

New Zealand's representative: Jessie Mackay, the Self-Determination for Ireland League of New Zealand and the Irish Race Congress

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ABSTRACT. *In January 1922, Jessie Mackay represented the Self-Determination for Ireland League of New Zealand (S.D.I.L.N.Z.) at the Irish Race Congress in Paris. Irish people around the world were invited to attend this grand 'family reunion', where delegates discussed ways to assist the Irish revival, created an international organisation to connect members of the Irish 'race' and enjoyed exhibitions of Irish art, drama, music and dancing. Among those who assembled in Paris were delegates from Australasia who represented the S.D.I.L.N.Z. and the Self-Determination for Ireland League of Australia. These Australasian delegates played a pivotal role in keeping the congress on course. This article interweaves the history of the S.D.I.L.N.Z. with biographical details of Mackay's life in 1921 and 1922. Drawing on new archival research and material from New Zealand newspapers and periodicals, it adds to previous treatments of the congress by offering a distinct Australasian point of view. It investigates the S.D.I.L.N.Z. and why Mackay was chosen to represent it, how she contributed to the congress and what she made of proceedings.*

At lunch one winter's day in Paris, the New Zealander Jessie Mackay sat on Éamon de Valera's left.¹ The pair were representing their respective countries at the Irish Race Congress, and the lunch gave delegates the opportunity to converse informally after the closing session. The congress had opened a week earlier, on 21 January 1922, the third anniversary of the formation of Dáil Éireann. Several sessions were devoted to discussing a new Irish world organisation, and, on the final day, delegates named it *Fine Gaedheal* or 'Family of the Gael'.²

The idea of a world congress of the Irish 'race' was proposed by the Irish Republican Association of South Africa in February 1921. At that time, the War of Independence was raging, Sinn Féin and other organisations had been proscribed, and the Auxiliaries had been deployed against the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.). In response to the I.R.A.'s raids and ambushes, the Auxiliaries

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¹ Jessie Mackay, diary, 28 Jan. 1922, quoted in Margaret Chapman, Pauline O'Leary, Ginny Talbot, Brenda Lyon and Jean Goodwin, *Jessie Mackay: a woman before her time* (Kakahu, 1997), n.p. Unless indicated otherwise, references to Chapman *et al.* are to the chapter entitled 'Her "wander" year'. All references to Mackay's diary are to the pages transcribed by Chapman *et al.*

² *Ibid.*

and Black and Tans engaged in brutal reprisals on Irish civilians and their property with the tacit approval of the British government. The proposed world congress would push Britain to withdraw its armed forces from Ireland, help secure international recognition of an independent Ireland and assist the Irish government in developing trade.³ The aim was to create an international organisation that would connect members of the Irish race and coordinate fitting activities in 'the Greater Ireland, the *Magna Hibernia* across the seas'.⁴

The Dáil approved this idea, and Katherine Hughes, a Canadian who promoted self-determination for Ireland internationally, became the principal organiser of the Irish Race Congress. In August 1921, Robert Brennan, the undersecretary for foreign affairs in the second Dáil, cabled invitations to Irish organisations around the world on behalf of President de Valera and Dáil Éireann.⁵ Then, in December, Hughes extended an invitation to the millions of members of the Irish race around the globe, publicising the congress as the greatest gathering of the Irish in over 900 years, a 'family reunion' for Irish Gaels 'on a world-wide scale'.⁶ Envisaged as a twentieth-century version of the ancient Aonac of Ireland, the congress would allow delegates to discuss ways 'to aid the revival of the Irish language, arts and crafts, ... trade, and reconstruction' following the War of Independence.⁷ Its organisers wanted to express 'the racial ambitions of Irish cultural and political nationalisms, and to formulate the institutional and intellectual bases of a global Irish race anchored in a newly formed racial state'.⁸ As part of the proceedings, Irish art, drama, music and dancing would be exhibited. Delegates from twenty-two countries gathered in Paris, listening to and offering papers related to Ireland's past, present and future. Among them, delegates from Australasia represented the Self-Determination for Ireland Leagues of New Zealand (S.D.I.L.N.Z.) and Australia (S.D.I.L.A.). These Australasian delegates played a pivotal role in keeping the congress on course.

Jessie Mackay (1864–1938) was one of two delegates from New Zealand. At first glance, she seems an odd choice as a representative at an Irish Race Congress: Mackay was of Scots descent, Presbyterian and not a member of the S.D.I.L.N.Z. Hence, this essay investigates the S.D.I.L.N.Z., why Mackay was chosen to represent it and her contribution to the congress. Drawing on new archival research and material from New Zealand newspapers and periodicals, it interweaves the history of the S.D.I.L.N.Z. with biographical details of Mackay's life in 1921 and 1922. With its moderate policies regarding Ireland's right to self-determination, the S.D.I.L.N.Z. attracted sympathetic New Zealanders of all races, creeds and political orientations; it actively lobbied officials, educated the public and provided relief for families affected by the War of Independence. Likewise, Mackay was eager to see Ireland obtain justice in the form of self-government, fearlessly pleading Ireland's case in journals and demonstrating

³ Richard Davis, 'The Self-Determination for Ireland Leagues and the Irish Race Convention in Paris, 1921–22' in *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, xxiv (1977), p. 95.

⁴ *The Republic*, quoted in T. K. Daniel, 'The scholars and the saboteurs: the wrecking of a South African Irish scheme, Paris 1922' in *South African-Irish Studies*, i (1991), pp 162–3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶ *New Zealand Tablet*, 2 Feb. 1922.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ For details of the Aonac, see John Brannigan, *Race in modern Irish literature and culture* (Edinburgh, 2009), pp 40, 48.

how New Zealanders could be loyal British subjects *and* friends of Ireland. Through their activities, Mackay and the S.D.I.L.N.Z. endeavoured to counter the pro-British bias of the New Zealand press and public, and to win sympathy and support for Ireland that could be channelled into pressing for political change.

In the second half of this article, I note Mackay's response to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and explore the way she and other Australasian delegates contributed to and interpreted the Race Congress. This article offers a distinct Australasian perspective, examining the Australasian reaction to Treaty politics, their divergent Irish identity and how Mackay presented the congress to her New Zealand audience. Until recently, historians justifiably regarded the congress as a debacle, an assessment with which the Australasian delegates would not have agreed.⁹ As Richard Davis noted, the congress was significant to the diaspora, and it was 'the logical culmination of the Self-Determination for Ireland movement'.¹⁰ It gave overseas Irish an opportunity to meet others, share their ideas and contribute to the development of the Free State, while also sharing in the Irish cultural displays.¹¹ Recent scholarship has reassessed the political and strategic importance of the congress, recognising the diversity of Irish experience and nationalism, and remembering the accomplishments of the 'global Ireland' network.¹²

I

In colonial New Zealand, Irish nationalists proceeded with caution. They realised early that only a moderate form of Irish nationalism would be tolerated by their neighbours, one that avoided violence and was loyal to Britain.¹³ They could openly support the moderate home rule constitutionally sought by the Irish Parliamentary Party (I.P.P.) at Westminster. From 1883 to 1911, visiting Irish delegates subtly changed New Zealand attitudes to the Irish question and garnered considerable support for Irish home rule.¹⁴ Their arguments were couched in terms that were palatable to colonial New Zealanders: Irish home rule would be a form of self-government comparable to that already enjoyed by New Zealanders, and it would strengthen, not fracture, the British empire.¹⁵ While Irish nationalists in New

⁹ Brannigan, *Race*, pp 35–48; Daniel, 'Scholars', pp 162–75; Davis, 'Self-Determination', pp 88–104; Dermot Keogh, 'The Treaty split and the Paris Irish Race Convention, 1922' in *Études irlandaises*, no. 12 (1987), pp 165–70; Gerard Keown, 'The Irish Race Conference, 1922, reconsidered' in *I.H.S.*, xxxii, no. 127 (2001), pp 365–76.

¹⁰ Davis, 'Self-Determination', pp 100–01.

¹¹ Seeing Ireland (<https://seeingireland.ie>) (6 July 2023).

¹² 'Centenary of the Irish Race Congress, Paris, 21–28 January 1922' (www.historyireland.com/centenary-of-the-irish-race-congress-paris-21-28-january-1922) (6 July 2023); Darragh Gannon, 'The Irish Race Congress: global Ireland' in Darragh Gannon and Fearghal McGarry (eds), *Ireland 1922: independence, partition, civil war* (Dublin, 2022), pp 27–32.

¹³ Richard P. Davis, *Irish issues in New Zealand politics 1868–1922* (Dunedin, 1974), p. 23.

¹⁴ For treatments of these delegations and the ebb and flow of Irish nationalism in this period, see *ibid.*, pp 102–30; Malcolm Campbell, 'John Redmond and the Irish National League in Australia and New Zealand, 1883' in *History*, lxxxvi, no. 283 (2001), pp 357–60; Lyndon Fraser, *Castles of gold: a history of New Zealand's West Coast Irish* (Dunedin, 2007), pp 145–52.

¹⁵ Campbell, 'John Redmond', p. 357.

Zealand enthusiastically formed organisations such as the Irish National League, only a 'fraction' of the Irish community joined them, and these organisations were often short-lived.¹⁶

The Great War impacted the expression of Irish nationalism in New Zealand. While the Home Rule Act had passed, implementation of it was suspended until after the war. Irish nationalist claims were put on hold, and, as most Irish New Zealanders identified with their adopted country, they enthusiastically greeted New Zealand's entry into the war and seized the opportunity to prove their loyalty.¹⁷ They denounced the 1916 Rising and reaffirmed their commitment to constitutionalism, yet their sympathy grew as news of arrests, executions, unauthorised killings and deportations came through.¹⁸ With the war heightening patriotic and imperial fervour and an upsurge in anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feeling, Irish nationalists were limited in how they could acceptably express that sympathy: disloyalty and dissent were not tolerated, and intensely nationalist voices were suppressed.¹⁹ In this context, many were reluctant to copy the Irish example and change their allegiance from the I.P.P. to Sinn Féin, but following Sinn Féin's resounding victory in the December 1918 general election, New Zealand's Irish nationalists began joining the push for self-determination.²⁰ Braving hostile public opinion, their activities included collecting contributions and respectfully (though unsuccessfully) demanding a parliamentary resolution in favour of Ireland's right to self-determination.²¹ They were assisted in their endeavours by other New Zealanders, notably Harry Holland and other Labour Party members.²²

It took a visit from Katherine Hughes to set up a national organisation in support of Irish self-determination. Hughes had visited Ireland in 1914, and there she underwent an 'ideological journey', from 'Canadian imperialist' and a supporter of home rule to, in her words, 'a proper Irish person' and a Sinn Féin convert.²³ She became a tireless promoter of self-determination for Ireland, for several years lecturing in Canada and the United States and lobbying in Washington.²⁴ Her talents, organisational strengths and work ethic were noticed by de Valera, who was living in the U.S. in 1920 and planning a centralised Self-Determination for Ireland League (S.D.I.L.) in every country having an Irish community.²⁵ With its moderate policies, the S.D.I.L. would draw in Irish sympathisers of every shade of opinion, and de Valera appointed Hughes as his leading organiser,

¹⁶ Fraser, *Castles*, pp 133, 145.

¹⁷ Lisa Marr, "'It would really ... matter tremendously': New Zealand women and the 1916 Rising" in Peter Kuch and Lisa Marr (eds), *New Zealand's responses to the 1916 Rising* (Cork, 2020), p. 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 40, 182 n. 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 37, 48–53. Seán Brosnahan analyses pockets of advanced Irish nationalism in "'Shaming the shoneens": the *Green Ray* and the Maoriland Irish Society in Dunedin, 1916–22" in Lyndon Fraser (ed.), *A distant shore: Irish migration & New Zealand settlement* (Dunedin, 2000), pp 117–34; 'Rebel hearts: New Zealand's Fenian families and the Easter Rising' in Kuch & Marr, *New Zealand's responses*, pp 100–17.

²⁰ Davis, *Irish issues*, pp 193, 194–5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 199–202; *New Zealand Tablet*, 20 Mar. 1919.

²² See, for example, *Auckland Star*, 14 July 1920; Davis, *Irish issues*, pp 205–08.

²³ Michael Posner, 'Katherine Hughes: a singular journey' in *Queen's Quarterly*, cxxii, no. 1 (2015), p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 34, 36, 37; Davis, 'Self-Determination', p. 91.

first in Canada and then in Australia and New Zealand.²⁶ With Hughes's help, the S.D.I.L.A. was founded in Sydney in February 1921 and the S.D.I.L.N.Z. a few months later.²⁷ In New Zealand, Hughes addressed meetings in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington, eloquently describing the situation in Ireland and advocating Ireland's right to self-determination.²⁸

The S.D.I.L.N.Z. was formed at a meeting in Wellington on 6 May. It took the S.D.I.L.'s name, membership criteria, aim and organisational structure.²⁹ Membership was open 'to all residents of New Zealand, of all races, all creeds, all political parties who sympathise with the aim of the league'. The league's aim was stated in the constitution the meeting adopted and printed in bold on the membership application: 'To secure organised support for the right of the people of Ireland to choose freely, without coercion or dictation from outside, their own Governmental Institutions and their political relationship with other States and peoples.'³⁰ Those who gathered elected officers, subscribed over £100 and expressed a desire to extend the league to neighbouring regions.³¹

Several New Zealand newspapers reported the league's formation and aim, but the *New Zealand Tablet*, the Catholic weekly, regularly published accounts that show how rapidly the S.D.I.L. spread throughout New Zealand. Within months, branches of the S.D.I.L.N.Z. were established from Auckland to Riverton.³² These branches informed the *Tablet* about their meetings, office-bearers and activities. They sent strongly-worded cables to officials in London, Dublin and New Zealand protesting against British policies in Ireland and requesting that the Irish people be granted the right of self-determination as 'the only just solution' to the Irish question and in 'the best interest of the Empire'.³³

Concerned that the press was presenting 'misleading and false information' to the public, what the *Tablet* called 'Day-lies and Fablegrams', the publicity committee in Wellington counteracted the misrepresentations, falsehoods and biased reporting.³⁴ They distributed pamphlets and asked the *Evening Post* — the capital's leading paper — to publish a statement of the league's aims, while Dunedin's *Evening Star* reprinted their manifesto.³⁵ In these writings and public lectures, the league appealed to New Zealanders' intelligence, sanity and sense of fair play, presenting arguments supported by quotations from leading English writers, clergy and intellectuals, and urging their fellow citizens to decry Britain's

²⁶ Davis, 'Self-Determination', pp 88, 91–4.

²⁷ Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the present* (Notre Dame, IN, 2000), pp 284–5; Davis, 'Self-Determination', pp 92–3.

²⁸ See, for example, *New Zealand Herald*, 20, 23 May 1921; *Waikato Times*, 31 May 1921; *New Zealand Tablet*, 9 June 1921.

²⁹ Davis, 'Self-Determination', p. 93.

³⁰ *Evening Post*, 7 May 1921; *Tentative constitution of the Self-Determination for Ireland League of New Zealand* (Auckland, [1921]) (Hocken Library Collections, 27,783); 'The Self-Determination for Ireland League of New Zealand: application for membership' (Hocken Library Collections, 27,784).

³¹ *Evening Post*, 7 May 1921.

³² *New Zealand Tablet*, 2, 9 June 1921.

³³ For example, *Waikato Times*, 31 May 1921; *Hokitika Guardian*, 11 June 1921.

³⁴ *New Zealand Tablet*, 23 June, 12 May 1921.

³⁵ *Evening Post*, 22 June 1921; *Evening Star*, 18 June 1921; *Manifesto of the Self-Determination for Ireland League of New Zealand* (Auckland, [1921]) (Hocken Library Collections, 27,784).

oppressive policies in Ireland and deliver freedom to this small nation.³⁶ They engaged with the propaganda war being fought by British authorities and republicans, bringing international pressure to bear on the Irish predicament.³⁷

When Irish and British representatives agreed a truce in July 1921, the S.D.I.L.N.Z. suspended 'all active work' while they awaited the outcome of negotiations; the Women's Auxiliary, though, kept up its activities.³⁸ S.D.I.L.N.Z. committees and branches continued to send cables of support to de Valera and other key figures, but public meetings and educational work gave way to the relief efforts of the Ladies' Auxiliary Committees.³⁹ From the league's inception, women could be full members and serve as officers. However, perhaps following Irish nationalist models such as Cumann na mBan (Irish Women's Council), they created a Ladies' Auxiliary, with Miss Killen as president and Mrs T. J. (Agnes) Bourke as secretary.⁴⁰ One of the main activities of the Ladies' Auxiliary was relief work: they raised funds and collected clothing for Irish children, which they forwarded on to Ireland.⁴¹ In August, the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee in Wellington organised a White Cross benefit concert to raise funds to relieve the affliction of hundreds of families who were homeless and hungry in the wake of the Anglo-Irish War.⁴² They borrowed the name 'White Cross' from the Irish relief organisation that had been set up in 1921 to distribute donations from the American Committee for Relief in Ireland.⁴³ Inspired by Bourke and in support of Irish industries, members of the Wellington Ladies' Auxiliary Committee began importing and selling Irish goods, investing their profits in local programmes that promoted Irish literature, history and language.⁴⁴ By engaging in these activities, they emulated another nationalist women's organisation: Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland).⁴⁵

On 8 October 1921, the S.D.I.L.N.Z. held its first national convention in order to select representatives to attend the Irish Race Congress in Paris or Dublin the following January. The league was responding to the invitation issued by de Valera and Dáil Éireann, and members expected the congress would discuss 'proposals for a settlement' between Ireland and Britain.⁴⁶ The S.D.I.L.N.Z.'s position was that, while overseas Irish might be invited to express their opinions, it would be left to the Irish themselves to decide which form of government they would accept. Convention delegates nominated several high-profile figures as their representatives, including Archbishop Thomas O'Shea, the Roman Catholic coadjutor archbishop of Wellington, and Rev. Dr James Kelly, the editor of the *Tablet*; Mrs Bourke

³⁶ See, for example, *Self-Determination for Ireland League: why you should join it* (Wellington, [1921]) (University of Canterbury Library, Macmillan Brown Collection, 378696).

³⁷ Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne: a life* (London, 1990), p. 122.

³⁸ *Evening Post*, 9 Aug. 1921.

³⁹ For examples of S.D.I.L.N.Z. cables, see *New Zealand Tablet*, 29 Sept. 1921.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 June 1921.

⁴¹ For example, *ibid.*, 23 June, 20 Oct., 17 Nov. 1921. For a letter of appreciation from the St Patrick's Guild, Dublin, see *ibid.*, 6 July 1922.

⁴² *Evening Post*, 18 Aug. 1921; *New Zealand Tablet*, 18 Aug. 1921.

⁴³ Ward, *Maud Gonne*, pp 124–5.

⁴⁴ *New Zealand Tablet*, 16 Feb. 1922.

⁴⁵ See Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable revolutionaries: women and Irish nationalism* (London, 1995), p. 51.

⁴⁶ *Evening Post*, 10 Oct. 1921.

proposed Jessie Mackay. The delegates unanimously chose four representatives: Mackay; the Very Rev. Father Gilbert, rector of St Patrick's College, Wellington; J. J. McGrath, a S.D.I.L.N.Z. executive officer; and Alfred Hall-Skelton, a barrister and solicitor who had accompanied Hughes on her lecture tour of New Zealand and was president of the Auckland Council of the S.D.I.L.N.Z.⁴⁷ Gilbert and McGrath did not make it to the congress, and Hall-Skelton was the chief spokesperson, a role for which he was well equipped.⁴⁸

Although Mackay's selection as a representative was unusual, it was deserved. Mackay was not of Irish descent: she was born in New Zealand to migrants from the Scottish Highlands. She was not Catholic, but the league was open to people of all denominations. She was not affiliated with the S.D.I.L.N.Z., had not communicated with the delegates and was not known personally to more than two delegates.⁴⁹ Yet, Bourke nominated her, and the delegates spontaneously invited her to be their representative, an appointment Mackay was 'honoured and delighted to accept'.⁵⁰ Some delegates would have been familiar with Mackay's name from her work as a feminist reformer: amongst other things, she was a suffragist, a member of the National Council of Women and a participant in the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Most of those in attendance would have known her as a poet and journalist, who wrote regularly on Ireland's behalf. Earlier in the year, the S.D.I.L.N.Z. executive had described Mackay's as the lone voice raised in public and in the daily press 'in defence of Ireland'.⁵¹

Mackay's advocacy of Ireland's cause was not new. Her opinions were well known to readers of the *Otago Witness* (a Dunedin weekly) and *Lyttelton Times* (a Christchurch daily) in particular, and her letters, articles and opinions were often published or reprinted in other New Zealand periodicals. Over the previous twenty-three years, she had written hundreds of articles and letters about Ireland. She had written two series of articles for the *Witness* as well: 'The woman of nations' in 1903 and 'Two roads to "union"' in 1916–17. In the first series, she compared Ireland's misgovernment by England to the way women had been dominated by men; in both cases, the defenceless had long been oppressed by the strong. In the second series, she sought to explain why England had achieved a 'real' union with Scotland, one characterised by friendship and respect, while England's 'union' with Ireland was a travesty. Although her writing responded to current events, Mackay often returned to familiar themes and symbols; for example, the rights of small nations, the 700 years of English oppression and betrayal, and Dublin Castle as an emblem of misrule.⁵² She assiduously studied Irish history and literature and kept abreast of developments relayed in the international press. She carefully weighed what she read before writing about Irish affairs and offering her opinions. While she was not a member of the S.D.I.L.N.Z., Mackay independently pursued similar aims, arguing for justice and Irish self-determination and addressing the misrepresentations of Ireland in the New Zealand press.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; *New Zealand Tablet*, 4 Aug. 1921.

⁴⁸ *NZ Truth*, 22 Oct. 1921. For coverage of Hall-Skelton's speaking engagements earlier in the year, see *Waikato Times*, 31 May 1921; *New Zealand Tablet*, 28 July, 4 Aug. 1921.

⁴⁹ *Evening Post*, 11 Oct. 1921.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 22 June 1921.

⁵² For more on these earlier writings, see Marr, 'It would really', pp 45–8.

In 1921, Mackay had been involved in two long-running controversies. The first ran from February to May in the pages of *The Outlook: A Christian Weekly for the Home*, a Presbyterian periodical published in Dunedin. This controversy spilled into other New Zealand papers, widening its reach. The second erupted in the *Lyttelton Times* in May and continued for two months. It revealed much about contemporary New Zealand attitudes to Ireland.

On 28 February, the *Outlook* published a letter from Mackay on 'The church and the Irish question', prompting a backlash from readers that was markedly sectarian and vicious. In her letter, Mackay urged readers to become informed about the policies and resultant crisis in Ireland and to take a stand. She appealed to their Christian and humanitarian values and challenged 'our Church' to 'declare her self on Ireland's case ... or be forever shamed'.⁵³ The following week, the *Outlook's* editor responded to Mackay's challenge in the first of three editorials on Ireland. While he acknowledged the complexity of the Irish situation and the impossibility of knowing exactly what was happening there, he summarised events since 1912 (when the third Home Rule Bill was introduced to parliament) and attempted to reason with his readers and guide them in the 'right attitude' towards Britain's policy of repression and reprisal in Ireland. He urged readers to remove from their minds 'certain prejudices and predilections', such as sectarian bitterness, politics or personal animus, and adopt a Christian viewpoint of the policies and their 'dreadful fruits'.⁵⁴

Outraged *Outlook* readers wrote letters to the editor that revealed the knotty nature of the Irish question and an unwillingness to set aside prejudices in discussing it. Several writers were surprised that the editor would publish Mackay's letter, thinking it disloyal and more suitable for the *Tablet* than 'the official organ of the "loyal Presbyterian church"'.⁵⁵ They maligned Mackay's Sinn Féin views and questioned her wisdom along with her facts.⁵⁶ Their humour was not improved by two further unflinching editorials and a second letter from Mackay.⁵⁷ While their letters were frequently bigoted, virulent and cruel, other letters were 'too abusive' to be published, and the editor closed correspondence on 18 April.⁵⁸

The controversy spread from the *Outlook* to the *Tablet* and *Timaru Herald* (a daily). Mackay's first letter to the *Outlook* was published in the *Timaru Herald* under the heading 'Light at last: N.Z. and the Irish question'.⁵⁹ Her second letter appeared in the *Tablet* under a new title, 'Ireland's fight for freedom'.⁶⁰ On 8 April, the *Timaru Herald* reported on the bi-monthly meeting of the Timaru Presbytery, whose members expressed their loyalty and distanced themselves from Mackay's opinions, unanimously carrying a motion 'that as the "Outlook" is the official organ of the Presbyterian Church its editor should express the views of the Church generally, and not the views which are held by a small minority'.⁶¹ When

⁵³ *The Outlook*, 28 Feb. 1921.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 Mar. 1921.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 Mar. 1921.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*, 11, 4 Apr. 1921. For the readers' letters to the editor, see also *ibid.*, 21, 28 Mar., 18 Apr. 1921. The editor counteracted their letters with articles that appealed to the empathy and consciences of readers: see *ibid.*, 14 Mar., 4, 11, 18 Apr. 1921.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1921.

⁵⁹ *Timaru Herald*, 9 Apr. 1921.

⁶⁰ *New Zealand Tablet*, 7 Apr. 1921.

⁶¹ *Timaru Herald*, 8 Apr., 8 June 1921.

the *Outlook* failed to publish their resolution, the Presbytery took ‘strong exception’, criticising the editor and mistakenly blaming him for the omission.⁶² Writing to the *Herald*, Mackay acknowledged that the Presbytery’s view was one shared by most Presbyterians in New Zealand, but she would not condone ‘the innocence of [such] ignorance’ given the facts available on conditions in Ireland.⁶³ Months later, the Presbyterian General Assembly published a resolution that the *Outlook*’s editor had made ‘a serious error of judgment’ in publishing Mackay’s letters and commenting on them.⁶⁴

The second controversy played out in the *Lyttelton Times*, a daily in Christchurch, which had developed a reputation for being the most ‘English’ of New Zealand’s cities. Mackay’s opening letter was triggered by a debate on the Irish question at Canterbury College (a University of New Zealand college), after which ‘the policy of the British Government was approved by 50 votes to 16’.⁶⁵ Lamenting the uniformity of thought evident in the debate, she sought to inform readers about British atrocities in Ireland and the growing condemnation of this coercive policy by figures in England and overseas. Concerned too about the way current policy was shaming and imperilling the British Empire, Mackay urged New Zealanders to speak up now to end the hostilities and secure a settlement.⁶⁶ With the dominions being asked to share their opinions at the upcoming imperial conference in London, Mackay called on them and their premiers to ‘save the Empire’ by exerting their influence.⁶⁷

In her letters to the *Lyttelton Times*, Mackay occasionally returned to old themes, but more often she shared recent findings gleaned from wide-ranging sources, debating the issues with other letter-writers and clearing up misconceptions. Her sources extended from the British Labour Party’s report on the horrors their commission discovered in Ireland, to yearbooks, parliamentary records and journalism: ‘in fact’, she wrote, ‘every avenue of moral and intelligent thought in Britain’.⁶⁸ Her letters reveal the sea change in English attitudes to Ireland, reporting, for example, the resolution passed by a meeting of the National Council of the Free Churches that expressed ‘horror and detestation’ of the actions of revolutionaries and Crown agents alike and appealed to all parties ‘to join in a policy of conciliation’.⁶⁹ She engaged in a polite dialogue with writers such as F. J. Alley, whereas other writers were less kind, sometimes resenting the ‘prominence’ given to Mackay’s letters and deploying gendered language to undermine her arguments.⁷⁰ She pounced on erroneous arguments, such as R. M. Thomson’s claim that ‘Sinn Fein is not really Irish.’⁷¹ In contrast to the correspondence in the *Outlook*, Mackay was no longer

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4 May, 8 June 1921. The convenor of the *Outlook*’s Publications Committee had asked the editor to withhold publication of the resolution, but it was later printed along with the editor’s explanation: *The Outlook*, 16 May 1921. The *Timaru Herald* reprinted this article on 21 May.

⁶³ *Timaru Herald*, 23 Apr. 1921.

⁶⁴ *Evening Star*, 23 Nov. 1921.

⁶⁵ *Lyttelton Times*, 2 May 1921.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 May 1921.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 June 1921.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 May, 14 June 1921.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 May 1921.

⁷⁰ For example, *ibid.*, 4, 2, 11 June 1921.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11, 14 June 1921. Thomson wrote several letters during this controversy. He was determined to air the other side of the argument and did not allow the facts to get in the way:

the lone voice supporting Irish claims: S.D.I.L.N.Z. members and others defended her, corrected misrepresentations of Ireland and stressed the need to move beyond narrow definitions of loyalty.⁷² When the truce in Ireland was confirmed, the letter-writers agreed to cease their activities and hoped for peace and a solution to the Irish question.⁷³ In her final letter, Mackay concluded that 'all persons of goodwill should now be bending their minds towards restoration, up-building, rehabilitation, and the one peace that will stand, being based on justice.'⁷⁴

Mackay's courageous advocacy of Ireland's right to self-determination endeared her to friends of Ireland and the S.D.I.L.N.Z., who chose her as their representative and said farewell to her in fine style. Before she left New Zealand, Mackay stayed briefly with the Duggan family in Wellington, and the league's president, P. J. O'Regan, formally presented her credentials to her at a gathering of S.D.I.L.N.Z. members in the Hibernian Rooms. In his speech, O'Regan commented on the appropriateness of Mackay's selection and praised her 'close acquaintance' with Irish history and the principles underlying the Irish demand for self-determination.⁷⁵ He reiterated that the role of overseas delegates at the congress was not to coerce or dictate to the Irish people in matters of government; rather, the Irish must decide whether they should insist on 'complete independence or ... accept a compromise falling short of that ideal'.⁷⁶ Women from the Ladies' Auxiliary robed Mackay in an expensive silk mantle, and the league paid for her return fare and expenses, £600 in total.⁷⁷ Mackay left Wellington on board the *Remuera* on 15 November.⁷⁸ Her journey to London (via Panama) would take six weeks, and the situation in Ireland changed enormously in that time.

II

For three weeks, Mackay and her fellow passengers heard no news of the outside world, so they only heard the Anglo-Irish Treaty had been signed once they reached Panama. When she departed from New Zealand, negotiations were ongoing between Irish representatives and those of the British government. In a letter written on board the *Remuera* on 5 December, she hoped that the negotiators had been working towards a solution and 'an early, peaceful, and honourable settlement' had been achieved: unbeknownst to her, the settlement came the following day.⁷⁹ In an article for the *Otago Witness* on Panama, Mackay joyfully described passengers returning from shore 'hugging ... precious newspapers with strange flaming cables about a Dominion new-born and a seven-centuries feud healed in a night'.⁸⁰ A constitutional nationalist, Mackay was profoundly thankful that

see *ibid.*, 5 July, 16 June 1921; and 'Spectemur Agendo's' response to the errors in this latter letter in *ibid.*, 24 June 1921.

⁷² See, for example, the letters of Robert Kelleher: *New Zealand Tablet*, 19 May 1921; *Lyttelton Times*, 18 June, 5 July 1921.

⁷³ *Lyttelton Times*, 27, 28 July 1921.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 July 1921.

⁷⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 15 Dec. 1921.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p.; *New Zealand Tablet*, 28 Sept. 1922.

⁷⁸ *New Zealand Tablet*, 15 Dec. 1921.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1922.

⁸⁰ *Otago Witness*, 14 Mar. 1922.

Ireland had been granted dominion status, assuming that it would function in the same way as New Zealand's, and she looked forward to visiting a 'free Ireland' in the new year.⁸¹ In her diary, she wondered how the Treaty would affect the congress: had the 'raison d'être of our going happily vanished into air?'⁸²

The settlement satisfied Mackay and the S.D.I.L.N.Z. Although she firmly believed that the Irish must determine for themselves the form of government they should have, Mackay had supported home rule from her teens and was convinced that the granting of dominion status was the solution for Ireland's ills.⁸³ Most New Zealand Irish were content with the Treaty and the establishment of the Irish Free State.⁸⁴ When news of the Treaty reached New Zealand, the National Executive of the S.D.I.L.N.Z. immediately met and issued a statement, which said in part: 'We rejoice most heartily at the great reconciliation between the two nations. On the terms of the treaty we have no comment to offer. It is enough for us that [the terms] have been accepted by the chosen representatives of the people of Ireland.'⁸⁵ On 11 December, they celebrated the announcement of the Free State with a monster meeting.⁸⁶

Once she reached London in late December, Mackay met with Irish groups and learned more about the terms of the Treaty.⁸⁷ On her first day there, she visited a Sinn Féin centre and met Irish men who had been recently released from prison.⁸⁸ Later, she connected with the S.D.I.L. and was updated on plans for the congress.⁸⁹ She no doubt was informed of the debates that were occurring over the Treaty in the Dáil. She possibly discovered that all six female T.D.s were opposed to the Treaty.⁹⁰ Having heard and read both sides of the Treaty discussion, she remained in favour of it and believed Ireland did well 'in gaining so much'.⁹¹

Mackay's time in London coincided with momentous events in Ireland. Following weeks of debate, the Dáil ratified the Treaty on 7 January 1922, with sixty-four voting for the Treaty and fifty-seven against.⁹² Two days later, de Valera resigned as president and was replaced by Arthur Griffith. Shortly after Mackay's departure from London, on 16 January, Dublin Castle was surrendered and formally handed over to the provisional government of the Irish Free State. For Mackay, the take-over of Dublin Castle symbolised 'the end of seven centuries of political subordination', making Ireland 'a nation once again'.⁹³

⁸¹ Nellie F. H. Macleod, *A voice on the wind: the story of Jessie Mackay* (Wellington, 1955), p. 71.

⁸² Quoted in Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p.

⁸³ See, for example, *ibid.* (chapter entitled 'Early days'); Macleod, *Voice*, p. 66.

⁸⁴ Seán Brosnahan, 'Parties or politics: Wellington's IRA 1922–1928' in Brad Patterson (ed.), *The Irish in New Zealand: historical contexts & perspectives* (Wellington, 2002), p. 67.

⁸⁵ *Otago Daily Times*, 9 Dec. 1921. See also *Auckland Star*, 30 Mar. 1922. The Treaty was officially called the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland.

⁸⁶ *Evening Post*, 10 Dec. 1921.

⁸⁷ Macleod, *Voice*, p. 71; Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p.

⁸⁸ Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Sonja Tiernan, *Irish women's speeches: voices that rocked the system* (Dublin, 2021), p. 80.

⁹¹ *New Zealand Tablet*, 23 Mar. 1922.

⁹² *Dáil Éireann deb.*, vol. T, no. 15 (7 Jan. 1922).

⁹³ *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Mar. 1922.

Like many of the Australasian delegates to the congress, Mackay arrived early in Paris. She stayed with the other delegates at the Grand Hotel and spent the week leading up to the conference sightseeing, reading, writing and meeting other delegates.⁹⁴ She was hugely impressed by the calibre of the delegates and relished the ‘unfailing romance of meeting superior people’, mentioning, amongst others, the young, cheerful ‘Hayes from Dublin’ (Michael Hayes, the new minister for education).⁹⁵ Having mingled with Hall-Skelton and the Australian delegates, led by the Very Rev. Dr Maurice O’Reilly, Mackay was treated to a ‘panorama’ of Irish personages: Eoin MacNeill, Douglas Hyde and then de Valera himself.⁹⁶ Writing on the eve of the formal opening, she likened this sociable reunion of Ireland’s ‘far-sundered children’ to ‘a huge family Christmas party’.⁹⁷ Commenting on the serendipitous timing of the conference, within days of the Irish Free State taking ‘her place among ruling nations’, Mackay delighted in the extraordinary circumstances and believed the congress had no apparent agenda or purpose ‘save to affirm to the world the unalterable solidarity of the Irish race’.⁹⁸

One of the first items of conference business was to set an agenda. Although the idea of a world congress originated in South Africa, it was organised initially by the Dáil, briefly by Art O’Brien in London and then by Katherine Hughes in Paris.⁹⁹ O’Brien founded and led the Irish Self-Determination League of Great Britain and was the Dáil’s envoy in London.¹⁰⁰ Hughes was appointed by de Valera, who instructed her to set up an office in Paris and organise the congress from there.¹⁰¹ Hughes’s plans were upset by the Treaty, and a committee set a new agenda.¹⁰² On Monday 23 January, Irish language, history and literature would be discussed; on Tuesday, Irish art, music and physical culture; on Thursday, economic subjects. On Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, delegates would discuss the formation of an Irish world organisation and its aims, objects and means.¹⁰³

The joyful sociability soon dissipated, and instead of affirming to the world ‘the unalterable solidarity of the Irish race’, the congress was marked by disagreement between pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty delegates. Understandably, the Irish delegates were foregrounded in accounts of proceedings. Ten delegates officially represented the Irish people. Arthur Griffith nominated Diarmuid Coffey, Douglas Hyde, the lord mayor of Dublin (Laurence O’Neill), Eoin MacNeill and Michael Hayes; these last two were ministers in the provisional government. As opposition leader,

⁹⁴ Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p. Many delegates failed to appear at the congress. A delegation of sixty North Americans was expected, but only four turned up: Davis, ‘Self-Determination’, p. 97.

⁹⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 23 Mar. 1922; *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Mar. 1922.

⁹⁶ *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Mar. 1922. For more detail on the Australian delegates, see *New Zealand Tablet*, 30 Mar. 1922.

⁹⁷ *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Mar. 1922.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Keown, ‘Irish Race Conference’, p. 366; Posner, ‘Katherine Hughes’, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰ Mary MacDiarmada, ‘Art O’Brien: London envoy of Dáil Éireann, 1919–1922: a diplomat “in the citadel of the enemy’s authority”’ in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, xxx (2019), p. 59.

¹⁰¹ Posner, ‘Katherine Hughes’, p. 38; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, vol. S, no. 3 (18 Aug. 1921).

¹⁰² Diarmuid Coffey, Michael Hayes, Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill, ‘Report on the Irish Race Conference in Paris’, Documents on Irish Foreign Policy (www.difp.ie/volume-1/1922/irish-race-convention-paris/239/#section-documentpage) (21 May 2022).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*; Mackay, diary, 23–28 Jan.

de Valera was asked to nominate five delegates: he chose himself, the lord mayor of Cork (Donal O'Callaghan), and T.D.s Constance Markievicz, Mary MacSwiney and Harry Boland. These two groups of delegates did not communicate with each other on the journey to Paris, and they set up separate bases once they arrived, with de Valera's party making the office of the Irish envoy their base rather than the Grand Hotel. Political discussions became heated, acrimonious and divisive, necessitating a move from public sessions to private meetings.¹⁰⁴ Some events were orchestrated to favour de Valera's party. At the inaugural banquet, for example, the programme of toasts and speeches excluded pro-Treaty speakers, and de Valera delivered 'a strong party "speech"'.¹⁰⁵ After a few days, some pro-Treaty delegates left Paris, and the de Valera party became the majority.¹⁰⁶ On several occasions, MacNeill and de Valera intervened to prevent a total breakdown in relations, and agreement was eventually reached through compromise.

The Australasian delegates were aghast at the conflict and political manoeuvring and endeavoured to keep the conference on course. The leagues they represented refrained from interfering in Irish decisions on government. Therefore, with the exception of T. J. Ryan (the delegate for South Australia), the Australasian delegates tried to avoid influencing political discussions, and they had no interest in engaging with civil war politics. Like the Irish in New Zealand, Irish Australians focused on what the Treaty had provided: the answer to the Irish question, the Irish Free State, a self-governing dominion like their own, which they equated with Irish freedom.¹⁰⁷ The Australasian delegates supported the ratified Treaty and respected the representatives of the provisional government, in Mackay's words, 'the first national Government of Ireland'.¹⁰⁸ They reacted strongly to any perceived attempt to hijack the congress for republican purposes.¹⁰⁹ Expecting unity of purpose amongst the assembled delegates, they were shocked by their encounter with 'Irish reality' and 'the less edifying aspects of Irish affairs'.¹¹⁰ At the conclusion of the congress, the Australasian delegates were satisfied that they had 'maintained a strict policy of non-interference, recognising that Ireland's future was her own concern'.¹¹¹

Their stance was criticised by some Irish delegates, and a gulf became evident between the Irish in Ireland and the diaspora. The Australasian delegates informed the congress that they 'were Australians and New Zealanders first and Irishmen afterwards', but they were 'prepared to support any movement apart from politics'.¹¹² O'Reilly stated that 'Irish Australians, the very backbone of Australian democracy, accepted unequivocally allegiance to the Australian Government': this was evidence of a 'slave mentality' in the minds of some of their Irish critics.¹¹³ Many

¹⁰⁴ Davis, 'Self-Determination', p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ Coffey *et al.*, 'Report'.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ O'Farrell, *Irish in Australia*, p. 289.

¹⁰⁸ *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Mar. 1922.

¹⁰⁹ Eoin MacNeill, 'Preliminary report on the Irish Race Conference (Paris, January 1922)', Documents on Irish Foreign Policy (www.difp.ie/volume-1/1922/irish-race-convention-paris/238/#section-documentpage) (21 May 2022); Coffey *et al.*, 'Report'; Mackay, diary, 25, 27 Jan.; *Evening Post*, 30 Mar. 1922.

¹¹⁰ O'Farrell, *Irish in Australia*, p. 285.

¹¹¹ *Lyttelton Times*, 30 Jan. 1922.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Davis, 'Self-Determination', p. 99.

people in Australasian Irish communities were second- or third-generation citizens and happy with their new societies and their position in the British empire.¹¹⁴ Keen to retain some link with Ireland, they preferred 'cultural and sentimental ties' to political ones.¹¹⁵ In his reconsideration of the congress, Gerard Keown argues that this divergence in attitudes between the diaspora and the Irish in Ireland subsequently affected their relationship and the development of Irish foreign policy and national identity.¹¹⁶

Staying within the boundaries set by their respective leagues, the Australasian delegates endeavoured to realise the original aim of the congress, contributing to discussions on Ireland's reconstruction. Hall-Skelton, for example, spoke about the dairy industry in New Zealand and offered suggestions as to how the industry might be developed in Ireland.¹¹⁷ He opposed Countess Markievicz's suggestion that overseas Irish should boycott English banks and insurance companies and advised that Ireland should utilise expert knowledge of finance and international trade rather than follow 'ignoramuses'.¹¹⁸ The overseas delegates believed their views were 'much appreciated' by the two Irish cabinet ministers in attendance.¹¹⁹ The delegates had ample opportunities to share their views informally — what the pro-Treaty party called 'propaganda by personal intercourse', as they and the anti-Treaty party attempted to garner support.¹²⁰ In her diary, Mackay notes long conversations with MacSwiney, Hayes, O'Reilly and an Ulster Presbyterian minister, Rev. Dr J. A. H. Irwin.¹²¹ While other Australasian delegates contributed verbally to sessions, Mackay worked quietly on several committees, impressing many delegates, and wrote regular reports for the S.D.I.L.N.Z. and New Zealand periodicals.¹²² Although she was characteristically quiet about her role in the proceedings, Mackay recorded for a New Zealand audience her impressions of the conference, the people present and associated cultural highlights.

In her articles, Mackay deliberately downplayed or excluded the political disagreements, instead focusing on cultural events. In one article written before the first controversial session on a world organisation, she mentioned the 'fiery and hasty' anti-Treaty delegates but minimised their 'occasional puff[s] of hot air', praising the way de Valera restrained the runaways with 'quietness and tact'.¹²³ While she noted in her diary the 'very obstructive' behaviour of some republicans who were attempting to 'exploit' the congress (27 and 25 January), she did not mention them again in her newspaper articles. She was sympathetic to the Free State party and valued the opportunity to meet MacNeill and Hayes, who, she believed, were working conscientiously on Ireland's reconstruction.¹²⁴ Mackay praised the 'statesmen, scholars, thinkers' amongst the delegates, singling out de

¹¹⁴ O'Farrell, *Irish in Australia*, p. 286; *Grey River Argus*, 27 Jan. 1922.

¹¹⁵ Keown, 'Irish Race Conference', p. 374.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 366, 373–5, 376.

¹¹⁷ *Evening Post*, 30 Mar. 1922.

¹¹⁸ Davis, 'Self-Determination', p. 99.

¹¹⁹ *Evening Post*, 30 Mar. 1922.

¹²⁰ Michael MacWhite's phrase, quoted in Keown, 'Irish Race Conference', p. 369; Davis, 'Self-Determination', p. 98.

¹²¹ Mackay, diary, 22, 23, 28, 29 Jan.

¹²² *Evening Post*, 30 Mar. 1922; *The Press* [Christchurch], 2 Sept. 1922.

¹²³ *Lyttelton Times*, 25 Mar. 1922.

¹²⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, 4 July 1922. A similar assessment of the Free State ministers, possibly written by Hall-Skelton, appears in *Evening Post*, 30 Mar. 1922.

Valera, MacNeill, Coffey, Irwin and Hyde.¹²⁵ She was drawn to these delegates by what she saw as their stateliness, their conciliatory actions and speech, their intelligence and other personal qualities, such as integrity and kindness.¹²⁶ Although her descriptions of these delegates were rather romantic, her emphasis was on their principles and constructive contributions.

Mackay featured aspects of the cultural programme in her journalism.¹²⁷ While Harry Boland may have ‘scoffed’ at the cultural discussions, they and the concerts were high points for Mackay.¹²⁸ From her youth, she had a love of Irish arts and history, which she developed throughout her life and shared with readers in articles and reviews. In preparation for the congress, she immersed herself in the literature of the Celtic revival, particularly the works of Yeats and Synge, writing several columns on the topic for the *Otago Witness*.¹²⁹ In her account of the papers delivered by Hyde (language), MacNeill (history) and Yeats (literature), she emphasised the vital role culture had played in Ireland’s revival.¹³⁰ In keeping with this argument, Mackay believed that the new world organisation must utilise these same bonds of language, history and literature — along with art, music and athletics — to unite Irish people around the globe.

Maud Gonne joined the delegates on one Irish music night; Mackay’s portrait of her is dreamy and romantic. After noting Gonne’s legendary beauty, Mackay described her as the ‘loveliest of actresses ... the dream of Ireland’s young poets’, Yeats’s muse,

and soul of Ireland’s rebirth as a nation ... Many a time [Gonne and Yeats] had sat and talked together, dreaming and planning of the new soul they and Irish art were giving to bankrupt Ireland in the darkest recoil of her despair — to Kathleen Na [*sic*] Houlihan, whose day of redemption has now dawned.¹³¹

In 1902, Gonne had played the title role in the Irish National Theatre Company’s production of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* (by Yeats and Augusta Gregory), in which the personification of Ireland, Kathleen, enlists the support of young men to regain her ‘four beautiful green fields’ (the four provinces of Ireland) and is transformed from an Old Woman into ‘a young girl’ who has ‘the walk of a queen’.¹³² When, at the end of the play, Kathleen/Maud flung off the old woman’s cloak and changed into a majestic young woman, Gonne became ‘the very image of a free nation’, beautiful, inspirational and magnificent.¹³³ In many people’s eyes, Gonne personified the mythical Kathleen ni Houlihan, the ‘soul of Ireland’s rebirth as a nation’. Even in 1922, Gonne was continuing to inspire as a romantic nationalist symbol.¹³⁴

¹²⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 27 Apr. 1922.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Lyttelton Times*, 25 Mar. 1922.

¹²⁸ Coffey *et al.*, ‘Report’.

¹²⁹ *Otago Witness*, 3, 24, 31 Jan., 7, 14 Feb. 1922.

¹³⁰ *Lyttelton Times*, 25 Mar. 1922.

¹³¹ *New Zealand Tablet*, 27 Apr. 1922.

¹³² Lady Gregory [and W. B. Yeats], ‘Kathleen ni Houlihan’ in *eadem*, *Selected writings* (London, 1995), pp 306, 311.

¹³³ Ward, *Maud Gonne*, p. 74.

¹³⁴ Mackay ignores the physical force elements in the play and in Gonne’s nationalism.

Other figures with links to Ireland's past were present that evening, evoking memories of their famous forebears in some guests and attracting the disapproval of others. The Duke of Tetuán, a descendant of Hugh Roe (or Red Hugh) O'Donnell (1572–1602) according to Mackay, had been invited to preside over the congress.¹³⁵ His presence was welcomed by Mackay, and he was honoured with a rendition of 'O'Donnell Abú'. Another distinguished visitor was Mrs Teeling, a relative of Bartholomew Teeling, one of the heroes of the 1798 rebellion. Their inclusion by organisers was designed to emphasise the purity of these bloodlines and 'the nobility of Irish ancestry, a continuity' between the Gaelic aristocracy and heroes of former times and 'their descendants in their adopted lands'.¹³⁶ In contrast to Mackay's respectful acknowledgement of these figures, Gonne opposed the establishment of such genealogies; days earlier, she had been horrified to see the red-draped dais and gilded throne the duke was to occupy. She observed that this Spanish duke 'knew nothing of Ireland except its horses', having purchased 'some good ones for the Spanish Government'.¹³⁷ She considered the throne grossly inappropriate for a republican congress and was concerned about the 'sneers and mockery' of French reporters who jibed, 'Voilà les Républicains Irlandais!'.¹³⁸

In her article on the concert, Mackay focused on the musical programme, commenting on the pieces and their performers. As a child, she first connected with Ireland through ballads, and a performance of 'The Fanaid Grove' took her back fifty years to when her mother sang it in their rural New Zealand home.¹³⁹ Amidst renditions of nationalist ballads such as 'Dark Rosaleen', she listened as a string quartet played a composition dedicated to 'the memory of Terence MacSwiney'; the 'mournful harmony ... sad, slow, yet changing into triumph, and intertwined with old Irish airs we know'.¹⁴⁰ The piece was composed by Swan Hennessy in response to MacSwiney's death in prison following a hunger strike. Its sad, slow opening suggested MacSwiney's suffering and gradual demise, and the triumphant finale glorified Ireland's future.¹⁴¹ In a letter to the *Lyttelton Times* in May 1921, Mackay referred to MacSwiney's unjust imprisonment, his 'martyrdom' and the feeling it stirred in 'nobler British hearts'.¹⁴² Calling him 'this Irish super-Hampden', she positioned him as a greater patriotic symbol and martyr to the cause of liberty than the Englishman John Hampden (d. 1643).¹⁴³ When the quartet finished playing, she was moved to see the elderly composer approach MacSwiney's sister, Mary, and solemnly take her hand.

Mackay was in Paris when the central executive of Fine Gael, the new world organisation, met for the first time, the day after the congress concluded. In her

¹³⁵ *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Mar. 1922; *New Zealand Tablet*, 27 Apr. 1922.

¹³⁶ Brannigan, *Race*, p. 41.

¹³⁷ Maud Gonne, *The autobiography of Maud Gonne: a servant to the queen*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares and Anna MacBride White (1938; Chicago, 1994), p. 173.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *New Zealand Tablet*, 15 Dec. 1921, 27 Apr. 1922.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 Apr. 1922.

¹⁴¹ Swan Hennessy, *Deuxième quatuor*, Op. 49 (Paris, 1920). For more information on Hennessy and his string quartet, see Axel Klein, 'Music for MacSwiney' in *History Ireland*, xxviii, no. 5 (2020), pp 32–4.

¹⁴² *Lyttelton Times*, 25 May 1921.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*; Iain Crawford, 'Wading through slaughter: John Hampden, Thomas Gray, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Studies in the Novel*, xx, no. 3 (1988), p. 250.

diary (27 January), she recorded how ‘strained’ the election process had been, her ‘dread’ of the issue splitting along party lines and the ‘splendid fight’ of the spokesmen for Australasia and the provisional government. Representatives from Australasia, South Africa and South America could not stand for election because they lived far from Dublin, where the organisation was to be based.¹⁴⁴ After much debate, a seven-person central executive was appointed, with de Valera as president, MacNeill as vice-president and an anti-Treaty majority.¹⁴⁵ Although de Valera promised that Fine Gael would not be used for partisan purposes, the Australasian delegates were highly concerned about the make-up of the executive, and Mackay talked at length with O’Reilly and Hayes.¹⁴⁶ Upon hearing MacNeill’s account of the inaugural committee meeting, the Australasian, Argentinian and South African delegates lost trust in the central executive and wrote to de Valera ‘informing him of their decision to recommend to their constituents that they refuse all cooperation with the executive’.¹⁴⁷ While individuals still believed in the potential of Fine Gael, the world organisation failed and was soon forgotten.¹⁴⁸

III

After the congress, Mackay spent two months in Ireland before touring Britain and Europe and returning to New Zealand on 29 August. In Dublin, she stayed with Mr and Mrs Vincent Clarke, an arrangement organised by Agnes Bourke, who was Mrs Clarke’s sister.¹⁴⁹ Mackay felt comfortable with the Clarks and their friends: they were cultured and their views on the Treaty aligned with her own.¹⁵⁰ She visited Dublin Castle and seemed disappointed with the reality, having imagined for decades a darker, more commanding ‘Bastille-like pile’ commensurate with its function and symbolism.¹⁵¹ She made her way around City Hall, the universities, the National Library and Museum, and other sites of historical and cultural interest.¹⁵² She attended talks and lectures, concerts and Æ’s salons and met, among others, the artist Sarah Purser and feminist and suffragist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington.¹⁵³ In connection with the relief work of the S.D.I.L.N.Z.’s Ladies’ Auxiliary, she was entertained by the St Patrick’s Guild and invited to talk on ‘Child welfare in New Zealand’.¹⁵⁴ She observed a session of Dáil Éireann, using her press pass to gain entry.¹⁵⁵ Believing that Ireland had achieved self-

¹⁴⁴ Daniel, ‘Scholars’, p. 171.

¹⁴⁵ MacNeill, ‘Preliminary report’. On the election of the central executive and its inaugural meeting, see this report; Coffey *et al.*, ‘Report’; Daniel, ‘Scholars’, pp 171–3; Keown, ‘Irish Race Conference’, pp 370–72.

¹⁴⁶ MacNeill, ‘Preliminary report’; Mackay, diary, 28, 29 Jan.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel, ‘Scholars’, p. 172. See also MacNeill, ‘Preliminary report’; Coffey *et al.*, ‘Report’.

¹⁴⁸ Keown, ‘Irish Race Conference’, p. 372.

¹⁴⁹ Macleod, *Voice*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ *Otago Witness*, 16 May 1922.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*; *ibid.*, 23, 30 May 1922.

¹⁵³ Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p.; Macleod, *Voice*, p. 72; Jessie Mackay, ‘One Dublin night’ in *Roisín Dubh*, i, no. 1 (1923), pp 9–11; *Lyttelton Times*, 6 Dec. 1922.

¹⁵⁴ *New Zealand Tablet*, 6 July 1922.

¹⁵⁵ Chapman *et al.*, *Jessie Mackay*, n.p.

determination, Mackay was deeply affected by the tensions and widening divide between supporters and opponents of the Treaty. While travelling homeward, she heard some Irish news, recording in her diary the 'Awful fighting in Dublin' as the civil war commenced (28 June) and the shooting of Michael Collins (23 August).¹⁵⁶

As she disembarked from the *Manuka* in Wellington, Mackay was met by members of the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee, and over the next few days she was received by the Wellington executive of the S.D.I.L.N.Z. and members of the recently-formed Wellington Gaelic Society (*Cumann na nGaedheal*). At the S.D.I.L.N.Z. gathering, she presented her impressions of the congress and developments in Ireland, positioning herself as a sympathetic outsider and sojourner who did not have the key to Ireland's current situation. She said she left the congress 'entirely convinced that Ireland's good rested with the party of peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction' — that is, the pro-Treaty party, whose hard work, sacrifice and 'Statecraft' she respected immensely. Yet, she acknowledged the 'tremendous sincerity' of the men and women who led the 'war party' (the anti-Treaty party), who similarly were self-sacrificing and devoted to Ireland's welfare. She believed these similarities allowed the parties to rise above their differences and establish *Fine Gaedheal*, and she earnestly hoped this organisation would continue in happier times ahead. In the meantime, Mackay urged the S.D.I.L.N.Z. to support Ireland through unity and charity, putting faction behind and freedom before them and realising the motto of *Fine Gaedheal*: 'Eye has not seen, nor the mind of man conceived, the greatness of the destiny God has in His mind for Ireland.'¹⁵⁷

Mackay's reception by Wellington's *Cumann na nGaedheal* is significant. The *Cumann*'s objects were based on those of the world organisation founded by congress delegates.¹⁵⁸ This non-political society aimed 'To foster among people of the Irish Race in Wellington a knowledge of the Irish language, literature, history and general culture. And to promote the trade, commerce and industries of Ireland.'¹⁵⁹ Its objects included creating and disseminating Irish culture, perpetuating 'a devoted attachment to Ireland' and assisting in 'the reconstruction of the Irish nation'.¹⁶⁰ This diasporic community desired to remain connected to Ireland through culture, education, sentiment and trade. Many of the *Cumann*'s members, including Agnes Bourke and Eileen Duggan, belonged to the S.D.I.L.N.Z., and over 200 people assembled in Mackay's honour. Father Gilbert praised Mackay for her notable work in defending Ireland's cause, and O'Regan read a paper Mackay had written conveying her impressions of prominent Irishmen she had encountered in Paris and Dublin. Mackay expressed her great pleasure at returning to New Zealand to find this new Gaelic society successfully ensconced.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Mackay wrote a poem mourning the passing of Collins and Arthur Griffith: Jessie Mackay, 'The keening' in *The bride of the rivers and other verses* (Christchurch, 1926), pp 38–9.

¹⁵⁷ *New Zealand Tablet*, 7 Sept. 1922. A more literal translation of the motto is provided in Daniel, 'Scholars', p. 175 n. 4.

¹⁵⁸ G. J. Griffin to M. J. Kelly, 29 Nov. 1926 (National Library [New Zealand], Gerald John Griffin papers, 86-043-3/15).

¹⁵⁹ Constitution (National Library, Griffin papers, 86-043-3/15).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *New Zealand Tablet*, 14 Sept. 1922.

IV

Mackay returned to Christchurch, rested for a time and took stock. While her experiences in Europe fuelled her writing for months, particularly her columns for the *Otago Witness*, she wrote little about Ireland and refused to be interviewed by reporters. She was detrimentally affected by the disunity and bitterness she had observed in Paris and Ireland and the ruinous civil war that erupted after her departure. She privately expressed her disillusionment to family and close friends, apologising to one friend for the ‘fanatical element among the Irish’ and telling another how she had gone to Europe ‘expecting to join a crusade of patriots’ but found instead faction and ‘trouble’.¹⁶² Mackay’s personal opinion of de Valera altered over time: at the congress, she openly admired him; upon her return to New Zealand, she reserved judgement on him; later, she referred to him as ‘fey’ and ‘doctrinaire’.¹⁶³ She maintained relationships with associates of Cumann na nGaedheal, contributing to its journal and joining O’Regan and others in urging Free State authorities to stop maltreating republican prisoners.¹⁶⁴ As Ireland had achieved self-government, Mackay turned her attention to Scottish nationalism, helping launch a branch of the Scottish Home Rule Association in Christchurch and becoming its joint secretary.¹⁶⁵ She kept writing poetry and journalism and remained active in temperance and women’s organisations.

In September 1922, the S.D.I.L.N.Z. concluded its activities and was dissolved. In its final report, the executive summarised the organisation’s brief history, including the selection of representatives for the Irish Race Congress. Of Jessie Mackay, it said,

Miss Mackay had won golden opinions from the friends of Ireland by her consistent and courageous advocacy of the national right of self-determination. ... Miss Mackay kept in constant touch with us, and since her return she has reported fully upon her mission. Needless to say, we all feel that in sending her as one of our representatives we paid her a well-deserved compliment, and that she has worthily represented us at the [congress].¹⁶⁶

The executive also acknowledged the untiring work of the Ladies’ Auxiliary Committee. At Agnes Bourke’s suggestion, it recommended that remaining funds be given to the Ladies’ Auxiliary to augment their relief fund for Irish children.¹⁶⁷

Mackay and the S.D.I.L.N.Z. had achieved their objective: Ireland had gained the right to choose its own government. With the majority of Irish

¹⁶² Macleod, *Voice*, p. 80. Mackay’s response was remarkably similar to O’Reilly’s: see O’Farrell, *Irish in Australia*, p. 286.

¹⁶³ For example, Mackay, diary, 25 Jan. 1922; *New Zealand Tablet*, 7 Sept. 1922; Macleod, *Voice*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁴ Mackay, ‘One Dublin night’; Jessie Mackay, ‘The lint of heaven’ in *Roisin Dubh*, ii, no. 2 (1924), p. 10; *Evening Post*, 23 June 1923.

¹⁶⁵ *The Press*, 28 Aug. 1928.

¹⁶⁶ *New Zealand Tablet*, 28 Sept. 1922.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

voters accepting the Treaty, Mackay and most league members were content with the Irish Free State, a self-governing dominion like New Zealand. They had informed the New Zealand public of the horrors of British policies in Ireland and offered a just solution to the Irish question, self-determination, winning some sympathy and support and pressing authorities to secure a settlement. With the league's dissolution, some former members maintained a connection with Ireland and Irish culture through societies such as Cumann na nGaedheal, while the few who held radical views were free to pursue a republican agenda.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ See Brosnahan, 'Parties'. I am grateful to the readers for their comments and recommendations and to the Hocken and National Library staff for their help in accessing newspapers and other resources.