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ARTICLE

'Save Me from My Friends': The Transnational Intimacies of an Irish-Latvian Couple within and beyond the Irish Revolution, 1916–1921

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What can a focus on intimacies and affinities between radical immigrants in Ireland and their Irish counterparts tell us about the transnational scope of the global Irish revolution? This article answers this question through the lives of Rose MacKenna, an Irish playwright and socialist, and her husband Sidney Arnold, a Latvian literary translator. The activist career of this obscure Irish-Latvian couple took them from revolutionary Dublin in the wake of the Easter Rising to Petrograd in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. This article argues that MacKenna and Arnold, by virtue of their obscurity and marginality, rather than in spite of it, can suggest the sources and methodologies required to uncover the transnational world of Ireland's radical intelligentsia.

Introduction

In Riga in July 1920, Konrad Peterson, a Latvian member of the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI), married Helen 'Lena' Yeates, a member of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) from Dublin.[1] Peterson first left the Russian Empire for Ireland in January 1906 after participating in revolutionary movements in his native Latvia.[2] In Ireland, he found both love and revolution before returning to Latvia with his Irish fiancée. Celebrating this union ahead of the wedding, the Irish republican Maud Gonne delivered a speech to the IWFL in Dublin. According to the *Irish Citizen*'s account of the celebration, Gonne 'dwelt on the pleasure this marriage between a Russian and an Irishwoman' gave to the bride's IWFL friends.[3] Gonne noted that members of the IWFL, Dublin's most prominent feminist organisation, would find the union 'so appropriate'.[4] For Gonne, the union was more than simply a marriage between an IWFL member and an SPI member. It was the natural intertwining of two revolutionary traditions. Gonne hoped the Peterson-Yeates marriage would symbolise 'the closer union in the future between Ireland and Russia', two countries 'with such a strong spiritual kinship'.[5] This socialist-feminist wedding in Latvia and its Dublin celebration point us to the questions

[1] 'Fashionable Marriages', *Irish Society*, 31 July 1920.

[2] 'Activities', *Irish Citizen*, 2 Aug. 1920; Konrad Peterson to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 20 Feb. 1922, National Archives of Ireland, Department of Justice, 2019/90/11. For more on Peterson see Sam Maguire, 'Konrad Peterson (1888–1981): Latvian Revolutionary and Pioneering Civil Engineer', *Come Here to Me!* https://comeheretome.com/2016/09/22/konrad-peterson-1888-1981-latvian-revolutionary-and-pioneering-civil-engineer/ (accessed 13 June 2021). The SPI was the third party with the title and operated from 1917 to 1921, when it formed the nucleus of the first Communist Party of Ireland; see Emmet O'Connor, 'True Bolsheviks? The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Party of Ireland, 1917–21', in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds., *Ireland in Transition, 1867–1921* (London: Routledge, 2004), 209–22.

[3] 'Activities', *Irish Citizen*, 2 Aug. 1920.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

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this article asks: can the intimate history of an obscure border-crossing couple tell a broader story of Ireland's place within a revolutionary world?[6] How can a 'global history of the Irish revolution' move beyond a focus on the Irish diaspora to understand the place of migrants within Ireland?[7] In response, this article suggests how exploring the intimate side of revolution by reconstructing transnational personal bonds opens new research avenues for Irish radical histories and the broader history of interwar communism.

Scholars of early twentieth century Irish radicalism have long sought to trace the multiplicity of connections between Irish revolutionaries and wider currents of radicalism.[8] While the focus of Irish radical history has tended towards analysing the ideological development of male-dominated Irish radical groups, such historians have broadly proved more interested in the study of political women, migrants and other rank-and-file activists than scholars of independent Ireland's major parliamentary parties. However, organisationally-focused histories of the Irish interwar left have proved more liable to simply note the presence of atypical activists in groups or meetings rather than evaluate the particularities of what it meant to be a minority within the wider movement. This absence is partly addressed by histories and biographies of Irish radical women, which have traced the specific contours of women's contributions to Irish socialist movements.[9] Yet the heterogeneity of Ireland's revolutionary world and its embeddedness within global currents of radical cultures still requires further exploration. This article particularly seeks to destabilise the national assumptions embedded within the categories of 'Irish radical' and 'Irish revolution' through exploring how a migrant socialist from the Russian Empire passed through Ireland's revolution. Categories of analysis normally side-lined in Irish radical historiography, such as self-representation, emotion and intimacy, can help us to uncover this more diverse radical past and relate it to wider historiographies.[10]

The transnational and emotional turns in the wider discipline are pulling Irish historians in new research directions. Yet the history of interwar Irish radicalism remains largely unmoved by wider historiographical currents. O'Connor and McLoughlin's recent and otherwise authoritative history of Irish involvement in the International Brigades, for example, does not engage with recent methodologically innovative work on the International Brigades by scholars such as Lisa Kirschenbaum and Fraser Raeburn.[11] Both Kirschenbaum and Raeburn are part of a wider wave of historians of transnational radicalism working with methodologies that reveal the affective nature of personal and political bonds between border-hopping activists.[12] Engaging with this historiography can rejuvenate

[6] Enda Delaney and Fearghal McGarry, 'Introduction: A Global History of the Irish Revolution', *Irish Historical Studies*, 44, 165 (May 2020), 1–20.

[7] The term 'revolution' is contested in the Irish case; see Aidan Beatty, 'An Irish Revolution without a Revolution', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22, 1 (2016), 54–76. My approach is pragmatic: those I research considered themselves revolutionaries living through a revolution. In this case, the term seems applicable.

[8] See, for example, Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals, 1919–1943* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003); Adrian Grant, *Irish Socialist Republicanism, 1909–1936* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012); David Convery '"As Imperialistic as Our Masters"? Relations between British and Irish Communists, 1920–1941', *Contemporary British History*, 32, 4 (2018), 470–91.

[9] See, for example, Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Irish Women and Nationalism* (London: Pluto, 1983), Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Kyte, *Feminist Fusions: Irish Socialist Feminists, 1900s–1940s* (unpublished PhD thesis, University College Cork, 2018).

[10] O'Connor contends that Irish communism supplies few sources for the study of self-representation: Emmet O'Connor, 'Identity and Self-Representation in Irish Communism: The Connolly Column and the Spanish Civil War', *Socialist History*, 34 (Apr. 2009), 36. The sources are sufficient, I would argue, but methodological insights from beyond Irish historiography are needed to exploit them. Jimmy Yan demonstrates this skilfully in his work on Irish diaspora radicalism; see Jimmy Yan, 'The Irish Revolution, Early Australian Communists and Anglophone Radical Peripheries: Dublin, Glasgow, Sydney, 1920–23', *Twentieth Century Communism*, 18 (2020), 95–125.

[11] Barry McLoughlin and Emmet O'Connor, *In Spanish Trenches: The Minds and Deeds of the Irish who Fought for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2020). Cf. Lisa Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and Suspicion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Fraser Raeburn, *Scots and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity, Activism and Humanitarianism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

[12] Alongside Kirschenbaum, Raeburn and others, Kasper Braskén, Brigitte Studer and Elizabeth McGuire are prominent contributors to this field that Oleksa Drachewych terms the 'Communist transnational'. See Oleksa Drachewych, 'The

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Irish radical histories. Moreover, studies more open to international sources, subjects and scholarship can help to underline the relevance of Ireland's story to a wider revolutionary history.

To explore what attracted migrant radicals to the Irish revolutionary cause and, indeed, what attracted them to Irish revolutionaries, I rely on a methodology drawing on recent histories of transnational radicalism, microhistory and the historical category of intimacy. George Morris notes that intimacy as a historical category can function as a macroscope: a lens that is 'capable of simultaneously taking in big pictures and zooming in on intricate detail'.[13] Applying such a macroscope to interwar anticolonial relationships, Michael Goebel outlines a 'social history of intimacy' that uses the category to examine the 'politics of affection, desire, and power' at work within interpersonal relationships grounded in a political milieu.[14] My understanding of the 'social history of intimacy' is indebted to Laura C. Forster's work on progressive political communities in late-nineteenth century London. Forster's history of exiled veterans of the Paris Commune in London underlines how interpersonal bonds and the 'pubs, shops, reading rooms and club rooms' that fostered radical friendships were catalysts of radical intellectual exchange.[15] Recovering 'friendships of the past', notes Forster, 'can help to challenge big narratives that don't always make space for the nuances of intimate human connection, or for the affective nature of political engagement'.[16] A history of transnational intimacies and the Irish revolution – political history rooted in the bonds between people that crossed borders – can help us reconstruct the 'elusive emotional worlds of political idea-swappers of the past'.[17]

Historians working with intimacy – and what is sometimes termed 'small history' – often draw readers' attention to the source base scaffolding upon which we build our narratives. In doing so, archival absences and unresolved research threads can become analytical opportunities rather than simply sources of frustration. What happens when scholars direct their readers' attention to what we *did not* find or *could not* access? Posing this question can create a type of history that is, in the words of Matt Houlbrook, willing to 'embrace "an irreducible dimension of opacity" and not-knowing about the past', one that is 'more open-ended in its conclusions, deliberately less confident'.[18] What Julia Laite terms the 'historian's tool of "maybe", "perhaps" and "must have"' is usually avoided by practitioners of Irish radical history in its conventional and deeply empirical form.[19] Yet an openness to writing histories with inconclusive fragments is essential for those working on the archival fringes. Less representative activists – from polyglot migrants to queer radicals – may prove harder to trace. But the research obstacles we face can tell us something important about how the archive of the radical past has foregrounded certain activist identities and obscured others.

This article traces how the story of an obscure Irish-Latvian revolutionary couple, Rosa and Sidney Arnold, can illuminate new case studies and framings we can use to study revolutionary change. The Arnolds belong both to Irish history and the history of the Communist International and its attempted world revolution. In tracing the Arnolds' path between Irish and Soviet-supported revolutionary movements, we can also come to a greater understanding of how these two contemporaneous radical

Communist Transnational? Transnational Studies and the History of the Comintern', *History Compass*, 17, 2 (Feb. 2019), 1–12.

[13] George Morris, 'Intimacy in Modern British History', *The Historical Journal*, 64, 3 (2021), 797. For a valuable application of the approach see George Morris, 'The Trance Phenomena of Mrs Thompson: Mediumship, Evidence, and Intimacy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 32, 4 (2021), 608–29.

[14] Michael Goebel, 'Spokesmen, Spies and Spouses: Anticolonialism, Surveillance, and Intimacy in Interwar France', *Journal of Modern History,* 91, 2 (June 2019), 384.

[15] Laura C. Forster, 'The Paris Commune in London and the Spatial History of Ideas, 1871–1900', *The Historical Journal*, 62, 3 (2019), 1021–44, esp. 1025.

[16] Laura C. Forster, 'Radical Friendship', *History Workshop Online*, https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/radical-friendship/ (accessed 22 June 2021).

[17] Ibid.

[18] Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 16,

[19] Julia Laite, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice* (London: Profile Books, 2021), p. x.

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upheavals were interwoven in the contemporary moment through shared personnel, ideals and political cultures.[20] Finally, the Arnolds' story raises questions about the sources we use to trace revolutionary lives. Prior to the advent of widescale digitisation (in particular newspaper and genealogical databases), tracing such obscure radical trajectories would have been exceedingly difficult if not impossible. If we deploy methodologies capable of containing the complex worlds of activists, we will prove better able to follow them across the historiographical borders they crossed and understand their importance to revolutionary movements in Ireland and elsewhere.

An Irish-Latvian Revolutionary Relationship

When exploring 'outsider' perspectives on the Irish revolution, the most common vantage point has been that of foreign correspondents.[21] But what about foreign-born *participants* in the revolutionary process?[22] A history of the Irish revolution that focuses on the role played by migrants within the Irish nationalist movement has yet to be written. The academic and popular enthusiasm for revolutionary histories of Ireland's diaspora has left the revolutionary diasporas that existed *within* Ireland largely neglected. Histories of the Irish Jewish community come closest to fulfilling this remit, although there has been a recent reappraisal of suggestions that Jewish support for Irish nationalism was widespread.[23] Conor Mulvagh's work on Indian law students in Dublin from 1913 to 1916 also reveals the legacies of the time these Indian visiting students spent in the insurrectionary capital.[24] The particular prominence of the Jewish community when tracing migrant sidelights on Irish revolutionary history is understandable: by the time of the 1901 census, the second largest grouping of foreign-born residents in Ireland listed their place of origin as Russia, a national designation that was usually synonymous with the descriptors Lithuanian and Jewish.[25] Yet, as Anna Bykova's research demonstrates, there was a spectrum of ethnic and confessional identities among early twentieth century migrants from the Russian Empire to Ireland.[26]

The dearth of histories of the revolution which centre the perspectives of migrants to Ireland can be partly attributed to the comparatively small immigrant population within Ireland during the period: roughly 28,000 in a population of 4 million. Yet, as David Fitzpatrick observes, 'the cultural impact of 28,000 cosmopolitans in a country of 4 million people was potentially immense, when we consider the intricate personal networks of neighbourhood, workplace and school fostered by Irish

[20] For further Irish-Soviet histories see Michael Quinn, *Irish-Soviet Diplomatic and Friendship Relations, 1917–1991* (Dublin: Umiskin Press, 2017); Michael Silvestri, '"Those Dead Heroes Did Not Regret the Sacrifices they Made": Responses to the Russian Revolution in Revolutionary Ireland, 1917–23', in Choi Chatterjee, Steven G. Marks, Mary Neuburger and Steven Sabol, eds., *The Global Impacts of Russia's Great War and Revolution*, Book 2, Part 2 (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2019), 253–73. Anna Lively recently submitted a PhD thesis on the topic of Irish-Russian revolutionary confluences from 1905–23 at the University of Edinburgh.

[21] Maurice Walsh, *The News from Ireland: Foreign Correspondents and the Irish Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

[22] For an earlier period of radicalism, Fintan Lane notes the presence of migrants from France, Russia and elsewhere in the early years of Irish socialism: Fintan Lane, *The Origins of Modern Irish Socialism, 1881–1896* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), esp. 120–1, 144. For an examination of literary migrant reflections on Ireland during the revolutionary period see Jimmy H. Yan, '"Ourselves Alone"? Encounters between the Irish Literary Revival and Australian Settler-Modernisms, ca. 1913–1919', *Australian Literary Studies*, 36, 2 (2021).

[23] Natalie Wynn argues that the 'Jewish relationship with Irish nationalism has hitherto been presented in a simplistic and apologetic manner': see Natalie Wynn, 'Jews, Antisemitism and Irish Politics: A Tale of Two Narratives', *PaRDeS; Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien*, 18 (2012), 66. Brian Hanley's recent work integrates Wynn's scepticism towards celebratory narratives yet also presents new evidence of Irish Jewish republican and radical collaborations, particularly within diasporic spaces, that is suggestive of a wider history of encounter: Brian Hanley, '"The Irish and the Jews have a Good Deal in Common": Irish Republicanism, anti-Semitism and the Post-War World', *Irish Historical Studies*, 44, 165 (2020), 57–75.

[24] Conor Mulvagh, *Irish Days, Indian Memories: V. V. Giri and Indian Law Students at University College Dublin, 1913–1916* (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2016).

[25] David Fitzpatrick, *The Americanization of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 25. As Fitzpatrick discusses in this work, the largest group of foreign-born residents were born in America.

[26] Anna Bykova, 'Russikie Mogili na Kladbishi Mount Jerome', *Ezhegodnik Doma Russkogo Zarubezhn'aia im. Aleksandra Solzhenitz'ina* (2019), 421–48.

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sociability'.[27] Adapting Fitzpatrick's insight to our purposes, it follows that within the world of Irish radicalism – which hosted a disproportionate number of 'cosmopolitans' and where the sphere of sociability was particularly contained – the cultural influence of migrants must have been impactful. Focusing on one pairing of a radical migrant and his Irish partner provides us with our macroscope of intimacy that illuminates this wider history. Turning to migrant perspectives allows us to consider transnational Irish radicalism on *internationalist* rather than nationalist terms.[28]

In June 1921, the *Workers' Dreadnought*, a London-based communist weekly edited by the revered socialist and feminist Sylvia Pankhurst, printed a letter from Moscow written by one of Pankhurst's old allies, Eugenie Bouvier. The St Petersburg-born Eugenie Bouvier, who had previously assisted Pankhurst in running the East London Federation of Suffragettes (later the Workers' Socialist Federation), had returned to her ancestral Russia to participate in the construction of a new revolutionary society. In her letter, dated 22 May 1921, Bouvier described a journey by rail through western Europe and across the Soviet frontier to Petrograd. While awaiting her onward train to Moscow, Bouvier traversed Petrograd's main avenue and came to rest in a square surrounding the monument to Catherine the Great. Here, she saw two familiar comrades whom she recognised from her life in London reading the English-language radical paper *The Communist* together.[29] 'They turned out to be Comrades Sidney Arnold and an Irish woman (whose name I don't remember), who I often met in London and who are both staying here in the Hotel International' wrote Bouvier.[30] Arnold and his Irish companion were, as Bouvier noted, visiting Petrograd to work for the Third International, better known as the Communist International or Comintern: the organising body of global communist parties.

Upon their initial arrival in their place of work, Comintern workers were obliged to complete an *Anketa*, or questionnaire. Thousands of such questionnaires were meticulously collated and preserved by the Comintern within the archives that would become the Russian State Archive for Socio-Political History. These forms now provide rare glimpses into the backgrounds of the individual radicals who came into the Comintern's orbit. These documents, which have been central to the broader biographical turn in wider Comintern history, were products of a widespread practice within international communism of collating the autobiographical statements of party recruits.[31] Among the seventy-odd such documents contained within the files for Irish radicals are two sets of questionnaires filled out by a couple who arrived in Russia from Ireland in February 1921. The two arrivals were Sidney Arnold, a Latvian-born representative of the SPI who was assigned to the Petrograd Press Department of the Comintern, alongside his wife Rose Arnold (neé MacKenna), who also described herself as a member of the SPI on her questionnaire.[32] How did Arnold and MacKenna find each other? And when together, how did they find their way to revolutionary Petrograd? The origins of this marriage allow us to trace the contours of a transnational social world whose currents flowed through Dublin during the Irish revolutionary period.

To date, Arnold and MacKenna have not featured prominently in historical accounts. Seán O'Casey's comment in his autobiography that he 'joined the few who formed the little Socialist Party of Ireland', including 'a Lett named Sidney Arnold (who since the Red Revolution in Russia said his name was Semyon Aronson)', is one of the few mentions of Arnold in published works.[33] Robin Jackson Boisseau, in a study of women and the Abbey Theatre, states that MacKenna 'was a well-known author

[27] Fitzpatrick, *Americanization of Ireland*, , 26.

[28] Niall Whelehan makes a similar turn in perspective in his article on Mary Donovan; see Niall Whelehan, 'Sacco and Vanzetti, Mary Donovan and Transatlantic Radicalism in the 1920s', *Irish Historical Studies*, 44, 165 (2020), 131–46.

[29] 'Moscow at Last', *Workers' Dreadnought*, 25 June 1921.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Kevin Morgan, 'Comparative Communist History and the "Biographical Turn"', *History Compass*, 10, 6 (2012), 462.

[32] For the Comintern questionnaires completed by Sidney and 'Rosa' Arnold, in addition to their certificate listing their place of work within the Comintern, see: Rossiiskii Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politischeskoi Istorii (Russian State Archive for Social and Political History, hereafter RGASPI), 495/218/24/1 and RGASPI 495/218/25/1–2. The name Rose is often transliterated into Russian as 'Rosa'.

[33] Seán O'Casey, *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (London: Pan Books, 1972 [1949]), 14.

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of short stories in Dublin' by 1918, the year her play *Aliens* was performed at the Abbey Theatre.[34] The couple also appear in two accounts of British counter-intelligence operations against Irish republicans in London between 1919 and 1921.[35] These concise accounts suggest the cultural and clandestine worlds through which the couple moved before their arrival in Soviet Russia. Ultimately, the lingering historical obscurity of Arnold and MacKenna is understandable: neither fulfilled a role of major organisational importance in the political movements that normally concern Irish historians.

Our clues to piece together the lives of Arnold and MacKenna are largely contained within the Irish press, some published writings and information provided by a British intelligence agent. The couple do not appear to have descendants and thus the likelihood of finding surviving personal material remains slim. Yet perhaps their marginality and the diffusive source base for their careers provides an opportunity to explore how a much larger Irish radical history can be glimpsed in lives captured only in brief flashes. Arnold, a migrant to Ireland, and MacKenna, a woman who did not belong to an Irish 'political family' nor rise to any prominence, can suggest the horizons of opportunity for travel and intellectual encounter that were open to ordinary members of groups like the SPI and the IWFL during the revolutionary period. Tracing the couple's path through the Irish revolution and toward the revolutionary Russian state provides us with an example of what Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi call the 'method of clues', a method summarised by Maria Todorova as the process of 'starting the investigation from something that seems odd, insignificant, and marginal, something that does not quite fit in and needs to be explained'.[36] Something like an Irish-Latvian couple being recognised by a Russian comrade while reading a radical newspaper together on a summer's day in Petrograd in 1921.

According to the information he provided to the Comintern Cadre Department, Sidney Arnold, who listed his age as thirty-six upon arrival in Petrograd in February 1921, was born around 1885 in Latvia.[37] He claimed to have completed university level education and listed his profession as 'writer'.[38] Rose Arnold, whose name was transliterated into Russian as 'Rosa', listed her age as forty-five in her Comintern questionnaire, giving her an approximate birth year of 1876.[39] However, genealogical research carried out on my behalf by Damian Mac Con Uladh suggests that Rose, who was born Rose Kennedy in Co. Cavan and received the surname MacKenna through her 1897 marriage to the Dublin publican James McKenna, may have been born earlier.[40] In the 1901 census, Rose McKenna, residing with James in Howth, is listed as twenty-eight years old, giving her an approximate birth date of 1873.[41] James McKenna, who was almost two decades older than Rose, died in 1918.[42] Tellingly, the attendees listed at James McKenna's funeral included two Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) politicians but not his widow Rose.[43] James McKenna's association with the IPP was longstanding, suggesting the nationalist milieu that Rose McKenna would have navigated in her married life (and later rejected).[44] Later in 1918, the Abbey Theatre hosted Rose MacKenna's play *Aliens*. The plot centres

[34] Robin Jackson Boisseau, *The Women of the Abbey Theatre, 1897–1925* (PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 2004), 324.

[35] Michael T. Foy, *Michael Collins's Intelligence War: The Struggle between the British and the IRA, 1919–1921* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013 [2008]); Julian Putkowski, 'The Best Secret Service Man We Had: Jack Byrnes, A2 and the IRA', *Lobster: Journal of Parapolitics*, 28 (1994), 4–17. Foy's book draws on Putkowski's earlier article for its account of Arnold and MacKenna.

[36] Maria Todorova, *The Lost World of Socialists at Europe's Margins* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 176.

[37] Sidney Arnold, *Anketa*, c. Feb. 1921, RGASPI 495/218/25/2.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Rosa Arnold, *Anketa*, c. Feb. 1921, RGASPI 495/218/25/1.

[40] 'Marriages', *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 Sept. 1897. MacKenna's name is sometimes spelled 'McKenna' in sources. Where citing identifying records such as census records and a marriage notice I have used McKenna to reflect the spelling within the original source, otherwise I use the more frequently adopted spelling of MacKenna.

[41] Census Return for House 137 in Howth, Co. Dublin, 1901 Census, http://census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Howth/Howth/1270838/ (accessed 16 June 2021).

[42] 'Late Mr. James McKenna', *Evening Herald*, 22 Jan. 1918.

[43] Ibid.

[44] James McKenna was listed as a subscriber to an 1892 IPP fund; see 'North and South Meath Election Petitions Fund', *Irish Independent*, 9 Aug. 1892.

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on Kathleen, a woman who is engaged to a man who is 'greatly disagreeable' to her.[45] The play builds to the protagonist's epiphany: she is 'highly educated but without the financial means to escape' her situation.[46] Whether or not the play contained autobiographical elements, by 1918 MacKenna had found a place within Irish literary, feminist and socialist circles that may have proved suspect to an IPP-aligned older spouse. For intellectual women looking to transform what perhaps seemed routine lives, radical and literary Dublin offered a number of spaces for reinvention.

Before 1917, both Arnold and MacKenna appear in the historical record primarily through their literary engagements. A 1916 description of a lecture given by MacKenna provides a tantalising suggestion of how MacKenna and Arnold could have been drawn to one another in the literary world of early twentieth century Dublin. In December 1916, MacKenna spoke to the Dublin Literary Society, a society for which MacKenna was the secretary, on the topic of 'An Aspect in Russian Literature'.[47] MacKenna informed her audience that 'never in the history of the world have people taken so much interest as now in the habits and thoughts of other nations'.[48] 'We are at present in the Russian period' she noted, 'when we are interested in everything Russian and especially in Russian literature'.[49] After the chair proposed a vote of thanks and suggested that 'we should all take up the Russian language for college or other purposes', a debate followed during which one 'Mr. Arnold' participated. Arnold, the *Irish Times* noted, 'was of the opinion that Irish people should try to look a little outwards to the world'.[50] MacKenna also lectured to the IWFL in December 1917, delivering a paper in the League rooms at 34 Westmoreland Street on 'Some Aspects of Bernard Shaw'.[51] In the same year the young Latvian writer who would eventually become MacKenna's husband first appeared on the pages of the IWFL journal. MacKenna's 1916 lecture contained an element of prophecy: from 1917, Dublin's radical cultural elite entered its 'Russian period' when it became interested in everything – and every*body* – Russian.

In March 1917, the Russian Revolution began on International Women's Day with thousands of workers locked out of the Putilov metalworks in Petrograd. The rapid demise of Russian Imperial power and the seeming ascent of workers' control expanded the horizons of possibility in the global radical imagination. Naturally, in a country like Ireland undergoing its own revolution-in-process, the arguments for social revolution presented by the vying factions in Russia attracted debate. In June 1917, Sidney Arnold made his first appearance in the *Irish Citizen* with a contribution to the Irish discussion on the Russian Revolution. Arnold wrote:

> As a constant reader of your paper I feel it my duty to call your attention with regard to your statement in last month's 'Irish Citizen', 'That Liberty and Democracy have not yet come into their own in Russia' and, furthermore, that 'the term "universal suffrage" excludes women'. I regret to say that many English and Irish journals are biased by a mere journalistic fiction and consequently misinterpret the meaning of the real Russian Democracy.[52]

In his letter, Arnold described himself as 'a Russian citizen, who is acquainted with tendencies of the Russian idealists'.[53] He was confident that 'Russian women will sow an example to the world by initiating a new and ideal life within the realm of the "fair sex"'.[54] The editor responded to Arnold's letter with a note that although 'no nation has attained true democracy, whilst its women are

[45] *Aliens*, Playography Ireland Summary based on the original production programme and Lennox Robinson history of the Abbey, http://www.irishplayography.com/play.aspx?playid=32176 (accessed 16 June 2021).

[46] Ibid.

[47] 'Coming Events', *Irish Times*, 13 Dec. 1916; William J. Feeney, *Drama in Hardwicke Street: A History of the Irish Theatre Company* (London: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 196.

[48] 'Russian Literature', *Irish Times*, 15 Dec. 1916.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] 'Irish Women's Franchise League', *Irish Independent*, 11 Dec. 1917.

[52] 'Correspondence', *Irish Citizen*, 2 June 1917.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

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unenfranchised', the *Citizen* nonetheless had 'hopes for Russia'.[55] While Arnold in this first *Citizen* appearance posed as an interpreter of Russia for Irish readers, he could also play the role of a literal translator. Arnold's choice of authors to translate for Irish journals, including the revolutionary writer Maxim Gorky and the archetypal late imperial Russian 'New Woman' Anastasia Verbitskaia, are suggestive of his worldview.[56]

Members of the IWFL were evidently intrigued by Arnold's ideas and the cultural and political ferment in Russia. Arnold was invited to address the IWFL in November 1917, shortly after the October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power in Russia. Arnold spoke from the perspective of 'a Russian' and informed the IWFL that Ireland, though high in principles, lacked the 'progressive tendency' and adopted 'the life of England in everything except labour ideals'.[57] Reportedly to the sound of applause, Arnold declared that Ireland was at once 'the most rebellious and the least revolutionary country in Europe'.[58] This distinction between rebelliousness – a propensity for action – and being revolutionary – guided by a progressive theory or 'tendency' – is important to understanding why many Irish radicals responded to the Russian Revolution. It provided an answer to the question: how can political tumult be channelled towards a total social revolution? A month before Arnold's IWFL lecture, MacKenna explored similar territory in a short pamphlet, *A Plea for Social Emancipation in Ireland*, written in October 1917 and dedicated to the memory of James Connolly.[59] For MacKenna, the Irish were torn between two high ideals, represented alternately by John Redmond and Kathleen ni Houlihan, without realising that the one 'straight road to the universal happiness and prosperity of Ireland' lay in socialism.[60] In a July 1918 *Citizen* article advocating the rise of a class of Irish revolutionary women, Arnold cited his future wife's pamphlet approvingly.[61]

As Arnold and MacKenna drew closer to the year of their marriage to one another, their political and cultural worlds became more closely enmeshed as Irish socialism and feminism became attracted to the Russian example. The most dramatic and oft-cited example of this efflorescent Russo-Irish convergence was the Russian Revolution solidarity meeting at Dublin's Mansion House, which took place in February 1918.[62] The event was in essence an SPI and IWFL co-production. The 'Russian Revolution and Republic Committee' had a number of IWFL members on its committee, including vice-chair Gonne, joint-secretary Margaret 'Meg' Connery and treasurer Cissie Cahalan.[63] One of the more curious aspects of accounts of the meeting were the names of those listed as participating, which included familiar names like SPI leading figure Cathal O'Shannon and Constance Markievicz, but also what the *Irish Times* defined as 'some Russian Bolsheviki'.[64]

These representatives were not, in fact, freshly arrived revolutionaries from the tumult of the Soviet state, but Konrad Peterson, 'who announced himself as a Russian Social Democrat', and Arnold, who, the *Irish Times* noted, was introduced on the platform as 'a Bolshevik'.[65] Neither Arnold nor Peterson were Russian Bolsheviks in the strict sense: although they may have supported the Bolshevik programme resolutely, it is unlikely that either activist was ever a member of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

55 Ibid.
56 'The Wind-Bird', *Irish Citizen*, 7 Sept. 1918; 'Rosalia', *New Ireland*, 23 Oct. 1915. On Verbitskaia, see Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siécle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), esp. 13.
57 'Ireland as She Seems', *Freemans Journal*, 15 Nov. 1917.
58 Ibid.
59 Rose MacKenna, *A Plea for Social Emancipation in Ireland* (Manchester and London: National Labour Press, 1917).
60 Ibid., 4.
61 'Women in New Ireland', *Irish Citizen*, 1 June 1918.
62 For Irish responses to the Russian Revolution beyond radical reactions see Silvestri, 'Responses to the Russian Revolution'.
63 'Circular letter announcing meeting to be held in the Mansion House, Dublin, under the chairmanship of Wm. O'Brien to express sympathy with the Russian Revolution', 4 Feb. 1918, NLI, *Thomas Johnson Papers*, MS 17,120/2.
64 'The Red Flag in Dublin', *Irish Times*, 9 Feb. 1918.
65 Ibid.

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Moreover, neither Arnold nor Peterson were born in Russia. Distinguishing between the many national groupings of the Russian Empire was not uniform in Irish political or press discourse during this period. Poland's nationalist movement was recognised by Irish observers and the Jewish community was often regarded as a distinct nationality. Ukrainians and those from the Baltic states, however, tended to be cast as 'Russian'. There are some exceptions to this rule, such as a 1918 report of an SPI gathering reporting on a 'hopeful international assembly of Russians, French, Lettish, English, Scottish and Irish workers' celebrating the Russian and German revolutions, and the aforementioned Sean O'Casey reference to Arnold as 'a Lett'.[66] When such migrants cast themselves as 'Russian', it is rarely clear whether or not they considered themselves ethnically Russian or were simply using the term as a shorthand for 'of the Russian Empire'. In Arnold's case, the only source where he personally noted his Latvian origin is on his Comintern questionnaire.

Intriguingly, Arnold does appear to have developed Bolshevik contacts around the time of the 1918 Mansion House meeting. Shortly after the gathering, *Irish Opinion* published a message from Maxim Litvinov 'to Russian and Irish socialists in Dublin'. The message was brief: 'Dear Comrade Sidney Arnold – Please accept my hearty thanks for your most encouraging message, and permit me to express my warm appreciation of the loyalty of our comrades in Ireland towards our great movement in Russia'.[67] The formulation is notable: not only did Litvinov, a leading Bolshevik revolutionary, address Arnold by name, but he also extended his greetings to Russian *and* Irish radicals in the capital.

As 1918 progressed, Arnold and MacKenna continued to share social worlds and journal pages.[68] Towards the end of the year they also worked together on a single publication: a pamphlet titled *New Russia: Anniversary Bulletin of the Bolshevik Revolution*. The pamphlet was edited by Arnold, with the Russified version of his name Semyon Aronson and the Anglicised version both appearing on the title. The bulk of the short pamphlet was a reproduction of the Soviet Russian constitution of 1918. MacKenna's contribution was framed as a greeting from an Irish socialist to the Russian revolutionaries. Ireland, she wrote, 'must assure the new Bolshevik Republic of our sympathy and encouragement'.[69] MacKenna's breathless tribute to the world revolution affirmed: 'It is our duty in Ireland to rouse ourselves to meet this great change, to look beyond the narrow outlook of our private interests, beyond the calumnies of the capitalist Press, and welcome this world-wide upheaval'.[70] Russia, she wrote, 'appeals especially to the young men and women of Ireland who are still full of hope and faith, and who have not yet outlived their ideals'.[71] The pamphlet reflected the enthusiasm shown by a certain section of radical Ireland for the October Revolution. It is also the product of a distinctive world within Dublin where Irish radicals could encounter migrant revolutionaries and gain from them an intimate connection to global events.

One of the contributors, Russia-born Zelda Kahan, was in a relationship that represented a similar confluence of transnational romantic and revolutionary union to that of Arnold and MacKenna.[72] In 1915, Kahan married Kinsale-born William Peyton Coates, a British Socialist Party member, an organiser for the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in Kilkenny-Waterford from 1918–19 and a frequent contributor to SPI platforms.[73] Although born in the Russian Empire, Zelda Kahan was raised in the Jewish East End. In 1903 her brother, Boris Kahan, translated an election pamphlet

[66] Lett and Lettish is an archaic term for Latvians. 'Cummanacht na hEireann', *Voice of Labour*, 23 Nov. 1918; O'Casey, *Inishfallen*, 14.

[67] 'Litvinoff's Message to Russian and Irish Socialists in Dublin', *Irish Opinion*, 16 Feb. 1918.

[68] MacKenna and Arnold were both listed as playwrights of plays performed by the Liberty Hall Players: 'Irish Transport Dramatic Class', *Irish Opinion*, 29 Mar. 1919.

[69] Rose MacKenna, 'Greetings (From an Irish Socialist)', in Sidney Arnold, ed., *New Russia: Anniversary Bulletin of the Bolshevik Revolution, Nov. 1917–1918* (Dublin: Socialist Party of Ireland, 1918), 19.

[70] Ibid., 20.

[71] Ibid., 21.

[72] Zelda K. Coates, 'The Soviet Republic and Democracy', in Sidney Arnold, ed., *New Russia: Anniversary Bulletin of the Bolshevik Revolution, Nov. 1917–1918*, 22–3.

[73] Manus O'Riordan, 'Connolly Socialism, and the Jewish Worker', *Saothar*, 13 (1988), 126; Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1992), 232–3.

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for James Connolly into Yiddish to help Irish socialists appeal to Dublin Jewish voters.[74] While Boris Kahan returned to Russia after the revolution, Zelda Kahan remained in England, producing pro-Soviet writings in collaboration with her Irish husband over several decades.[75]

Placing this pamphlet in its intimate contexts reveals the benefits of tracing a personal relationship through published literature and reports. An intimate approach emphasises how even 'public' works, like translations or lectures, are the products of interpersonal connections. Michael Silvestri notes that this pamphlet was produced by the SPI and contained an essay from an author who identified themselves as 'an Irish socialist'.[76] Through understanding that the 'Irish socialist' was the partner of the Latvian editor and that the only other contribution came from the East London Jewish partner of another Irish socialist, the pamphlet becomes a rare glimpse into an interlinked world of cross-cultural revolutionary romance. These political and personal relationships might be otherwise difficult to recover if we limited ourselves only to those who left behind personal documents.

Even if the sources for Arnold and MacKenna were restricted to the above-cited press accounts, publications and an arrival questionnaire in an archive in Moscow, their partnership would remain reflective of a transnational cultural and political current in revolutionary Ireland that deserves greater attention. But just as my initial encounter with the Arnolds in a Moscow archive first hinted, there was more to this intellectual Irish-Latvian duo than what can be found in 'public' sources like newspapers and published writings. This was something that the British intelligence agent Jack C. Byrnes came to understand in the year before he was found dead in a Glasnevin avenue with gunshot wounds to his head and chest.[77]

Agent No. 8

In June 1919, following a meeting of the Committee of the Rank and File Conference in London, John C. Byrnes, a First World War veteran and secretary of the Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Union, was approached by a woman named 'Miss Rose' – identified by Julian Putkowski as Rose MacKenna – with a request to purchase arms for Sinn Féin.[78] Unbeknownst to MacKenna, Byrnes was an agent for the British intelligence unit A2 tasked with penetrating the British revolutionary left. According to a report compiled for A2, MacKenna asked Byrnes if 'he would get hold of some ammunition for the Sinn Féin movement'.[79] MacKenna did not know precisely what type was needed, but stated that 'they were prepared to spend £2,000 on it'.[80] In coming into contact with Byrnes, MacKenna unwittingly ensured that she and Arnold became part of a web of contacts that the agent was constructing within Irish republican circles in London. Through visits to Dublin in late 1919 and early 1920, Byrnes would make his mark as the agent who confirmed for British intelligence Michael Collins' importance within the IRA command structure. Yet this initial contact also ensured that Arnold and MacKenna's revolutionary activities would be detailed for the historical record, allowing us to place the couple within an often overlooked militant network of radicals, many of them women activists tied to socialism and Irish republicanism, that stretched between Dublin and London in the post-war years.

In March 1919, several months before MacKenna approached Byrnes with a request for arms, the Third International, better known as the Communist International or Comintern, was founded in Petrograd. With the establishment of the Comintern, the world of transnational radicalism was transformed irrevocably. Even organisations whose definition of internationalism differed greatly from that of the Comintern, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Labour

[74] O'Riordan, 'Connolly Socialism', 122.

[75] See, for example, W. P. Coates and Zelda K. Coates, *Scenes from Soviet Life* (New York: International Publishers, 1937) and W. P. Coates and Zelda K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1958).

[76] Silvestri, 'Responses to the Russian Revolution', 262.

[77] 'The Glasnevin Murder', *Irish Times*, 4 Mar. 1920.

[78] No. 8 Report, 8 June 1919, Ralph Heyward Isham Papers, MS 1455 (Hereafter RHIP), Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives (Hereafter YUMA), Box 1, Folder 7; Putkowski, 'The Best Secret Service Man', fn. 19, 16.

[79] No. 8 Report, 8 June 1919, RHIP, YUMA, Box, 1 Folder 7.

[80] Ibid.

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and Socialist International, needed to evaluate their strategies against the emergence of this disciplined and semi-clandestine network. For those inspired by the call to spread the world revolution, the establishment of the Comintern inaugurated a new source of inspiration, theoretical guidance and funding. Attendant to the Comintern's ambitions to conduct the symphony of global calls to revolution, Soviet Russia became a site of sanctuary for emigrant radicals.

The world's first 'workers state' offered a bolt hole where international radicals could undertake meaningful work for the cause and elude the security services of the national governments they were intent on overthrowing. In Soviet Russia, political emigrants found a country where the state, at least in theory, worked in their interests. The sense of relief provided in crossing the Soviet frontier is evident in the memoir of R. M. Fox, the Leeds-born writer and husband of the Irish socialist and feminist Patricia Lynch. In his 1937 memoir, Fox recalled his 1921 train crossing into the land of socialism with an acute ring of radical nostalgia. His fellow travellers on the train had 'come without passports and with little money, hidden in barrels and behind cases in ships' holds, concealed among the baggage on the trains, helped by friendly sailors and transport men'.[81] Fox remembered the 'rousing strains of the *Internationale*' bursting among the passengers as they realised that they could finally 'relax their vigilance, for they were among friends'.[82] The emotions and experiences of revolutionaries who crossed this frontier in the post-revolutionary decades is a recurring trope in the autobiographical literature and a growing focus of study in transnational histories of the Comintern.[83] Fox's memories of the privations and obstacles faced by his itinerant comrades suggests an issue that was forefront on the minds of revolutionaries like Arnold and MacKenna who were bound for the Soviet state: how to get there.

In 1919 and 1920, the years when agent Byrnes tracked MacKenna and Arnold, the British state was assisting the anti-Bolshevik forces in the Russian Civil War. With Irish and British radicals only able to secure visas as far as Finland, Helsinki became an important revolutionary crossroads. As a result, a network of Finnish communists became important within the early years of British communism as conductors of the so-called 'Northern Underground', a covert travel route into Soviet Russia.[84] Kevin Morgan and Tauno Saarela note that the Finnish red emissaries operating within British radicalism worked closely with Sylvia Pankhurst.[85] Pankhurst was also a rarity on the British left in her assertive and consistent support of the Irish republican cause.

Two Finnish agents working alongside Pankhurst, Salme Pekkala and Erki Veltheim, suggested that a Red Officers' Corps combining Irish nationalists with militant ex-servicemen and left-oriented serving military should be formed to bring about a British revolution.[86] With their national, nationalist and union backgrounds, the trio of MacKenna, Arnold and Byrnes were neatly representative of this suggested nucleus of the socialist revolution in Britain and Ireland. The plan for a Red Officers' Corps came to little, in part because a chief instigator was captured and deported. In October 1920, Veltheim was arrested in London upon leaving the home of Col. L'Estrange Malone, a pro-Soviet relative of the prominent Irish republican Constance Markievicz.[87] Following the arrest, an encoded letter requesting Soviet money to assist Pankhurst's group in supporting Irish republicans was found on his possession.[88] Veltheim's arrest was a successful component of a British intelligence

[81] R. M. Fox, *Smoky Crusade* (London: Hogarth Press, 1937), 314.
[82] Ibid.
[83] See, for example, Kirschenbaum, *International Communism* and Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[84] Kevin Morgan and Tauno Saarela, 'Northern Underground Revisited: Finnish Reds and the Origins of British Communism', *European History Quarterly*, 29, 2 (Apr. 1999), 179–215.
[85] Ibid., 194.
[86] Ibid., 200–3.
[87] *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Oct. 1920. Markievicz's own intimate connections to Eastern Europe came through her husband Casimir Dunin Markievicz. For a detailed examination of their lives see Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[88] *Daily Chronicle*, 3 Nov. 1920.

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operation intent on neutralising any incipient Irish-Soviet revolutionary alliance. MacKenna and Arnold had become unwitting actors in this operation as a result of their personal connection to Byrnes. Byrnes, in turn, became further enmeshed in the intimate world of Irish republicanism partly through his connection to Arnold and MacKenna, ultimately leading to his death.

On 14 July 1919, Byrnes met with Sidney Arnold, Rose MacKenna and two other activists at 20 Hanover Square in London. Byrnes informed his A2 handlers that a sub-committee was being formed in order to establish a group 'representing all Unions, to formulate plans to bring about social revolution'.[89] The group also discussed fruitless plans to secure a passport and to establish contact with Vladimir Lenin and James 'Big Jim' Larkin, leading figure of the major 1913 Irish industrial dispute known as the 'Dublin Lockout'.[90] After departing Ireland in late 1914, Larkin spent much of the following decade in New York, where he eventually became active in early communist circles.[91] While remaining conscious of the sleuth's capacity for exaggeration, such scheming is plausible. Both Arnold and MacKenna demonstrated growing radicalisation in their published writings in response to the October Revolution. The rhetoric in their 1918 *New Russia* pamphlet was insurrectionary in tone and the path from articulating those ideals towards suggesting that they take an organisational form was straightforward.[92] The fact that this group of revolutionaries – whom Byrne termed the 'Russians' – gathered at 20 Hanover Square, London, was neatly symbolic of MacKenna and Arnold's intertwining of literary interests with clandestine activities. The Hanover Square address was the headquarters of the Irish Literary Society, a place for 'social and literary' – in addition to, it seems, revolutionary – 'intercourse for persons of Irish nationality' in London.[93]

Maurice Facey, another British socialist who joined the sub-committee alongside Byrnes, came under suspicion from his left-wing comrades several months after the formation of the Arnold-MacKenna group.[94] However, personal correspondence from Facey to Arnold and MacKenna suggests that he retained their trust during his ordeal. In 1919, Facey wrote to Arnold from Dublin, where Facey was attempting to lay low. Facey told Arnold that he was tailed from the SPI headquarters and his landlord had recognised Arnold.[95] 'Be careful you are not observed and I suggest you lie low and keep away from the S.P.I. Headquarters, it would be advisable in view of events', Facey continued, before wishing 'Comrade McK' best wishes for a recovery from a recent illness.[96] The letter suggests the additional stresses that MacKenna and Arnold's evolution into a more clandestine mode of radicalism demanded, particularly in the overtly suspicious and internecine world of the post-war British left.

In September, Facey suggested to Arnold and MacKenna that the pall of suspicion meant that he must withdraw from the cause. Facey wrote to MacKenna and Arnold together, opening with the line: 'Dear Comrades, Save me from my Friends would indeed be a cry appropriate to my case if all that I am told is true'.[97] Facey explained further:

> It was my intention to devote the few remaining years of my life to a work in which I put both heart and soul, but this, my recent experience has taught me, that generally the movement is bankrupt of common sense and decency; people to whom I looked as friends, to some as confidences, are ready to accept any and every story circulated with a view to discrediting me.

[89] Putkowski, 'Best Secret Service', 6. Here I rely on Putkowski's transcriptions of Box 1, Folder 8 of the Yale University Isham files. Due to the pandemic, reprographics services at Yale University Library were temporarily suspended. I obtained a reproduction of the previously digitised Folder 7, from which I cite directly.

[90] Putkowski, 'Best Secret Service', 6.

[91] For a recent biography see Emmet O'Connor, *Big Jim Larkin: Hero or Wrecker?* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016).

[92] Arnold, *New Russia*.

[93] Mark Meredith, ed., *The Literary Year-Book* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1921), 583; Putkowski, 'Best Secret Service', 16.

[94] Ibid., 7–8.

[95] Maurice Facey to Sidney Arnold, 27 Aug. 1919, RHIP, YUMA, Box, 1 Folder 7.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Maurice Facey to Sidney Arnold and Rose MacKenna, 12 Sept. 1919, RHIP, YUMA, Box, 1 Folder 7.

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> When I remember what I have sacrificed for the cause, and what might have been, I feel very bitter. Scotland Yard Agents have in this case done their work well and they seem to be very numerous.[98]

We do not know whether or not MacKenna and Arnold came to recognise the irony of the final sentence. According to Putkowski, Facey had been in the employ of British intelligence since May 1919.[99] The suspicions of the broader movement were, seemingly, correct. Not for the last time, MacKenna and Arnold's trust was misplaced.

Facey's two letters represent the only known extant personal correspondence sent to MacKenna and Arnold. That such evidence can be found in the archive of Ralph Heyward Isham, the head of a British intelligence unit tasked with suppressing Bolshevik activities, illustrates both the world in which MacKenna and Arnold were enmeshed and the difficulties and opportunities of using these sources to trace radical lives. As John Callaghan and Mark Pythian have noted, surveillance material can be read against the grain to understand what it meant to live a radical life, particularly how the clandestine dimension of such an existence underpinned many of the tensions and compromises of revolutionary identities.[100] Yet we are hostages not only to the secret agent's paranoia but also to their abilities and techniques. We can trace MacKenna and Arnold through these months in advance of their move to Petrograd only because their lives were penetrated by agents. These agents in turn were the targets of counter-intelligence practices being harnessed by the movements they sought to infiltrate. Whenever such manoeuvres by leftists and Irish radicals proved successful in ensnaring spooks such as Facey and Byrnes, both British intelligence and historians lost a source.

With Facey hiding out in Dublin, Byrnes made the first of his trips to the city. Frank Thornton, the Deputy Assistant Director of Intelligence for the IRA during the War of Independence, remembered Byrnes as a 'very interesting individual' who came to Dublin from London with the 'highest recommendations', including one from Art Ó Briain, a leading figure in London Irish republicanism.[101] Byrnes was 'one of those fiery communistic speakers', Thornton recalled, who appeared in Hyde Park each Sunday on the communist platform that was erected next to the Irish Self-Determination League platform.[102] An A2 report dated December 1919, which details an eight day visit by Byrnes to Dublin, pinpoints the moment that A2 learned, through Byrnes, that Michael Collins was 'the Chief Director of all active movement amongst the Sinn Feiners'.[103] The report also outlined MacKenna and Arnold's activities and networks within Dublin. According to this summary of a conversation with Byrnes, whom A2 referred to internally as No. 8, MacKenna and Arnold were continuing their radical activities while establishing a clothing business on Dublin's South Frederick Street. MacKenna, the report noted, 'indicated that she was not pleased to see no 8 as she understood that he was responsible for Facey's trouble'.[104] Byrnes visited Arnold at their clothing store, where he 'gained the impression that this business was being undertaken merely to camaflage [sic] the meetings of the Socialist Republicans and the members of the Gaelic League, and that it was also intended to offer employment to any who were thrown out of work through victimisation'.[105]

The proximity of the Irish and communist platforms in Hyde Park described by Thornton provides a useful metaphor for the political valence of the encounters between Byrnes, MacKenna and Arnold. High level cooperation between the Irish republican movement and the Soviet government inevitably

[98] Ibid.

[99] Putkowski, 'Best Secret Service', 7.

[100] John Callaghan and Mark Pythian, 'State Surveillance and Communist Lives: Rose Cohen and the Early British Communist Milieu', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 12, 2 (2013), 134–55.

[101] Frank Thornton, Witness Statement No. 615, Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, 38.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Putkowski, 'Best Secret Service', 11.

[104] Report cited in ibid.

[105] Report cited in ibid.

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came to a dead end.[106] The attempt by Irish republican envoy Patrick McCartan to negotiate a treaty of mutual recognition between the Irish and Soviet republics – an effort that ultimately failed as both sides rapidly moved in different directions on the foreign policy stage – is a case in point. The shared ground of being new states arising from the war soon gave way to a profound divergence in organisational and ideological objectives. However, activists moving through everyday political spaces such as speakers' corners and meeting rooms more easily found points of commonality and reasons for collaboration. Byrnes was directed by an intelligence operation that was itself paranoid about a supposed Sinn Féin-Bolshevik conspiracy. Yet to a great extent, this 'conspiracy' only existed tangibly on an intimate level: among small transnational networks of comrades.

The intimacy of Irish radical networks in the revolutionary years is, in part, what made intelligence work so dangerous for British agents. The IRA was seemingly aware of Byrnes' connection to British intelligence from early August 1919, months before he was finally executed. Putkowski cites a memoir by Collins' ally David Nelligan, who recalled that T. J. McElligott, an IRA-supporting RIC Sergeant and anti-conscription organiser, learned of Byrnes' connection to British Intelligence from Jack Hayes, a comrade in the British Police Union.[107] McElligott's Witness Statement corroborates Nelligan's memory and Putkowski's hypothesis that Collins knew about Byrnes by early August 1919, when McElligott returned from London. In his statement, McElligott described an encounter with Byrnes and recalled that he 'gave a full report to Michael Collins of J. C. Byrnes when I returned to Dublin, where he became known to the Volunteer Intelligence as "Jameson"'.[108] On 22 February 1920, Sidney Arnold delivered a lecture to the Dublin branch of the SPI on the 'Historical Development of Bolshevism'.[109] Just over a week later, on 2 March, members of Collins' 'squad' escorted the man whom MacKenna and Arnold knew as 'Comrade Byrnes' to a pathway in Glasnevin and executed him.[110]

MacKenna and Arnold almost certainly learned of what had transpired. The death of Byrnes was widely covered in the Irish press and news of informers unmasked spread easily through radical networks. Yet the sources to gauge MacKenna and Arnold's response to the assassination do not exist, because the informer documenting their lives was the one who was killed. Evidently, the death did not delay another plan that MacKenna and Arnold were developing that year: in June 1920, Rose MacKenna married Sidney Arnold, taking his name to become Rose Arnold.[111] Within the historical record, the couple disappear from view until their arrival in Soviet Russia in February 1921.

A Russian-language work certificate issued by the secretary of the Comintern's Press Bureau to the Arnolds in the summer of 1921 noted that 'Comrades Sidney and Rosa Arnold' were seconded from the Petrograd Press Department of the Comintern to work in the Press Bureau of Comintern's Third World Congress.[112] Upon finishing their work at the congress, they were to return to their place of work, likely meaning the Press Department.[113] The Press Bureau (*Otdel Pechati*) was a crucial part of the Comintern apparatus and one of the first departments formed following the Comintern's foundation in 1919.[114] The department was divided into four sections – Russian, German, English and French – and its task was to organise propaganda and publish documents relating to the Comintern and the Soviet Communist Party in different languages.[115] Arnold's Russian to English

[106] The arrival questionnaires of McCartan and his travelling companion Robert MacDonald are held in RGASPI, see: RGASPI 495/218/30/1–2.
[107] Putkowski, 'Best Secret Service', 7.
[108] T. J. McElligott, WS 472, Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, 12–13.
[109] 'Cumannacht na h-Eireann', *The Watchword*, 21 Feb. 1920. A description of a similar lecture given by Arnold can be found in the *Freeman's Journal*, see: 'The Beginning of Bolshevism', *Freeman's Journal*, 7 Apr. 1919.
[110] 'The Glasnevin Murder', *Irish Times*, 4 Mar. 1920; Joseph Dolan, Witness Statement 663, Bureau of Military History, 10–11.
[111] Civil Marriage Registry, Vol. 1b, 1323, via FreeBMD: https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?scan=1&r=144029862:7035&d=bmd_1622585863 (accessed 21 June 2021).
[112] Work Certificate issued to Sidney and Rosa Arnold, c. June 1921, RGASPI 495/218/25/1.
[113] Ibid.
[114] G. M. Adibekov, E. N. Shakhnazarova and K. P. Shirinya, *Organizatsionnaia Struktura Kominterna, 1919–1943* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), 9–10.
[115] Ibid., 45.

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translation skills were valuable for such work. MacKenna appears to have had translation abilities in French, which would have also proved useful.[116] These technical details matter: they allow us not only to place the Arnolds precisely within their Comintern world but also within a broader pattern of radical emigration to the newly-formed Soviet state.

Viewed in the isolation of an Ireland-bound historiography, the Arnolds appear an extreme anomaly: few activists who experienced the revolution in Ireland later found employment in Soviet Russia. There were, as Barry McLoughlin first revealed, a small number of Irish migrants to the USSR, three of whom were victims of the Stalinist terror.[117] The Arnolds were migrants moving on a well-worn transnational Comintern trail. A number of veterans from the Dublin-London and diaspora radical nexus became Comintern technical workers. Eugenie Bouvier, who recognised Sidney Arnold sitting with Rose in Petrograd in her May 1921 letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, worked as a Comintern translator.[118] Rose Arnold was not even the only Irish woman to work in the Press Bureau: the English section of the bureau was managed by the Wexford-born intellectual, polyglot and former Sylvia Pankhurst ally May O'Callaghan from 1924 until 1928.[119] Like Arnold, a Russian migrant in Ireland, Irish migrants in Russia also found romance through their work in the Soviet state. Edward Fitzgerald, a London-Irish radical who was active in diaspora Irish nationalism before emigrating to the Soviet Russia, met his Hamburg-born wife Hilde Kramer through his work for the Comintern.[120] The 1935 questionnaire of Kathleen Louisa O'Donoghue, who came to Moscow as a student at the International Lenin School, provides a further example of a political biography combining diaspora politics with intimate commitments. O'Donoghue married Michael Kavalchik, editor of *Tribuna*, a Polish-language newspaper printed in Moscow.[121] She had previously come to Russia for the Sixth Comintern World Congress and by the mid-1930s was employed in the *Moscow Daily News*.[122] She defined her nationality as 'English (Irish)' and listed stenography skills in addition to knowledge of English, Russian, German and Polish.[123] Daisy McMackin and Padraic Breslin, Irish political emigrants who met and married in Soviet Moscow in 1936, provide another remarkable and tragic example of the Irish in the interwar USSR (Breslin, a victim of the terror, died in 1942 in a labour camp near Kazan).[124]

A distinct 'Comintern-type' emerged. Technical workers tended to have linguistic skills and activist backgrounds in the most historically obscure class of revolutionaries: the radical administration team. Stenographers and translators were highly valued in the Comintern and women occupied these roles disproportionately.[125] Arguably, part of the dominance of male activists in histories of the Comintern derives from a failure to appreciate the historical importance of radical administrators like Rose Arnold. What the Arnolds also shared with other Comintern employees was a background in

[116] MacKenna's language abilities are suggested by her translation of a short story by the French writer Théophile Gautier: 'The Little Shoes of Bread', *The Irish Monthly*, 45, 385–9.

[117] Barry McLoughin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007); Barry McLoughin, 'Visitors and Victims: British Communists in Russia between the Wars', in John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan and Alan Campbell, eds., *Party People, Communist Lives: Explorations in Biography* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), 210–30.

[118] Evgeniia Bouvier, *Anketa*, 28 Sept. 1930, RGASPI 495/65a/4042/2.

[119] Maurice J. Casey, 'O'Callaghan, May', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* https://www.dib.ie/biography/ocallaghan-may-a10133 (accessed 22 June 2021). For further detail on Bouvier, O'Callaghan and other British and Irish suffrage veterans involved in international communist networks see Maurice J. Casey, 'From Votes for Women to World Revolution: British and Irish Suffragettes and International Communism, 1919–1939', in Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins, eds., *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local National and International Dimensions* (London: University of London Press, 2021), 331–52.

[120] Hilde Kramer, *Rebellin in München, Moskau und Berlin, 1900–1924* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 2011), 120–6.

[121] Kathleen Taylor Rust, *Anketa*, 26 Aug. 1935, RGASPI 495/198/885/3.

[122] Kathleen Taylor Rust, *Anketa*, 26 Aug. 1935, RGASPI 495/198/885/4.

[123] Ibid.

[124] McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves*.

[125] An easy test for this hypothesis is to look at any photograph or painting of Comintern congresses. The translation and stenography table below the podium are inevitably almost exclusively occupied by women.

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clandestine activities. Exceptional and largely unrepresentative as a radical cross-cultural couple in the Irish republican movement, in Soviet Russia, the Arnolds became archetypal Comintern activists.

The Arnolds did not remain in Soviet Russia throughout the 1920s. *Sunday Independent* articles published in the mid-1920s and attributed to Rose Arnold suggest the couple were back in Ireland within years.[126] These demure literary articles appear to reflect a return to the mode of operation which characterised their earlier life together. In a 1929 article, Rose Arnold talked about how great men, including several Russians, had risen from humble beginnings such as migrant backgrounds to eventually become influential. 'Strong character and outstanding personality are absolutely necessary' for such transitions, Rose Arnold noted, 'but also a good deal of luck'.[127] A death notice for Rose Arnold, who died in Ostend, Belgium, appeared in the *Irish Independent* in November 1931.[128] Sidney Arnold's year of death remains unknown. One of the final publications attributed to Arnold is the text of a 1953 lecture he delivered to the Irish Club in London. In the address, Arnold spoke of time spent in Ostend and his personal acquaintance with Seán O'Casey, who, in turn, remains one of the few memoirists of the Irish revolution to have mentioned Arnold.[129] The Arnolds do not appear to have joined interwar Irish radical groups like the Friends of Soviet Russia, where one might have expected them to resurface. Perhaps the couple left behind radical agitation and transnational revolutionary networking upon their return from Soviet Russia – or perhaps they learned from experience how to avoid becoming part of the informant's paper trail.

Conclusion

A history of transnational intimacies within Irish radicalism presents us with a number of archival curiosities, but it must do more than simply highlight previously marginalised historical figures or unearth surprising cross-border connections. This article has sought to demonstrate how Arnold and MacKenna can function as a node around which we can reconstruct a wider network of transnational radicals and their internationally-minded Irish counterparts moving through Dublin and London radical circles during the revolutionary period. Their story is representative of a phenomenon that this article suggests was more commonplace than has previously been assumed: migrants *within* Ireland became for their Irish interlocutors translators of foreign revolutionary events and living links to global radical movements. Arnold demonstrates how migrant radicals could find revolutionary potential in their Irish surroundings, even if they might also criticise the limited horizons of the social revolution within the national revolution. MacKenna's journey from being the literary-minded widow of a publican on the fringes of the IPP to the committed revolutionary partner of a radical intellectual migrant also presents us with an example of the diverse and transnational paths Irish women took through the revolution. Precisely *how* broad and impactful this cosmopolitanism was within Irish radicalism deserves extended research.

The Arnolds' path from the Irish revolution to the Comintern's world revolution also reveals the value of reading revolutionary archives in tandem. Bringing the thousands of Comintern cadre files together with the archives of countries from where Comintern technical workers emigrated allows us to replicate what this article has sought to achieve through the case study of the Arnolds. Reverse engineering the paths followed by thousands of obscure revolutionaries towards a place of revolutionary employment in the Comintern allows us to probe the degree to which national revolutions of the early twentieth century were each part of one world revolutionary moment. As Kevin Morgan notes, research drawing from the vast collection of biographical questionnaires and

[126] See for example: 'The Fascination of Vienna', *Sunday Independent*, 24 July 1927; 'The Scientific Restaurant', *Sunday Independent*, 3 Mar. 1929.

[127] 'The Era of Opportunity', *Sunday Independent*, 22 Sept. 1929.

[128] 'Recent Deaths', *Irish Independent*, 18 Nov. 1931.

[129] Sidney Arnold, *Irish Literature and its Influence* (London: Candlelight Press, 1953), 5, 8–9. The National Library of Ireland catalogue gives Arnold's dates as 1878–1945, however Arnold is here being confused with Sydney Arnold, the British Liberal MP and Baron of Hale.

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revolutionary life histories gathered by the Comintern is 'a long way from being exhausted'.[130] When read as biographical evidence for a single global social network, the Comintern files provide historians of modern Europe with not only the potential for comparative histories but the opportunity to write the history of a fundamentally interlinked global revolutionary movement.[131]

Digitisation, as Laite notes, has given us the 'power to deploy individual stories, to find exceptions, disrupt stereotypes, dismantle troupes, question stock characters, and challenge assumptions based on big data'.[132] Billions of digitised historical records ensure that 'we have more and more ability to know the lives of individuals in history, even those who were humble, marginal, and obscure'.[133] The obstacles to recovering the worlds of 'humble, marginal and obscure' revolutionaries may be predicated more on a failure to recognise their value for our arguments rather than a dearth of sources available to trace their lives. Of course, digitisation is not a panacea for the vast unknowability of the past. The events of our own times also foreclose certain research opportunities. This article was written during a pandemic and, while under review, a war in Europe rendered many archives of global radicalism inaccessible. Even so, it remains the case that more individual case studies are retrievable than ever before. We must hone the methodologies capable of harnessing them. Writing an intimate political history that foregrounds affective ties between individual activists operating within global revolutionary structures is one methodology that allows us to sort the digitised signal from the noise.

The story of MacKenna and Arnold ultimately complicates general assumptions about who constituted and contributed to early twentieth century Irish radicalism. When we write about an 'Irish' revolution, 'Irish' radicals and 'Irish' movements, who gets to be included in our definition of 'Irish'? What perspectives do we lose when we exclude historical actors who could not claim an Irish identity through birthplace or descent? What transnational political horizons were alive in the moment that have become obscured by a focus on how politics played out in a single country? Recognising the many historical experiences that border on irretrievability, historians should treat Peter Hart's suggestion that Ireland's revolution may be 'the best-documented revolution in modern history' with a dose of archival humility.[134] Rose MacKenna and Sidney Arnold and the many likeminded radicals who constituted their vast network did not necessarily experience an Irish revolution. Rather, they encountered the world revolution in Ireland. With that turn in perspective in mind, we can return to the moment in a Petrograd square in 1921, when a Russian woman recently returned from emigration, Eugenie Bouvier, encountered an Irish-Latvian couple as they poured over a radical newspaper. Bouvier recognised Sidney and Rose Arnold because their paths had crossed elsewhere as they pursued their activist careers across linguistic, cultural and national borders.

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[130] Morgan, 'Comparative Communist History', 462.

[131] For a review of the potentials of transnational Comintern histories see Drachewych, 'The Communist Transnational?', 1–12.

[132] Julia Laite, 'The Emmet's Inch: Small History in a Digital Age', *Journal of Social History*, 53, 4 (2020), 982.

[133] Ibid., 964.

[134] Peter Hart, 'The Social Structure of the Irish Republican Army, 1916–1923', *The Historical Journal*, 42, 1 (1999), 208.

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