these allegations, the Labour Exchange had informed him that 161 labourers had been taken on during the Czech crisis specifically to carry out air raid precautions at Speke. Once the crisis was over this work had been suspended and the men laid off. To dispute this version of events Rowan produced twenty witnesses from the audience who claimed that they had been employed for up to a week at Speke and had then been sacked without any apparent reason. Each of them contended that the work was not finished and that their jobs were given to Irishmen. The contractors, McAlpine, in response to further enquiries by Rowan, had stated that 95% of the men employed on the Speke site were from Merseyside. This was disputed by Rowan, who claimed that from six names taken at random from McAlpine's records five had given accommodation addresses.

Rowan explained how the Irish had established their stranglehold on the Liverpool labour market. 'Gangers' came over from County Mayo. When settled they sent for relations who came and worked until they had enough stamps on their cards to entitle them to benefit. They then sent over for another relative and 'went on to the Unemployment Assistance Board'. Their wives and families came with them and if they did not work the Liverpool Public Assistance Committee was 'compelled to keep them'. The city could only ask them to return to the Free State. If they agreed to go, the city had to pay their transport costs and they often returned in a few days. If they refused to go, the city had to keep them. Houses, education and social services had to be provided. The children needed free milk and meals. These Irish settled in slum property, and when that was demolished they got new 'municipal houses', while Liverpool people who had waited for years could not get houses. The Irish Free State had certainly discovered 'a cheap way to keep its poor'. He did not

blame the Irish for coming. It was the system that was at fault. Liverpool should present a united front to the government and demand an amendment to the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. This should be done to secure a 'square deal' for Liverpool men 'while this is still our England'.⁴⁰

Rowan was supported by a former Labour councillor, Mary Agnes Cumella, who had lost her seat in Granby in the November 1937 election, fought on the issue of grants to Catholic schools. She denied that religious affiliation was an issue in the Irish problem. The problem was an economic one. Liverpool could recover the costs of migrants from other parts of the United Kingdom if they became chargeable to the Public Assistance Committee but this was not the case with those from Ireland. Irish immigrants came to Liverpool and brought their families. They were often kept by family or friends for the statutory year and a day. After that the local ratepayers had to keep them and 'their families of eight and nine children'. When it came to housing and slum clearance the director of housing did not take into account whether slum residents had been there for six years or six months. Irish people who had been in Liverpool only a few months were now living in new municipal houses, subsidised in their rent by Liverpool ratepayers, while young married Liverpool people with children could not get houses. Cumella also complained of 'the low cultural development' of the Irish, which 'did no good to the city'. Liverpool had a right to expect some return from these immigrants but the only return it got from the Irish was 'a baby every year'. Cumella's comment that people should not have a baby every year for somebody else to keep was greeted with cheers from the audience. The Irish in Liverpool were doing considerably better on relief than they would at home and had no intention of returning. Liverpool needed a confidential bureau to gather information on Irish immigration and to find out which employers were giving jobs to the Irish. If there were no employers who gave jobs to the Irish there would be jobs for Liverpool people. She concluded by referring to another strand in the Irish narrative, the IRA bombing campaign, which had recently begun in various parts of England. She hoped that if the outrages continued 'Liverpool would rise in a body and clear the Irish out'. This was greeted with applause.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19 Jan. 1939.

⁴¹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19 Jan. 1939.

Liverpolitan welcomed the establishment of an 'Irish Investigation Bureau', claiming it would clarify to what extent jobs, which could have gone to Liverpool's unemployed, had been taken by Irish immigrants. That this happened to 'an enormous extent' was well known, but it was difficult to get exact information of the names and addresses of migrants and their employers. *Liverpolitan* alleged that some employers organised the import of these workers or at least were 'in league with agents' who did: 'How else is it possible to explain that so many natives of Eire who arrive in Liverpool obtain employment here almost immediately?' Rowan had been wise to set up the bureau on non-sectarian lines and to exclude Alderman Longbottom, the leader of the Protestant Party in Liverpool, from the platform, for that would have given the impression that this was an anti-Catholic initiative. The object of the bureau was to stem the flow of people from Eire, regardless of religion, although the vast majority were of course Catholics. The aim was to prevent these immigrants becoming a charge on the PAC.⁴²

Alarmed by the enthusiasm with which Cumella's call for Liverpool to rise up and expel the Irish had been greeted, one local clergyman warned against a pogrom of the Irish. The Rev. George Durham of Waterloo accepted that the Irish who came to Liverpool were probably prepared to work for lower wages than were local men. These Irish were in a position of work or starve and were easy prey for unscrupulous employers. But this was no reason for a pogrom. What was needed was a commitment to policies that would banish unemployment from the United Kingdom and Ireland, for to refuse men work was 'a collective sin against Our Father and our fellows'.⁴³

The Protestant Party city councillor, G. H. Dunbar, brushed aside Durham's fear of a pogrom. Rather, in a reference to the IRA campaign, it seemed to him that that 'quite a few of them are attempting to start a pogrom against their English benefactors'. Dismissing Durham's solution, the creation of employment for all, as utopian, he insisted it was necessary to take 'stringent steps' to protect 'our social services'. This was needed against the hundreds of Irish who settled in Liverpool each year with a permanent pension at the ratepayers' expense and the need for ever-larger allowances because of 'rapid additions to the family'.

⁴² *Liverpolitan*, Feb. 1939, p. 3.

⁴³ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 Jan. 1939.

Rowan received support from Liverpool Conservative MPs. David Maxwell Fyfe, Member for Liverpool West Derby, intended to inform the Secretary for the Dominions of the Picton Hall resolution and Sir Edmund Brocklebank, of Liverpool Fairfield, regretted that the government had not introduced a passport system, with powers of exclusion, for those entering the country from Ireland, nor taken powers to expel those already living in England. Rowan indicated that one of the prime concerns of the Anti-Irish Immigration Bureau would be to protect the interests of Liverpool working men against 'cheap Irish labour and consequent unjust dismissals'.⁴⁴

Rowan pursued his campaign in the city council and its Public Assistance Committee. In February 1939 the council accepted Rowan's motion that the PAC should submit a report on the number of Irish and their dependants who had become chargeable to the PAC in the previous five years, the number who had been sent back in that period, and the cost of those removals. Additionally the PAC should produce a monthly report on the numbers from Eire applying for relief and the decision of the PAC in each case. The PAC's reports were submitted to the full council in June 1939.⁴⁵

The PAC, confining itself to those who had arrived directly in Liverpool from Ireland and who did not have a minimum of twelve months continuous residence prior to applying for assistance, reported that between 1 April 1934 and 8 February 1939 1,061 men, 221 women and 233 children (in total 1,515 people) from Ireland had become chargeable. They were mainly people who had been destitute on arrival. In the same period no individual had been sent back to Ireland. There was no provision in the Poor Law to compel the return of destitute people to Eire and no legislation to allow the PAC to treat people arriving from Ireland differently from those arriving from any British possession or Dominion. However, the local authority could make a contribution to the costs of those who returned voluntarily to Ireland. In the previous five years 992 men, 117 women and 125 children (1,164 people in total) had been helped to return. The cost to the local authority had been approximately £500. The PAC had also made arrangements to provide the monthly report demanded by Rowan's motion.⁴⁶ The situation in March, for example, was that thirteen cases in the previous month

⁴⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 Jan. 1939.

⁴⁵ Liverpool City Council, Proceedings, 7 June 1939, pp. 663–64.

⁴⁶ Public Assistance Committee, Proceedings, Nov. 1938–Oct. 1939, pp. 3–4.

had become chargeable to the PAC. These involved twelve men, seven women and thirteen children. Two cases involved former members of the British Army who alleged victimisation in their own country. In the week ending 29 April 1939 the PAC scrutinised all cases of those receiving relief. Of the 20,703 cases, sixty-seven involved people originally from Eire who had not resided continuously without relief in Liverpool for a period of five years before their initial application. These sixty-seven cases involved forty-one men, sixty-seven women and eighty-four children, indicating some divergence from the common stereotype of the Irish migrant. The weekly cost of these cases to the PAC was just over £57, or approximately £3,000 per year.⁴⁷

The PAC figures did not include recent Irish immigrants who were in work and not seeking assistance; they hardly substantiated the popular picture of the number of destitute Irish being supported by the city's ratepayers. The first figures produced by the Public Assistance Officer, G. W. Molyneux, were challenged at the PAC's meeting on 19 April, where the response was on clearly-defined party lines. Councillor H. N. Bewley, Conservative, Castle Street, objected that Molyneux had used as his base line a period of twelve months continuous residence before application for Public Assistance was made. Bewley insisted that this was not a sufficiently long period. The use of a five-year residence period would produce a fairer assessment of the position. The five-year period was adopted in later reports by the Public Assistance Officer. However, Longbottom, the leader of the Protestant Party, felt the adoption of the five-year benchmark would make little difference to the figures. As an opponent of Irish immigration he did not claim that Irish people came to Liverpool to claim relief, rather they came to 'jobs which were prepared for them.' Obviously if the job did not work out relief became 'merely a calling point'. He alleged that there had been considerable trafficking in 'Labour Exchange cards'. Longbottom's assertions were challenged by Hogan, the Labour Party leader, a Catholic:

All this great scare is simply eyewash. It is based upon something that you have in Liverpool and that you have not got in any other part of the country—a deep venomous hostility to the people, who if trouble breaks out in Europe, you will want to have on your side. Whoever Alderman

⁴⁷ Public Assistance Committee, Proceedings, Nov. 1938–Oct. 1939, pp. 4, 7.

Longbottom fools, he does not fool intelligent people of this city. We understand his motives only too well.

The left-wing Labourite John Braddock rejected the notion that Irish migrants came to Liverpool for Public Assistance relief. They came to Liverpool because they were encouraged to do so by employers who wanted 'that type of labour'. These employers would strenuously resist any effort to stop the Irish from coming.⁴⁸

The interim report of the Anti-Irish Immigration Bureau appeared on 3 August. The background to its publication was the IRA bombing campaign of 1939 and the introduction of the Prevention of Violence Act, which gave the government powers to expel suspected IRA terrorists.⁴⁹ The first expulsions under the Act had been made before the report's appearance. Many of the deportations were made from Liverpool.⁵⁰ The interim report stated that the Bureau's object was to expose where preference was given to Irish labour to the detriment of Liverpool's unemployed and demanded the revision of the 1920 Act to ensure that the Irish government accepted financial responsibility for its nationals who had become chargeable to public funds in Liverpool. In the Bureau's view IRA activities in recent months and the difficulty of tracing and arresting those involved was ample proof that the Act was being abused. A radical political and economic cure was needed. The Act should be amended, there should be a rigorous control of immigration, and a passport/identity card system should be introduced, which would control immigration at the port of entry and which would enable the authorities to keep track of those who had been allowed entry.⁵¹

The central charge of the Bureau was that Irishmen had been given preference over local unemployed workers. Some employers had claimed that Irish labourers were better equipped to endure the 'arduous nature' of the work than local men who lacked the stamina to give them physical equality with the Irish labourers. The report refuted this assertion. The authors, having interviewed local labourers and experienced gangers in the building trade, alleged that Irish labourers accepted the poorest working conditions, which would not be tolerated by local workers. To support this allegation,

⁴⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 20 Apr. 1939.

⁴⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 July, 28 July 1939.

⁵⁰ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 July, 31 July, 1-3 Aug. 1939.

⁵¹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 Aug. 1939.

which had a wide currency in Liverpool, the report produced the evidence of one ganger who was responsible for ninety men. Irishmen, he claimed, would work in the rain, and would help in erecting huts on new sites, often working for days without pay. They would later give the foreman sixpence or a shilling out of their pay, work without overtime rates of pay, and 'without shoes in trenches that are dangerous'. The conditions were deliberately kept bad 'so that only Irishmen will stick it'. This ganger said that this was common practice on large building jobs and that by the time the Irishmen were taken on to the payroll they were already indebted to the Irish ganger, who often operated as a moneylender, and whose authority was undisputed. Where Liverpool men did succeed in getting jobs, working conditions were kept at a primitive level to discourage them, and no protective clothing or hot water for tea was provided.⁵²

The report also examined the procedure for employing men on corporation and government contracts. Council standing orders insisted on the employment of local labour on all corporation contracts. The Bureau agreed that in the main this was the case but the position was not entirely satisfactory because the council only employed one labour investigator. In the case of government contracts, the Ministry of Labour had agreed that workers should be employed through the local Labour Exchange but the Bureau contended this was honoured more in the breach than the observance. It had investigated representative cases where it had found that Irish labourers had been recruited by Irish gangers while local men 'with the green employment Exchange cards' were not employed. Other locals had been dismissed and replaced by Irishmen. Irishmen had used accommodation addresses and the Bureau had repeatedly discovered on public works Irishmen who had not registered at Employment Exchanges. Supporting the claim that there was extensive traffic in employment cards, it demanded closer inspection of insurance cards on public works sites in Liverpool.⁵³

The report repeated the allegation that Irish immigrants were obtaining Corporation houses before local people: 'It is probable that had it not been for the influx of immigrants from Eire since the war into Liverpool slum property, the Corporation clearance schemes would have been completed'. The re-housing of Irish

⁵² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 Aug. 1939.

⁵³ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 Aug. 1939.

immigrants, it asserted, in new Corporation houses, subsidised by the general body of ratepayers, was causing great discontent among Liverpool-born people who had been registered as applicants for corporation houses for many years. The report's authors felt that the Irish problem should be tackled at source, the port of entry, but were disappointed at the lack of support they were receiving from 'the responsible authorities'.⁵⁴

Contributing a further strand to the Irish narratives in 1939 was an IRA bombing campaign, part of a campaign by Irish republicans to achieve a United Ireland. Reports of IRA incidents soon began appearing in the Liverpool and national press.⁵⁵ By the last week in January there were rumours on Merseyside that IRA bombs had been found at Seaforth Barracks, a training centre for recruits to Liverpool King's Regiment. This was denied by the police, but they did carry out searches and visited a number of houses and premises in 'the Irish quarter of the city'.⁵⁶ In the same week they were reported to be still investigating 'activities in Irish circles' and were receiving a good deal of support from the general public. There was a call for this to be maintained and increased. The police felt that they would be more successful if they continued to receive 'constant and immediate information'. Anyone who was suspicious about any group or meeting of people, or who might have seen parcels being delivered in 'incongruous circumstances', should contact them immediately as time was 'an essential factor in such inquiry work'.⁵⁷ Within days of this appeal explosives had been seized in Liverpool after raids on a number of houses and six men had been remanded on various charges.⁵⁸

IRA activity continued nationally and locally into the spring and early summer and there were reports of numerous incidents in Liverpool. Police searches continued and cases came to court. In one search of a young Irishman's rooms poems 'dealing with vengeance' and photographs of Irish patriots were found, in another a rifle and a machine-gun manual.⁵⁹ By mid-March, six Liverpool men were on

⁵⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 Aug. 1939. The report was signed by six city councillors, five Conservative, one Liberal, and Mrs Cumella, the secretary.

⁵⁵ For example, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁶ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 31 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 24–25 Feb. 1939.

trial for possession of explosives.⁶⁰ In April and May there were a number of bombing incidents in Liverpool. On 5 April the tramway system in the southern suburbs of the city was attacked although little damage was done. A bomb exploded on 11 April in Islington Square, a venue for open-air meetings. A telephone kiosk was wrecked, hundreds of windows were shattered, and IRA slogans were chalked on pavements. Another telephone kiosk in the east of the city was blown up three days later. Towards the end of the month on 25 April there was a widespread and concerted attack on commercial premises in the city centre when explosives were dropped through letterboxes.⁶¹ In early May two Liverpool city centre cinemas were subjected to tear gas attacks and three thousand cinemagoers had to be evacuated. A week later a sub-post office in the densely populated Liverpool Irish area of Scotland Road was targeted. The prompt action of a postman, who discovered the forty-seven sticks of gelignite, prevented what 'might have been the most serious explosion Liverpool has known in the series of IRA bomb outrages'.⁶²

The voice of middle-class Liverpool, *Liverpolitan*, was 'amazed' at the beginning of February that there had been no denunciation of these 'dastardly outrages' by the leaders of the Liverpool Irish Catholic community, such as Alderman Austin Harford, Centre Party leader and former Irish Nationalist, or Alderman Luke Hogan, Labour Party leader since 1930. It was of course 'convinced' that the outrages were 'repugnant to the minds and hearts of an overwhelming majority' of Irish people. However, enormous cost was involved in the preparation and execution of the bombings. *Liverpolitan* had it on 'high authority' that the IRA was being financed from Germany, a repetition of Germany's efforts before the war of 1914-18.⁶³ Its readers were left to draw their own conclusions about the loyalty of the Irish in case of a future conflict with Germany.

Harford and Hogan continued to maintain their silence on the IRA campaign but Richard Downey, Archbishop of Liverpool, and himself Irish, who from his consecration as Archbishop in 1928 had striven to re-brand Liverpool Catholicism and had stressed the

⁶⁰ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15 Mar. 1939.

⁶¹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6, 12, 15 and 26 Apr. 1939.

⁶² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 and 11 May 1939.

⁶³ *Liverpolitan*, Feb. 1939, p. 2.

loyalty of Catholics, did condemn the IRA. Harford presided at the St Patrick's Eve dinner in Liverpool, and expressed his wish, when proposing the loyal toast, that the King and Queen might in the not too distant future visit a United Ireland. Downey in response accepted that Ireland was passing through a difficult time of 'reconstruction and co-ordination'. He was happy that relations between Britain and Eire were on an amicable basis but regretted that

a shadow had been cast by the criminal folly of some men and women of Irish lineage who had mistakenly allowed their patriotism to be exploited in such a way as to bring discredit on themselves and their cause.

In any civilised community, terrorism, wherever it appeared and whatever the cause it promoted, must be 'wiped out'. These men and women who were endangering and causing the destruction of human life deserved severe sentences in the courts. He believed that they were the 'tool' of others and that the 'hidden hand' that manipulated them would soon be brought to account.⁶⁴

Liverpolitan welcomed Downey's public condemnation of the IRA as timely but insisted that the 'hidden hand' was to be looked for across the North Sea. Despite Downey's statement, *Liverpolitan* continued to insinuate that the loyalty of the Irish was still in doubt and warned,

in the interests of the Irish people both in this country and in Eire, it is to be hoped that all those who were born in Ireland but now reside here will help by every means in their power to end these terrorist operations.⁶⁵

Liverpolitan's suspicion of IRA-German links was shared by others in the city. At a Conservative Party meeting on 16 May it was alleged that gelignite from Eire was being brought into Liverpool by German ships. This gelignite was then used by the IRA. Stinton Johnson, chairman of the political committee of the Abercromby ward Conservative Party, claimed that German tramp steamers sailed with this cargo into Garston docks. He had been told that every time there was an IRA explosion in Liverpool 'a certain vessel, of this type was in Garston docks.' There was also evidence, he alleged, of contact between Irishmen and the German Labour Front in London. The allegations prefaced a call for identity cards to be

⁶⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 Mar. 1939.

⁶⁵ *Liverpolitan*, Apr. 1939, p. 2.

introduced for all citizens of the Irish Free State living or working in Britain. Councillor J. Sloan was convinced that much of the money earned by Irish workers in Britain, where they had displaced 'good English labour', was used to finance IRA outrages. Identity cards would enable a check to be kept on 'these anti-social acts'. The renegade Labour councillor, Reginald Bevins, who switched to the Conservatives in 1938 on the Catholic schools grant question, deplored the 'behaviour' of those Irish employed on public works, who used their position 'to play into the hands of hostile forces'. He agreed with Johnson's proposals for an identity card system. He added, referring to the contentious issue of the possible conscription of Irish citizens into the British armed services in the event of war against Germany, that all Irishmen in Britain should be required 'to perform their responsibilities to the state or should be given short shrift'.⁶⁶

In May, in response to the IRA cinema bombs, *Liverpolitan* called on the Government to introduce drastic measures to end the terrorism to which the British people were being subjected. The unrestricted immigration of Irish into Britain should be stopped. Only those with identity cards should be allowed entry and the Irish should be subject to the same regulations as 'aliens' generally. Furthermore all customs officers of Irish nationality should be removed from service at British ports and should be replaced by British-born members of the service.⁶⁷

Liverpolitan's concerns about the reliability of Irish-born customs officers was echoed in Parliament by the Labour MP for Newcastle under Lyme, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, scion of the Staffordshire pottery family, initiator of the *History of Parliament*, and self-appointed defender of British democratic values.⁶⁸ Wedgwood tabled a number of questions to the Home Secretary. He asked whether the deportation of IRA suspects had been considered and wanted to know how many members of the Metropolitan police force, and of the Liverpool and Manchester forces had been born in Eire. David Logan, Labour MP for Liverpool Scotland and staunch defender of the Liverpool Irish community, took exception to the

⁶⁶ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 May 1939.

⁶⁷ *Liverpolitan*, May 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁸ David Cannadine, *In Churchill's shadow: Confronting the past in modern Britain* (London, 2002), pp. 134–58. For Wedgwood's defence of the rights of internees in WWII see Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939–1945* (London, 2004), p. 229.

word 'suspect' on the House of Commons order paper and to the use of a Parliamentary question to make unsupported allegations. Rather, he argued that the Irish in Britain deserved the 'protection of the House'. In response to Wedgwood's question the Home Office volunteered that there were 130 Irish-born police in the Metropolitan Police, fourteen in Manchester and forty-one in Liverpool.⁶⁹

In the increasingly agitated public atmosphere generated by the IRA campaign the government introduced an anti-IRA measure, the Prevention of Violence (Temporary Provisions) Act on 19 July. It went through all its parliamentary stages in ten days, becoming law on 28 July, with little opposition, although Ellen Wilkinson, Labour MP for Jarrow, did suggest that if the Home Secretary were not careful it would be a criminal offence to have an Irish accent. The special powers allowed the government to deport citizens of Eire suspected of IRA activities or connections and a series of such expulsions were carried out in late July and August.⁷⁰ The *Liverpool Daily Post* did demonstrate some unease about the draconic powers conferred by the act, arguing that the measures were not directed at the Irish people as a whole or even against the people of Eire. Eire itself had led the way by outlawing the IRA. Nevertheless, the *Daily Post* felt that it was 'intolerable that this country should be disturbed at a time like this' by men and women whose political ideas did not go beyond 'a naïve belief in physical force'.⁷¹

As the IRA campaign continued despite the use of the special powers the public mood in Liverpool was graphically illustrated by an incident at the end of August, a matter of days before Britain went to war with Germany. There were a number of explosions in various parts of the country, including Liverpool on the weekend of 26/27 August, and further attacks and false alarms in the middle of the following week.⁷² The chief constable, A. K. Wilson appealed for greater vigilance and cooperation from the general public in dealing with the IRA. Boarding house keepers, especially, were asked to inform the police immediately if 'any Irish men or women, not already well-known to them' sought accommodation.⁷³ In the highly charged atmosphere, to which such appeals contributed, it was

⁶⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 30 June 1939.

⁷⁰ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 20, 27, 28 and 29 July, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 Aug. 1939.

⁷¹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 20 July 1939.

⁷² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28, 29 and 30 Aug. 1939.

⁷³ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 31 Aug. 1939.

perhaps hardly surprising that unsuspecting locals could become the centre of violent attention. It was public knowledge in Liverpool that during the IRA campaign gelignite had been packed in balloons. On 30 August a man was seen in a shop in North Hill Street, in south Liverpool, close to St Patrick's Catholic Church, buying a balloon for his child. A rumour that he was an IRA member quickly produced a large and angry crowd. The unfortunate shopper, in fear for his life, was trapped. He was eventually rescued by two detectives and five uniformed police from the nearby Essex St police station.⁷⁴

While there were demands for the introduction of identity cards and for special powers of deportation, there were some inconsistencies in the popular Irish narratives of the summer of 1939. The IRA campaign took place against the backdrop of the deterioration of relations with Nazi Germany and with the acceptance of the seeming inevitability of war. The issue of various forms of national service, including conscription into the armed forces, in the case of war, increasingly occupied public opinion, as did the question of what part the Irish living in Britain should play in this process. In Liverpool there was a long tradition of Irish volunteer regiments for the British army.⁷⁵ Even *Liverpolitan*, drawing a distinction between Irish immigrants and Liverpool-born Irish, accepted in May 1939 that the loyalty of the latter group was 'unquestionable', as was shown by the numbers joining the ranks of the reconstituted 8th (Irish) Battalion of the Liverpool King's Regiment.⁷⁶ The initiative to raise an Irish battalion of thirty-one officers and 630 men, had come from the 8th Irish Old Comrades Association.⁷⁷ In mid-July the 8th (Irish) Battalion paraded at St Francis Xavier's church accompanied by two hundred veterans (a small number of non-Catholics in the battalion paraded at the nearby St Augustine's, Shaw Street).⁷⁸

However, the positive response to the 8th (Irish) Battalion was far outweighed by the negative tones produced in response to what was seen as Irish disloyalty. Responding to the Irish's Government's

⁷⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 31 Aug. 1939.

⁷⁵ See, for example, J. Davies, 'British Catholics and the South African War, 1899–1900', in J. A. Hilton, ed., *Turning the last century: Essays on English Catholicism circa 1900* (Wigan, 2003), pp. 53–54.

⁷⁶ *Liverpolitan*, May 1939, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 Apr. 1939.

⁷⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 July 1939.

intention to remain neutral in the case of war with Germany unless a United Ireland was conceded by Britain, *Liverpolitan* demanded that no resident Irish should be exempt from military service unless they declared themselves aliens, in which case they should be deported. It argued that past experience, the Czech crisis of 1938, indicated that there would be a mass exodus of Irish. In that case steps should be taken to prevent their return.⁷⁹ In September, despite its bitter resentment of de Valera's Irish Government's neutrality in the war against Germany, *Liverpolitan* did find it of some consolation that in the previous weeks 'not less than a quarter of a million Irish have fled from these shores to their native land'. Many of these had given up key positions in important industries from which in the past they had been able to give jobs to their compatriots. Others, involved in important construction work at high rates of pay, had 'likewise deserted their posts'. *Liverpolitan* asked whether it was 'too much to hope that British employers of labour will refuse to re-instate these "rats" at the end of the war?'⁸⁰

Liverpool's Irish narratives thus came to an end with the outbreak of World War II with a return to their dominant theme, the theft of jobs from British workers by Irish immigrants. Tributary streams such as the Catholic Schools Grant question, the cost to the Public Assistance Committee of Liverpool of Irish relief seekers, and the IRA campaign and the responses to it in 1939, all fed into this swollen river of discontent at the perceived privileged position in Liverpool of Irish immigrant workers. These public narratives in the 1930s, beginning with the Anglican *Liverpool Review* at the beginning of the decade, all claimed to be articulating, rather than forming, popular opinion. Bishop David, in initiating the debate, was undoubtedly under pressure from the evangelical wing of his own church, which felt that in working-class Liverpool Anglicans were losing out to more radical Protestant groups, such as that led by the Reverend Longbottom. The middle-class journal *Liverpolitan* saw itself as defending ratepayers, who bore the burden of National Assistance Board costs and whose interests, it claimed, were not adequately represented by the existing political parties or by groups such as the Ratepayers Association. Liverpool politicians, city councillors and MPs, were responding, in their view, to the legitimate concerns of their constituents.

⁷⁹ *Liverpolitan*, May 1939, p. 1.

⁸⁰ *Liverpolitan*, Sept. 1939, p. 7.

To what extent were these Irish narratives racist or sectarian/anti-Catholic? The majority of the authors of these narratives evidently felt some unease on this question and took pains to dissociate themselves from any suggestion that they were opposed to the Irish because of their race or religion. Most of them claimed they were only concerned with the economic impact of Irish immigration at a time of extreme economic distress. Despite this, however, the theme of the Irish as 'other', culturally and religiously, continually surfaced. Hickman, referring to Irish migration in the nineteenth century has argued that the Irish were essential in the process by which a British national identity was forged.⁸¹ If this was the case then it appears that the process was still incomplete in Liverpool in the 1930s.

⁸¹ Hickman, *Religion, class and identity*, p. 12.