

## PROTESTANT DEPOPULATION IN SOUTH 1921-26

THE IRISH TIMES 22 Sept 2014

Sir, – Dr John M [Regan](#) (September 17th) commenting on Charles Townshend's review of Gemma Clark's *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War* and focusing specifically on the depopulation of southern Irish Protestants between 1911 and 1926, rejects Prof Townshend's observation that this population decline, if not ethnic cleansing, was a process far from normal.

The exodus of tens of thousands of Protestants from the Irish Free State heralding the decline in the Protestant population was not as a result of sectarianism, intimidation or land-grabbing. Such views clearly promote a sectarian narrative about republican actions during the War of Independence and is not supported by evidence. Although some Irish Protestants were victims of a process of expulsion, coercion, and in some cases murder – acts which would have been abhorred by those who planned the Easter Rising – there are reasons other than those suggested by Prof Townshend.

A significant contributor to this population decline can be identified with the Great War and aggressively encouraged Protestant relocation north. The horrific slaughter of young Irish Protestant men in the first World War had a devastating and disproportionate impact on the male Protestant population of the South.

This was reflected in the birth rate for decades following the war. In addition, the Northern Ireland regime led by Sir James Craig enticed large numbers of Protestants, through the offer of government jobs and housing, to relocate north of the Border in an attempt to offset Catholic majorities in Border counties. Some in government service chose to leave with their families rather than enter the civil/public service of the Free State.

In addition, there was a large British military establishment in Ireland which was stood down in 1922. This group was disproportionately Protestant.

Others left because they no longer enjoyed social and official privilege being Protestant once brought.

Furthermore, the strong religious, cultural and political ties which southern Protestants had in common with the northern majority resulted in a sizable shift of Protestants north across the Border.

It is worth noting that two Protestants who decided to stay south subsequently became presidents of Ireland. – Yours, etc,

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Sir, – The subject of Protestant depopulation in the area of independent Ireland continues to provoke analysis and comment, especially within the scholarly community.

John M Regan mentions the recent publication by Prof David Fitzpatrick on the subject of Southern Irish depopulation. It is particularly gratifying to see that Prof Fitzpatrick has arrived substantially at the same conclusion I arrived at in 1993 in my article in the *Irish Economic and Social History Journal*. In a study of the Dublin Protestant working class (with conclusions on the whole Protestant experience), I concluded that the causes of Protestant decline in Dublin, apparent since the 1820s, were social and economic.

The deindustrialisation of Ireland led to economic decline, leading in turn to a fall in immigration of Protestant persons from Great Britain, along with accelerating out-migration of Irish Protestants.

However, also very significant was the social force of marriage, especially the marriage pattern of Irish Protestant women marrying British military grooms on an Irish tour of duty.

I found that fully one-third of Protestant brides married British military grooms. The loss of young marriageable females to British soldiers was much more significant than the notorious *Ne Temere* decree in depleting Protestant society.

It seemed to me then, in 1993, and recent research has tended to confirm my conclusions, that social class is more important than religion in explaining depopulation.

The survival of a confident and prosperous Protestant middle class in the independent Irish state suggests that the simple category “Protestant” is not sufficient to sustain an historical explanation. – Yours, etc,

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