MITCHELL, ARTHUR. Revolutionary Government in Ireland. Dáil Éireann, 1919–22. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1995. xii, 423 pp. £40.00.

The Irish independence movement of 1919 to 1922 comprised three branches: Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and Dáil Éireann. The first of these has been the subject of major studies; the second has received detailed, if selective, treatment; this book is the first comprehensive assessment of the third.

Sinn Féin was founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith. Usually translated literally as "we ourselves", Sinn Féin essentially meant "self-reliance". Prevailing nationalist strategy was to seek "Home Rule" through alliance with the Liberal Party at Westminster; an approach Griffith denounced as ineffective and anglicizing. Instead, inspired by the example of Hungarian patriots in 1848, he argued that Irish MPs should abstain from Westminster, convene a parliament in Dublin, and develop the nation through policies of economic and cultural self-sufficiency. The party made little headway until the Easter 1916 Rising popularized advanced nationalism. In 1917, a "second Sinn Féin" emerged, as the tiny party was taken over by a new generation of republicans – many of them veterans of the Rising, and still connected with the Volunteers (or IRA as they were soon to be better known). In the elections that followed World War I, Sinn Féin won seventy-three of the 105 Irish Westminster constituencies. The Home Rule party was reduced to six seats, and Unionists won twenty-six. Twenty-nine Sinn Féin MPs – the others were imprisoned or "on the run" – duly met on 21 January 1919 to declare Irish independence, and establish Dáil Éireann, complete with a government and ministries.

Mitchell offers a conventional, top down, administrative history of this process. There is only the barest mention of the intellectual origins of what he calls the "counter-state"; not even a critique of Griffith's pamphlet, *The Resurrection of Hungary; A Parallel for Ireland* (Dublin, 1904), or a discussion of how the concept was understood in the second Sinn Féin party. Readers unfamiliar with Irish history may also find references to pre-1919 events confusing, as even minor incidents are occasionally cited without elaboration.

Where Mitchell succeeds is in offering a thorough account of the work of Dáil Éireann, its government, civil service, foreign relations and finances; its interconnection with Sinn Féin and the IRA; its relations with the two most powerful forces in nationalist Ireland outside the republican movement, the Catholic Church and the trade unions; and its duel with the British state agencies. Partly because the present Irish parliament dates its origins from the first Dáil, the success of the experiment has been taken for granted. At the same time, the social revolutionary intent of the Dáil has not been taken seriously. Historians have treated the two Dáileanna of 1919–1922 primarily as illustrations of the democratic basis and bourgeois liberal nature of the independence movement. With a few exceptions, the work of Dáil ministries has been seen as a pretence to demonstrate the separatist principle, or concerned with managing the social unrest of the post-1918 period, and thereby facilitating a purely political revolution that would not disturb existing class relations. In other words, the counter-state was also the counter-revolution.

Mitchell revises all of these interpretations. Dáil Éireann aroused curiosity in the international media, but, for most of 1919, was derided by the British

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administration and much of the Irish press. Sinn Féin itself had no thought-through plan of campaign. Building departments of government proceeded slowly on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on the requirements of the political struggle or the enterprise of individual ministers. There were limits to what could be done and the more achieved the more these were exposed. Once the Dáil did begin to register an impact, it was suppressed and driven underground from September 1919 to July 1921. Funding came mainly from public subscriptions in Ireland and the United States, as it was found impossible to divert tax revenues, leaving the Republic unable to assume responsibility for any of the big spending branches of state. The Dáil government also suffered the usual human relations problems that lurk in any executive: inter-personal friction, and inert or inefficient ministers. While the colonial regime existed, however despised and isolated, the Dáil cabinet could not be the *de facto* government.

Though Mitchell does not dispute the point, he provides enough evidence to cast doubt on the thesis that the revolutionary Dáileanna were important in laying a foundation for parliamentary democracy after 1922. During the two and a half years of the War of Independence, the Dáil sat on twenty-one days. Attendance in any one session is not known to have exceeded fifty-two deputies. There was little time for scrutiny of legislation, and little dissent. Even if all Irish MPs were invited, the Dáil remained a one-party assembly. In the elections for the second Dáil, in May 1921, Sinn Féin used intimidation where necessary to have its candidates returned unopposed; though it faced no serious challenge. A crucial chink in the Republic's claim to be a functioning democracy is the ambiguity in relations between the Dáil and the IRA. If in practice there was a close connection, the Dáil did not publicly assume responsibility for the IRA until the spring of 1921. It is more likely that post-colonial Ireland developed a stable democracy because of the strength of the middle and farming classes, than habits acquired in debates in Dáil Éireann.

Nonetheless, the Dáil meant business. It followed parliamentary procedure as much as possible (ironically emulating the Westminster model), and aimed to displace the colonial state. The one area where this was achieved was law and order. When, by 1920, the IRA had paralysed civil policing and the lower divisions of the judiciary, the Dáil organized an efficient system of courts and arbitration, and a rather less effective police force. That its greatest administrative success came in defusing social agitation, especially campaigns of landless labourers and small farmers for the breakup of ranches in north Munster and east Connacht, has endorsed the retrospective myth of Sinn Féin as "the most conservative revolutionaries". Mitchell qualifies this image, stressing the radical nature of the counter-state concept, and its imaginative thinking on certain issues. If slim on sociology, he provides a useful socio-intellectual profile of republican leaders, describing them as "predominantly young, urban, middle-class, bred politically on a pure broth of simple nationalism and little more"(p. 9). Youth and simplicity gave Sinn Féin a pragmatic, eclectic outlook on economic questions. In the first flush of post-war radicalism, Dáil Éireann adopted the Labour Party's "Democratic Programme" as its social manifesto, and was enthusiastic about economic restructuring along co-operative lines. Its major economic initiative was to establish eight fishing co-operatives on the south and west coasts. The Labour Party and Trades Union Congress might have pushed the Republic to the left had it been bold enough to risk involvement with the practice of the revolution.

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Mitchell is guarded in evaluating the counter-state's contribution to Sinn Féin's partial victory in 1922. Certainly, the Dáil and its government were of immense propaganda value. The colonial regime, headed by the ageing, blimpish Lord French, underestimated its opponents, and, with the failure of a few feeble and ludicrous efforts at winning "hearts and minds", relied increasingly on repression. But was independence due primarily to Dáil Éireann, Sinn Féin, or the IRA? The counter-state was most useful in 1920 when it filled the vacuum created by the collapse of policing and the courts. In the process, it generated a sense of the inevitability of national independence. However, it could not discharge the other functions of the modern state. Its economic initiatives in afforestation and co-operatives were marginal or unsuccessful. Ultimately, the counter-state was driven by the Sinn Féin-IRA struggle, and failed as a project to create an alternative regime in embryo.

After the truce of July 1921, Republicans were preoccupied with negotiations for the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The post-war economic boom had now yielded to a slump, and Dáil civil servants had plenty of work to do in administering land courts and labour arbitration. Yet the Dáil debates on the Treaty fixed obsessively on the constitutional status of the proposed new Ireland, to the neglect of practicalities or the Ulster question. With the foundation of Saorstát Éireann, what little remained of the counter-state was wound up or merged into systems of government and bureaucracy modelled on Westminster and Whitehall. One of the great puzzles of Irish history is how Sinn Féin steered a purely political revolution through a period of intense social conflict. Recent studies in contemporary local history are confirming the importance of the Republican state as a factor in shaping agrarian and labour unrest, and the attitudes of interest groups such as ranchers, small farmers and trade unionists towards the national movement. Up to now, that state has been ill-defined. Mitchell gives it definition in this balanced, objective and extensive account of the revolutionary Republic.

Emmet O Connor

TILLY, CHARLES. Popular Contention in Great Britain 1758–1834. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) [etc.] 1995. xvii, 476 pp. Ill. $49.95; £31.50.

Over twenty years in the making, this major study of popular collective behaviour combines painstaking research and mature reflection. In tune with fashionable epistemological and historiographical developments, Charles Tilly now eschews the teleological paradigms which informed his earlier analysis of collective violence. Modernization is purportedly purged from these pages, along with any attempt at meta-historical analysis. In place of epochal transition from the traditional and reactionary to the modern and proactive, Tilly offers a minute investigation of the complex but critical emergence of public meetings, demonstrations and special-interest associations. A study of how change occurs, it celebrates the advent of "durable mass national politics" in nineteenth-century Britain.

Aided by a team of research assistants, Tilly has drawn up a database of over 8,000 "contentious gatherings", occasions on which ten or more people, outside of the government, "gathered in a publicly accessible place and made claims on

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