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CHAPTER THREE

'Ride rough-shod': evictions, sheriffs' sales and the anti-hunting agitation

Shortly after coming to power in April 1880, William Gladstone, who was later to praise Emily Lawless's *Hurrish* as a novel that depicted 'not as an abstract proposition, but as a living reality, the estrangement of the people of Ireland from the law',[1] appointed a royal commission under the Irish landlord, Lord Bessborough, to examine the workings and failures of property law in Ireland. This commission was given the task of exploring issues relating to Irish land acts and, in particular, to the workings of the 1870 Land Act.[2] Forming connections between land agitation and land tenure, the commission traced the problems of Irish land to the misapplication of English property law to Ireland, a country where, the report stated, the relationship between landlords, tenant-farmers and land was substantially different to the relationship recognized by this property law:

> That law may have been beneficial in its operation in a country where it was merely the embodiment of existing relations or the expression of prevailing tendencies; but when transplanted into a country where the relations between landlord and tenant were of a different character [...] not only did it fail to change those relations into the likeness of English traditions, but also, by its attitude of continual antagonism to the prevailing sentiment, it became detestable to tenants, and helped to bring the courts that administered it, and the government that enforced it, into undeserved odium. In the result, a conflict of rights, legal and traditional, has existed in Ireland for centuries.[3]

The report sought to clarify what the main function of property law ideally should be; the purpose of such law was not to force change, but to provide 'legal recognition to the existing state of things'. In Ireland, the commissioners' research had led them to conclude, this was patently not the case and, con-

1 Gladstone, *Special aspects of the Irish question*, 87. 2 Gladstone's first land act, the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, recognized in law a limited version of tenant right custom where it existed in the province of Ulster or in cases of like practice elsewhere in Ireland. 3 *Report of her majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the acts amending the same* [Bessborough Commission], 5.

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sequently, 'a chasm exists [...] between the law and the facts, which has to be filled up somehow.' The commissioners concluded that there were only two possible solutions to this dilemma: 'either the realities of society as we find them, which have existed for centuries, must at last be severed from their foundations, or the law must be altered.'[4] Choosing to endorse the second of these options, the commissioners urged parliament to legislate for the actual relationship between landlord, tenant-farmer and land in Ireland.

Reading the Bessborough Commission's report, it becomes apparent that one of the main obstacles encountered by those seeking to restore faith in the official system of law in Ireland was their own lack of confidence in the appropriateness of the laws they were supposed to endorse. It was not only Irish nationalist leaders who argued that official law could amount to a system of 'legal injustice',[5] barristers sympathetic to the nationalist cause who wrote of the 'landlords' law',[6] and popular ballads that proclaimed the sentiments, 'if it's legally so, 'tis not justice, I know.'[7] Many members of Gladstone's Irish government and even some members of the later Tory government were to share the nationalist belief that in Ireland popular disaffection towards the law was not without some justification.

In his discussion of the serving of processes in Carraroe in 1880, Richard Hawkins describes how mass evictions and particularly the events that took place on the Kirwan estate in the month of June were to convince many in the Irish administration of the injustice of property law in Ireland.[8] Members of this administration, arguing that they had no choice but to enforce the law and recognize a landlord's right to evict, reluctantly assisted with evictions on over seven hundred people who, according to their local government board inspector, were on the point of starvation and simply unable to pay their rent:

> As to the condition of the people they are at all times an exceedingly poor community and the circumstances which have combined to impoverish the whole of the west have rendered them doubly poor [...] A few of them have some little money, and some who have boats avail themselves of an occasional fine day to replenish their store from their long lines. These are the means at present, and charity is interposing to make them suffice till the crop is down.[9]

4 Ibid., 19, 20–1, 21. 5 Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland*, 165. 6 Bodkin, *The devil's work on the Clanricarde estate*, 5. 7 'An Irish peasant's lament'; cited in Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland*, 167. 8 Hawkins, 'Liberals, land and coercion in the summer of 1880'. The Land War was accompanied by a sharp increase in evictions. In 1877, 1900 people were evicted from their farms. By 1883, this figure had risen to 16,786. 9 Henry Robinson, 22 March 1880, NAD, CSO, RP, 1880/13676; cited in Hawkins, 'Liberals, land and coercion in the summer of 1880', 41.

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With reference to the situation at Carraroe, William Forster addressed the parliament on what he alleged to be one of the main difficulties encountered when administering law in Ireland:

> We feel bound to carry out the law, and enforce these evictions with any exercise of force however severely they may press upon this distressed people. So long as I remain where I am, and that law exists, it will be my hard duty to enforce it, because nothing can work so much harm in Ireland as to allow the law to be disobeyed or disregarded. At any exercise of force we must enforce the law. And mark what I say – let the house realise our responsibility, in order that they may realise its own. We must enforce the law, even at the cost of life. On the other hand, we find a feeling of injustice [...] We want to be in the position that when we send down 100 or 200 men to protect a process-server [...] or ejectment, that it should be an ejectment which should be justifiable not merely in a court of law, but in a tribunal of justice.[10]

In her journal, Florence Arnold-Forster, the adopted daughter of William Forster, wrote of communication that passed between her father and the lord lieutenant, Lord Cowper, in which both described their reluctance to 'use the full legal and military [force] of the executive in helping landlords to clear their estates by evicting the peasants under the present circumstances of unavoidable distress and poverty'.[11] William Forster argued on a number of occasions that, in order to be enforceable, property law in Ireland would have to be altered. The Compensation for Disturbance Act which he hoped would make property law more just was, however, rejected by the House of Lords in the August following the Carraroe evictions.

Representatives of the Conservative government with responsibility for Irish affairs were likewise unsure whether law could always be said to equate with justice for the tenant-farmers of Ireland. Major General Sir Redvers Buller, 'pacifier of the African bush', was appointed under the Salisbury administration to restore law and order in the south-west of the country in August 1886. As pointed out by Margaret O'Callaghan,

> Buller, a professional soldier with colonial experience, [...] was [supposed] to provide an antidote to the ambiguity that was seen to have

10 *Hansard 3*, cclii, 860–4, 1722–3; cclv, 135, 420–1; cited in Hawkins, 'Liberals, land and coercion in the summer of 1880', 55–6. 11 *Florence Arnold-Forster's Irish journal*, 6.

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> characterised Liberal policy towards law and order in the period leading up to the introduction of the Home Rule bill in 1886.[12]

After spending just three months in Ireland, however, Buller wrote to the Tory chief secretary, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, to outline what he believed to be one of the principle sources of rural discontent:

> The fact is the bulk of the landlords do nothing for their tenants but extract as much rent as they can by every means in their power, and the law helps them: and the tenant, even if an industrious, hardworking man, has no defence [...] What chance has a tenant under the present law?[13]

In an earlier letter to Hicks-Beach, Buller referred to 'a certain landlord Colonel O'Callaghan – who is what is here described as very obnoxious to his tenantry, and who is certainly in respect to them a hard, overbearing man'.[14] Buller, informing Hicks-Beach that 'most of the tenants cannot really pay,' sought advice as to whether evictions on O'Callaghan's property should be assisted.[15] Hoping to reduce the number of evictions taking place in the southwest, Buller proposed a scheme whereby landlords intent on eviction would be compelled to complete an official form stating the time, place and reason for the proceedings. If inquires should lead Buller to conclude that the proposed eviction was unjust, he could refuse to provide a protection force for the sheriff and his evicting party. The attorney general, Sir Richard Webster, was one of a number of Conservatives to vigorously oppose this initiative on the grounds that it denied Irish landlords full recourse to the law.[16]

Alfred Turner, who was appointed divisional magistrate under the Conservative government, later participated in evictions on Colonial O'Callaghan's Bodyke estate in Co. Clare. In an interview with a Press Association journalist at the time of the evictions, Turner stated that 'these are the most unjust evictions I ever saw, and you may tell it from me,'[17] while in his memoirs he recalled that 'the proceedings were in the highest degree distasteful to us all, but it was our duty to enable the sheriff to carry out his work.'[18] According to Virginia Crossman, there were a number of resignations from the police force in Turner's district in the spring of that year. John Dillon, reminding Balfour of this embarrassing situation, sought clarification in parliament

12 O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a nationalist Ireland*, 132. 13 Buller to Hicks-Beach, 15 Nov. 1886. St Aldwyn MSS. Cited in Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, 155. 14 Buller to Hicks-Beach, n.d.; cited in O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a nationalist Ireland*, 137. 15 Addendum, special query to Hicks-Beach appended to previous letter. Cited in O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a nationalist Ireland*, 137. 16 See Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, 141–2. 17 Higginbottom, *The vivid life*, 79. 18 Turner, *Sixty years of a soldier's life*, 224.

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as to whether the reason given by seven of those who had resigned was not 'that the proposed coercion act of the government would render the position of the Irish constabulary intolerable, and that they must decline to be the instruments of carrying out any further evictions which they know to be unjust'.[19]

Nevertheless, impetus for the transformations in the land system that took place in Ireland in the 1880s should be traced neither to the 'altruism' of the colonial government nor even to moving speeches by the nationalist leadership, but to the tenant-farmers themselves and their relationship to the land they worked. When Charles Stewart Parnell announced at a meeting in Westport that the tenant-farmers of Ireland should 'hold a firm grip' of their 'homesteads and lands', he was accused by both English conservative newspapers and mainstream Irish nationalist newspapers of implanting dangerous ideas into the minds of the Irish rural poor.[20] A journalist from the *Times* asked C.S. Parnell whether, in the context of his Westport speech, he would be surprised 'if ignorant rustics carried away the impression that in his view it was right to snap their fingers at the law and the rights of property, and to treat the holdings which they farm as their own',[21] while an editorial in the *Freeman's Journal* reminded nationalist leaders that 'the law gives the landlord the right to his rent or to the land.'[22] As both of these newspapers interpreted changes in the Irish political climate in terms of elite stimulus and subaltern response, they failed to recognize that C.S. Parnell was not necessarily dictating that his audience develop a radically new attitude to the holdings they farmed, but perhaps merely acknowledging that an attitude which already existed could become a crucial component of Irish agrarian agitation.

George Campbell, a Scottish employee of the English government in India, wrote about Irish land tenure over ten years before C.S. Parnell's speech and was one of a number of commentators at that time to describe the actualities of land relations in Ireland as anomalous from the perspective of English property law: 'It is hardly possible to approach the subject without first realising this – viz., that in Ireland a landlord is not a landlord, and a tenant is not a tenant – in the English sense.' In England, according to Campbell, the term 'tenant' is understood to refer to 'a man holding under a contract of a commercial character'. In Ireland, 'the man whom we call a tenant is something for which we have not even a word.'[23] In Scotland and England, Campbell pointed out, it was expected that the landlord would reclaim waste land, put up fences, build outhouses, etc., while in Ireland, as in India, it was generally the tenant-farmer who

19 *Hansard 3*, cccxiii, 1123 (18 April 1887). Cited in Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth-century Ireland*, 167–8. **20** 'The question of rents: the Westport meeting', *Freeman's Journal* (9 June 1879). **21** 'The Westport meeting', *Times* (11 June 1879). Cited in the *Freeman's Journal* (12 June 1879). **22** 'Editorial', *Freeman's Journal* (9 June 1879). **23** Campbell, *The Irish land*, 5, 58, 58.

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was responsible for any improvement to property.[24] Campbell was not alone in arguing that these contrasting practices were symptomatic of very different property relations. Frederick Waymouth Gibbs, an English barrister who shared Campbell's conviction that Irish land tenure was 'at variance with the spirit of English law', likewise drew attention to the Irish custom whereby 'as a rule the permanent improvements are [...] made almost wholly by tenants.'[25] The later Bessborough Commission was to point to one of the practical difficulties that resulted from this discrepancy between law and practice:

> In Ireland it has been the general rule for tenants to do more, at all events, than the mere agricultural operations necessary to insure them such a profit as could be realized within the time which constituted the legal terms of their tenancies.[26]

Campbell, acknowledging that it might seem 'absurd to English ears that a man who has come in under a definite contract of a mercantile character [...] should claim any right to hold beyond the terms of his contract', informed his readers that in Ireland contracts are invariably at conflict with custom.[27] While contracts between tenant-farmers and landlords asserted absolute rights of property as vested in the landlord, all classes in Ireland, not just the Irish tenant-farmer, described the tenant 'as "owning a farm", "selling his farm", "having bought a farm", "having inherited a farm"'.[28] After questioning tenant-farmers and landlords in nearly every region of Ireland, Campbell was to state that 'it is well known that the tenants habitually dispose of their farms by formal will, charge them with fortunes for daughters, and in every respect deal with them as property.'[29] In Ireland, even those who are 'not inclined to assert [tenants'] rights of property against those of the landlords [are found to be] constantly, and as it were unconsciously, applying the language of property to the tenure of farms'.[30] For Campbell, putting 'out of sight the customary law of the country' and asserting that 'the theoretical English law is the only law' had resulted in the following situation: 'in theory the landlords are absolute owners; but in fact are they so? Most assuredly not.' Under these circumstances, 'it is a mere superstition to talk as if it would be a sacrilege to acknowledge some sort

24 In a number of passages in *The Irish land* and in a later essay, 'The tenure of land in India', George Campbell drew his readers' attention to similarities between the Irish tenant-farmer and the Indian *ryot*. See, for example, Campbell, 'The tenure of land in India', 175. **25** Gibbs, *English law and Irish tenure*, 80, 13–14. **26** Bessborough Commission, 4. **27** Campbell, *The Irish land*, 16. **28** Ibid., 8. **29** Ibid. In support of his thesis, Campbell enclosed in *The Irish land* a copy of the will of Jeremiah Sheehan, a tenant-farmer, who bequeathed his house and land to his eldest daughter Margaret. The will, dated 18 June 1869, states that Margaret 'who is to be the proprietor of the place, is to pay the debts due of the place'. **30** Ibid.

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of claim to a property which is already so fixed in the hearts and language of the people of Ireland, low and high.' Recognizing 'the occupiers as in some sense co-proprietors of the soil', according to Campbell, would 'only be giving the people by law what in practice they already have'.[31]

Forming a similar conclusion to the later Bessborough Commission, Campbell argued that 'the whole difficulty arises from our applying English ideas and English laws to a country where they are opposed to facts and to [...] the customs of the people.' The tensions that Campbell claimed to be a direct result of 'the clashing of these two systems' were, he stated, particularly pronounced in times of eviction. Under English law, landlords were entitled to evict and could seek the help of the police in order to do so. Reminding his readers that 'the law administered by the ordinary tribunals' was not the only law in Ireland, Campbell asserted that 'it is an abominable state of things when any wrong-headed man might throw a country into a rebellion by ignoring rights which the law has strangely ignored.' An example of this type of wrong-headed man, for Campbell, was a landlord who 'tries to take possession of the land as his own, or to give it to whom he chooses'. As under the law that the colonial authorities had mistakenly dismissed as 'nothing but "lewd customs"', no such right to evict existed, this man would be 'at once met by a law stronger than the law'.[32] Campbell concluded from his research that the tenantry who attempted to prevent evictions taking place interpreted their actions not in the context of breaking the law, but in terms of protecting what they believed to be their legitimate right to the land.[33]

Reflecting upon the issues raised in George Campbell's *The Irish land* encourages us to engage with a question that has long been a source of heated debate within Irish historiography: What were the concepts of property that Campbell believed had been unsuccessfully erased by English law in Ireland? The translation, transcription and publication of the Brehon law tracts in the latter half of the nineteenth century brought a new impetus to this debate, functioning as a source of reference for both those who sought to prove that prior to the conquest of the country the Irish had no concept of absolute property ownership and those who were keen to dismiss such claims as a primitivist fallacy. The historian, A.G. Richey, introduced the fourth volume of the *Ancient laws and institutes of Ireland* by arguing that for the 'Irish tribes' the 'legal unit is not the individual but the household; the head of the house acquires property for

31 Ibid., 6, 6, 6, 9, 85, 86. 32 Ibid., 5–6, 6, 7, 124, 7, 30, 7. 33 In *England and Ireland*, 13, John Stuart Mill, an avid supporter of peasant proprietary, puts a different twist on this argument: 'Even the Whiteboy and the Rockite, in their outrages against the landlord, fought for, not against, the sacredness of what was property in their eyes; for it is not the right of the rent-receiver, but the right of the cultivator, with which the idea of property is connected in the Irish popular mind.'

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his household, and possesses it as the manager of an implied partnership, not as an absolute owner'.[34] In a later passage, however, Richey referred the reader to a Brehon law tract, 'Divisions of land', which he claimed was

> sufficient to put an end, once and for ever, to an assertion, which seems to have become an axiom adopted by all authors on Irish history and antiquities, and which has also gained considerable political notoriety, namely, that the ancient Irish had not attained to the idea of exclusive ownership in land, and that all the land, until the influence of English law prevailed, was considered the joint property of the tribe and family.[35]

For James Connolly, common ownership of land or a 'primitive communism' that in other countries had failed to acquire 'a higher status than that conferred by the social sanction of unlettered and uneducated tribes', had in Ireland

> formed part of the well defined social organisations of a nation of scholars and students, recognised by Chief and Tanist, Brehon and Bard, as the inspiring principle of their collective life, and the basis of their national system of jurisprudence.[36]

In contrast, the historian and activist, Eoin MacNeill, was critical of those who he claimed had 'come to Irish law as a happy hunting ground for primitive big game' expecting to find 'evidence of a primitive custom of tribal communism', but instead discovering that 'the ancient Irish jurists, all of them, seem to have a bias towards private as distinguished from collective property.'[37] MacNeill's disparaging remarks were directed in particular at the renowned sociologist, Sir Henry Maine, whose writings on the Brehon laws in *The early history of institutions* was in his opinion indicative of such an approach. Notwithstanding MacNeill's claims to the contrary, Maine's research into the Brehon laws did not lead him to reject the significance of communal property ownership to early Irish society and focus on those aspects of the Brehon laws that seemed most in tune with the concept of private ownership. Acknowledging that many Irish commentators 'resent the assertion that the land belonged to the tribe in common as practically imputing to the ancient Irish that utter barbarism to which private property is unknown',[38] Maine put forward a nuanced analysis in which the Brehon law tracts point to the existence of a form of private ownership, but not to absolute property rights:

34 Richey (ed.), *The ancient laws and institutes of Ireland*, vol. 4, cv–cvi. 35 Ibid., cxxxix. 36 Connolly, *Erin's hope*, 2. 37 MacNeill, *Early Irish laws and institutions*, 86–7. 38 Maine, *The early history of institutions*, 128.

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> It is perfectly true that the form of private ownership in land which grew out of the appropriations of portions of the tribal domain to individual households of tribesmen is plainly recognised by the Brehon lawyers; yet the rights of private owners are limited by the controlling rights of a brotherhood of kinsmen, and the control is in some respects even more stringent than that exercised over separate property by an Indian village-community.[39]

Those working on the ground in early modern Ireland also commented on landholding practices at that time. In the early seventeenth century, English land surveyors were to discover that Gaelic landholding was an extremely complex system with significant regional variations. What these surveyors soon found out, however, was that any attempt to assess 'ownership' of land, as defined under English Common Law, would invariably run into difficulties.[40] Gaelic landholding may have differed from region to region, but certain characteristics were common throughout the country, the most notable of which was the absence of a concept of absolute ownership of land. Even the overlord, who occupied the highest rung of this landholding system, did not 'own' land. Certain lands were attached to his office, but, as Michael Glancy, a more recent commentator, points out, these demesne lands were technically the property of the entire sept as opposed to the property of the individual lord.[41] In early Irish society, where absolute ownership of land was rare, occupancy was a matter of some importance. Even the unfree gained a right of inheritance after thirty years uninterrupted occupation.

It is questionable whether Irish tenant-farmers in the mid to late nineteenth-century fully adhered, as George Campbell proposed, to the concepts and practices of Gaelic landholding. Nonetheless, the most common modes of resistance exercised against sheriffs, process-servers and bailiffs suggest that while the Irish tenantry believed they had a right to the land they occupied, this sense of 'ownership' was by no means individualistic. When S.J. McMeekin, the agent's manager for the Kirwan estate in Carraroe, requested the constable at Carraroe RIC barrack for an escort of four men to enforce the serving of processes, the constable informed him that 'he would not leave the barrack for the purpose with 100 men, and that at least 200 must be brought there.'[42] The constable warned McMeekin that even with that number of police, there is 'a village on Carraroe North called Derryarty where no ejectment will be served without shooting down a passage through the mob'.[43] As this constable would have been

39 Ibid., 89–90. **40** See Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster*, 42. **41** Glancy, 'The primates and the church lands of Armagh', 372. **42** Cited in Hawkins, 'Liberals, land and coercion in the summer of 1880', 46. **43** Ibid.

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aware, it was common practice for large numbers of men, women and children to gather to prevent the serving and enforcing of processes on holdings whose occupants they may never have met. The church bells or horns that warned of the approach of process-servers and eviction parties could assemble a considerable crowd in a matter of minutes. The policemen and soldiers who were given the task of protecting those serving and enforcing processes were often compelled to retreat when faced with such assemblages.

Other methods employed to prevent or delay evictions required the labor of a large portion of the local community. The practices of fortifying houses and blocking the passage of process-servers and sheriffs by placing boulders, trees or other more unusual objects in their path point to a collective resistance to evictions. In 1881, when a county sub-sheriff travelled to New Pallas to visit a landlord in the process of evicting a tenant, he found his passage 'obstructed at intervals by heaps of stones'. The final impediment that he encountered consisted of

> a number of dead cats, which depended from a line drawn across the road, either end being fastened to a tree. This, although apparently the most harmless obstruction, was near being the most serious, as the cats having come in contact with the horse's head, the animal became restive, and was with difficulty restrained from taking flight.[44]

In 1886, evictions on Lord Clanricarde's estate in Co. Galway were hampered by an operation which, L.P. Curtis Jnr tells us, 'in design and execution resembled a medieval siege'.[45] Enforcing evictions on this estate cost the authorities £3000 and required the assistance of two resident magistrates, more than five hundred RIC men, and a number of bailiffs and emergency men. In August 1888, the property of a tenant threatened with eviction at Coolroe, Co. Wexford was transformed into a high-security fortress. A number of trees were felled and placed on the road of approach. Earthworks twenty feet high were thrown up around the man's house, protecting it from demolition and the battering ram. A deep trench was dug between the earthworks and the house making entry to the house extremely difficult, as did the iron bars that were fastened to the windows with chains. The siege finally ended when a local parish priest intervened to prevent the inspector in charge opening fire.[46] Orchestrated action of the kind that formed the no-rent manifesto and the later Plan of Campaign was successful, therefore, not simply because of the popularity of the nation-

44 'Eviction in New Pallas', *Freeman's Journal* (9 Dec. 1881). **45** Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, 139. **46** See *Freeman's Journal* (17–18 Aug. 1888). See also Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, 245.

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alist leadership, but because the concept of co-operative resistance to threats to property and land was already deeply ingrained in Irish rural life.

In *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India*, the subalternist historian Ranajit Guha notes that conspiracy theories tend to figure prominently in official interpretations of Indian peasant uprisings: 'The conspirators are in most of these cases suspected to be members of one or the other rural elite group on the simple assumption that the peasant has no initiative of his own and is a mere instrument of his master.'[47] This tendency is also evident in the writings of officials based in Ireland in the late nineteenth century. In *Ireland under the Land League*, for example, Clifford Lloyd attempted to blame 'disorder' in rural Ireland on Land League leaders whose speeches, he claimed, were the source of the present discontent and whose tyranny had terrorized the people into submission. Lloyd's text concludes with the following dramatic assertion: 'blood the Land League wanted, and blood it caused to flow, with a cruelty and savageness unsurpassed in history.'[48] What Lloyd tried to indicate through such statements was both the externality of the agents of 'disorder' and the natural passivity of the peasantry. As is the case in the writings Guha discusses, the suggestion is that the poorer rural dwellers have lost 'their innocence thanks to the irruption of outsiders' and would be 'blissfully reconciled to landlord rule' if left alone.[49] When engaged in reading Lloyd's account of his work in Ireland, however, it becomes clear that the relationship between Land League branches and agitating tenant-farmers and labourers was far more complex, variable and ambiguous than his closing statement suggests. While Lloyd, in a number of passages, attributed 'lawlessness' to the secret design of a small number of instigators, his description of individual events reveals the extent to which agrarian agitation was shaped by the poorest members of the rural population. On Lord Granard's estate in Co. Longford, for example, process-servers, 'protected by large bodies of police and the Royal Dragoons', were forced to turn back when they encountered 'the people "assembled in their thousands" armed with pitchforks and staves'.[50] An even more frustrating series of events outlined by Lloyd occurred when he was on his way to rescue an agent's son who he believed to be in danger and found his way blocked by three walls, each bigger than the previous one, which had been built in the middle of the road. Forced to dismantle the walls to allow passage to police and army vehicles, Lloyd found on his return that the walls had been rebuilt and had to be dismantled once more.[51]

In his account in *The fall of feudalism in Ireland* of the particular events he witnessed during his trip to Carraroe in 1880, Michael Davitt made it clear to the

47 Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 80. 48 Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League*, 243. 49 Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 222. 50 Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League*, 25. 51 See Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League*, Chapter 8.

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reader that what he referred to as the 'battle of Carraroe' was a popular-based agitation in which he played little part.[52] Davitt noted that 'it required no outside influence [...] to rouse a village or a town-land in opposition' to evictions. The process-server's arrival in Carraroe, Davitt tells us, was 'looked for by sentinels on hill-tops and other places of observation, and, when his police escort would be seen approaching, horns would be sounded or other signals be given which would summon all within hearing to repair to the scene of the process-server's work'. News of attempts to serve processes at Carraroe was 'sent to all the neighbouring islands and inland to Rossmuck and the western part of the Joyce country for aid'. By the following morning, Davitt tells us, 'the mountaineers [...] succeeded in bringing in reinforcements from all the islands off the coast as well as from the interior of the mountains, mustering altogether some two thousand men in front of the constabulary barracks.' In his description of these events, Davitt refers to himself as an 'intruder' who 'women and children, in their bawneens and red petticoats [...] greet [...] by kindly glance or scowling looks, according to the impression which my appearance created'. Davitt, carrying a notebook in which he kept a record of his impressions, '*observed* the road had been dug across some six feet of its width, with the evident intention of cutting off communication between Spiddal, the Royal Irish Constabulary base, and Carraroe' (my emphasis). He was 'more than delighted to *observe* by this that the mountaineers had some practical ideas of warfare' (my emphasis). He '*observed*, a quarter of a mile farther on, that a huge rock had been rolled down from the precipice upon the road passing at its base' and speculated that the purpose behind this action must be to give 'annoyance to the peelers' convoys' (my emphasis).[53] The relationship between Davitt, one of the most prominent leaders of the Land League, and the inhabitants of this Connemara district is depicted in *The fall of feudalism in Ireland* as that of interested spectator and active participants.

The contrast between collective resistance, as practised by the rural poor, and what was generally perceived to be the more isolated nature of the landlords' response was a cause of considerable concern for colonial commentators and members of successive Irish governments. In the context of the impediments, often quite literal, that he encountered in even the most mundane aspects of his work, Clifford Lloyd drew attention to the landlords' unwillingness in the early 1880s to form counter-combinations in response to the all-too-successful combinations of the rural poor: 'there is no cohesion on the part of the landlords, nor among other people whose conscience, loyalty, or interests prompted them to resist the self-created authority set up in their midst.'[54] Nearly

52 Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland*, 213. 53 Ibid., 213, 213, 217, 218, 213–14, 214. 54 Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land*

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ten years later, the Conservative chief secretary, A.J. Balfour, was to complain about the Irish landlords who 'always cry out before they are hurt when the government is concerned: – but when the National League is concerned, they fold their hands and do nothing'.[55] Angered by a landlord in Co. Galway who had surrendered to the Plan of Campaign and those who had failed to provide this landlord with adequate financial and moral support, Balfour wrote to his uncle that '[i]t is utterly useless to try and help the Irish landlords by trifling grants from the Treasury – when they show themselves so utterly incapable of the simplest combination to be destroyed piecemeal in this fashion.'[56] Recording his impressions of 'landlord and English interest' in Cos. Kerry and Clare during the autumn of 1886, Alfred Milner was likewise highly critical of the individualist nature of the landlords' response to the Plan:

> It is very hard to combine Irish landlords at all, [even harder] to combine the self-centred and ignorant squireens of a backward county like Kerry. They have no notions of organisation, and are only too apt to think it safest; as of course it is easiest, to make the best terms they can for themselves, and let their neighbours sink or swim as they may.[57]

The Plan of Campaign, though limited to a relatively small number of estates, was, as Virginia Crossman has pointed out, 'subject to intense media scrutiny and came to be seen as a trial of strength between tenants, supported by the National League, and landlords, supported by the government'.[58] The problem for the government was that while there were a number of well-known incidences when landlords had refused to lend or give money to fellow landlords made insolvent by the Plan, it was generally acknowledged that the League had little difficulty in organizing tenants and in ensuring that they were supported by the wider community.

Notwithstanding accusations of disunity directed against the landlord class by Lloyd, Balfour, Milner and others, there were a number of organizations established by landlords during the 1880s the sole purpose of which was to provide support for Irish landlords and their associates. The services offered by the Anti-boycotting Association, the Anti-Plan of Campaign Association, the Land Corporation, the Irish Defence Union, the Irish Land Committee, the Orange Emergency Committee, county defence unions, and the Property

League, 41. **55** Balfour to Salisbury, 2 Nov. 1889; Salisbury MSS, cited in Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, 217. **56** Balfour to Salisbury, 29 Feb. 1888; Salisbury MSS, cited in ibid., 239. **57** Milner, *Journal of a visit to Ireland, Sept.–Oct. 1886*. Milner papers, Bodleian Library, MSS 60. **58** Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth-century Ireland*, 157. For a contemporary account of the workings of the Plan on five of these estates, see Anon., *The Plan of Campaign illustrated*.

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Defence Association included providing Protestant labourers from the north of the country for boycotted landlords, supplying bailiffs to assist sheriffs, providing armed men to protect farms from which tenants had been evicted, protecting 'landgrabbers' from intimidation, and sending representatives to bid for farms or stock being sold for rent due.

In a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* in January 1882, Earl Fitzwilliam, a founder member of the Property Defence Association, outlined what this latter service entailed:

> in the case of dishonest tenants who refuse to pay rent and whose cattle and farms are put up for sale by legal process, the Property Defence Association comes forward to bid and ensure a *bona fide* sale, which, without that aid, cannot take place, as the Land League prohibits anyone from purchasing in these cases.[59]

Refusal to pay rent could result in a civil bill process, signed by the landlord, being served on the tenant-farmer requiring him/her to appear before the county court judge. If the county court judge found in favour of the landlord, he would direct the sheriff to execute the civil bill decree to obtain the debt owed. Under this decree, the sheriff was entitled to seize goods belonging to the tenant-farmer and auction them to the highest bidder. As Fitzwilliam's letter indicates, however, sheriff's sales in the early 1880s were to take on a significance beyond that of the stock offered up for sale. In February 1881, Charles Stewart Parnell congratulated the 'people' for their refusal 'to bid for stock offered for sale in cases of distraint for unjust rent', adding that 'only in a very few instances can the organisation of the landlords and focus of the Government be sufficient to enable an oppressive landlord to collect his rent by these means.'[60] To guarantee that landlords did receive the money due to them in rent, an organization consisting primarily of landlords bid for and often bought property and stock it probably had no specific use for. The main purpose of this exercise, Fitzwilliam's letter makes clear, was to ensure that a sale was seen to have taken place and, consequently, to provide visual proof that Irish landlords were capable of counteracting the combinations that worked against them.

Reports that appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Leinster Leader* towards the end of 1881 and beginning of 1882 confirm Charles Stewart Parnell's and Earl Fitzwilliam's depictions of sheriff's sales as a primary focus of rural tensions.[61] 'An abortive sheriff's sale at Dalkey', an article published in the *Freeman's*

59 'The defence of property in Ireland', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Jan. 1882). **60** *Freeman's Journal* (1 March 1881). **61** See 'Sheriff's sale at Naas', *Leinster Leader* (17 Sept. 1881); 'Abortive sheriff's sale at Dalkey', *Freeman's Journal* (8 Dec.

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Journal on 8 December 1881, is representative of the kind of coverage such events received. When stock (animals, carts, hay, etc.) belonging to Mortimer Doyle, a tenant-farmer who owed his landlord rent, was put up for auction, the only bidder was Mr Hanna of the Property Defence Association who purchased two cows. The cows were then driven to Bray by Property Defence men who, we are told, required the protection of about a dozen policemen.[62] In descriptions of sheriff's sales at Keady and on Lord Mayo's estate, the *Freeman's Journal* clarified why a substantial police presence might have been deemed necessary on such occasions. In Keady, 'there was a large crowd present, who groaned the agent and Emergency men,'[63] while on Lord Mayo's estate there was a 'large assembly of people, and their numbers were momentarily increased by the ringing of chapel bells in the district and the blowing of horns'.[64] In the latter case, where the haycocks put up for auction were 'decorated with pictures taken from the *Weekly Freeman* of Davitt, Parnell, and Dillon', a tenant's wife 'opened a bag of feathers and [...] thickly coated the uniform of the police'.[65]

An article that appeared in the *Leinster Leader* in September 1881, focused on events that occurred in conjunction with a sheriff's sale at Naas:

> Half Kilcullen and that side of the country turned out to show their sympathy with the tenants, and as the long cavalcade, preceded by the fife and drum band, playing national airs, defiled into the town, the spectacle was at once suggestive and impressive.[66]

The account given in the *Freeman's Journal* of Captain L'Estrange's response to the bands that arrived in Edenderry for a sheriff's sale suggests that these defiantly-festive gatherings had become all too familiar to some officials:

> [Captain L'Estrange] next turned to the head-constable, and told him if any band appeared on the scene to break every instrument they would have. At the time, no band was present, but just as the sale was over the Rhode Fife and Drum Band was heard approaching [...] [Captain L'Estrange] marched a party of police rapidly up, took their large drum, and had it brought into barrack. It was subsequently restored, with the top and bottom cut through in several places. When Mr Wyer's cattle were set free they were marched up the street, and the Edenderry Brass

1881); 'Sheriff's sale in Thurles', *Freeman's Journal* (16 Dec. 1881); 'Sheriff's sale in Trimblestown', *Freeman's Journal* (21 Dec. 1881); 'Sheriff's sale in Edenderry', *Freeman's Journal* (31 Dec. 1881); 'Sheriff's sale at Keady', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Jan. 1882); 'Sheriff's sale near Edenderry – seizure of cars', *Freeman's Journal* (6 Jan. 1882). **62** 'Abortive sheriff's sale at Dalkey', *Freeman's Journal* (8 Dec. 1881). **63** 'Sheriff's sale at Keady', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Jan. 1882). **64** 'Sheriff's sales', *Freeman's Journal* (24 Dec. 1881). **65** Ibid. **66** 'Sheriff's sale at Naas', *Leinster Leader* (17 Sept. 1881).

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> Band suddenly turned out and played them round the market square. Just as they had completed its circuit they saw the captain and a large body of police rapidly approaching, and fled into shelter.[67]

When a tenant-farmer bought back his fifteen cattle that had been taken for rent due, Captain L'Estrange, who was in charge of troops brought to Edenderry to oversee this sale, accused him of being 'one of a band of rogues who would not honestly pay their rent, but was taking up his whole time hunting for their pigs and cattle to seize on and make them pay'.[68]

As Captain L'Estrange's comments suggest, preparations for sheriff's sales could be just as frustrating for the authorities as the sales themselves. Hunting and herding cattle and pigs were not the activities that this army man believed should fill his working day. Sheriff's sales could not take place, however, until the sheriff had physical possession of the goods to be sold and this stock was not always easily obtained. The soldiers who set out to confiscate vehicles to transport crops and animals to a sheriff's sale near Edenderry at the beginning of January 1882, found their efforts thwarted as 'drivers escaped by galloping at full speed'.[69] Even with transportation, the task of seizing stock was far from straightforward. According to the *Freeman's Journal*, cavalry and infantry drafted into Edenderry to escort members of the Orange Emergency Committee to a farm six miles outside Edenderry found that 'some hundreds of men spent the night cutting down immense trees, tearing up the roads, and breaking down bridges, so that immense labour had to be expended before they reached the farm.'[70] Moreover, upon reaching a farm, it might be discovered that the stock had already been removed. In November 1881, the *Leinster Leader* reported on the case of a member of the Clonmore branch of the Land League, Mr James Carty, who had refused to pay his rent. After receiving information that his stock was to be confiscated and sold, three thousand men and women, many of whom had to be turned away, are said to have gathered to save Mr Carty's potatoes and turnips. Following the work in the fields, the ceremonial aspect of the proceedings took place. The men and women 'marched off in processional order to Clonmore, a distance of two miles. The horses and cars headed the proces-

67 'Sheriff's sale in Edenderry', *Freeman's Journal* (31 Dec. 1881). In Ireland, music and musical instruments have long been associated with agrarian agitation. In a footnote to 'Topographies of terror', Luke Gibbons pinpoints the playing of pipes as an ominous signal for the mobilization of various Irish agrarian movements, including the Whiteboys, the Rightboys and the Ribbonmen. See Gibbons, 'Topographies of terror', 43–4: note 40. Official hostility to musicians and musical instruments was not unique to the Irish context. In India during the *hool*, the prohibition and destruction of Santal drums and flutes was an integral part of the counterinsurgency policy adopted by the Government of Bengal. See Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 231. 68 'Sheriff's sale in Edenderry', *Freeman's Journal* (31 Dec. 1881). 69 'Sheriff's sales near Edenderry – seizure of cars', *Freeman's Journal* (6 Jan. 1882). 70 'The latest emergency expedition', *Freeman's Journal* (12 Jan. 1882).

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sion, the drivers standing erect with their glistening steel forks on their shoulders.' Demonstrating his awareness of the symbolic importance of such occasions, the reporter tells us that the 'men on foot marched four deep, shouldering their forks, shovels, and spades, as if they were weapons of defence, which in one sense they were'.[71]

Captain L'Estrange was not the only official who was critical of the nature of the tasks that the British army was expected to perform in the early 1880s when based in Ireland. The employment of British army units in providing escorts for sheriffs, process-servers, bailiffs, seized cattle, etc. was a cause of considerable concern for military authorities and the War Office. The breakdown of civil power in Ireland and subsequent involvement of the army in police work was interpreted by many as a violation of the legal status of the soldier. When it was proposed in 1882 that the Irish practice whereby soldiers performed police duties should be adopted in Egypt, the then secretary for war, H.C.E. Childers, outlined to Gladstone the War Office's objections to this policy:

> The question is not with me in the least one of etiquette or professional prejudice [...] It is one of law. Soldiers under the army/mutiny act can only obey a military officer on shore. They could not be tried for breach of discipline and they might be liable to be tried for murder, if they obeyed anyone else. It is therefore most important to comply with the law. Merely calling a particular operation 'police duty' would not alter the legal position of a soldier.[72]

Men and women like those who marched away from Mr Carty's farm carrying their farming implements as if they were rifles had, however, dictated the terms by which the Land War would be fought and the British army was forced to spend much of its time engaged in duties which under ordinary circumstances would be considered within the domain of the civil forces. In December 1881, the government appointed an auxiliary force drawn mainly from the army reserve to assist the RIC in the day-to-day policing of rural Ireland. Moreover, members of the Rifle Brigade and Guardsmen were often enlisted for protection duty. As Donal O'Sullivan points out in his history of policing in Ireland, it was not uncommon at this time to see 'two neat, well-turned-out Guardsmen, in white jackets, deep in the mountains of Kerry, protecting a herdsman on an evicted farm'.[73]

In *Ireland under the Land League*, Clifford Lloyd described the capture and transportation of livestock as a particularly odious exercise that often required the assistance of the army. Lloyd, ill from recurrent bouts of malaria, set out on

71 '"No rent", in Carlow', *Leinster Leader* (12 Nov. 1881). **72** Childers to Gladstone, 16 July 1882; BM Add.; MSS 44130, cited in Hawkins, 'An army on police work, 1881–2', 83. **73** O'Sullivan, *The Irish constabularies, 1822–1922*, 160.

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expeditions which 'frequently went on for four or five days running' to seize farm animals which would then be brought 'under a strong guard with fixed bayonets' to the nearest railway station.[74] Referring to one of these expeditions in some depth, Lloyd informed his readership that 'this was a long and troublesome day's work, and I was suffering such pain that it was with difficulty I kept the saddle.' In Chapter 3 of *Ireland under the Land League*, Lloyd admitted that, in the parts of the country in which he was based, he had become increasingly associated with evictions and the seizure of stock and that this association made his job all the more arduous. While on a week-long expedition with an agent, a sheriff, 'sixty men of the 48th, under Captain Bell, sixty men of the Royal Irish Constabulary, thirty horses, and six army service-waggons, carrying the bedding, food, and necessaries for the week, the sub-sheriff, with about ten subordinates', Lloyd was compelled to travel the countryside at night. As soon as he was seen approaching, however, church bells would be rung and the cattle he had come to seize would be hidden in old sheds or driven up the sides of mountains. Furthermore, the animals that he did succeed in seizing were regularly prevented passage through villages and towns. According to Lloyd, a sheriff embarking on this task in Kilmallock requested a force 'made up of a squadron of the Greys, detachments of the 25th, 48th, and 57th Regiments and Transport Corps, which, with about 200 of the Royal Irish Constabulary, make a total of about 500 men'. Lloyd described a separate incident when a gathering of men, women and children intent on 'wanton acts of rebellion against the law and the constituted authority of the land' blocked the streets of a village, forcing Lloyd to turn back and find an alternative route for the cattle. These expeditions, Lloyd acknowledged, generally concluded in the following manner. The cattle he had managed to confiscate were taken with difficulty to the railway station and loaded onto trucks. At that moment, the tenant-farmer who owned them would appear and pay the rent he owed. Lloyd would then allow the cattle to be unloaded and driven back through the countryside to the farms they had been taken from. Lloyd, perhaps signalling his displeasure at the failure of the landlord class to organize themselves as effectively, begrudgingly admitted that 'it spoke much for the strength of the Land League, when the tenants obeyed instructions costing them such an amount of annoyance and money.'[75]

Hunting was one activity that brought the often-isolated landed élite together and emphasized the bonds that existed between them. The feeling of camaraderie achieved when hunting foxes, hares and stags across tenanted land had a significance, therefore, beyond that of a mere pleasurable pastime. As stated in the *Sportsman's year-book for 1881*, 'there is no place and no pursuit, whether of business

74 Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League*, 127. 75 Ibid., 128, 163, 121, 154, 128.

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and pleasure, where men are so much made to feel of one family.'[76] Catholic farmers of substantial acreage were not prevented from taking part in such hunts, but their family status was likely to be that of poor relation. As pointed out by L.P. Curtis Jnr in 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', financial considerations alone dictated that 'the hard or hearty core of virtually every hunt consisted of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy: Church of Ireland as well as landed and wealthy.'[77] There was quite simply no other class in Ireland at that time that could have afforded the trappings of an active hunting life as pursued by the Anglo-Irish.

The event with which Mark Bence-Jones chooses to open his nostalgic account of the twilight of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy is the visit to Ireland by 'the most dashing and glamorous huntswoman in Europe'.[78] The empress of Austria's trips to Ireland in 1879 and 1880 and her decision not to return in 1881 when 'hunting had virtually been brought to a standstill through acts of sabotage and violence' is the narrative Bence-Jones employs to tell us of the final triumph of a class before its subsequent decline.[79] The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and the success of Home Rule candidates in the 1874 General Election are cited as important landmarks in the downfall of the Anglo-Irish landed class, but, having gained access to the papers of a number of Ascendancy families, Bence-Jones surmises that it was the Land War and the anti-hunting campaign that marked one of the most significant moments in the history of the Ascendancy. A popular-based agitation that forced all but two or three of Ireland's fox-hunts to temporarily suspend hunting and at least five hunt committees to break up their establishments becomes, in Bence-Jones's account, the ultimate betrayal – that of the landlord class by their tenantry.

L.P. Curtis Jnr provides an analysis of what he quite rightly describes as this 'neglected aspect of the Land War' in his highly informative essay 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882'.[80] In this study, Curtis, keen to point out that 'from start to finish the anti-hunting campaign was primarily a grass-roots movement with little or no support from the League executive in Dublin,' traces the impetus for the disruptions to hunting to the decision by League branches in Queen's County (now Co. Laois) and Co. Kildare to protest repressive measures against those 'reasonably suspected' under the Protection of Person and Property Act of 1881. For Curtis, the anti-hunting agitation was a 'formidable challenge to one of the landlords' more cherished rituals' in response to the arrest of Land League 'suspects'. The demonstrators, Curtis concludes, 'were expressing their hatred of coercion by depriving the landlords of their favourite pastime. They hoped that the campaign would remind those responsible for coercion of what

76 *Sportsman's year-book for 1881* (London, 1881), 9. **77** Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 354. **78** Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the Ascendancy*, 1. **79** Ibid., 38–9. **80** Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 350.

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had been done to the leaders and liberties of the Irish people'.[81] In support of this thesis, Curtis draws our attention to verbal and written communications received by various hunt committees throughout the country, including a threatening letter informing Burton R. Persse, master of the Galway Blazers, that his hounds would continue to be poisoned 'until the magistrates unite in getting the suspects out of prison'.[82]

As Curtis's article suggests, contemporary accounts of the anti-hunting agitation point to a number of links between this agitation and the holding of 'suspects' under the Protection of Person and Property Act. The *Freeman's Journal*, primarily concerned about the effects of the agitation on the business community in Ireland, produced daily reports on both the interference with hunting and the response of hunt committees to this interference. In the earlier stages of the anti-hunting agitation, the newspaper provided an account of a meeting held by the Kilkenny Hunt committee who, having being denied access to a number of coverts in the area, wished to ascertain 'the views of the farmers of the County Kilkenny with regard to the continuance of fox hunting'. A man named Mr Dowling addressed the meeting and told those present that the farmers 'would be in favour of hunting if the members of the hunt club signed a memorial for the release of the suspects arrested in that county'.[83] At a similar meeting attended by the 'landholders of Kildare' and the Kildare Hunt, hunt members were likewise informed that an extensively signed petition to the government for the release of the 'suspects' would enable hunting to continue unimpeded.[84] A number of days later, the newspaper reported that members of the Kildare Hunt, 'unanimously of opinion that hunting could not be resumed on the terms laid down in those resolutions', had resolved to discontinue hunting and sell their stud of hunters in England.[85]

An editorial in the *Leinster Leader* on 26 November 1881 condemns the poisoning of hounds, but interprets the agitation against hunting as the inevitable outcome of a dispute that dated back to the arrest of C.S. Parnell as a 'suspect':

> It is now announced that there will be no further hunting in Kildare. The resolutions passed against fox-hunting at the convention held in Naas, on the day of Mr Parnell's arrest, and the action taken by the farmers almost everywhere through the county, in conformity with that resolution, left no doubt as to the result.[86]

81 Ibid., 357, 395, 376. **82** Ibid., 375. This letter, dated 4 December 1881, was printed in the *Irish Times* (2 Jan. 1882). **83** 'Hunting in the County Kilkenny', *Freeman's Journal* (14 Nov. 1881). **84** 'Fox hunting in Kildare', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Dec. 1881). **85** 'Abandonment of the Kildare hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (5 Dec. 1881). **86** 'Editorial', *Leinster Leader* (26 Nov. 1881).

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The editorial informed the newspaper's readership that following the Naas convention, negotiations taking place had begun to break down when it was discovered that the hunt committee had failed to prevent certain members from participating in the hunt:

> The gentlemen who have made themselves obnoxious as landlords or magistrates, may have been privately requested to stay at home, but when the list of those who put in an appearance at Johnstown, on the opening day, was published, it was generally felt that a direct defiance had been given to the people, and that the entire people of the country would resent it.[87]

The result, according to the *Leinster Leader*, was an 'uprising [...] so universal' that further negotiations had become extremely difficult, if not impossible.[88]

As these and other newspaper reports testify, Curtis is quite right to draw our attention to connections between disruptions to hunting and the detention of local and national Land League leaders under the Protection of Person and Property Act. What also becomes apparent when reading such reports, however, is the extent to which the agitation functioned as a vehicle for the articulation for a broad range of issues. In the series of events documented by the editor of the *Leinster Leader*, it is the failure of the Kildare Hunt committee to effectively enforce boycotts that leads to an irreversible breakdown in communication, the intensification of the campaign, and its spread throughout the countryside. The porous nature of the agitation is likewise evident in the report that appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* concerning the meeting held in Co. Kilkenny. After Mr Dowling urged the hunt members attending this meeting to sign a petition for the release of the 'suspects', he made the following proclamation: 'the day was gone by when the gentry could ride rough-shod over them; when they could trample upon them and kick their faces off.'[89] One can only speculate that if hunting, for this farmer, could function as an appropriate metaphor for rural power relations, the ability to dictate the terms by which hunting would be allowed to continue must have represented an at least partial inversion of the social and political order.

Hunting and the anti-hunting agitation is assigned a similar role in Anthony Trollope's *The Landleaguers*, a novel that is set in the west of Ireland during the Land War and focused primarily on the threat that the modes of resistance that made up this conflict posed to social hierarchies. Having been informed that 'the people were about to rise and interfere with fox-hunting,' Trollope's fictional

87 Ibid. 88 Ibid. 89 'Hunting in the County Kilkenny', *Freeman's Journal* (14 Nov. 1881).

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master of the hounds, Tom Daly, leads the hunt to the coverts of Moytubber, determined 'to protect the rights of others in the pursuit of their favourite amusement'.[90] Upon arrival, however, he discovers that the covert has been surrounded by a crowd which includes Kit Mooney, a tenant-farmer who, in the period prior to the Land War, would 'at this moment have been touching his hat to Tom Daly, and whispering to him of the fox that had lately been seen "stalling away jist there, Mr Daly, 'fore a'most yer very eyes"'. Kit Mooney does step forward to address Tom Daly, but the words that he chooses to greet him with suggest that this confrontation is a deliberate parody of the servile encounter related above. As a dispirited Tom Daly watches the crowds gather and wander indiscriminately through the gorse, Kit Mooney cheerfully informs him that 'there is not a boy in the barony but what is out to bid yer honour welcome this morning.'[91] For Sir Nicholas Bodkin, a local landlord in Trollope's novel, it is Kit Mooney's mockery of feudal authority which suggests that rural power relations have been so transformed as to make hunting a thing of the past. In the following pages, I will draw attention to the symbolic functions served by both the hunt and the forms of resistance that made up the anti-hunting agitation. What this analysis should make clear is that while the arrest of 'suspects' under the Protection of Person and Property Act functioned as an immediate stimulus for the agitation against hunting, the underlining roots of this agitation are, as is recognized in Trollope's *The Landleaguers*, to be found elsewhere.

For members of the local hunt, the pursuit of preserved game across fields and over ditches and fences provided, as Curtis claims, 'adventure with an aristocratic flavour'.[92] Two of the most prolific writers of the hunt, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, referred on a number of occasions to the sheer pleasure of the hunt. In *Irish memories*, Edith Somerville, attempting to explain the central role that hunting had been assigned in their writings, described how 'much of the fun we have had in our lives has been "owed to horse and hound".'[93] With reference to a character who appears in the novel, *Dan Russell the fox*, Somerville stated that 'we, like Katherine, have known "the glory of feeling a big horse jumping big out of his stride", while the hounds "fleeted and sped, and the river of their music flowed back to her", and like her too, we have "galloped in it, and there was nothing else in Heaven or earth".'[94] Nonetheless, as Somerville was to note in *Irish memories*, hunting in Ireland was never a mere recreational activity. In Somerville and Ross's descriptions of the hunt, as in other contemporary accounts, it is clear that hunting not only fostered class solidarity within the Ascendancy, but was one of the main means through which a par-

90 Trollope, *The Landleaguers*, 81, 83. 91 Ibid., 90. 92 Curtis Jnr, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 351. 93 Somerville and Ross, *Irish memories*, 272. 94 Somerville and Ross, *Wheel-tracks*, 111–12.

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ticular relationship between that class, the poorer rural dwellers and the land could be both defined and maintained. Looking back with nostalgia to the days when her brother kept hounds, Edith Somerville outlined the multi-faceted nature of the hunt: 'we had the best of sport and learned to know the people and the country in the way that hunting alone can teach'.[95] If we are to accept Somerville and Ross's claim that hunting enabled the Anglo-Irish landlord class to establish a relationship with the 'people' and the land, it would be useful to ask some questions concerning the type of relationship fostered by the hunt.

Two very different accounts of that relationship can be found towards the end of 1881 in the *Irish Sportsman* and *Weekly News*. In the initial phase of the anti-hunting agitation, the *Irish Sportsman* nervously reminded its readership that sport in Ireland, particularly hunting, 'has ever formed a strong bond of union among all classes'.[96] The following month, a 'strong bond' created by the hunt had been placed under some strain by the 'systematic efforts of the farmers to prevent hunting'; efforts that had 'intensified [...] the bitterness of feeling now unhappily so prevalent between the owners and occupiers of land in Ireland'.[97] In contrast, for the editor of the *Weekly News*, it was hunting, not the anti-hunting agitation, that fostered rural tensions. According to the editorial, 'Shall there be hunting?', a hunt comprised mainly of the propertied class that travelled freely over the land worked by the Irish tenantry provided a very visual representation of relations of dominance and subordination: 'the sporting gentry' could no longer ride over their tenants' fields as they had done '"in the good ould times" when they felt themselves lords and masters of the population around them'.[98] In the overall terms of their arguments, however, both sets of journalists are in agreement: the hunt was an important component in preserving rural class relations, while the anti-hunting agitation posed a threat to the status quo.

Like the fox that Somerville and Ross associated in their writings with the Irish Ascendancy, the hunt roamed at will over the tenants' land.[99] Though both were enthusiastic participants in the hunt, Somerville and Ross were more than willing to admit that it rode 'sometimes, it is to be feared, where it should not have ridden'.[1] In his analysis of *The silver fox*, Declan Kiberd points out that Somerville and Ross were 'too fastidious' to blind themselves to the criticisms that were directed at the hunting class.[2] Nevertheless, in Somerville and Ross's recollections of the hunt, as in other less critical contemporary descriptions of hunting, members of the hunt enjoy a special relationship with the land and

95 Somerville and Ross, *Irish memories*, 274. 96 'Editorial', *Irish Sportsman* (23 Oct. 1880). 97 'Editorial', *Irish Sportsman* (27 Nov. 1880). 98 'Shall there be hunting', *Weekly News* (10 Dec. 1881). 99 See, for example, Somerville and Ross, *Irish memories*, 34, 91. 1 Somerville and Ross, *Wheel-tracks*, 132. 2 Kiberd, *Irish classics*, 360. Kiberd draws our attention to the following statement in *The silver fox*: 'Although he hunted six days a week, he kept a soul somewhere and his sister knew where it was.' Somerville and Ross, *The silver fox*, 76.

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its features. As can be ascertained from the following passage taken from *Wheeltracks*, for Somerville and Ross the countryside was an active participant in this relationship, throwing up huge ditches, scenic cliff-tops and steep inclines:

> We were hunting on the hills, after a time of very wet weather, when a fox jumped up under our feet. The hounds took him at a great pace along the rough ridge of the hill, and then swung seawards, right down its wet, steep, southern side [...] We followed the hounds over the edge of the hill. It was steep enough to make the drops off the fences seem pretty heavy, but not too steep. Soon, however, we came to a slope as sheer as was possible for horses to attempt, and Crowley and I, in the lead, had hardly gone more than a horse's length downwards when we felt the boggy fleece of soaking sedge and heather beginning to slide under us [...] After a few palpitating moments, we arrived at a level place, and our progress arrested. I looked back, and there I saw the side of the hill, a sheet of wet, shining rock, that we had scalped as bare as the skull of an Indian warrior's victim.[3]

In such writings, features in the landscape serve no function save that designated by the hunt. The hill that perhaps marks the boundary between two tenants' properties merely works to demonstrate the aristocratic recklessness of the members of the hunt who negotiate it and subsequently conquer its sheer slopes.

Indeed, the only land boundaries that tended to be observed in accounts of hunting were those established by hunt committees:

> The boundaries of a hunting country are not infrequently a contentious matter, but in West Carbery we have no trespassers, neither do we trespass. The Atlantic Ocean half-circles us on the south and west, and is a boundary that admits of no dispute; on the east there is a margin of thirty miles or so between us and any rivals, and northward we might run up the coast to Donegal without poaching.[4]

This is an unoccupied landscape, devoid of inhabitants save for the 'country boys' who, we are frequently informed in both literary and non-literary accounts of hunting, passively observe the hunt from a hilltop. Given these descriptions, it comes as no surprise that the empress of Austria's visits occupy such a prominent place in Mark Bence-Jones's narrative: The 'country people [...] went miles in the hope of catching a glimpse of her,' gathering up 'the tiny lace handker-

3 Somerville and Ross, *Wheel-tracks*, 134. 4 Ibid., 133.

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chiefs which she took out with her when hunting' and watching her take 'the banks and ditches more recklessly than the most daredevil Irish'.[5] In the triadic relationship that is the focus of most accounts of the hunt, it is the huntsmen/women and the land that actively engage with each other; congenial sparring partners displaying themselves to the poorer rural inhabitants.

As Declan Kiberd reminds us in *Irish classics*, 'the hunt had always expressed the sovereignty of an upper class.'[6] The dethroned Gaelic aristocracy of 1600 also hunted and, as Kiberd deduces from the Gaelic song, 'Seán Ó Duibhir an ghleanna', were equally impervious to the damage that could result from this activity:

> Is bean go dúbhach sa bhealach
> Ag áireamh a cuid géan [...]
>
> And a woman left sadly in the way
> counting her geese [...][7]

In late nineteenth-century Ireland, when the total number of meets prior to the Land War averaged around one hundred and fifty during each week of the eight-month hunting season, hunting functioned as a conspicuous reminder of Ascendancy presence. The designated role of the tenant-farmers and labourers in this ritualized creation of spectacle was that of onlooker and sometimes recipient of payment for damage to crops, livestock and fences on the 'little fields', which, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross admitted, could 'look very sorry for themselves after a couple of dozen horses have galloped over them'.[8] The act of hunting was, therefore, a symbolic and indeed very real assertion of ownership over the fields trampled by the horses' hooves. The pursuit of game over land occupied by the Irish tenantry, regardless of how these hunts were conducted, functioned as a physical enactment of property rights.

What was recognized at the Durrow League Branch meeting referred to by Curtis as one of the sources of the anti-hunting agitation was that the triadic relationship established by the hunt and the notion of power relations and property rights it encapsulated was open to challenge. When the Reverend Edward Rowan, secretary of the Durrow League Branch, informed the master of the Queen's County Hounds that the tenant-farmers could prevent the hunt from using '*their* lands' (my emphasis), he was making it clear to the hunt committee that while the tenantry generally tolerated hunting over the land they occupied, they considered it to be a privilege that could potentially be withdrawn.[9] By the

5 Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the Ascendancy*, 2. 6 Kiberd, *Irish classics*, 374. 7 Cited and translated in ibid. 8 Somerville and Ross, *Wheel-tracks*, 132. 9 Cited in Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 359.

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middle of November 1881, a very different relationship between the land, the hunt and the poorer rural occupants begins to emerge in newspaper coverage:

> The moment they went away with their fox a number of people, who had been assembling there for some time before, commenced shouting and blowing horns to interfere with the hunt. The hounds, however, ran down to Glangoole, near Hon. Colonel White's property, where the people were found to have gathered all along the neighbouring hills, having with them a lot of mongrel hounds and other dogs, which they let loose on the foxhounds, while using at the same time violent language to those who were out with the hunt. One gentleman from the neighbourhood of Thurles was stoned, himself and his horse receiving several blows. He rode up in a fence to escape this violence, but a number of persons attacked him with sticks and forced his horse down a very steep and dangerous place [...] Immediately outside the demesne the crowds were found to have assembled again in large numbers, shouting and conducting themselves in the most violent manner. Owing to the violence they then displayed the hunt could not go on to Coalbrook, which was to have been the next draw. It was then hurriedly resolved to proceed to Garrancole, but the crowd assuming a very threatening attitude in that direction, this intention had likewise to be abandoned. The master [...] determined upon going to Prout's Furze, where everything was found apparently quiet. Here the huntsman dismounted and tied his mare to the fence, getting inside it himself to view the fox away [...] Immediately a young man, who was observed coming down the hill-side, untied the mare, and vaulting with the greatest ability into the saddle, galloped away. The master of the hounds [...] followed at once in pursuit, accompanied by the few members of the field who had then remained with him. The people collected round and began yelling and shouting as before. However, the horse was captured after a most exciting and lengthened chase. The hounds were then with much difficulty got together, and the hunt retired, followed for some distance through the fields and along the roads by the crowd.[10]

A landscape, so often depicted in the 'Hunting notes' of the *Freeman's Journal* as almost empty of inhabitants is all-too-densely populated in this report. Features in the landscape serve quite a different function to those generally recorded in accounts of the hunt. Hilly land enables the gathering crowds to monitor

10 'Stopping a hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (14 Nov. 1881).

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the progress of the Tipperary Hounds and anticipate any sudden changes in its destination. 'A very steep and dangerous place' is no longer there to display the reckless courage of those on horseback, but works with the crowd to demonstrate their helplessness. The 'country boys' who watch from the hilltops are now an active and threatening presence. The huntsman of the Tipperary Hounds who dismounts and ties his horse to a fence is reduced to a passive spectator when a young man, who was observed coming down the hill-side, displays his own reckless courage to the watching crowds.

Though seldom described in such dramatic terms as the above confrontation, the *Freeman's Journal* provided extensive coverage of an agitation it clearly found somewhat baffling. For a paper that regularly dedicated an entire page to hunting appointments and, in an article on the empress of Austria's visit in 1879, had spoken with pride of 'the hunt now famed all the world over,' the anti-hunting agitation was a surprising and not altogether welcome development.[11] The social tensions that the hunt could generate were certainly not evident to the editor who wrote in March 1879 that, when in Ireland, the empress 'saw all classes congregate in the friendly and equal rivalry of the hunting field [where] urbanity and good-fellowship prevailed from the duke to the peasant'.[12] Editorials that appeared in the paper two years after this trip urged tenant-farmers in Co. Kildare to 'pause before they consign to the past the splendid traditions of [the Kildare] Hunt' and reminded tenant-farmers in general that 'they have it in their power to stop hunting if they like, but we think they ought not to do so without having most carefully considered all the pros and cons.'[13]

Nevertheless, at the agitation's climax at the end of December 1881 and beginning of January 1882, the *Freeman's Journal* was producing up to eight articles a day on the threat the anti-hunting protesters were posing to the hunting community. Most of these reports provide us with only the barest of detail. Under the title, 'Preventing a hunt', we are told that 'the Killimer Hunt, near Kilrush, met yesterday, but owing to the opposition of the tenants, who threatened to maim the dogs and horses, the members were compelled to abandon the meet for the present'.[14] In Kildare on 23 November,

> an unfortunate incident occurred in the poisoning of two hounds. It is supposed they took the poison when drawing Castlekealy covert. One of the hounds died in the course of the run, and the other hound dropped dead after the run was over. The Master immediately stopped

11 'Empress of Austria', *Freeman's Journal* (25 Feb. 1879). **12** 'Editorial', *Freeman's Journal* (24 March 1879). **13** 'Editorial', *Freeman's Journal* (30 Nov. 1881); 'Editorial', *Freeman's Journal* (1 Dec. 1881). **14** 'Preventing a hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (5 Nov. 1881).

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> all further hunting [...] In the consequence of the loss of the two hounds, added to that of a third hound, which was poisoned near Gending on the previous day [...] the master has decided to hunt no longer, and has virtually cancelled all future fixtures.[15]

This report, as is the case with the previous newspaper reports I have cited, provides far greater insight into the actions and reactions of the hunt members than those of the protesters. If we divide these articles into statements concerning the men, women and children who were preventing the hunts and statements concerning those who were participating in the hunts, a number of discrepancies can be noted. The sections of the reports that are concerned with the anti-hunt protesters tell us about their actions. They shout, blow horns, threaten with sticks and poison hounds. The information we are provided with relating to members of the hunt is quite different. We are not only given details telling us of their actions, we are privy to their thoughts. We are told what hunt members 'resolved' to do, what they had 'determined' to do, what they felt 'compelled' to do, what had been their 'intention' and what they had 'decided'. Consequently, it is through the thoughts and decisions of the members of the Tipperary Hounds, the Killimer Hunt and the Kildare Hounds that these episodes are related to us.

The problems that we encounter when relying on newspaper reports as a source of information about the anti-hunting agitation and those who were involved in it are typical of the problems faced by those studying accounts of popular unrest. As Ranajit Guha has pointed out in relation to India, 'evidence of this type has a way of stamping the interests and outlook of the rebels' enemies on every account of our peasant rebellions.'[16] In *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India*, Guha warns us not only about the biased nature of official records (police reports, administrative accounts, etc.), but also about non-official sources, such as nationalist newspapers, which he claims are equally prone to speak with an 'elite' voice. This does not mean, however, that newspaper articles such as those I have cited should be simply condemned and ignored. These reports may be primarily concerned with registering the effects of the agitation on those who it was directed against, but the reactions of those the agitation affected were predicated on the actions of the anti-hunt protesters. Even reports which interpreted the agitation from the perspective of the hunt members can be a useful source of information, not only concerning the effect of the agitation on hunting, but also about the nature of the agitation itself.

15 'Stoppage of the Kildare Hounds', *Freeman's Journal* (23 Nov. 1881). **16** Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 14.

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According to an article that appeared on 25 November 1881, 'to-day the Wexford Hounds were stopped hunting at Muffin by a large crowd of farmers and labourers [...] In consequence of the opposition the hounds were withdrawn.'[17] The following week, 'in consequence of the Wexford Fox-hounds having met with serious opposition on five days out of seven since the beginning of regular hunting', it is deemed 'useless' to issue a new list of hunting appointments.[18] An article published the same day, 'An attack on the Duhallow Hounds', tells us that 'a large mob assembled, stoned the hounds, and assaulted the huntsmen, completely putting a stop to all hunting.'[19] This article was accompanied by another, 'More hunts stopped', in which it was reported that the Tipperary Hounds were 'stopped by a mob, who stoned the huntsmen and prevented sport being continued'.[20] A few days later, the newspaper carried a report on the Carlow and Island Hounds who are said to have been stopped by 'a large crowd of people, men and boys, all armed with stout sticks'.[21] An article that appeared on 7 December tells us that the Clonmel Harriers were prevented from hunting by 'a crowd of about one hundred persons' who 'stoned the animals, killing two and wounding five'.[22] The United Hunt made an appearance in the newspaper three days later, when it was reported that members of the hunt were confronted near Riverstown by 'a crowd of nearly three hundred persons, with pitchforks and sticks' who 'beat off the huntsmen [...] and compelled them to retire'.[23] These reports provide us with few details concerning the motivations of those who took part in the anti-hunting agitation, but collectively they allow us to draw two important conclusions concerning the nature of the agitation: first, that it was widespread and, second, that it was effective. As the field sports correspondent of the *Irish Times* was to report towards the end of December 1881, the actions of the anti-hunting protesters had insured that hunting was 'practically extinct in a country which for well nigh a century stood in the very front rank of all matters appertaining to the chase'.[24]

Other articles published in the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Leinster Leader* provide us with a more detailed account of the words and actions of the protesters and demonstrate the extent to which the agitation was to fuse local disputes with issues acknowledged by such newspapers to be of national importance. On 12 November 1881, the editor of the *Leinster Leader*, discussing the effects of anti-hunting agitation on the Kildare Foxhounds, the Kilkenny Hunt, the Queen's County Hounds and the Newbridge Harriers, pointed out that over

17 'Stopping the Wexford Hounds', *Freeman's Journal* (25 Nov. 1881). **18** 'Hunting appointments', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Dec. 1881). **19** 'An attack on the Duhallow Hounds', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Dec. 1881). **20** 'More hunts stopped', *Freeman's Journal* (3 Dec. 1881). **21** 'Hunting stopped in County Carlow', *Freeman's Journal* (6 Dec. 1881). **22** 'Stopping the Clonmel Harriers', *Freeman's Journal* (7 Dec. 1881). **23** 'The United Hunt stopped', *Freeman's Journal* (10 Dec. 1881). **24** 'Irish sport in 1881', *Irish Times* (27 Dec. 1881).

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the previous week the newspaper's offices had received an unprecedented number of visits from tenant-farmers stating that they would not allow any hunting over their lands until the political prisoners had been released. The editorial also reported, however, on resolutions passed in Queen's County the previous Monday. Hunting would not be allowed to continue in that county 'whilst the servers of writs and founders of Emergency Associations appear in the hunting field' and until 'the Middlemóunt and Ballykealy tenants are fully and fairly settled with'.[25] In some parts of the country all hunts were disrupted, while in other districts the presence of certain individuals associated in the locality with evictions, sheriffs' sales and other unpopular proceedings could result in the prevention of a hunt that might otherwise have proceeded unimpeded. A letter, signed 'landholder', that was sent to the *Freeman's Journal* at the end of November 1881, sought to clarify this latter position for the newspaper's readership:

> Let no man say there is hostility to sport in Kildare. There is none. But there is a decided and valid objection lodged against some few members of the hunt endangering their precious carcasses in future over the banks of Kildare, and I would suggest to these parties to stay at home, as they have a perfect legal right to do, but as far as I am a lawyer, no legal right to trespass on me or anyone else.[26]

According to the *Freeman's Journal*, in November 1881 several hundred men assembled at a covert at Knock 'with pitchforks, scythes, hedge-slashers, and other weapons' with the intention of obstructing Lord Huntingdon's hunting party 'in the event of some obnoxious person of the district being amongst them'. On ascertaining that the man they were searching for was not present, the crowd 'quietly dispersed'.[27] One of the earliest recorded confrontations between members of a hunt and anti-hunting protesters took place on 3 October 1881 near Coolnamuck, Co. Waterford, when a group of tenant-farmers and labourers surrounded a hunt that included the special resident magistrate for the Waterford and Tipperary region, Captain Owen R. Slacke. As the demonstrators jeered the hunters, a woman is reported to have thrown a branch across Captain Slacke's saddle and threatened to 'hamstring' his horse if he ever attempted to ride across her farm.[28]

As these and other newspaper accounts indicate, the anti-hunting agitation could be interpreted in a number of different ways by those partaking in it. Indeed, the popularity and, therefore, effectiveness of the agitation might best

25 'Editorial', *Leinster Leader* (12 Nov. 1881). **26** 'The Kildare Hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (30 Nov. 1881). **27** 'Strange scene at a fox-hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (10 Nov. 1881). **28** *Cork Examiner* (5 Oct. 1881); *Waterford Daily Mail* (5 Oct. 1881).

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be attributed to its multifaceted nature. Some of those who gathered to obstruct hunts sought to make public their disapproval of coercive legislation, while others were motivated by the failure of hunt committees to effectively enforce boycotts on unpopular land agents, officials and 'emergency men'. What the tenant-farmers who walked into the offices of the *Leinster Leader* shared with the 'landholder' who wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* and the woman who threw a branch at Captain Slacke's horse, however, was a desire to assert control over the land they occupied and determine the conditions under which others might gain access to it. The tenant-farmers would not allow any hunting over *their* lands until the political prisoners had been released.[29] The 'landholder' argued that the hunt members had 'no legal right to trespass on me or anyone else'.[30] The woman in Waterford warned Captain Slacke against riding across *her* farm. On 14 November 1881, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on the attempts of Mr Murray, a tenant-farmer from Tuitestown, to enforce a legal recognition of his right to control access to the property he leased. During a weekly petty session held in Co. Westmeath, Mr Murray summoned Mr J.C. Lyons, master of harriers, and Mr J.W. Norton 'with riding over his land in following the hunt'. The judge, having expressed a hope that 'the farmers of Westmeath were not going to follow the example of some farmers throughout Ireland', dismissed Mr Murray's case as a 'most wanton proceeding on behalf of the complainant'.[31]

In his history of Irish policing from 1822 to 1922, Donal J. O'Sullivan describes the 'fishing of privately owned rivers and lakes and hunting over ground which was privately owned or preserved' as a common feature of the Land War period.[32] At a time when tenant-farmers were warning hunt members against trespassing on their land, an increasing number of allegations of trespassing and poaching were being filed against tenant-farmers and labourers. At the beginning of November 1881, the *Irish Sportsman* was proud to announce that 'in Ireland poaching has not assumed the dimensions of a national vice, has never come to add its quota to the sum total of our national troubles.'[33] Less than two months later, an article on salmon poaching proclaimed the banks of Irish rivers 'infested by gangs of lawless marauders' and demanded that more water-bailiffs be made available.[34] The *Freeman's Journal* was likewise to express concern over the sharp rise in salmon poaching, pre-empting the *Irish Sportsman's* support for greater levels of vigilance:

> The nightly affrays, the attacks on bailiffs, and the prosecutions reported from day to day in our columns show that salmon poaching

29 'Editorial', *Leinster Leader* (12 Nov. 1881). **30** 'The Kildare Hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (30 Nov. 1881). **31** 'Hunting in Westmeath', *Freeman's Journal* (14 Nov. 1881). **32** O'Sullivan, *The Irish constabularies, 1822–1922*, 157. **33** 'Editorial', *Irish Sportsman* (6 Nov. 1880). **34** 'About salmon poaching', *Irish Sportsman* (1 Jan. 1881).

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> this year is unusually prevalent, so that we are not altogether surprised to hear rumours of legislative interference to secure better observance of the close season.[35]

Unlike the *Irish Sportsman*, however, the *Freeman's Journal* was unwilling to condemn out of hand an activity that it admitted had a 'popular aspect' to it. Poachers, according to this nationalist newspaper, could be denounced as 'unmanly, unsportsmanlike, and unpatriotic', but 'it may be contended that the element of water by sea and land, together with all contained therein, is the common property of all.' Ultimately, however, the author of the article concluded that salmon was at present the 'luxury of the rich' and while he regretted that this luxury food could not 'descend to the table of the poor', he argued that the preservation of salmon was essential to the Irish business community.[36]

As was recognized by the author of this article on salmon poaching, poaching is a criminal offence with significant inversive undertones. Taking food considered the 'luxury of the rich' and serving it up on 'the table of the poor' has long been considered a highly-symbolic crime that posed a threat not only to the material wealth of the gentry, but also to their prestige. In eighteenth-century England, Ranajit Guha reminds us, poaching 'allowed the lower classes to share with the gentry such food and sport as were considered to be the exclusive symbols of privileged status', and was, therefore, in the eyes of the English landed aristocracy, not only the theft of a deer or salmon, but, more significantly, the theft of a particular form of social capital. Hoping to 'save the food of the gods from desecration of the underdogs', members of the aristocracy put pressure on the king to legislate against poaching in the draconian Black Act of 1723.[37] Describing poaching as 'the most defiant of all rural crimes', Guha suggests that this activity is intimately linked to rural power relations, with a marked increase in the incidence of poaching commonly preceding agrarian uprisings.[38]

As is suggested in the previous paragraph, in Ranajit Guha's analysis of Indian peasant rebellion, crime and insurgency are interlinked, but derived from two contrasting codes of behaviour and, therefore, clearly distinguishable from one

35 'Salmon poaching', *Freeman's Journal* (31 Dec. 1881). 36 Ibid. 37 Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 78. The Waltham Black, more commonly known as the Black Act, created some fifty new capital offences. According to E.P. Thompson, the main group of offences defined by this act was that of 'hunting, wounding or stealing red or fallow deer, and the poaching of hares, conies or fish. These were made capital if the persons offending were armed and disguised, and, in the case of deer, if the offences were committed in any of the King's forests, whether the offenders were armed and disguised or not'. Thompson, *Whigs and hunters*, 22. 38 Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 83. Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé have also noted this pattern, pointing out that in the years immediately preceding the Rising in England in 1830 – known as 'Swing' – the incidence of poaching rose sharply. Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, 80–1.

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another. Unlike criminal offences (such as poaching) which 'must rely on secrecy to be effective', insurgency, Guha tells us, is 'necessarily and invariably public and communal'.[39] Consequently, in Guha's work, insurgency is the very antithesis of crime, with the criminal standing in the same relation to the insurgent as does what is 'conspiratorial (or secretive) to what is public (or open), or what is individualistic (or small-group) to what is communal (or mass) in character'.[40]

These distinctions are difficult to maintain, however, when applied to the events that made up the Irish Land War. Poaching towards the end of 1881 may have included the 'nightly affrays' that the *Freeman's Journal* referred to in its article on Irish salmon,[41] but even small-scale poaching at this time could be openly confrontational. On 28 November 1881, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on an 'extraordinary affair' that took place on the property of Dowager Lady Massy. Five tenant-farmers caught poaching on this property with greyhounds were prosecuted and fined, but returned later with a large body of men and proceeded to hunt in full view of the gamekeeper and his assistants. According to the *Freeman's Journal*, 'an immense amount of damage was done, and a large number of game killed' as a result of this defiant behaviour.[42] In a letter to the editor of the *Freeman's Journal* the following week, one of the 'poachers' present on that day rejected legal and cultural distinctions between 'sportsmen' and 'poachers' and sought to establish a new set of terms through which his 'day's pleasure hunting' could be interpreted. In this alternative version of events, five men did go onto Dowager Lady Massy's property with dogs for the purpose of hunting, but they had a 'perfect right' to be there 'having got permission from the tenants thereon'. When the gamekeeper 'accosted us and told us the lands were preserved, and not to hunt on them', the men were on land occupied by Thomas Byrne, who had 'invited us to hunt on his farm'. The men informed the gamekeeper that 'we had leave to hunt from the tenant, who was present, and who told us to hunt away as long as we wished to. The gamekeeper took down our names to summon us, but we did not mind but hunted away' as 'fines had no right to be imposed on us.'[43]

Poaching, which, as Guha claims, is generally characterized by individualistic or small-group deviance from the law, was transformed in Ireland in the early 1880s into an act of collective social defiance. The tenant-farmer who removed game from a landlord's property in the middle of the night broke laws against poaching, but the men who continued to hunt in front of Lady Massy's gamekeeper did so in open defiance of these laws and the authority behind them. Both sets of 'poachers' were defying the landlords' absolute right over the

39 Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 109, 79. **40** Ibid., 79. **41** 'Salmon poaching', *Freeman's Journal* (31 Dec. 1881). **42** 'An extraordinary affair', *Freeman's Journal* (28 Nov. 1881). **43** 'An extraordinary affair', *Freeman's Journal* (6 Dec. 1881).

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land and the animals that lived on it, but in the latter case the 'poachers' were also refusing to accept the rationale through which their actions were judged to be illegal.

Denying the hunt access to the land the tenant-farmers occupied was only one facet of the anti-hunting agitation. The protesters were not merely preventing hunt members from entering their farm-lands, they were challenging a social order that often gave landlords sole rights to the animals that roamed these properties.[44] On 17 December 1881, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on a crowd of '500 people' who had gathered to prevent the Galway Hounds hunt and then 'with a number of dogs, started a fox, which escaped'.[45] The 'crowd of about three hundred farmers' who confronted the Westmeath Hunt in the same month, were said to have killed a fox, which they displayed 'fastened on a long pole'.[46] The *Freeman's Journal* told of a hunt near Tullimore which 'was stopped yesterday by a body of over 1000 persons, the farmers refusing to allow the land to be crossed. A dead fox was hoisted on a pole by the mob'.[47]

Towards the end of December 1881, the anti-hunting agitation was increasingly dominated by the event commonly referred to as the 'people's hunt' or the 'Land League hunt'. In 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', L.P. Curtis Jnr provides a brief analysis of this counter-hunting agitation, describing how large crowds would meet, through word of mouth or printed notice, to stage their own hunt. From the perspective of the landlords who held the sporting rights over the fields where these hunts took place, and also, in the opinion of a number of more recent commentators like Curtis, the gathering of tenant-farmers and labourers with their dogs in search of 'protected' hares, rabbits, foxes and game-birds amounted to 'mass poaching exercises'.[48] In contrast to the furtive labourer hiding a hare under his coat in the middle of the night, the 'people's hunts' were, however, public and ceremonial occasions often followed by celebrations as festive as the hunt balls that took place at the end of the hunting season.

One of the first recorded events of this type took place near Clogheen, where, according to an article published in the *Freeman's Journal* on 17 November, 'an immense crowd, accompanied by greyhounds, mongrels, and dogs of every description [...] extended themselves in one unbroken line of two miles through the country [...] killing upwards of sixty hares and rabbits.'[49] The incidence of people's hunts appears to have peaked just over six weeks later on St. Stephen's

44 Many leases included a clause stating that the game on rented land was reserved for the landlord's use. Consequently, Thady Braughal from Clonebag could be prosecuted in December 1881 for setting snares and killing a hare on land his father leased. See 'Game prosecution', *Freeman's Journal* (28 Dec. 1881). **45** 'Stopping the Galway Hounds', *Freeman's Journal* (17 Dec. 1881). **46** 'Stopping the Westmeath Hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (12 Dec. 1881). **47** 'Another hunt stopped', *Freeman's Journal* (13 Dec. 1881). **48** Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 381. **49** 'Hunting extraordinary', *Freeman's Journal* (17 Nov. 1881).

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Day, with hunts reported as having took place at Nenagh, Bienrally Castle (Limerick), Hook, Latoon, Cashel, Dockdomnie, Moycashel, Streamstown and Birr. The 26th of December, according to an editorial in the *Freeman's Journal*, 'saw the country dotted over with little armies of linked constabulary and military, each attended by its doctor and train of ambulance wagons, wearily struggling after a hunt here and there – in this district or that'.[50] In response to notices posted in the surrounding countryside, Nenagh in Co. Tipperary was host on St Stephen's Day to 'one of the wildest scenes ever witnessed in the South of Ireland'. The 57th Regiment, who were drafted in from Limerick to prevent the hunt taking place, encountered 'crowds of peasants and others, on foot and on horseback, all wending their way from different points to the appointed place'.[51] One of the largest groups to assemble during the Land War period was on St Stephen's Day at Birr, when a crowd estimated by newspaper journalists to comprise of ten thousand men, women and children hunted for game on land from which they had previously expelled an official hunt. Following the hunt, the participants, holding up Land League banners and poles from which dead animals were suspended, are reported to have marched after a band of musicians past members of the RIC who, according to L.P. Curtis Jnr, wisely refrained from interfering with the proceedings.[52]

The hunts that took place at Birr, Nenagh and elsewhere intervened in the Irish political arena on a number of different levels. As previously stated, they challenged the landlords' ownership of the land and their sole right to the animals that inhabited it. People's hunts were also acts of inversion in that large-scale hunting with dogs was widely considered to be a gentleman's sport with certain game, such as deer, restricted to the tables of the rich.[53] Many recorded details of subversive hunts suggest an engagement with what were considered to be some of the important political issues of the day. At a hunt that took place in Co. Waterford, a number of dogs wore collars inscribed with such names as 'No Rent', 'Forster', 'Marwood', 'Goddard' and 'Boycott',[54] while it was common practice for animals killed during people's hunts to be publicly divided among the families of those interned under the Protection of Person and Property Act. The 'immense crowd' that gathered in November 1881 for a hunt in the neighbourhood of Clogheen, for example, 'killed upwards of sixty

50 'Editorial', *Freeman's Journal* (27 Dec. 1881). **51** 'An extraordinary demonstration', *Freeman's Journal* (27 Dec. 1881). **52** For an account of the events at Birr, see Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 384. **53** On 28 December 1881, the *Freeman's Journal* condemned the killing of deer in a deer park in Ballycorran by 'the golden hunt, which numbered about three thousand persons'. 'Slaughter of deer', *Freeman's Journal* (28 Dec. 1881). **54** 'A national hunting club', *Freeman's Journal* (5 Dec. 1881). At a people's hunt near Maryborough in January 1882, the dogs were reported to have worn collars bearing the names 'Buckshot', 'Revolver', 'Dynamite' and 'Rackrent'. 'A people's hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (9 Jan. 1882).

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hares and rabbits, and having done so marched into Clogheen, and distributed them amongst families of "suspects"'.[55] This method of distribution allowed those partaking in such hunts to clearly distinguish their actions from poaching for personal gain and demonstrate that, when participating in a 'people's hunt', they were engaging in a political act.

Notices announcing the formation of the Irish National Hunting Club, the National Hunting Association, and the National Terrier and Sheep Dog Hunt that were posted in towns and villages throughout Ireland in December 1881 suggest that the people's hunts were interpreted by tenant-farmers and labourers not as criminal acts of poaching, but as a form of activity that looked to an alternative concept of legality. In contrast, for the editor of the *Freeman's Journal* the law was quite simply the law and, under its dictates, Land League hunts were 'distinctly illegal'. Reminding his readership that 'in every letting, almost without a single exception, throughout the entire country, the game is reserved to the landlord, and even on his own holding a tenant has no right to destroy it,' he implored 'the people to discontinue a practice so unjustifiable in itself, and so fraught, in our opinion with danger'.[56] Two days prior to the appearance of this editorial, however, the page-layout of an edition of the *Freeman's Journal* suggested a very different understanding of 'people's hunts'. As was generally the practice, the title 'Sporting intelligence' was positioned on page seven of the newspaper. Under this heading, a number of subheadings supplied information on meets that had taken place over the previous days, meets that had been subject to interference by protesters and meets that were scheduled to take place over the coming days. What was unusual about this edition of the *Freeman's Journal*, however, was a section that was positioned next to 'Sporting intelligence', replicating its every stylistic detail. Printed in the same size lettering and similarly underlined, the heading 'The Land League hunts' was followed by eleven subheadings telling of 'people's hunts' that had taken place over the previous days, 'people's hunts' that had been subject to interference by the military and police, and hoax hunts.[57] Thus in one week the *Freeman's Journal* offered two opposing interpretations of subversive hunts: 'people's hunts' as illegal acts of poaching and 'people's hunts' as a form of activity that challenged the idea of poaching as defined in Ireland at that time.

During the month of January 1882, the incidence of both 'people's hunts' and interference with official hunts gradually decreased. L.P. Curtis Jnr explains this trend with reference to a number of external factors. Towards the end of

55 'Hunting extraordinary', *Freeman's Journal* (17 Nov. 1881). 56 'Editorial', *Freeman's Journal* (9 Jan. 1882). 57 'Military displays', 'An extraordinary hunt', 'An expected Land League hunt', 'Land League hunt at Littleton', 'Preparing for a Land League hunt', 'A hoax', 'Precautions against a Land League hunt', 'A hunting party pursued', 'A bootless errand', 'More incorrect information', 'A moonlight hunt'. *Freeman's Journal* (7 Jan. 1882).

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December 1881, he informs us, a circular was issued throughout Ireland informing resident magistrates and the constabulary that 'people's hunts' were to be dealt with as illegal assemblies. By the beginning of January 1882, the military and police were dispersing hunts and making arrests in nearly every part of the country.[58] Curtis also directs our attention to a notice that accompanied the 'Hunting appointments' for the Kildare Hounds and Newbridge Harriers in the *Leinster Leader* in November 1882: 'Gentlemen are most earnestly requested not to ride over New Grass, Corn or Turnips.'[59] For Curtis, this notice suggests that, in the aftermath of the anti-hunting agitation, members of hunts still in operation were acknowledging that their hunting activities could only continue if the tenantry allowed them to do so.

Curtis is quite right to list tough measures and a change in attitudes among the factors that brought about a cessation of the anti-hunting agitation. A number of articles and notices that appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* and *Leinster Leader* at the height of the agitation demonstrate that those partaking in official hunts were beginning to redefine their relationship to the land and those who worked it. In December 1881, the executive committee of the Ward Hounds, pointing out that 'the landholders in the hunt district have ever been most indulgent,' asked that 'the Ward country [...] not be used as a hunting ground for the general body of hunting men who have hitherto enjoyed sport with packs which have ceased for the present to hunt'.[60] The Meath Hunt issued a similar statement that month, informing disbanded hunts that 'in future only the members of the Meath Hunt and residents in the county should attend its meets, the fields having increased beyond what may be considered fair to the farmers whose lands are hunted over.'[61] Following an observation in the *Leinster Leader* in November 1881 that there were a number of 'refugees from the more aristocratic but proscribed pastime of fox-hunting' at a recent meet of the Newbridge Harriers, the author of the article expressed a hope 'that the present friendly relations that exist between the farmers and the members of the hunt may not be interrupted by the intrusion of objectionable individuals'.[62] In these articles and notices, the use of land occupied by the tenantry for the purpose of hunting is interpreted as a privilege that could potentially be withdrawn if abused.

Furthermore, there can be no doubt that the increased military and police presence had an effect on the counter-hunting agitation. On St Stephen's Day, the 'people's hunt' at Bienrally Castle was 'met and dispersed by military and police, who had information respecting the expedition',[63] while the Millstreet

58 Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882', 385–6. **59** 'Hunting appointments', *Leinster Leader* (25 Nov. 1882). Cited in ibid., 390. **60** 'Hunting notes: the Ward Hounds', *Freeman's Journal* (14 Dec. 1881). **61** 'Sporting intelligence', *Freeman's Journal* (17 Dec. 1881). **62** 'The Newbridge Harriers', *Leinster Leader* (12 Nov. 1881). **63** 'A hunt dispersed',

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Popular Harriers 'found [Latoon] guarded by soldiers and police, and were cautioned under heavy penalties against crossing the lands'.[64] A report that appeared in the *Connaught Telegraph* on 31 December 1881 informed the newspaper's readership that '250 police, 100 soldiers of the 64th Regiment and a number of Army Service Corps' had been dispatched to a location near Athlone to disperse a proclaimed Land League hunt.[65] On 7 January 1882, the *Freeman's Journal* tells of an incident that took place at Glenstal when 'police and soldiers pursued and captured twenty-seven farmers [...] [while] others of the hunting party were pursued for miles over the country.'[66] In a letter published in the *Freeman's Journal* on 16 January, Clifford Lloyd described 'people's hunts' as

> illegal and intolerable, and for the future will assemble in the counties of Limerick and Clare at the peril of those joining in them, for they will be dispersed by the troops [...] who will use such means as are at their disposal and as may be necessary for the purpose.[67]

On the same day, it was reported that a troop of Scots Greys, two companies of infantry and a force of constabulary had been dispatched from Limerick to prevent a hunt taking place on preserves at Castlepark.[68] During the following week, arrests were made at 'people's hunts' near Woodford, Loughlynn, Millstreet and Ballybunion.[69] This more stringent official response coincided with a marked decrease in 'people's hunts' and a reduction in the number of incidents of resistance to official hunts. Indeed, under the heading 'The United Hunt Club Hounds', it was stated in the *Freeman's Journal* on 19 January that 'the obstruction which had been offered to the noble sport of foxhunting in this part of the country is fast dying out.'[70]

'People's hunts' did decrease in number in the month of January 1882, but before dying out they underwent a series of transformations designed to combat police and military strategies of counter-insurgency. Hunts were still advertised by both word of mouth and printed notice, but the information supplied through these mediums was often conflicting. Notices pinned to trees, gates and buildings supplied details concerning a hunt, while tenant-farmers and labourers would arrange by word of mouth to meet at a different time or location.

Freeman's Journal (27 Dec. 1881). **64** 'A "popular hunt" prevented', *Freeman's Journal* (27 Dec. 1881). **65** 'The proclaimed Land League hunt near Athlone', *Connaught Telegraph* (31 Dec. 1881). **66** 'A hunting party pursued', *Freeman's Journal* (7 Jan. 1882). **67** 'Land League hunts', *Freeman's Journal* (16 Jan. 1882). **68** 'Anticipated Land League hunt: imposing military display', *Freeman's Journal* (16 Jan. 1882). **69** 'A Land League hunt – numerous arrests', *Freeman's Journal* (18 Jan. 1882); 'A Land League hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (19 Jan. 1882); 'Prosecution of Land League hunters', *Freeman's Journal* (19 Jan. 1882); 'Land League hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (20 Jan. 1882). **70** 'The United Hunt Club Hounds', *Freeman's Journal* (19 Jan. 1882).

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Consequently, the police and military were often engaged in searching for groups of tenant-farmers and labourers in remote districts, while the hunts they had come to prevent had either already taken place or were in the process of taking place elsewhere. As previously stated, on St Stephen's Day a number of alternative hunts, including those held at Bienrally Castle and Latoon, were subject to interference by the authorities. In other parts of the country, the police and military had a less successful day. The 'military and a large number of constabulary' who 'proceeded to a village called Nash, for the purpose of dispersing a "Land League hunt", which was announced to be held there to-day' found 'no hunt of any description and [...] had to return home'. Meanwhile 'the hunt was carried out some miles distant, at the Hook.'[71] Police drafted into Moate on Christmas Day to prevent a hunt due to take place some distance outside the town the following day travelled all night to reach the advertised location. The hunt, however, was held 'at Dockdomnie, half a mile from Moate' where '500 persons assembled and had two hours sport'.[72] On 28 December, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on a hunt 'announced by written notices, posted extensively about the county' that the authorities had assumed would take place at Ballybran, the stated location. When the authorities arrived at Ballybran, however,

> the only hunters they saw at the meet were three little urchins and one dog. The army and police perceived at once that they had been hoaxed, and hoaxed they were for a surety, for while they were drawn upon the ground word came to them that the hunt was going on at Mrs Moreland's property, some five miles distant. The whole force immediately started for Raheen, but when they got there the hunt had retired.[73]

The purpose of hoax hunts was not always, however, to divert the attention of the authorities from actual hunts. As the month of January progressed, it became increasingly common practice for hunts to be publicly advertised when no hunt was due to be held. According to the *Freeman's Journal*, at Ballitore, 'the authorities were completely hoaxed.' After 'waiting the greater part of the day it was found that no hunt was going to be held' and the 'force of infantry, hussars, and police' returned to their bases.[74] This is one of a number of accounts of policemen and soldiers marching for miles in search of hunts that never took place. Under the heading, 'A bootless errand', the *Freeman's Journal* attempted to capture on page the sheer frustration experienced by the soldiers and police send to break up a hoax hunt at Coumbeg:

71 'A Land League hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (27 Dec. 1881). **72** 'Precautions against "Land League hunting"', *Freeman's Journal* (27 Dec. 1881). **73** 'A Land League hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (28 Dec. 1881). **74** 'A hoax', *Freeman's Journal* (7 Jan. 1882).

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> Marching and countermarching of troops and constabulary have taken place all day here [...] They all marched to Coumbeg, a mountain range lying along the western shores of Lough Derg, where it was expected that 'a Land League hunt' would be held to-day. Not a single person, however, put in an appearance at the appointed place, and the troops were marched back again, quite harassed after their visit to the mountains, where a storm of rain prevailed all day long. Other bodies of troops and constabulary were drafted to Tomgraney and Ogonnelloe, near Killaloe, to stop hunts at those places, but the meets did not take place.[75]

By the end of January 1882, hoax hunts were still a relatively common phenomenon, but, as Curtis points out, people's hunts were taking place far less frequently. The gradual reduction in the number of hunts should not, however, be attributed solely to external pressures, such as increased military and police presence. To understand why this form of agrarian agitation was less prevalent in the latter part of January, it is first necessary to explain why it peaked on 26 December. This date, St Stephen's Day, had a significance for both members of official hunts and those who participated in 'people's hunts'. The ascendancy calendar marked St Stephen's Day as the occasion of the Big Hunt. In 'St Stephen's Day with the West Carbery Fox-Hounds', Martin Ross described it as a date that 'is dedicated to a meet of the West Carbery Foxhounds at the Clock Tower, Skibbereen, Co. Cork'.[76] As throngs of mass-goers made their way 'through the town to the great grey chapel above the river', the 'classic pageant of fox-hunting takes the stage with the gravity and decorum that befits its ancient traditions'.[77] On 26 December 1881, the 'classic pageant of fox-hunting' was a rarer sight than in previous years, but even in Birr where the official hunt was forced to disband, public performances and pageants were very much in evidence. The tenant-farmers and labourers who marched through Birr on St Stephen's Day displaying Land League banners and dead foxes on poles were, at least in part, mimicking and perhaps parodying the ritualized creation of spectacle so intrinsic to the official hunt.

The ascendancy cultural calendar is not our only guide to the significance of certain dates within the pattern of Irish rural life. A number of commentators, including Michael Beames, Maureen Wall and Luke Gibbons, have pointed out in their studies of Whiteboyism that agrarian agitation owed much

75 'A bootless errand', *Freeman's Journal* (7 Jan. 1882). According to Donal O'Sullivan in *The Irish constabularies, 1822–1922*, 161, the long arduous tours of duty the constabulary were compelled to perform during the period of the Land War resulted in an unusually high prevalence of deaths from tuberculosis, bronchitis, pleurisy and other bronchial diseases. **76** M. Ross, 'St Stephen's Day with the West Carbery Fox-Hounds' in Somerville and Ross, *Wheel-tracks*, 277–83, 277. **77** Ibid., 277, 278.

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to the traditional calendar of rural Ireland, tending to 'peak' around the times of popular seasonal festivals, such as May Eve, May Day, Halloween (*Samhain*), November Eve, New Year's Eve and St Stephen's Day.[78] Whiteboyism, Beames surmises, 'marched closely in time to the rhythms of peasant life'.[79] For Martin Ross, St Stephen's Day was a 'holiday of the first importance' characterized by its links with fox-hunting.[80] For the men, women and children who joined in 'people's hunts' on 26 December 1881, St Stephen's Day would have been associated with the hunting of a very different species of animal – the wren. The counter-hunting agitation was, therefore, interwoven with both subaltern and elite cultural practices. This agitation borrowed aspects from both the official hunts it threatened to displace and the rural rituals from which it perhaps gained much of its legitimacy.

While Beames is primarily concerned in the passage quoted above with forming links between agrarian agitation and festive days in the late eighteenth century, a notice banning 'hunting the wren' that was 'posted up extensively through the baronies of Ormonde, and Owney and Arra' in the latter half of December 1881 suggests that this intersection was still strong enough during the Land War period to be a cause of anxiety for the authorities.[81] In addition, a number of articles published in the *Freeman's Journal* towards the end of December 1881 recognized 'people's hunts' and 'hunting the wren' as interrelated activities. Under the heading, 'Hunting the wren', for example, it was stated that notwithstanding notices posted in a number of 'disturbed' regions proclaiming this practice, 'the customary amusement of "hunting the wren" was indulged pretty generally, and, in addition, hares to a large number were killed.'[82] On 23 January 1882, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on the trial of twenty-seven men answering 'a charge of having taken part in a riotous and unlawful assembly at Moycashel and Streamstown on St Stephen's Day'. The following interpretation of the day's events was put forward by the defence:

> A few score of boys and men, following an immemorial usage, assembled on St Stephen's Day. Their quarry was not deer or fox, pheasant or hare, but that most persecuted of the feathered tribe, 'the wren, the king of all birds', and if when passing through a field a hare started under their feet, it was only human nature if a few of the people did pursue the flying animal a few yards across the bounds of the preserved lands.[83]

78 Beames, *Peasants and power*, 72–4; Wall, 'The Whiteboys', 16; Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish culture*, 140–1; Gibbons, 'Topographies of terror', 36–7; Gibbons, 'Between Captain Rock and a hard place', 41. **79** Beames, *Peasants and power*, 74. **80** M. Ross, 'St Stephen's Day with the West Carbery Fox-Hounds' in Somerville and Ross, *Wheel-tracks*, 277–83, 277. **81** 'Hunting the wren', *Freeman's Journal* (28 Dec. 1881). **82** Ibid. **83** 'Alleged Land League hunt', *Freeman's Journal* (23 Jan. 1882).

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The case was dismissed and the men were allowed to return home.

Described by Michael Beames as 'one of the main seasonal festivals in the peasant calendar', 'hunting the wren' involved a range of activities from the capture of the wren on the days leading up to St Stephen's Day to the festivities that took place that night and over the following days.[84] In their accounts of 'hunting the wren', Sylvie Muller and Kevin Danaher have provided an outline of the various practices that constituted this festival.[85] In the weeks preceding Christmas, wrenboys roamed the fields in search of wrens to capture and kill. On St Stephen's Day, 'the procession element of the ritual always took place'.[86] The wrens were paraded from house to house placed on a decorated wooden tray or inside a holly bush elevated on a long pole. The group was sometimes headed by a 'captain' who was dressed in quasi-military style and carried a sword. Some of the wrenboys wore masks made from straw or animal skin or blackened their faces, while others were disguised as women (*óinseach*) or dressed as fools (*amadán*). In Co. Kerry, it was common practice for one of the wrenboys to carry a hobby-horse or white mare (*láir bhán*) with jaws and hooves designed to move by means of strings. Music was an important feature of 'hunting the wren' with bodhrán players and other musicians often leading the wrenboys through the locality and accompanying them when they sang the 'wren song' and danced at the doorsteps of houses.[87] If the wrenboys did not receive the money or drink asked for in the 'wren song', they might threaten to bury one of their wrens opposite the front door; an action that was said to prevent good luck from entering the house for one year. At the end of St Stephen's Day, the wren might be buried according to human burial rites, that is, his body was placed in a coffin and keened. Following the wren's burial, the money collected during the day would be used to buy food and drink, and a wren dance, also referred to as a 'wren's wake', would be held that night or some days later. This latter part of the proceedings led one nineteenth-century commentator, Humphrey O'Súilleabháin, to urge the withholding of funds from the wrenboys: 'The rabble of the town going from door to door, with a wren in a holly

84 Beames, *Peasants and power*, 73. **85** Muller, 'The Irish wren tales and ritual'; Danaher, *The year in Ireland*. **86** Muller, 'The Irish wren tales and ritual', 141. **87** One version of the song cited in Danaher, *The year in Ireland*, 246, opens with the following verse:

> The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
> On St Stephen's Day, was caught in the furze;
> Though his body is small, his family is great,
> So, if you please, your honour, give us a treat.
> On Christmas Day I turned a spit;
> I burned my finger: I feel it yet,
> Up with the kettle, and down with the pan:
> Give us some money to bury the wren.

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bush, asking for money, in order to be drunk late this evening. It is a bad custom to give it to them.'[88]

'Hunting the wren', as can be gathered from the above description of this event, contained elements that Ranajit Guha and others have pinpointed as recognizable features of popular festive days. In *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India*, Guha outlines some of the main characteristics of the rituals held on such days. On these occasions, Guha tells us, people have licence to act in normally prohibited ways: '"Degree, priority and place" are not observed so long as these festivals of contraries continue and most of the visual and verbal signs of authority and obedience which represent social morality are mutually substituted for the time being.'[89] As in 'hunting the wren', when boys and men dressed as women and a labourer or tenant-farmer might bear the title of 'captain', status and gender reversals were commonly indulged in. Although Guha argues that the function of such ritual or prescriptive inversion was 'not to destroy or even weaken a social order, but to buttress it', he acknowledges a 'not too rare correspondence' between festive days and insurgency.[90] While generally the festivities that occur on these days act as a 'safety-valve device' that 'reinforce[s] authority by feigning defiance', Guha points out that it is possible for a 'sudden switching of codes' to transform 'a festival into an insurrection'.[91]

In the aftermath of the anti-hunting agitation, landlords returned to the hunting field, but, as Julian Moynahan points out, they did so with an hysterical energy suggestive of a class on the decline: 'landlords resumed hunting with an enthusiasm that was perhaps obsessive, because it masked a nostalgia for dominance that would never again be satisfied in reality.'[92] Whether the events that took place in Ireland around St Stephen's Day, 1881 could be categorized as an insurrection is, however, open to debate. What is possible to state is that something akin to a 'switching of codes' had taken place. Displaying dead foxes on the end of long poles instead of wrens, the crowds that gathered in villages and towns on 26 December 1881 were not so much partaking in the simulated upheavals so intrinsic to festive days, as making visible a widely-held desire for a more permanent inversion of rural power relations.

88 Cited in Danaher, *The year in Ireland*, 249. **89** Guha, *Elementary aspects*, 30. **90** Ibid., 30, 31. The examples Guha cites includes 'the incursion of Wat Tyler's men into London on the morning of Corpus Christi, 13 June 1381', 'peasant revolts in Germany during Fastnacht 1525', and the 'threat of a massive uprising in Bombay during Muharram and Diwali in the year of the Mutiny'. **91** Ibid., 31, 30. **92** Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish*, 191.