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The Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association and Irish Ex-Servicemen of the First World War, 1922–1932

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In 1925, the Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association (SILRA), originally founded for the relief of southern Irish loyalist refugees in Britain, created a fund for ex-servicemen resident in the Irish Free State (IFS). Populated primarily from among the ‘diehard’ right of the British Conservative Party, SILRA’s charitable work was inevitably influenced by the world view of its membership and their audience. But it also had a Dublin sub-committee that operated in very different circumstances in the IFS. This study of SILRA’s efforts to provide welfare to southern Irish veterans of the First World War highlights the extent to which conditions in Ireland – real or perceived – continued to animate British Conservatives long after the Irish Revolution (1916–23). It also adds to the growing literature on ex-servicemen in post-revolutionary Ireland through the lens of SILRA’s lobbying and fundraising.

KEYWORDS Loyalism; Irish Free State; empire; charity; ex-servicemen

Introduction

In March 1929, Major Ion White visited the Irish Free State (IFS) as relief secretary of the Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association (SILRA), a charitable organisation originally founded for the relief of southern Irish loyalist refugees in Britain. Reporting on his tour, White described meeting an ex-army sergeant in a town in the west of Ireland, badly wounded during the First World War, living with his wife and six children ‘in a cabin, 12 ft by 13 ft’. ‘The mother and four children slept in the only bed, the father and one child on two boards; the eldest boy slept on a ledge in the roof, by courtesy called a loft’. It was a ‘clean and tidy’ cabin but had flooded during the past winter and the ‘mother and baby appeared to be slowly dying’. This, White suggested, was the fate of many Irish men who had volunteered for the British armed forces during the war – left to the ‘mercy of their bitterest enemies’

by the British government, living in hovels in Irish towns with ‘nothing to do, many looking starving and ragged’, consumption ‘rampant among them’.¹

White’s report sought to raise awareness of the supposed conditions for loyalists and ex-servicemen in the twenty-six county IFS, which had gained dominion status in 1922 under the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and to encourage donations for those facing hardship after the British withdrawal. This message was repeated by the association in a series of pamphlets, letters to the editor, and speeches.² Appealing to the British public – ‘surely the cry of the children will be heard in this still wealthy country’ – SILRA also consistently argued that it was the responsibility of the British government to do its duty to those who had volunteered to fight for the empire.³

The experiences of Irish ex-servicemen – and particularly those returning to what became the IFS – has recently drawn sustained attention from historians. This scholarship has often aimed at evaluating the extent to which Irish veterans were targets for violence during the Irish struggle for independence or victims of discrimination in the IFS on the basis of their past service to the British Crown. Efforts have also been made to highlight the range of welfare services and charity available to Irish ex-servicemen, including the mentally or physically disabled.⁴ This article adds to the literature through an examination of a unique and specifically ‘loyalist’ charitable organisation. While SILRA continued to exist until the early 1960s, the focus here will remain on its first, and most active, decade in operation. In charting the nature of SILRA’s relief work for ex-servicemen in the IFS, and its relationship with other military welfare charities, this case study highlights the politicisation of southern Irish ex-servicemen by the ‘diehard’ right of the interwar British Conservative Party. SILRA’s charitable work, and the ways in which it was received, cannot be completely disentangled from the politics of its membership.

¹ ‘Report by the Relief Secretary on his Visit to Ireland in March 1929’, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Irish Unionists Alliance Papers, D989/B/5/2. White had made an earlier tour in 1924.

² SILRA pamphlet, ‘This is Poverty? Will you Help?’, n.d., PRONI D989/B/5/2; Northumberland, Letter to the Editor: ‘Plight of Ex-Soldiers’, *Daily Mail*, 2 February 1925, 9; ‘Southern Irish Loyalists: Lord Carson’s Plea’, *Irish Times*, 15 July 1926, 8; ‘Plight of ex-Service Men in Free State: Shameful Abandonment’, *Belfast News-letter*, 10 June 1927, 15; ‘Loyalists’ Plight’, *Daily Mail*, 10 June 1927, 4.

³ ‘Ex-servicemen in the Irish Free State. Their terrible sufferings.’, n.d., PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁴ For some of the earliest work on this: Jane Leonard, ‘The Twinge of Memory: Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday in Dublin Since 1919’, in *Unionism in Modern Ireland: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture*, ed. by Richard English and Graham Walker (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996); Jane Leonard, ‘Facing “The Finger of Scorn”: Veterans’ Memories of Ireland after the Great War’, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). More recently, Shannon Monaghan, ‘Whose country? Whose soldiers? Whose responsibility? First World War Ex-servicemen and the Development of the Irish Free State, 1923–1939’, *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 1 (2014), 75–94; Paul Taylor, *Heroes or Traitors? Experiences of Southern Irish Soldiers Returning to the Great War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015); Paul Huddle, ‘Ex-servicemen and the Soldiers’, Sailors’ and Airmen’s Families Association, 1919–1921’ in *Veterans of the First World War: Ex-servicemen and Ex-servicewomen in Post-War Britain and Ireland* ed. by David Swift and Oliver Wilkinson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Mandy Link, *Remembrance of the Great War in the Irish Free State, 1914–1937* (Cham: Palgrave, 2019); Michael Robinson, *Shell-Shocked British Army Veterans in Ireland, 1918–39: A difficult homecoming* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Emmanuel Destenay, *Shadows From the Trenches: Veterans of the Great War and the Irish Revolution (1918–1923)* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2021).

Indeed, it can highlight some of the ways in which the legacies of revolution in Ireland continued to animate British Conservatives long after 1923, while also providing insights into the experiences of the ex-unionist (or loyalist) minority in southern Ireland.

Rather than the varied experiences of Irish ex-servicemen themselves, this article will examine the ways in which welfare distributed in the IFS was organised, framed, and presented to audiences in Britain, Ireland, and further afield by a cohort of Conservative diehard activists. In turn, it will assess the reception of welfare for ex-servicemen and its accompanying messaging in the IFS. Of particular interest is the periodically fraught relationship between SILRA and the British Legion.⁵ A final section will examine the significance of SILRA's decision to provide relief to ex-servicemen, and its (problematic) labelling of war veterans as a separate, though homogenous, sub-category of Irish loyalist. As the demographics of SILRA's membership and the relationship between its committees in London and Dublin are crucial to understanding its work, it is necessary first to outline the origins and structure of the association before turning to the organisation of its fund for ex-servicemen.

Foundation and membership

SILRA was founded in London in June 1922. From March 1923 until his death in August 1930, Alan Ian Percy, 8th Duke of Northumberland, served as the chairman and public face of the association.⁶ Northumberland was a fiery orator and propagandist 'on the extreme right wing' of the Conservative Party, 'often at variance with the policies of its leaders after the War'.⁷ Neil Fleming has recently suggested that 'for all his ubiquity' in these circles, Northumberland 'never amounted politically to anything more than a county councillor'.⁸ This is perhaps unsurprising, given Northumberland's widely published controversialist views and distrust of the political élite, but he was, for a period after 1920, a significant figure amongst a diehard leadership whose views held weight with disenchanted Conservatives. Persistent lobbying by Northumberland and SILRA in the mid-1920s saw the introduction of a new compensation scheme for southern Irish loyalists and was again influential when limits set on the payment of awards granted were reversed.⁹ As

⁵ The Legion was the principal ex-servicemen's representative organisation, which also undertook philanthropic and charitable functions: Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British veterans, politics and society, 1921–1939* (Westport, CA and London: Praeger, 2005).

⁶ General committee minutes, 1 March 1923, 4 May 1923, 18 May 1923, PRONI D989/B/1/3.

⁷ Markku Ruotsila, 'The Antisemitism of the Eighth Duke of Northumberland's the *Patriot*, 1922–1930', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, 1 (2004), 71–2; C.M. Headlam, 'Percy, Ian Alan' in J.H.R. Weaver (ed), *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922–1930* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 662–3; Philip Williamson, 'Percy, Ian Alan, eighth Duke of Northumberland (1880–1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online.

⁸ N.C. Fleming, *Britannia's Zealots: Volume 1: Tradition, Empire, and the Forging of the Conservative Right* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 114.

⁹ Niamh Brennan, 'A political minefield: southern loyalists, the Irish Grants Committee and the British government, 1922–31', *Irish Historical Studies* 30, no. 119 (1997), 406–19. In 1927 the Treasury resolved to limit payments to 60 per cent of the excess of any award over £1,000, but this policy was reversed in February 1929.

Fleming suggests, the cause of the southern Irish loyalist might be Northumberland's most notable success.¹⁰

SILRA's membership was drawn almost entirely from the diehard wing of the Conservative Party and its circles, with a scattering of Anglo-Irish exiles.¹¹ Members ranged from those closer to government – like the 4th Marquess of Salisbury, who later succeeded Northumberland as chairman and was Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords in the 1920s – to backbench MPs, along with others further to the fringes of the right. What they had in common was their firm opposition to Prime Minister David Lloyd George's coalition government and to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The twenty-six county IFS created by the Treaty remained tied to the Empire, but the settlement was seen by diehards as a cowardly surrender to republicans.¹² Diehard interest in Ireland after 1922 reflected wider obsessions with the fate of the British Empire, informed by anti-Bolshevik (and also often anti-Semitic) conspiracy theories. Since 1920, Northumberland and others had warned in print and in the Houses of Parliament that rebellion in Ireland was part of a Bolshevik plot to smash the empire, financed and aided by German Jews.¹³ While the loss of southern Ireland was just one of many perceived threats, it was, as Paul Stocker has suggested, a 'moment of profound trauma' for the empire's strongest proponents – representative of a 'growing trend of subversion which was spreading like a virus around the world'.¹⁴ There was also, however, no desire to push for reconquest. The diehards recognised that it was unrealistic to reverse the Anglo-Irish Treaty, but an association like SILRA was one way in which they could continue to highlight the coalition government's surrender and betrayal.¹⁵

Along with executive, general, and women's committees in London, SILRA had an Irish sub-committee based in offices on Grafton Street in Dublin. This was essentially a rebranding of the old Irish Unionist Alliance (IUA), doomed to irrelevance by partition and the Anglo-Irish Treaty.¹⁶ Most of the Dublin committee, including William Jellett and John E. Walsh, had been elected to the IUA executive after the association split in January 1919, as their more moderate colleagues followed Lord Midleton into the Unionist Anti-Partition League.¹⁷ Jellett was their most prominent public figure, having sat as MP for Dublin University between 1919 and 1922. Walsh, a Protestant barrister, served as Dublin relief secretary and Major Ion White's counterpart in the IFS.¹⁸ In their respective roles, Walsh and White provided the most important link between the London and Dublin committees.

¹⁰ Fleming, 151.

¹¹ R.B. McDowell, *Crisis and Decline: The Fate of the Southern Unionists* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1997), 132.

¹² Fleming, 5–7, 121–9.

¹³ D.M. Leeson, 'British Conspiracy Theories and the Irish War of Independence', *Éire-Ireland* 56, no. 1–2 (2021), 188–91; 'Ireland', *The Patriot*, supplement, 9 February 1922.

¹⁴ Paul Stocker, *Lost Imperium: Far Right Visions of the British Empire, c. 1920–1980* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 61.

¹⁵ Kevin Matthews, 'Stanley Baldwin's "Irish Question"', *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 4 (2000), 1030.

¹⁶ McDowell, 111–2.

¹⁷ *Irish Unionist Alliance. First Annual Meeting of the General Council under the Amended Constitution held the 24th January, 1919*, National Library of Ireland, Ms. 49,708/6.

¹⁸ Minutes of meeting, 30 May 1922, PRONI D989/B/1/1; McDowell, 112, 132.

Reflecting a different but similarly narrow demographic, SILRA was populated in Dublin by legal professionals, clergymen, and their wives – that is, representatives of pre-1922 middle-class unionism, and specifically the ‘stern, unbending unionists’ who had rejected Middleton’s moderate approach to the issue of home rule for Ireland.¹⁹ They shared some of the British diehards’ views on the meaning of revolution in Ireland, but, as part of the ‘ex-unionist’ minority remaining in the IFS, saw their remit as identifying and providing relief to necessitous cases – including ex-servicemen – rather than lobbying or engaging political opponents.²⁰ In London, SILRA’s primary function was tied firmly to broader political objectives. The Irish sub-committee, meanwhile, generally avoided open criticism of the IFS government in favour of relief work on behalf of ex-servicemen and other loyalists. Though not initially under the association’s remit, ex-servicemen soon became increasingly prominent in the Dublin committee’s workload.

Work for ex-servicemen

SILRA was founded to provide relief to southern Irish loyalist ‘refugees’ arriving in Britain in spring 1922 – ex-servicemen, former members of the recently disbanded Royal Irish Constabulary, and others with allegiances or connections to the British government in Ireland.²¹ The association provided grants, loans, gifts of clothing, and made efforts to secure suitable employment for individuals. It also issued appeals, organised fund-raising events, and ran its own clothing department. Though primarily centred around London, meetings took place across England (though mainly in the south), with clothing branches established as far north as Aberdeen and Cupar in Scotland.²² By 1924, the focus had moved towards loyalists resident in the IFS and, soon afterwards, the welfare of ex-servicemen. The latter was already a busy field of work in the IFS. In 1921, for instance, representatives of ten relevant organisations or committees met in Dublin and acknowledged the need for ‘friendly co-operation’ to minimise overlap and inefficiency. By July a guide for applicants was published in the press, which the *Irish Times* believed would ‘leave small excuse for confusion or for the waste and extravagance that confusion always entails’.²³ A month later, however, the paper was again suggesting that ‘the very multiplicity of societies and funds for ex-Service men is one of the causes of what must be admitted to be a very unsatisfactory state of affairs’.²⁴ SILRA was a

¹⁹ McDowell, 71–2.

²⁰ See for example, speeches by William quoted in Leeson, ‘Conspiracy Theories’, 91; Pdraig Yeates, *A City in Turmoil: Dublin, 1919–21* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012), 254.

²¹ Minutes of meeting, 30 May 1922, PRONI D989/B/1/1.

²² For fundraising events: minutes of the ladies’ general and executive committees, 1924–36, PRONI D989/B/1/4. For clothing branches in Scotland: ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 3 January 1923, 5 and ‘Southern Irish Loyalist Relief Association’, *St. Andrew’s Citizen*, 31 March 1923, 3.

²³ ‘Assisting Ex-Servicemen’, *Irish Times*, 25 February 1921, 6; ‘Relief for Ex-Servicemen. New Plan of Co-ordination. Guide for Applicants’, *Irish Times*, 28 July 1921, 5.

²⁴ ‘The Men who Fought’, *Irish Times*, 29 August 1921, 2.

potentially provocative addition to the problem, but also, in its own view, evidence of failures to resolve it.

While SILRA was aware of ex-servicemen in need of assistance in early 1923, the London committee declared as late as April 1924 that those living in the IFS were beyond its scope.²⁵ In March, Major White had informed the Dublin committee that ‘ex-ordnance men should be helped’, but other ex-servicemen ‘out of work, and unlikely to get any on account of their past service’, could only be assisted in very special cases where it was ‘established that the applicant had been persecuted or definitely refused work by reason of the fact that he was an ex-Service man’.²⁶ Walsh was instructed to send any cases of ‘an unemployed ex-Service man who is nearly destitute, with illness in the family’ to the United Services Fund (USF) – established in Ireland in March 1920 and dealing primarily with the children of ex-servicemen and cases of illness not related to war service.²⁷ But when Lord Haig, president of the British Legion in London, issued a public appeal for unemployed ex-servicemen in October 1924, White wrote to Dublin to ask if ‘something could be done for the starving ex-Service men in Ireland’.²⁸ Two days later, he reported that negotiations had begun with the USF ‘with the object of having the Fund extended so as to cover the cases of ex-soldiers in the IFS now in a state bordering on destitution’.²⁹

It appears the negotiations were not fruitful (as far as SILRA was concerned at least), and when a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* appeared in December 1924 complaining about the circumstances of ex-servicemen in the IFS, Northumberland published a reply declaring that any funds donated to SILRA for their relief would be put to that purpose.³⁰ His suggestion that ‘neither the United Services Fund nor Lord Haig’s appeal seem to be able to do anything for the Irish ex-service men’ – a ‘controversial point’, as White admitted – was judiciously cut (although the British Legion corrected an assertion that ‘Poppy Day’ funds were only available to Legion members).³¹ A separate grant of £25 was immediately made available to Dublin by SILRA’s London committee for distribution before Christmas, followed by a cheque for £250 (over £14,500 in modern currency).³² The *Daily Mail* appeal brought in

²⁵ White to Walsh, 23 June 1923, White to Walsh, 17 April 1924 and Walsh to White, 28 June 1923, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

²⁶ Dublin advisory committee minutes, 26 March 1924, PRONI D989/B/1/2. It is not clear why it was deemed suitable to assist men who had been part of what was by then known as the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, significantly enlarged and reorganised during the war and tasked with the supply and later repair of arms, ammunition, and equipment.

²⁷ Walsh to White, 17 April 1924, PRONI D989/B/3/5; ‘United Services Fund: Useful Work in the Irish Area’, *Irish Times*, 30 January 1926, 5.

²⁸ White to Walsh, 27 October 1924, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

²⁹ Dublin advisory committee minutes, 29 October 1924, PRONI D989/B/1/2.

³⁰ C. Fox, Letter to the Editor: ‘Irish Ex-service Men’, *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1924, 8; Northumberland, Letter to the Editor: ‘Irish Ex-service Men’, *Daily Mail*, 17 December 1924, 8.

³¹ White to Walsh, 16 December 1924 PRONI D989/B/3/6; Northumberland, ‘Plight of Ex-soldiers’, *Daily Mail*, 2 February 1925, 9.

³² White to Hamilton, 19 December 1924 and White to Hamilton, 23 December 1924, PRONI D989/B/3/5. Modern currency calculated using <www.measuringworth.com> [accessed 14 September 2022].

£402, disbursed by SILRA as fuel and food tickets to 153 families.³³ By late January 1925, funds were exhausted, but Northumberland's lobbying encouraged a donation of 1000 guineas (£1050) by the *Daily Mail* for 'the relief of destitute ex-servicemen in Southern Ireland'.³⁴ A dedicated 'Ex-Service Fund' was created, administered in London and distributed *via* the Dublin committee. In early March, the fund amounted to £4717 (over £270,000 in modern currency), with over £2000 of this already spent.³⁵

An early SILRA notice had claimed that there were as many as 200,000 'workless ex-Service men' in the IFS, but later the association suggested that one third of a total of 180,000 were unemployed and living in poverty.³⁶ But even 60,000 was likely an exaggeration. Shortly after the war, the British Ministry of Transport estimated that there were 40,000 unemployed ex-servicemen in Ireland and in November 1919 the House of Commons was informed that 35,000 demobilised ex-servicemen on the island were drawing out-of-work donations.³⁷ Whatever the exact figures, unemployment among ex-servicemen in the IFS remained a significant source of poverty and hardship.³⁸ SILRA publicly suggested that the only solution was an extensive emigration scheme. It had assisted small numbers to go to Canada or New Zealand, but claimed anything more was impossible owing to a lack of funds and strict immigration regulations in the Dominions.³⁹ In November 1926, the association appealed to the Imperial Conference on behalf of '60,000 unemployed British ex-servicemen' whose only hope, they suggested, was a 'comprehensive assisted migration scheme', though this was never on the conference's agenda.⁴⁰

Once SILRA began providing relief to ex-servicemen, demand in Dublin was 'phenomenal'. In February 1925, a Captain Mahony and two porters were hired to deal with the 'enormous rush' at the Grafton Street offices. Reports to London mentioned police intervention, the strain put on their structurally unsafe premises, and the inconvenience caused to the business operating on the ground floor.⁴¹ Aid was 'given in the form of food' at a maximum of £1 over eight weeks for single men or married men with no children (later reduced to six weeks); £1 5s for

³³ Northumberland, 'Plight of Ex-soldiers', *Daily Mail*, 2 February 1925, 9.

³⁴ Quoted in "'Daily Mail's" Donation of 1,000 Guineas to Relief Fund', *Evening Herald*, 4 February 1925, 7.

³⁵ White to Walsh, 5 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

³⁶ 'Ex-Service Men's Plight', *Daily Mail*, 29 April 1926, 6.

³⁷ Robinson, 79; HC Debate, 10 November 1919, Vol. 21, Col. 77.

³⁸ Robinson, 81.

³⁹ Preston to Hamilton, 18 November 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5 [references for emigrants to Canada]; Walsh to White, 25 October 1925 ['the only way for them to deal with the problem effectively is an extensive scheme of emigration'], PRONI D989/B/3/5: 'Report by the Relief Secretary on his Visit to Ireland in March, 1929' ['restrictions now placed by the various Governments on emigration are so severe that emigration can be ruled out'], PRONI D989/B/5/2.

⁴⁰ 'Ex-Service Men in the Irish Free State. Appeal to Imperial Conference for Help', *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 November 1926, 9; *Imperial Conference, 1926. Summary of Proceedings Presented to Both Houses of the Oireachtas by Order of the Executive Council* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1926).

⁴¹ Walsh to White, 10 February 1925; Walsh to White, 13 February 1925 and Walsh to Preston, 26 February 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

married men with up to three children; and £1 10s for men with four or more children.⁴² These were much smaller amounts than the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA), then working in co-operation with the USF, were distributing. The SSAFA's assistance ranged from 17s 6d in urban districts or 14s in rural districts per week for a woman with no children to £3 3s 6d or £3 for a woman with seven children, up to a maximum of £10 or three months' assistance (with an additional 6s for each child after the seventh).⁴³ SILRA claimed that value lay not just in the amounts disbursed, but in speed and efficiency when other sources of assistance – from the British Legion, for instance – were slow or inaccessible. For men and families in immediate need, there was obvious merit in receiving a little assistance quickly, rather than waiting on the promise of more substantial aid in the future.⁴⁴

When the Ex-Service Fund ran low again in June 1925, small discounts were instead secured on grocers' bills.⁴⁵ It seemed that the fund would then be wound down. In July 1925, Captain Mahony and the two porters were relieved of their duties, but the fund ultimately survived and Mahony was rehired. Still *in situ* in 1929, he received a £5 bonus that year in recognition of an 'extraordinary amount of work ... during the weeks preceding Christmas, including the interviewing of some thousands of destitute ex-Service men'.⁴⁶ In October 1929, Walsh had reported that 'in a great majority of cases in which we have given what may be described as help of a permanent nature (e.g. purchasing a cow) we have received no further application, which is evidence of the more or less permanent benefit that has accrued from the grant'.⁴⁷ A year later, White informed readers of the *Irish Times* that SILRA had expended 'very large sums of money' from limited resources since December 1927, much of which had been used to 'establish men on an earning basis', and assisted 'over 2,400 ex-Service men's families, clothing some 8,000 individuals, for which purpose they provided over 53,000 articles of clothing'.⁴⁸ Grants were approved for tools, equipment, and to start new businesses, while a basket-making concern was founded in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, and funds provided to other employment schemes for ex-servicemen.⁴⁹

White's letter to the editor of the *Irish Times* was not sent in isolation but prompted by a report on Earl Jellicoe's visit to Dublin as president of the British Legion. During an address to Jellicoe, the chairman of the British Legion in Ireland (Southern Area) (BLSI) claimed that the British Legion was 'the

⁴² Dublin advisory committee minutes, 18 February 1925, PRONI D989/B/1/5; White to Walsh, 5 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁴³ The Soldiers', and Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association, in co-operation with the United Services Fund, *Post-War Circular* No. 5, May 1921 in *Annual Report, 1920–1921*, 1142. I am grateful to Dr Paul Huddie for alerting me to this source.

⁴⁴ For similar logic within the SSAFA: Huddie, 'Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association', 39.

⁴⁵ Walsh to White, 12 June 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁴⁶ Preston to Walsh, 2 July 1925, Preston to Walsh, 8 July 1925 and Walsh to White, 13 December 1929, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁴⁷ Walsh to White, 4 October 1929, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁴⁸ I.H.G. White, Letter to the editor: 'Distressed Ex-service Men', *Irish Times*, 17 October 1930, 6.

⁴⁹ Report of a meeting of the Dublin committee, 30 October 1929, PRONI D989/B/3/6; Pamphlet for SILRA ball to be held 12 June 1930, PRONI D989/B/5/2.

only organisation which protects [ex-servicemen's] interests and seeks their welfare'.⁵⁰ Walsh wished to highlight that 'several other associations do similar work'.⁵¹ The early exchanges noted here suggest that the association had a difficult relationship with the British Legion and its Irish arm. As will be seen in the next section, SILRA repeatedly argued that welfare organisations for ex-servicemen, and the BLSI specifically, were not fit for purpose.

Attitudes to SILRA in the Irish Free State

The public figures most associated with charity for ex-servicemen in the IFS were moderate 'ex-unionists' or constitutional nationalists. Unionist Sir Bryan Mahon, commander of the 10th (Irish) Division during the war, advocated for ex-servicemen from a seat in the IFS senate, as did Sir William Hickie, a home ruler who had commanded the 16th (Irish) Division and became president of the BLSI in 1925. Sir John Lumsden, chairman of the St. John Ambulance Brigade and the British Red Cross Society, meanwhile, had impartially attended to wounded men during the 1916 Easter Rising and again during fighting at the Four Courts in Dublin in 1922. While Mahon and Hickie were not necessarily representative of the new order, SILRA's Dublin committee were especially politically marginalised, and hardly representative of the majority of ex-servicemen in the state. Association with the diehards in London only exacerbated their marginality. Large crowds had gathered and Union flags were flown in Dublin and elsewhere on 'Victory Day' (19 July 1919) and on successive Armistice Days (11 November). Tens of thousands of poppies were also sold by the BLSI in the IFS in the 1920s. But remembrance of the war was contentious. At best, the IFS government remained aloof, and commemoration was accompanied by clashes with republicans and others who resented what they saw as unwelcome displays of imperialism.⁵² The SILRA committee in Dublin were acutely aware of their place as a small political minority in the IFS, and the sometimes very different priorities of their London counterparts. As Walsh informed White in London, 'We have to live in the country and will have to face the consequences'.⁵³

When White wrote to Dublin in June 1923, a month after the end of the Irish Civil War, suggesting a new advertisement be published in the *Irish Times*, Walsh considered it 'inadvisable, and that a better course would be to write to the secretaries of organisations such as the Protestant Orphans Society & Distressed Protestants Society, and Soldiers & Sailors organisations, drawing their attention to the objects of the S.I.L.R.A'.⁵⁴ As sensible as reticence might have been, this was not simply about avoiding unwanted attention: the work of the association in

⁵⁰ 'Earl Jellicoe in Dublin', *Irish Times*, 13 October 1930, 9. In January 1925, the Legion of Irish Ex-Servicemen agreed to change its name to the British Legion in Ireland (Southern Area) and, along with the British Legion of Northern Ireland became an administrative area of the British Legion: 'Ex-Service Men: the British Legion in Ireland', *Irish Times*, 27 January 1925, 7.

⁵¹ I.H.G. White, Letter to the editor: 'Distressed Ex-service Men', *Irish Times*, 17 October 1930, 6.

⁵² Leonard, 'Twinge of Memory', 102–5; Monaghan, 86–7; Taylor, 241; Link, 148–57.

⁵³ Walsh to White, 5 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁵⁴ Dublin advisory committee minutes, 20 June 1923, PRONI D989/B/1/2.

Dublin was shaped by a mix of politics and broader attitudes in society towards relief, charity, and the deserving poor. In early 1925, Walsh described how the initial surge of ex-service applicants was ‘of a very poor description so far, but we hope to get on to the many deserving cases when the first rush is over, which we believe will happen when it gets round that no money is being given out’. Later he reported that other organisations had ‘assured us that the really deserving cases would not come along until after the rush of the less deserving was over, i.e. those who prefer to live on charity. This has been our experience’.⁵⁵ In October 1925, Walsh informed White that a public appeal on behalf of ex-servicemen in Dublin would ‘mean an avalanche of undesirables’ and suggested a private appeal to large subscribers as ‘a means of securing the necessary funds to do some essential work unostentatiously’.⁵⁶ This highlighted the Association’s desire to avoid provoking the minority, but also SILRA’s own perception of the loyalist class it aimed to support: decent, respectable citizens reduced to destitution through no fault of their own.

Around the same time, the impact of SILRA’s marginal position in the IFS was apparent to its Dublin members. The Dublin committee felt that it had been placed in ‘an extremely awkward’ position in February 1925 when the London executive first decided to close the Ex-Service Fund to new applicants and direct them to alternatives. Walsh was quick to point out the difficulties this would create. Having ‘suddenly’ taken on the work of distributing the fund, he wrote, the Dublin committee had ‘naturally incurred the hostility of the recognised military benevolent funds, or some of them’.⁵⁷ It had taken time to perfect their machinery and stamp out fraud, and ‘a good impression had already gotten out’ among ex-servicemen that their ‘needs were being dealt with promptly and courteously’. Cutting the scheme, Walsh suggested, would ‘give way to the impression that the less-deserving have been dealt with to the exclusion of the deserving’ – a ‘victory’ that would be used by opponents to ‘stir up resentment against us’. Therefore, it was ‘urgently important’ that the matter be seen through ‘for the good name of the Association in Ireland’.⁵⁸

In another letter to London, Walsh emphasised that those who have ‘objected to our activities all along’ had ‘always assumed that we had some political objective in view’:

So long as we were able to carry on unostentatiously, the lie was given to this theory. But owing to notoriety which the efforts of this Association on behalf of Ex-Service men has gained, especially in the Dublin area – through no fault of ours – we fear that this point of view may again be pushed to the front and turned to the disadvantage of the Association.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ White to Walsh, 13 February 1925 and White to Walsh, 2 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁵⁶ Walsh to White, 2 October 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁵⁷ Walsh to White, 10 February 1925; Walsh to White, 13 February 1925; and Walsh to Preston, 26 February 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁵⁸ White to Walsh, 5 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁵⁹ White to Walsh, 9 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

White's suggestion that it was 'never intended to encroach upon the grounds of other Relief Funds in Dublin or elsewhere in Southern Ireland but to supplement them temporarily in the present circumstances of distress' betrays, perhaps, some naivety about the ways in which this activity would be interpreted in Ireland.⁶⁰

SILRA maintained that it was simply responding to the scale of destitution among ex-servicemen as the British Legion was unable to do so effectively, and complained that the Legion was ignoring or denying the obvious destitution faced by ex-servicemen to avoid political embarrassment.⁶¹ The advisory committee, for instance, decided not to send representatives to a meeting proposed by Sir Bryan Mahon in March 1925 to investigate the 'victimisation' of Irish ex-servicemen on the assumption that it was designed not to find any, and was merely part of what Walsh described as 'an effort to discredit the efforts of a loyalist association'.⁶² While SILRA seemed to have had a mutually cooperative relationship with some charitable organisations in Dublin, it clashed with the USF, as noted above, and the BLSI.⁶³ SILRA placed much of the blame for this on William P. Walker, the administrative agent of the USF and BLSI chairman (described as a 'pioneer' of the 'ex-Service men's movement' by the *Irish Times*).⁶⁴ White deemed Walker inexplicably hostile, but only mirrored criticism of his own association in describing the Legion's Irish arm as 'almost entirely a political stunt', insisting that, while Walker was in charge, 'nothing radical could be done for ex-Service men'.⁶⁵ SILRA again claimed that money from poppy sales was distributed only to Legion members – never more than between three and ten per cent of ex-servicemen in the IFS – and that £1000 distributed to the BLSI would 'not ease the situation here in any way, as at least 95 per cent. of the applicants here are not members of the Legion. They say they cannot afford to belong to it'.⁶⁶ SILRA further complained that men sent to BLSI branches were being sent away, that offices were only open for short periods, and that they regularly ran out of application forms.⁶⁷ A conference in London only convinced Northumberland that further cooperation was pointless, though

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Walsh to White, 30 April 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5; White to Walsh, 6 May 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁶² Minutes of advisory committee, 18 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/1/3; Walsh to White, 13 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁶³ For a substantial collection of correspondence on the relationship from SILRA's side: PRONI D989/B/3/5 and D989/B/3/6. For relationships with other organisations, see acknowledgments of donations to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society: 'Assisting the Ex-Service Men: Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society', *Irish Times*, 21 July 1928, 10 and 'Ex-Service Men in Ireland', *Irish Times*, 25 May 1929, 6.

⁶⁴ 'Obituary: Mr. W.P. Walker', *Irish Times*, 10 September 1925, 8.

⁶⁵ Unsigned copy of a letter to White, 25 June 1925 and White to Walsh, 6 May 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5. Denis Gwynn, for instance, suggested that a SILRA meeting was 'little more than an English "Die-hard" stunt': Denis Gwynn, 'London Letter', *Freeman's Journal*, 19 June 1923, 4. See also 'Nailing of a Lie: Sir Bryan Mahon's Reply', *Irish Independent*, 4 February 1925, 7.

⁶⁶ Walsh to White, 29 January 1925 and Walsh to White, 23 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/6. For British Legion membership in Ireland: Leonard, 'Survivors', 218; Robinson, 128; 'British Legion in Free State', *Weekly Irish Times*, 28 February 1931, 1, 10. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society confirmed that non-members were helped by the Legion in some rare cases.

⁶⁷ Walsh to White, 10 February 1925 and Walsh to White, 19 November 1925; Walker to Hamilton, 13 May 1925 and Memo by Walsh, 9 December 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

Walsh noted that Legion representatives ‘were all quite pleasant & realised that after all we were not so bad as we were painted’.⁶⁸

Walker died in September 1925, and attitudes in SILRA towards the BLSI seem to have softened by 1926. In June 1927, Northumberland told a SILRA meeting that the BLSI ‘was doing excellent work for the men, but was only able to touch a fringe of the needs’ – avoiding blaming it for any failings.⁶⁹ Later that year, the London committee admitted that its Dublin counterparts could not administer the scheme for ex-servicemen on its own and should work with other charitable organisations (on the condition that they were ‘unable to sanction the handing over of their money to any other Association’).⁷⁰ But, by 1929, the complaints of 1925 were being repeated, suggesting that Walker was not alone responsible for clashes between the organisations. SILRA again accused the BLSI of turning away significant numbers of men, and another conference in London in June 1929 ended with Northumberland declaring that the Legion was ‘so wanting in consideration of this Association’ that it was ‘useless’ to continue the conversation.⁷¹ Northumberland was unlikely to be blameless, but others shared similar views of the BLSI. British philanthropist Elizabeth Whitman, for instance, argued that BLSI clubs in many parts of Ireland were ‘a hopeless failure’.⁷² In December 1929, a Tipperary solicitor complained that the Legion was doing little or nothing to help ex-servicemen in the IFS while SILRA went ‘out of their way’ to assist families outside their original remit.⁷³ Some local BLSI branch secretaries even wrote to SILRA for assistance rather than to headquarters in Dublin.⁷⁴

Throughout the mid- and late-1920s, SILRA continued to issue its own public appeals and kept its Ex-Service Fund in operation, although it was mostly restricted to food tickets and grants of clothing to children.⁷⁵ Negative reactions to this work in the IFS press were often based on perceived slights by SILRA (sometimes explicit, sometimes not) against the reputation of the state. The association’s lobbying in Britain was covered in the Irish press, and the Dublin committee could not be separated from Conservative diehard rhetoric often designed with wider imperial objectives in mind. While it was perhaps possible for the Dublin committee to believe that it was operating ‘unostentatiously’, the priorities and politics of the London

⁶⁸ White to Walsh, 6 May 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁶⁹ ‘Loyalists’ Plight’, *Daily Mail*, 10 June 1927, 4.

⁷⁰ White to Walsh, 9 November 1927, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁷¹ White to Walsh, 28 September 1929, PRONI D989/B/3/5. See also correspondence March to October 1925 and September to October 1929 in PRONI D989/B/3/5 and D989/B/3/6.

⁷² Robinson, 128.

⁷³ Dudley, Nenagh, to Administrative Agent, Small Business Loans and Migration Department, British Legion and United Services Fund, London, 29 November 1930, PRONI D989/B/3/5. White forwarded the letter to Doris Murray of the Dublin committee (who later married John E. Walsh), suggesting she ‘keep a copy to chuckle over’.

⁷⁴ Report of meeting of the Dublin committee, 30 October 1929, PRONI D989/B/3/6; letter from N. Walsh, secretary of Callan branch of the British Legion, 8 June 1929, Walsh to White, 26 September 1929; Walsh to White, 10 October 1929; and Corry, Kilrush, to ‘Hon. Sec. S.I.L.A. 109 Grafton St’, 1 December 1929, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁷⁵ Minutes of the Dublin committee, 1925–1930, PRONI D989/B/1/2.

organisation were never very far away.⁷⁶ SILRA's relationship with the majority in the IFS was, however, more complex than might be assumed.

The association's criticism of the IFS government softened over time. In April 1925, Walsh acknowledged that it was 'natural that the Free State authorities should give preference in every way to men who have been in the National Army'. Still, he continued, 'the fact remains that the knowledge that a man has served with the Crown forces is a bar to his getting any employment under the Free State Government'.⁷⁷ The only significant barrier imposed on SILRA's work in the IFS, however, came in the form of customs duties on second-hand clothes imported from Britain. In 1927, Northumberland complained that SILRA had spent £412 8s 6d in duty on clothes sent to 4500 people, while the IFS government made 'a handsome profit', which he saw as an unfair imposition on the British public who were 'undertaking an obligation that should be the concern' of the IFS.⁷⁸ Four months later, however, White insisted that the association was not 'criticising the Free State Government in any form. ... It is the British Government that have let these poor people down'.⁷⁹ Irish ex-servicemen had been victims of the 'breaking of the Union', 'deserted by the British Government who made such flamboyant promises to them in 1914', 'discarded' having fought for the empire in its time of need.⁸⁰

With no representatives in the Dublin government, SILRA's Irish committee sought out necessitous cases through private correspondence and a sympathetic network.⁸¹ Soon after it began distributing relief to ex-servicemen, Walsh reported to London that the officer who interviewed applicants at the Dublin office was 'emphatic on the point that the effect of the efforts so far made has been to rekindle sentiments of loyalty, which is all to the good. A sustained effort would undoubtedly stimulate this tendency, and may have far-reaching consequences'.⁸² Within a few weeks, however, he complained that ex-servicemen were taking up most of their attention, to the neglect of 'ordinary' cases (the latter apparently being more reluctant to come forward).⁸³ By 1928, Walsh was suggesting that, though 'wholly unable to cope with the problem of want and destitution among ex-servicemen, there were 'many' other organisations charged with the task.

The loyalists, on the other hand, have only the S.I.L.R.A. to appeal to for help, and the conditions in the country are such that the distress among them is still very acute. Our Committee feel that they should be the first care of the Association, and that the work of collecting funds for and distributing them amongst the ex-service

⁷⁶ Coverage in the *Freeman's Journal*, including 'Shemus' cartoons (by Ernest Forbes): 23 November 1921, 17 May 1922, 28 June 1923, 11 January 1924, 7 July 1923, 19 January 1924, 29 January 1924, and 9 February 1924.

⁷⁷ Walsh to White, 30 April 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁷⁸ 'Southern Loyalists: Tax on Second-Hand Clothes for Ex-Service Men', *Belfast News-letter*, 12 October 1927, 7.

⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 10 February 1928.

⁸⁰ 'Report by the Relief Secretary on his Visit to Ireland in March, 1929.', PRONI D989/B/5/2; 'Ex-servicemen in southern Ireland. Their terrible sufferings', n.d., PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁸¹ Dublin advisory committee minutes, 23 January 1924, PRONI D989/B/1/2.

⁸² Walsh to White, 30 April 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁸³ Walsh to White, 12 June 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

men should not be allowed to interfere with the primary work of assisting loyalists in distress. They also feel that in the provision of clothing, preference should be given to loyalists.⁸⁴

Ex-servicemen thus held a unique position in the work of the association – at times part of a broader cohort of Irish loyalists but most often a distinct category of their own, defined, perhaps, by their shared service rather than their allegiances.

Ex-servicemen as ‘loyalists’

Paul Taylor has suggested that ‘perceived discrimination against those who had fought for Britain brought a sympathetic and well-publicised response’ from the press and politicians, with ex-servicemen likely more appealing cases than absentee landlords.⁸⁵ Indeed, Walsh believed that ‘Ex-service men are regarded as an important political asset’.⁸⁶ But in the association’s literature ex-servicemen formed something of a sub-category, most notably in the organisation of an ‘Ordinary Fund’ for loyalists and a separate ‘Ex-Service Fund’. The 1931 constitution and rules similarly referred to ‘Loyalists *and* ex-Service men’ – a tacit acknowledgement that ex-servicemen had a claim to loyalty but were not the same as other southern Irish loyalists.⁸⁷

Ex-servicemen held a distinct badge of identity, but also a plethora of individual and collective political views and motivations. Relatively few had enlisted from the twenty-six counties as ‘loyalists’, or openly identified in that way afterwards.⁸⁸ In June 1924, White informed a Dublin representative of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, an international Catholic charitable organisation, that the association could not ‘help unemployed ex-soldiers unless they can satisfy us they have been in some way persecuted for their loyalty to the Crown’.⁸⁹ Irish loyalism and unionism in southern Ireland is traditionally associated with the Protestant minority, but large cohorts of ex-servicemen in the IFS were Catholic.⁹⁰ There is, however, no record of the religious denomination of applicants to SILRA, as application forms did not ask an applicant to specify their religion.⁹¹ The association declared itself to be non-party and ‘absolutely non-sectarian in administering relief’ and in 1924 it was suggested that ‘not less than half of those provided with relief were

⁸⁴ Walsh to White, 26 March 1928, PRONI D989/B/3/6.

⁸⁵ Taylor, 88, 247.

⁸⁶ Walsh to White, 9 March 1925, PRONI D989/B/3/5.

⁸⁷ Constitution and Rules of SILRA, 1931, PRONI D989/B/5/6.

⁸⁸ For Irish recruitment during the Great War: David Fitzpatrick, ‘The logic of collective sacrifice: Ireland and the British army, 1914–1918,’ *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 4 (1995), 1017–30; more recently Timothy Bowman, William Butler, Michael Wheatley, eds, *The Disparity of Sacrifice: Irish Recruitment to the British Armed forces* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020). For ‘imperial’ recruitment in an Irish context: Monaghan, ‘Whose Country?’, 80–3.

⁸⁹ White to Walsh, 14 June 1924, PRONI D989/B/5/6.

⁹⁰ Brian Hughes and Connor Morrissey, ‘Southern Irish Loyalism from Home Rule Crisis to Republic: An Introduction,’ in *Southern Irish Loyalism, 1912–1949*, Brian Hughes and Connor Morrissey, eds, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 2–4.

⁹¹ Two surviving application forms for the SILRA Ex-Service Fund, 1927, PRONI D989/B/2/5.

Catholics'.⁹² Explicit mention of religion was also avoided in publicity material and public speeches, even when appeals were made to Church of Ireland clergy for a portion of Armistice Day offerings for 'loyal ex-Servicemen who are suffering acutely owing to the prevailing economic conditions'.⁹³

In spite of complaints from Dublin in the 1920s, the extent to which there remained destitute veterans and dependents in need of relief in the longer term became central to debates about the future of the charity. In 1938, the Marquess of Salisbury, who had replaced Northumberland as chair on the latter's death, sought to close the Dublin office and maintain 'a small association' to deal with a 'residue of appeals' and the widows of ex-members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. In November, he told the association's annual meeting that subscriptions were becoming increasingly difficult to secure. As the BLSI was now deemed to be in a position to deal adequately with ex-servicemen, Salisbury proposed that the association should cease to do so. He had some supporters, but his motion was rejected in favour of continuing as before – 'by a large show of hands'.⁹⁴

The Dublin committee protested against efforts to close it down or limit its work: it organised a petition and argued that with the Legion overburdened by 'red tape', SILRA was the only source of aid available in many cases. Defeated, Salisbury resigned, and it was veterans of the Dublin committee who kept the association going until it was wound up in 1962.⁹⁵ By then, it was surviving on what Patrick Buckland has described as 'a sense of social solidarity', rather than any grand political aims or ambitions.⁹⁶ The surviving members' own sense that necessitous cases remained among their loyalist brethren is telling, and a reminder that the financial consequences of a decade of war and revolution in Ireland still lingered for at least some southern Irish loyalists and their families. Whether or not it was directly related to their past service to the Crown, this was similarly the case for ageing veterans of the First World War.

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this article to offer an assessment of the extent to which ex-servicemen suffered from state, institutional, or localised discrimination in the IFS. That some Irish ex-servicemen lived in severe poverty and distress is clear, and it was easy enough for SILRA and others to find examples of men overlooked for work, mocked for their war service, or suffering subtle and less subtle prejudices

⁹² Denis Gwynn, 'London Lottery', *Freeman's Journal*, 11 January 1924, 6.

⁹³ I.H.G. White, 'An Armistice Day Appeal', *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 11 November 1932, 664; I.H.G. White, 'Armistice Day', 20 October 1933, 602.

⁹⁴ General committee minutes, 5 April 1938, 17 May 1938, and 27 July 1938; Annual meeting minutes, 22 November 1938, PRONI D989/B/1/3.

⁹⁵ Derived from minutes and correspondence contained in the minute book of the London committees, 1938–1956, PRONI D989/B/1/3 and McDowell, 133–4. Ultimately, the London office closed first.

⁹⁶ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism I: The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885 – 1922* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1972), 291.

and slights.⁹⁷ Their experiences of poverty and hardship were no less real regardless of whether or not they resulted from deliberate or malicious policy. While the SILRA committee in Dublin made efforts to avoid provocation, this was difficult for an association founded by British Conservative diehards and operating on behalf of the ex-unionist and loyalist minority. At the same time, in assisting ex-servicemen to the extent it did, SILRA chose to forego tricky questions about the loyalism of ex-servicemen as a body. Many ex-servicemen themselves, from a presumably wide range of backgrounds, in turn saw no issue in seeking relief from an explicitly loyalist association.

The welfare provided to veterans of the First World War is an important part of the story of their integration into the nascent IFS and highlights politicisation of a group that went beyond the control of individuals. For that reason, the study of an association like SILRA is more important for what it says about what ex-servicemen meant to others than for what it says about the experiences of the ex-servicemen themselves. Studying SILRA's full range of fundraising and lobbying provides important insights into a specifically British form of non-violent counter-revolution – in which the status of Ireland played a significant part – as well as fresh perspectives on the survival of loyalism in the IFS.⁹⁸ Fundraising and lobbying for ex-servicemen became a prominent part of SILRA's work, but nevertheless occupied a unique space in the association's rhetoric. This was perhaps sensible, given the limited extent to which ex-servicemen as a whole might be considered 'loyalist'. Indeed, it is telling of the complex and often awkward return to civil life faced by southern Irish veterans of the First World War. The complexity of allegiance and identity among Irish ex-servicemen and their families must be embraced and understood. There is also more to be done to integrate the Irish ex-servicemen more firmly into wider histories of interwar veterans.

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⁹⁷ See letters from ex-servicemen to SILRA in PRONI D989/B/3/5 and D989/B/3/6; Leonard, 'Facing "The Finger of Scorn"'; Robinson, 113–14.

⁹⁸ Brian Hughes, "'Our own people": the Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association in interwar Britain and Ireland', *Contemporary European History* 1–19. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000789>>.

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