

Sacco and Vanzetti, Mary Donovan and transatlantic radicalism in the 1920s

NIALL WHELEHAN\*

*University of Strathclyde*

*Abstract: In 1927 the Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were executed in Boston following a murder trial that was widely denounced for its anti-labour and anti-immigrant bias. From 1921 the campaign to save the two men powerfully mobilised labour internationalism and triggered waves of protests across the world. This article examines the important contributions made by Irish and Irish American radicals to the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign. Mary Donovan was a leading member of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee and a second-generation Irish union organiser and member of Boston's James Connolly Club. In the 1920s she travelled to Ireland twice and appealed to Irish and Irish American labour to support the campaign. At the same time, Donovan and many of the activists considered here held ambiguous personal and political relationships with Ireland. Transnational Irish radicalism in the early-twentieth century is most commonly considered in nationalist terms. Taking a distinctly non-Irish cause – the Sacco-Vanzetti case of 1920-27 – allows us to look from a different perspective at the global Irish revolution and reveals how radical labour currents reached into Irish and Irish-American circles during the revolutionary era, though the response to the campaign also indicates a receding internationalism in the immediate aftermath of Irish independence.*

In August 1927 the funerals took place in Boston of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two immigrant anarchists from Italy who were sentenced to death following their convictions in 1921 for taking part in a fatal robbery. The graveside oration was delivered by Mary Donovan, who described the executions as ‘one of the blackest crimes in the history of mankind’, no doubt reflecting the thoughts of most present.<sup>1</sup> The funeral procession had been followed by thousands of mourners and watched by some 200,000 bystanders, most of whom came out in support. When the procession passed through an Irish neighbourhood near the Forest Hills cemetery, however, some spectators heckled, Donovan was spat on, and a friend later told her of an Irish immigrant who widely boasted about singling her out.<sup>2</sup> Donovan was a second-generation Irish socialist and member of Boston’s James Connolly Club, who dedicated herself entirely to the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti. In the 1920s she travelled to Ireland twice, and urged James Larkin to rally Irish workers behind the two prisoners. Donovan’s activism linked the world of the Irish Revolution to one of the largest and most controversial political prisoner campaigns of the twentieth century, and spoke to hopes that social change could follow political transformation in

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\* *School of Humanities, University of Strathclyde, niall.whelehan@strath.ac.uk*

<sup>1</sup> *Boston Globe*, 29 Aug.1927.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Donovan, ‘No tears for my youth’, unpublished draft autobiography (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Mary Donovan Hapgood papers). The manuscript contains several versions of chapters with no page numbers; the citations here reflect this. My thanks to the Lilly Library staff for their help during my research. I’m also grateful for the comments and suggestions received at the Global Irish Revolution workshop at the University of Edinburgh, and at the Irish Centre for Histories of Labour and Class, N.U.I. Galway, where an early draft of this article was presented.

Ireland. Yet it also revealed how, by the late-1920s, those hopes were fading, along with some of the internationalism of the revolutionary era.

Such was the scale of global protest against the death sentences that, by the time of their executions, Sacco and Vanzetti were ‘the two most famous prisoners in all the world’.<sup>3</sup> The trial verdict was widely considered a miscarriage of justice, and the movement to save them from the electric chair powerfully mobilised working-class internationalism and liberal indignation across the world at the anti-labour and anti-immigrant prejudice their flawed trial demonstrated. From their initial arrest and imprisonment in 1920 to their executions in 1927, their case triggered protests and general strikes in North, Central and South America, Germany, Japan, Spain, South Africa, Australia, England, Finland, France, the Soviet Union, and China, among other places. According to one study, ‘the world would never again witness an international, worker-led protest of comparable scope’.<sup>4</sup> The anarchist-led Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in Boston began the campaign and organised the legal defence, while the later involvement of the Comintern and the communist International Labor Defense extended the worldwide call for solidarity. This article examines how Irish radicalism fitted into this global jigsaw, with a focus on the overlooked figure of Mary Donovan. Her radical network was small, but its activities demonstrated how anarchist, communist and syndicalist currents reached into Irish and Irish-American circles during the revolutionary era, rather than being external to them.

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<sup>3</sup> *New Republic* (New York) quoted in Michael Miller Topp, *Those without a country: the political culture of Italian American syndicalists* (Minneapolis, 2001), p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> Lisa McGirr, ‘The passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: a global history’ in *Journal of American History*, xciii, no. 4 (Mar. 2007), p. 1085.

## I

Transnational Irish radicalism in the early-twentieth century is most commonly considered in nationalist terms and the surge of Irish-American support for independence from 1916 to 1923, and in the context of the broader anti-war and anti-imperialist movements of the era, in which Irish nationalism held a stake. Social radicalism is frequently subordinated or is attributed significance only in how it related to the nationalist narrative. Taking a distinctly non-Irish cause – the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign of 1920-7 – allows us to explore a different angle and to consider individuals who engaged with the world of the Irish Revolution, but who did not regard national independence to be of primary importance. At first glance, the plight of two militant Italian anarchists might not be expected to enlist much support in Ireland or the diaspora. At a 1919 St Patrick’s day meeting of the Friends of Irish Freedom, the mayor of Boston proudly declared that ‘nobody ever heard of an Irish anarchist’, commending Irish America’s anti-radicalism.<sup>5</sup> Yet labour activists of Irish birth and descent made substantial contributions to the campaign to release the two anarchists, including Donovan and two of her fellow members of Boston’s James Connolly Club – John Barry and Mike Flaherty – as well as Elisabeth Gurley Flynn, James P. Cannon, Tom O’Flaherty and James Larkin.

Placing an emphasis on the Irishness of these radicals perhaps leaves us with an ill-fitting national approach to a global story. The Sacco-Vanzetti campaign mobilised huge numbers of people worldwide through labour solidarity and the desire to correct a miscarriage of justice. Donovan and the other individuals considered here primarily

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew J. Peters quoted in Damien Murray, *Irish nationalists in Boston: Catholicism and conflict, 1900-1928* (Washington D.C., 2018), p. 116.

identified as labour internationalists, yet ethnic Irish networks cannot be discounted when analysing their activism. Transnational and global approaches do not aim to flatten out the nation and national identities, but to understand them in broader contexts, and relations between the diaspora and the homeland are a central part of this in modern Irish history. To examine the complexity of these relations, focusing on individual lives can be a useful means to uncover ties between people and places typically considered in separation, and to recognise how transnational connections have been ‘driven by and reflected in personal experience’.<sup>6</sup> Investigating the role of Donovan and others in the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign reveals the importance of personal relationships in connecting Ireland and Irish-America with this global protest movement, though this dimension is often overlooked in radical histories.<sup>7</sup> Donovan’s conflicted attitude towards Ireland and Irish-America can only be fully understood with some consideration of her family background, which she wrote about at length in her unpublished memoir. While she travelled to Ireland twice, unlike many members of Irish-American nationalist organisations, she arguably felt more distant from her parents’ home by the end of the decade than at the beginning.

## II

Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested in 1920 and sentenced to death one year later, but it was not until 1924 that the James Connolly Club became actively involved in the

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<sup>6</sup> Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, ‘Introduction’ in eidem (eds), *Transnational lives: biographies of global modernity, 1700-present* (London, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Barrett, *History from the bottom up & the inside out: ethnicity, race and identity in working-class history* (Durham, NC, 2017), pp 3-4.

Boston-based Defense Committee. The committee initially comprised of a close-knit group of Italian anarchists led by Aldino Felicani, an immigrant from Florence, and remained somewhat closed off to external support. In 1924 circumstances changed and the committee opened to a wider range of socialists, trade unionists and liberals. Campaigns for political prisoners have the capacity to pull together coalitions of people from a variety of backgrounds, and the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign did so on a massive scale. Among the first of the new additions were John Barry, Mike Flaherty and Mary Donovan. Boston's Connolly Club, sometimes known as the James Connolly Literary Society, emerged after James Larkin established the New York James Connolly Socialist Club in 1918 as an alternative to the left-leaning Irish Progressive League.<sup>8</sup> The Boston club comprised of about fifty people whose ideological alignments reflected James Connolly's own politics, with republicans, socialists and Wobblies among their ranks.<sup>9</sup> Their first large campaign was for the release of Larkin, who was arrested in 1920 in the United States on a charge of criminal anarchy.<sup>10</sup> John Barry was an Irish immigrant steelworker and from 1924 acted as a chairman at Defense Committee meetings. Apparently his unassuming character helped overcome wariness among the anarchists. Mike Flaherty became vice-chairman and was by most accounts a more exuberant presence. From the Aran Islands, he was a popular organiser in the Boston Labor Union and was president of the Painters' Union. Donovan became the recording secretary, as well as the 'errand

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<sup>8</sup> Emmet O'Connor, *Big Jim Larkin: hero or wrecker?* (Dublin, 2015), p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> Donovan, 'No tears'; Francis Russell, *Tragedy in Dedham: the story of the Sacco-Vanzetti case* (London, 1963), pp 267-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Boston Globe*, 21 June 1920.

boy and the spokesman for the committee, as most of the members spoke English with difficulty'.<sup>11</sup>

Of the three, Donovan was the one most publicly associated with the campaign and she became good friends with Vanzetti. Her tireless campaigning led to her arrest and the loss of her job, and the executions took a toll on her health. When she died in 1973, her obituary in the *Boston Globe* observed that her career 'included most reform movements of the twentieth century', yet she has drawn scant scholarly attention. She remained an activist her entire life, as a union organiser in coalfields, in the American Civil Liberties Union, in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and she supported Eugene McCarthy's bid for the Democratic nomination in the 1968 presidential elections. Yet it was with the Sacco-Vanzetti case that she was remembered most.<sup>12</sup>

Born in 1886, Donovan was the daughter of Irish immigrants who came to Massachusetts in 1872, and were followed by several relatives.<sup>13</sup> She grew up on a small farm near North Brookfield, close to an extended family of uncles, aunts and numerous cousins. Her father Dennis was a shoe worker and was active in the Knights of Labour and the Irish Land League, and Donovan suggested he was a Fenian before he emigrated.<sup>14</sup> Growing up, being Irish and Catholic were central to Donovan's identity, but this came into tension with her politics as she grew older. Her first

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<sup>11</sup> Donovan, 'No tears'.

<sup>12</sup> *Boston Globe*, 28 June 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Information drawn from the United States Federal Census, 1880, 1900, accessed via [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (2 Jan. 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Bussel, *From Harvard to the ranks of labour: Powers Hapgood and the American working class* (University Park PA, 1999), p. 102.

contact with radicalism came through her older brother Dan, who ‘brought back’ Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) literature from the west coast. Donovan had been an ‘ardent Catholic, intensely religious’, but she joined the Socialist Party when studying at the University of Michigan and working summers in a textile mill. This brought her into conflict with Edward Kelly, the bishop of Detroit. Until then the two had been good friends, but Kelly took the drastic step of organising her excommunication from the Catholic church for refusing to leave the Socialist Party. This represented a sharp personal blow for Donovan and began her life-long estrangement from Catholicism.<sup>15</sup>

In the early twentieth century considerable links existed between Irish nationalists and the east coast labour movement that women activists played critical roles in developing.<sup>16</sup> In Boston, Irish American women were heavily involved in the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic and Margaret M. Ryan, for example, combined membership of the Socialist Party with that of Irish political and cultural organisations.<sup>17</sup> After graduating in 1912, Donovan worked for a time as a teacher and became increasingly active in the Socialist Party, Boston’s Central Labor Union, the anti-war movement, and Irish nationalism. Despite her

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<sup>15</sup> Donovan, ‘No tears’; *Boston Globe*, 8 Jan 1928.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth McKillen, ‘Divided loyalties: Irish American women labor leaders and the Irish Revolution, 1916–23’ in *Éire-Ireland*, li, nos 3 & 4 (Fall/Winter 2016), pp 165-87; Catherine M. Burns, ‘Kathleen O’Brennan and American identity in the transatlantic Irish republican movement’ in David T. Gleeson (ed.), *The Irish in the Atlantic world* (Columbia, 2010), pp 176–94; David Brundage, ‘American labour and Irish independence, 1916-1923’ in *Saothar*, xxiv (1999), pp 59-66.

<sup>17</sup> Murray, *Irish nationalists in Boston*, p. 178.

politics, in 1914 she managed to secure a permanent position with the Massachusetts Department of Labor as a factory inspector, which gave her some financial independence. Some studies have claimed she was a ‘Sinn Féin organiser’ about this time, and while she didn’t make this specific claim herself, her activism represented a crossover between American labour and Irish nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

In 1921 Donovan sailed to Ireland to witness the events of the Irish Revolution first hand. She toured the island for one month officially under the auspices of conducting ‘an industrial survey’ with Julia O’Connor, a second-generation Irish unioniser from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.<sup>19</sup> Donovan’s meetings in Ireland demonstrate that her main interests lay in the labour movement above republicanism. She visited the offices of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union and met with the Labour Party leader, Tom Johnson. The highlight of her trip was a meeting with Constance Markievicz, then the minister for labour in the revolutionary Dáil, who expressed an interest in her work for the Massachusetts Department of Labor, though Donovan revealed few more details of this encounter.<sup>20</sup> Spurred on by her conversations in Ireland, when Donovan returned she visited New York’s Sing Sing jail, where James Larkin was imprisoned from 1920-3. She was impressed by their meeting, and they became ‘close friends’. She later described him as ‘absolutely fearless and incorruptible’, though ‘too much of an individualist’ to

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti: the men, the murders, and the judgment of mankind* (New York, 2007), p. 265.

<sup>19</sup> Donovan recalled they travelled in 1920, but O’Connor’s contemporary writings place the trip in the summer of 1921: *Union Telephone Operator* (Boston), July 1921.

<sup>20</sup> Donovan, ‘No tears’.

work effectively with others.<sup>21</sup> Larkin proved to be an important influence on Donovan, and their meeting probably would not have come to pass had she not visited Ireland in 1921. It was around the time of her trip to Sing Sing prison that Donovan received a Socialist Party circular calling for people to help fundraise for Sacco and Vanzetti, which began her involvement in the case.

The James Connolly Club had offered support to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee from the outset in 1920, though they were initially rebuffed.<sup>22</sup> Donovan blamed their exclusion on some ‘New York anarchists’, who she felt had made ‘every effort to instil their suspicion of me’ into the committee.<sup>23</sup> Yet it was surely no surprise that the anarchists were suspicious of an employee of the Massachusetts Department of Labor, a socialist attempting to involve more socialists in the committee. Tensions also existed between Irish and Italian immigrants. From the perspective of the Italian anarchists, the Boston Irish were a group associated primarily with the Catholic Church, the police and anti-radicalism.<sup>24</sup> During the 1912 ‘Bread and Roses’ strike of unskilled workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts – a landmark event for Sacco and Vanzetti – Irish American religious and political

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*; Mary Donovan Hapgood, ‘Review of R. M. Fox, *Jim Larkin: Irish labor leader*’, unpublished (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Mary Donovan Hapgood papers).

<sup>22</sup> Eugene Lyons to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, 26 Oct 1921 (N.L.I., Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 33,606 (8)).

<sup>23</sup> Donovan, ‘No tears’.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Creagh, ‘La classe ouvrière américaine et l’affaire Sacco-Vanzetti’ in Daniel Royo (ed.), *Les États-Unis à l’épreuve de la modernité: mirages, crises et mutations de 1918 à 1928* (Paris, 1993), pp 127-40.

leaders, and even some labour figures, were linked to the side of the employers. In the 1910s Irish American Peter Collins led a campaign in the Boston Central Labor Union to promote Catholic principles and oppose socialism, with the approval of the reactionary Cardinal William O'Connell. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, O'Connell sought to link Irish identity in the United States with anti-Bolshevism.<sup>25</sup> According to Vanzetti, the Irish American policeman who first arrested the pair made anti-Italian comments. When the *Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* were posthumously published in 1928, the editors deliberately removed 'uncomplimentary remarks' by Vanzetti about the Boston Irish.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, ethnic tensions, while present, shouldn't be over-emphasised. Sacco had a close relationship with the Irish American family who employed him, and who always maintained his innocence.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, from the start Elisabeth Gurley Flynn played a critical role in the campaign for the men's release.

Flynn was a well-known figure on the American left who proudly identified as a child of politicised Irish immigrants. Her parents had been active in the Knights of Labor and the Irish Feminist Club. She worked closely with James Connolly and Jim Larkin during their American years, and after the 1916 Rising she assisted Irish nationalists in organising American fundraising tours, though the Friends of Irish

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<sup>25</sup> Marc Karson, 'Catholic anti-socialism' in John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds), *Failure of a dream? Essays in the history of American socialism* (Berkeley, 1984), pp 82-102.

<sup>26</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York, 1997), p. xxxviii.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist voices: an oral history of Anarchism in America* (Oakland, 2005), pp 99-100.

Freedom had warned against her radicalism. During Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's 1916-18 American stay, Flynn provided significant support.<sup>28</sup> At the 1912 Lawrence strike, Flynn met the Italian anarchist Carlo Tresca, with whom she started a long relationship, and it was partly through Tresca that Flynn became involved in the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign. More important was her status as the secretary of the Workers Defense Union in New York and as a founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union, which made her an ideal intermediary between the anarchists and wider left-wing and liberal groups. She utilised her vast contacts to mobilise a broad range of support and forge new alliances for the case, she organised the counsel of the labour lawyer Fred Moore, and she toured widely to speak and fundraise on the men's behalf.<sup>29</sup>

Carlo Tresca was one of the 'New York anarchists' that Donovan blamed for initially cutting her off from the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, yet this seems out of character given his reputation as a popular figure who consistently sought out alliances beyond the anarchist-syndicalism he espoused. Similar to Flynn, Tresca was a broker who linked networks of socialists, communists and trade-unionists, and when he was arrested in 1916, James Larkin, along with several prominent labour figures,

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Ward, *Fearless woman: Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, feminism and the Irish Revolution* (Dublin, 2019), p. 247.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The rebel girl: an autobiography, my first life (1906-1926)* (1973; repr. New York, 1986), pp 23-30, 270, 300-32; Mary Anne Trasciatti, 'Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and the rise and fall of the Liberal-Radical Alliance, 1920-1940' in *American Communist History*, xv, no. 2 (2016), pp 191-216.

addressed a large New York demonstration for his release.<sup>30</sup> In 1920 the curious scenario came to pass of Tresca assisting a boycott triggered by the arrest of a Catholic bishop. That August the American Women Pickets, a mixture of left-leaning Irish nationalists and feminists, led a boycott of British shipping on Manhattan's West Side docks in protest at the arrest of Daniel Mannix, an Irish Catholic bishop, and the imprisonment of the mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney. Mannix had stopped in New York on route from Australia to Ireland, and after his departure was arrested at sea by the British authorities. The boycott turned into a massive strike of hundreds of longshoremen that lasted over three weeks and attracted huge publicity.<sup>31</sup> Sidney Czira, the founder of the New York branch of Cumann na mBan, recalled that Tresca became involved via Flynn and first 'suggested that we should call out the seamen on the British ships', as he had 'great influence among the sea-faring fraternity'.<sup>32</sup> Czira was surprised to find out afterwards that he was an anarchist, yet Tresca and Flynn surfaced in multiple causes and campaigns in the 1920s.

In 1924 the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee agreed to expand to include people from beyond the anarchist movement, following recommendations made by Flynn and Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union. Flynn was crucial to implementing these changes, raising the sizable fee of \$20,000 for new lawyers, and using her networks to broaden support, which included reaching out to the James Connolly Club.<sup>33</sup> Donovan made only a couple of fleeting references to Flynn in her

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<sup>30</sup> Nunzio Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca: portrait of a rebel* (New York, 2005), p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> Joe Doyle, 'Striking for Ireland on the New York Docks' in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996), p. 362.

<sup>32</sup> Sidney Czira statement (M.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 909, p. 49).

<sup>33</sup> Flynn, *The rebel girl*, p. 329-32; Trasciati, 'Elizabeth Gurley Flynn', 209-10.

memoirs and seems to have deliberately minimised her vital role in this period. One study has argued that Flynn's ongoing membership of the Communist Party during the second red scare in the 1950s led her to being 'airbrushed' from some veterans' accounts of the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign written in that decade, which in turn has resulted in historians downplaying her immense contribution.<sup>34</sup> It appears Donovan's account suffered from the same malaise.<sup>35</sup> Their work on the committee, however, overlapped for just a short time. In 1925 Flynn began to work less with the Boston-based Defense Committee, and her long relationship with Tresca also ended, though she remained involved in the wider campaign for the men's release.<sup>36</sup>

As Flynn took a step back, Donovan became fully immersed in the campaign. When the Connolly Club members first arrived at the Defense Committee headquarters, she recalled how in 'a small, shabby, cluttered room we found Felicani ... around the walls were shelves containing bulging cardboard filled boxes, which held the story of the past four years'. Her initial impression was of a cash-strapped operation with 'no lights, no telephone', but she quickly adapted, taking on the role of recording secretary, and constantly fired off letters to newspapers, politicians, intellectuals and others to mobilise opinion, addressed demonstrations, attended court hearings, visited the imprisoned men and helped edit the Defense Committee bulletin. When a convicted criminal confessed to the murder for which Sacco and Vanzetti were imprisoned, Donovan chased down leads to substantiate the confession in the evenings and weekends.<sup>37</sup> According to Russell's 1962 history of the campaign, she

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<sup>34</sup> Trasciati, 'Elizabeth Gurley Flynn', p. 193.

<sup>35</sup> For her part, Flynn made no mention of Donovan in her own recollections.

<sup>36</sup> Flynn, *The rebel girl*, p. 333.

<sup>37</sup> Donovan, 'No tears'.

was ‘not an easy person to get along with’.<sup>38</sup> Despite her earlier criticisms of being excluded, she herself was territorial toward new members of the committee, including the Boston journalist Gardner Jackson.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, she remained in friendly contact with Felicani and surviving members of the Defense Committee till her death in 1973, and from 1924-7 worked to exhaustion for the case.

The Connolly Club members claimed a type of revolutionary history that included Fenianism as well as stories of Irish immigrant marginalisation that paralleled Italian experiences in the 1920s. Donovan’s family were part of the late-nineteenth century generation of Irish Land Leaguers and nationalists, and Boston’s Fenian past was an important part of Mike Flaherty’s radical identity. In 1927 the Defense Committee applied for a permit from Boston’s City Council for a large outdoor meeting with the Swedish social democrat Georg Branting, then visiting the city, to protest against the denial of a new trial by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts. At City Hall, Flaherty made an impassioned plea to officials, ‘practically every one of whom was Irish’, about his love of Boston, ‘the city that gave refuge to my fellow countryman, John Boyle O’Reilly’. O’Reilly was a Fenian who made a legendary escape in 1869 from an Australian penal colony to the United States, where he settled in Boston and edited the influential *The Pilot* newspaper.<sup>40</sup> Flaherty’s speech evoked the scorn of Boston Brahmins toward the Irish of O’Reilly’s generation, declaring that they still scorned the ‘Irish hirelings that are doing their bidding now’. He ended by quoting an O’Reilly poem about revolution, and

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<sup>38</sup> Russell, *Tragedy in Dedham*, p. 268.

<sup>39</sup> Watson, *Sacco & Vanzetti*, p. 266.

<sup>40</sup> In 1908 *The Pilot* was bought out by the Catholic church and became its official organ.

according to Donovan, the ‘room was filled and every doorway was jammed’. Securing the permit, then, depended on whether the clerks were ‘more anti-Italian and anti-radical or more pro-Irish while they listened to Mike Flaherty’. In the end, the permit was denied, but Flaherty had won some members over. One official followed them out and suggested that were a crowd to meet Branting at the station without banners, no permit was necessary.<sup>41</sup> The following Sunday afternoon, hundreds gathered at the station and walked with Branting to Boston Common, where he addressed the crowd.

In the summer of 1925 Donovan borrowed \$400 for her second trip to Ireland to raise publicity and fundraise for the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign. The trip lasted six weeks and she met with Jim Larkin amongst others in Dublin, and also with some anarchists and the reformer George Lansbury during a visit to England. Her recollections, however, offer frustratingly few details about this trip, and the response likely fell short of her expectations.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, a number of individuals did rally for the case. The earliest support in Ireland came from Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, who had toured the United States to raise funds for Irish political prisoners and supported Tom Mooney, the Irish-American Wobbly wrongly imprisoned for the 1916 ‘Preparedness Day’ bombing in San Francisco. In 1921 she cabled money and a message of support to the Defense Committee, which was gratefully acknowledged as

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<sup>41</sup> Donovan, ‘No tears’; Donovan to Michael Barry, 26 May 1927 (Boston Public Library (hereafter B.P.L.), Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, Series 2 (S2) / Box 8 (B8) / Folder 33 (F33) / Item 2 (I2)).

<sup>42</sup> Donovan, ‘No tears’. Donovan dates the trip to 1926 in her papers, but her letters to Vanzetti state that it took place in 1925 (*Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, p. 155).

‘one of the most encouraging things that has come to our office recently’.<sup>43</sup> Larkin had the closest links to Donovan and Flynn, and he was the figure most associated with the campaign in Ireland when he returned from the United States, and the Defence Committee welcomed his ‘constant and valuable interest in the case’.<sup>44</sup> Vanzetti himself was an admirer, writing to Donovan that Larkin had the ‘love and respect of me and my comrades ... for, fanatic as we may be, we know a little about sincerity, character and faith, and those who have them’.<sup>45</sup> Donovan visited Vanzetti regularly in prison, brought him a picture of Larkin and passed on his messages of support. When she returned from Ireland, Vanzetti asked her to ‘please tell Jim Larkin that I accept with glad heart his and the Irish workers’ greetings and congratulation: for it proves their solidarity to us’.<sup>46</sup>

The increased prominence of the Sacco-Vanzetti case in Ireland from 1924 reflects how Donovan’s personal relationship with Larkin interlinked the labour movement in Ireland with transatlantic developments. From Dublin, he wrote to her that ‘Comrades here urge all who believe in justice not to fail in their duty’ and linked

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<sup>43</sup> Lyons to Sheehy Skeffington, 26 Oct. 1921 (N.L.I., Sheehy Skeffington papers, MS 33,606 (8)).

<sup>44</sup> Amleto Fabbri to James Larkin, 4 Feb. 1926 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, S2/B7/F19/I2).

<sup>45</sup> Vanzetti to Donovan, 22 July 1925 (*Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, p. 163).

<sup>46</sup> Vanzetti to Donovan, 9 Oct. 1926 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, Series 1: Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti correspondence and writings, 1916-1928, B2b/F4/I6).

the Sacco-Vanzetti case to Tom Mooney.<sup>47</sup> Larkin's *Irish Worker* reprinted the article 'Sacco and Vanzetti shall not die' by the Defense Committee and organised a demonstration to coincide with a global day of protest on 1 March 1925.<sup>48</sup> Later that month, a large meeting was held at Dublin's Mansion House to commemorate the Paris Commune and to protest Sacco and Vanzetti's sentence. Resolutions were passed declaring 'Dublin workers ... pledge ourselves to do all in our power to save these, our comrades, from the injustice of the courts of the U.S.A.'<sup>49</sup>

The journalist and Larkin-ally Jack Carney maintained considerable interest in the case, first from San Francisco where he edited *Labor Unity* and later from Dublin, where he promised to do 'all that is humanly possible to bring support' when the petition for clemency for the two men was hanging in the balance in July 1927. Along with Larkin he organised a meeting at the end of the month and encouraged Donovan and the committee to make postcards of the two men, with a printed message to the governor of Massachusetts, that supporters in Ireland could send in protest. He also urged that their publicity efforts should 'not miss this part of the world. As is well known the workers of Dublin are inherently loyal to the claims of all those who are victims of the system.'<sup>50</sup> At this time, Larkin cabled two messages to the governor of

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<sup>47</sup> Larkin to the SV Defense Committee, 14 Nov. 1924 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, B6/F49/I5).

<sup>48</sup> *Irish Worker* (Dublin), 7 Feb. 1925. National newspapers did not report on this demonstration.

<sup>49</sup> *Irish Worker*, 21 Mar. 1925.

<sup>50</sup> Jack Carney to SV Defense Committee, 18, 19 July 1927 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, S2/B9/F5/I1 6); Carney to the SV New Trial League, 13 May 1924 (ibid., S4/B37/F5/I1).

Massachusetts urging clemency.<sup>51</sup> When Donovan was arrested following the executions, Larkin telegraphed, with some humour during a dark week, to welcome her into the 'International Jailbirds' Union'.<sup>52</sup>

The response in Ireland wasn't confined to Larkin and his allies. In the summer of 1927 the Labour Party's Thomas Johnson, whom Donovan had met, cabled the U.S. President Calvin Coolidge to ask for clemency.<sup>53</sup> Roddy Connolly's Workers' Party of Ireland signed a resolution against the executions that was forwarded to the U.S. minister to the Irish Free State, Frederick Sterling. In a note to the Department of External Affairs, Sterling said the case was a matter for Massachusetts, not the federal government, and asked that the letter be passed onto the police, though he did 'not consider any particular action necessary in regard to the signatories who appear to be well meaning'. If more belligerent protests were made, it seems, closer attention would have been desired.<sup>54</sup> When clemency appeals failed and the executions became certain, there was a demonstration in Belfast and an 'Irish labour protest meeting against judicial murder' in Dublin's Foster Place.<sup>55</sup> In the month before the executions, Connolly's *Workers' Republic* and *An Phoblacht* ran some short articles on Sacco and Vanzetti, though they had given the case little attention in the previous years.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Larkin to Donovan, 19 July 1927 (ibid., S2/B9/F5/I7).

<sup>52</sup> Larkin to Donovan, 31 Aug., 27 Sept. 1927 (ibid., Sub-Series 3, B10/F7/I20, F8/I17); *Irish Independent*, 25 Aug. 1927.

<sup>53</sup> John Anthony Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson, 1872–1963* (Dublin, 1980), p. 304.

<sup>54</sup> Secretary of the U.S. consulate to Dept. of External Affairs, 30 July 1927 (N.A.I., DFA/1/GR/946 1927).

<sup>55</sup> *Labor Defender* (Chicago), July, Sept. 1927.

<sup>56</sup> *Workers' Republic*, April, Aug., Sept. 1927; *An Phoblacht*, 12 Aug. 1927.

Interestingly, *An Phoblacht* referred to Sacco and Vanzetti as communists, not anarchists. The Comintern played a major role in organising the global Sacco-Vanzetti campaign through the International Red Aid body (which founded an Irish branch in 1925), and their propagandistic portrayal of the men as communists influenced reporting on the case, including in the mainstream press. The *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* labelled the men ‘Bolsheviks’, and deemed the sentence to be fair, but judged the six-year stay of execution to be ‘repugnant’ and noted that this would not happen in the Free State.<sup>57</sup> Overall, the reaction in Ireland in the crucial summer months of 1927 was limited by domestic events. The executions came just one month after the assassination of the minister for justice Kevin O’Higgins and the death of Constance Markievicz, and they were caught between the two general elections of June and September, and Larkin was busy contesting a seat in the latter. This was also a period of quarrels and one-upmanship in the Irish labour movement that hindered more coordinated publicity for the case. Nonetheless, the efforts of labour organisations surpassed those of Irish republicans.

#### IV

In the United States, Irish involvement in the campaign extended beyond Donovan and the James Connolly Club to communist circles. Tom O’Flaherty from Inis Mór and the Irish-American communist James P. Cannon played important roles in organising appeals, protests and fundraising for Sacco and Vanzetti’s release. Cannon was a well-established labour agitator from Kansas who hailed from an Irish nationalist family. His mother supported the home rule party and his father had been secretary of a Land League branch in England before moving to the United States.

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<sup>57</sup> *Irish Times*, 6, 24 Aug. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 24 Aug. 1927.

When mobilising support for Sacco and Vanzetti Cannon used networks of Irish-American communists including William Dunne and William Z. Foster. In 1925, he conceived of the International Labor Defence (I.L.D.) organisation following a conversation in Moscow with Big Bill Haywood about political prisoners, with the aim of defending any member of the worker's movement without partisan bias. The I.L.D. was linked to the Comintern's International Red Aid network and mobilised massive support behind Sacco and Vanzetti in the years 1926-7, sponsoring mass rallies in New York's Union Square and Madison Square Garden, where Flynn, Tresca and Foster spoke, and which were attended by up to 25,000 people.<sup>58</sup> In Canada, a sister organisation, the communist Labor Defence League also publicised the case, and one member offered to draw on Irish-Canadian networks for fundraising.<sup>59</sup>

In 1926 the I.L.D. began publishing a monthly magazine, the Chicago-based *Labor Defender*, which was distinctive for its innovative use of photographs and illustrations. It was edited by Tom O'Flaherty who, similar to many of the activists discussed here, came from a politicised home. His brother was the novelist and communist Liam, and their father had been a Fenian and Land Leaguer.<sup>60</sup> O'Flaherty shared this generational dimension with Donovan, Flynn, Cannon and Foster, who were all the children of parents active in the Fenians and Land League in the late-

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<sup>58</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the origins of the American revolutionary left, 1890-1928* (Chicago, 2007), pp 24, 260-8.

<sup>59</sup> F. W. Garrish to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 4 May 1927 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, S2/B8/F22/I1). Garrish was also the honorary secretary of the Irish Trade Bureau of Canada.

<sup>60</sup> Tim Robinson, *Stones of Aran: labyrinth* (Dublin, 1995), pp 318-19.

nineteenth century, and who were now taking their own path. O’Flaherty had emigrated to the United States in 1912 and joined the I.W.W. and later the Communist Party, and contributed to the *Voice of Labor* and *Daily Worker*. In 1925 and 1926 he travelled to Moscow as a delegate to the International Red Aid Congress. In Boston, where O’Flaherty had first settled after leaving Ireland, he helped organise the James Connolly Club and had collaborated with its members on the Larkin Defense Committee of 1920.<sup>61</sup> When planning the *Labor Defender*, he resolved that the first issue should focus on Sacco and Vanzetti and reached out to the Boston-based Defense Committee.<sup>62</sup> Six months later, he and Cannon commissioned a special ‘Save Sacco and Vanzetti’ issue which included an ‘Appeal to American Labor’ by Eugene Debs, the socialist leader and candidate in the 1920 presidential election.<sup>63</sup> O’Flaherty’s tenure as editor proved short-lived, however, and in the summer of 1926 he stood down due to health struggles. The *Labor Defender* continued to have broad international appeal and drew news from Ireland of meetings, fundraisers and messages of support for Sacco and Vanzetti. The Irish Labour Party, the Belfast Independent Labour Party, the Irish Trade Union Congress, the Workers’ Party of Ireland and Larkin’s Workers’ Union of Ireland were all listed in its columns in the summer of 1927.<sup>64</sup>

James Cannon contributed numerous articles to the *Labor Defender* on Sacco and Vanzetti that repeatedly emphasised how their case provided common ground for

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<sup>61</sup> *Boston Globe*, 21 June 1920.

<sup>62</sup> *Labor Defender*, Jan. 1926; O’Flaherty to the SV Defense Committee, 23 Oct. 1925 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, S2/B7/F15/I6).

<sup>63</sup> *Labor Defender*, July 1926.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, July, Sept. 1927.

all strands on the left to come together. For Cannon, the case was another chapter in the history of the legal repression of American labour, which included the 1887 Haymarket executions and the 1916 Tom Mooney case.<sup>65</sup> His calls for a united front were effective, but support for Sacco and Vanzetti was not always automatic due to their militant associations. They belonged to a faction of the anarchist movement led by Luigi Galleani, who advocated violence and expropriation. Some of the Galleanisti were possibly responsible for the 1916 San Francisco Preparedness Day bomb, for which Irish-American Tom Mooney was convicted. During his 1918 deportation hearings, Galleani told interviewers that he knew for certain Mooney was innocent.<sup>66</sup> John Fitzpatrick, the Westmeath-born president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, who had been heavily involved in Mooney's defence, expressed unease at supporting 'irresponsible people', an allusion to the Galleanisti. Cannon responded by stressing his belief in Sacco and Vanzetti's innocence, declaring this was 'not the case of two hold up men or bandits. We have become convinced that it is the working class against the capitalists.' Stopping the executions, he went on, was 'the job of the working class of the world', because their conviction aimed not 'only to burn Sacco and Vanzetti in the electric chair but to burn the labor movement in America'.<sup>67</sup>

The Sacco Vanzetti Defense Committee in Boston were wary of communist involvement, and with good grounds believed the case was being cynically exploited

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., June 1927.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: the anarchist background* (Princeton NJ, 1991), p. 138.

<sup>67</sup> *Labor Defender*, June 1927; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, p. 277. Fitzpatrick had supported the 1920 boycott of British goods and shipping: Chapman, 'John Forrest Kelly's *Irish World*', p. 238.

by communists who saw the men more useful as dead martyrs than alive. Felicani complained that over half a million dollars raised by the Communist Party never reached Boston.<sup>68</sup> For his part, Cannon also had issues with the Communist Party, believing he had been left isolated during the campaign and he criticised the *Daily Worker's* under-coverage of the I.L.D.'s activities.<sup>69</sup> Of the communists involved in the case, he communicated the most with the anarchist-led Defense Committee – there are over sixty telegrams from him in the committee's archive – and he corresponded directly with Vanzetti. According to his biographer, Cannon made efforts to ensure that I.L.D. funds collected for the two prisoners made it to their destination, and he sent \$20 each month to Sacco and Vanzetti, and letters of thanks and solidarity from the men were published in the *Labor Defender*.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, Cannon did want more communist control in the running of the campaign and Felicani viewed him with mistrust.<sup>71</sup> By the time of the executions, a bitter, public rupture had occurred between the communists and the Defense Committee.<sup>72</sup> When the former suggested taking the ashes of Sacco and Vanzetti to a mass protest meeting in New York, Donovan and Felicani flatly rejected the idea as a publicity stunt. In response, the *Daily Worker* didn't hold back, referring to Donovan as 'an obscure spiteful female, with a great lust for publicity', and to her and Felicani as 'two little parasites who

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<sup>68</sup> Donovan, 'No tears'; Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, p. 335.

<sup>69</sup> Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, pp 280-2.

<sup>70</sup> *Labor Defender*, July 1926, August 1927; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, p 280.

<sup>71</sup> Russell, *Tragedy in Dedham*, pp 335-8; Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, p 278.

<sup>72</sup> Max Shachtman, *Sacco and Vanzetti: Labor's martyrs* (New York, 1927), pp 63-4.

have fastened on the Sacco-Vanzetti case in Boston and tried to keep it from the world'.<sup>73</sup>

For Donovan, the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti represented a personal trauma. On the night of the executions she broke the news to Vanzetti's sister and Sacco's wife at her apartment, with reporters and photographers repeatedly ringing the bell outside. Sacco's wife had temporarily moved in with her and their son stayed with Donovan's father and sister on their North Brookfield farm.<sup>74</sup> When the bodies were removed to the funeral parlour, Donovan was arrested outside for carrying a placard with a quote from the judge who sentenced the men: 'Did you see what I did to those anarchist bastards? – Judge Thayer'. She was charged with advocating anarchy and inciting a riot, but released in time for the funeral and later received a one-year suspended sentence.<sup>75</sup> She helped plan the route of the procession, and at the funeral she originally intended to read a poem by Vanzetti, but agreed to deliver an oration prepared by Gardner Jackson.<sup>76</sup> After the funeral, she found herself with lots of free time and no job. Realising the difficulty she would now have in getting work in Boston, she moved to New York and took a low-paid job as a short-order cook.<sup>77</sup>

Following a period of ill-health, Donovan recovered and married Powers Hapgood, a socialist unioniser who she had met during the campaign. Their first child was named Barta after Bartolomeo Vanzetti. In 1928 she ran unsuccessfully for governor of Massachusetts as the Socialist Party candidate. In 1932 she was proposed

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<sup>73</sup> Donovan, 'No tears'.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid; *Boston Globe*, 26 Aug. 1927.

<sup>76</sup> *Boston Globe*, 29 Aug. 1927; Donovan, 'No tears'.

<sup>77</sup> Bussel, *From Harvard*, p. 103.

as the party's candidate for vice-president of the United States, but did not accept, and over the next decades she remained active as a union organiser and civil liberties advocate from her new home in Indiana, where Hapgood came from.<sup>78</sup> Donovan felt that her marriage meant that her public role was subordinated to her husband's, and the title of an unpublished essay was indicative of her frustrations: 'Why *do* intelligent women marry'.<sup>79</sup> She remained active in commemorative events for Sacco and Vanzetti, and in 1959 attended a posthumous pardon event for the men wearing a death mask. Mike Flaherty also continued to organise anniversary events, memorials, and protests. On the fortieth anniversary of the executions in 1967, aged eighty-six, he delivered a speech.<sup>80</sup>

## V

Elisabeth Gurley Flynn openly identified with her Irish background and perhaps occasionally played on the 'Irish rebel' stereotype, but some of the other activists considered here held more mixed feelings. By the time James Cannon joined the communists in 1919, he complained that he was 'sick and fed up' with the Irish: 'When I looked around and saw all the god-damned Irishmen were either cops or politicians or grafters and contractors and prosecuting attorneys, I said to hell with it. I disaffiliated.'<sup>81</sup> William Z. Foster avoided any identification with his Irish

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<sup>78</sup> Kurt Vonnegut said he voted for Donovan; see the prologue to Vonnegut's *Jailbird* (London, 1992), pp xi-xii.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Donovan, 'Why *do* intelligent women marry' (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Mary Donovan Hapgood papers); Bussel, *From Harvard*, pp 150, 228.

<sup>80</sup> *Boston Globe*, 23 Aug. 1967; *Berkshire Eagle*, 6 Feb. 1959.

<sup>81</sup> Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, p. 113.

background. Mary Donovan's misgivings were not so explicit, nonetheless her unpublished autobiography, written in the 1950s, includes a lot of personal details that indicate a complex relationship with Ireland and Irish America, and which allow for a fuller understanding of her political outlook. She afforded surprisingly little detail about her trips to Ireland, both of which were over one month long. On the other hand, she drafted and revised the chapter describing her youth and Irish Catholic upbringing multiple times, more than any of the other chapters. The title of her manuscript – 'No tears for my youth' – suggests some bitterness toward the most distinctively Irish stage of her life. Donovan was born into a working class family and remembered her parents fondly, but when she was five years old her mother died and her father, struggling to cope with three children, sent her to live with his brother and sister-in-law, also Irish immigrants. She recalled this period as a bleak one, a 'sort of Oliver Twist existence', that included severe daily beatings from her aunt Peg with fists, straps and sticks. Donovan remembered her aunt with a mix of hatred and embarrassment. She was an 'Irish peasant type, with their usual harsh stupidity', whose illiteracy added to Donovan's low opinion of her. She 'had the intellect but not the patience of an ox', Donovan continued, and overall was 'the most uncouth and the most unattractive person that I had ever seen or heard of'.<sup>82</sup> Donovan returned to the family home as a teenager and had a good relationship with her father, though her descriptions of her childhood indicate a desire to emphasise an unromanticised side of Irish immigrant life.

Donovan's excommunication from the Catholic church, which had been a huge part of her early life, contributed to her frustrations with the Irish community. It removed a central aspect of her cultural identity, but arguably also gave her the

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<sup>82</sup> Donovan, 'No tears'.

freedom to pursue radical politics without concern for clerical opinion.<sup>83</sup> From the end of the First World War Catholic religious and political leaders in Boston, led by Cardinal William O’Connell, promoted anti-socialism as an intrinsic part of being Irish American.<sup>84</sup> O’Connell refused to ask publicly for clemency for Sacco and Vanzetti, despite the growing population of Italian Catholics in Boston and direct appeals from the men’s relatives and, at the last minute, from the Vatican.<sup>85</sup> *The Pilot*, Boston’s official Catholic newspaper since 1908, astonishingly made no mention at all of the case. Particularly at the time of the executions, it was remarkable that a Boston-based newspaper made no reference to the men when they were front-page news around the world.<sup>86</sup> Irish support for Sacco and Vanzetti in Boston was, then, all the more conspicuous, and those involved were exposed to considerable hostility. During the campaign Donovan was spat on, received scores of threatening letters, and she felt her Irishness brought her more police attention.<sup>87</sup> As the campaign progressed, she felt increasingly marginalised from Irish America.

Along with hostility from elements of Boston’s Irish community, Donovan’s mixed feelings toward Ireland were shaded by disillusionment with the outcomes of the Irish Revolution, and she perceived a fascist strain developing within Irish politics

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<sup>83</sup> Bussel, *From Harvard*, p. 102.

<sup>84</sup> Murray, *Irish nationalists in Boston*, p. 120.

<sup>85</sup> Rosario Joseph Tosiello, “‘Requests I cannot ignore’: a new perspective on the role of Cardinal O’Connell in the Sacco-Vanzetti case’ in *Catholic Historical Review*, lxxviii, no. 1 (Jan. 1982), pp 46-53.

<sup>86</sup> *The Pilot*, 27 Aug., 3 Sept.1927.

<sup>87</sup> Donovan, ‘No tears’; *Boston Globe*, 28 Jan. 1928.

in the late-twenties.<sup>88</sup> Throughout the decade the nationalist movement proved largely indifferent or hostile to Sacco and Vanzetti. Frank P. Walsh, the Irish American nationalist and progressive lawyer, joined the final legal attempts to save their lives, but he was a somewhat isolated figure. New York's *Irish World*, which published left-leaning journalists, ran an article asking where was Ireland's worldwide campaign in 1916. 'There is scarcely a civilized city in the world that has not become excited about this case', the paper acknowledged, yet 'we fail to see any particular reason for getting excited because some frantic foreigner waves his bobbed locks at us.' When the Easter Rising leaders were executed, 'Did all the labor leaders rise in indignation? Was there a world-wide agitation made to save them?' No, because 'they were Irishmen and patriots. Evidently it is much better to be Italian anarchists and convicted murderers.'<sup>89</sup>

Had the case occurred seven years earlier, it might have been different. When Irish-American enthusiasm for Irish independence swelled and nationalists sought out radical and anti-imperialist alliances, Sacco and Vanzetti might have received more attention from Irish republicans, who themselves had organised multiple political prisoner campaigns in the United States during the revolutionary years. That many nationalists were unmoved by the campaign speaks to the fading internationalism of the Irish movement in the first years of the new Free State. The attention afforded to Sacco and Vanzetti in Irish America and Ireland disappointed Donovan. And yet one wonders what response she reasonably expected to find during her 1925 trip. It seems that, rather than being based on a cold assessment of circumstances in the new Free

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<sup>88</sup> Donovan to Felicani, 22 Jan. 1928 (B.P.L., Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti papers, S6/B49/F74/I3).

<sup>89</sup> *Irish World*, 27 Aug. 1927.

State, her decision to travel was moved by her deep personal connection to Ireland, along with her fading hopes that some social transformation might still follow the political revolution.

The well-known transatlantic Irish organisations may have remained largely indifferent, and sometimes hostile, to Sacco and Vanzetti, nonetheless their case did inspire a spirited response from numerous radicals of Irish birth and descent, and Donovan was at the centre of the global campaign to save them. Examining these individuals uncovers new interpersonal links and transnational networks of left-wing Irish radicalism that are often obscured by the focus on nationalism in histories of the early-twentieth century. They may have been relatively marginal figures to mainstream Irish transatlantic politics, nevertheless the Irish Revolution played a role in shaping their actions and outlooks, and they linked Irish and Irish-American circles to a genuinely global protest movement in the twenties. Situating Irish revolutionary politics in global contexts necessitates more than just considering the people and events that contributed to realising the political outcomes that came to pass in Ireland in the early 1920s. It also requires analysis of the edges of the Irish Revolution, how it spilled over into different situations and had points of crossover with non-Irish struggles and movements.