

Mulcahy, Richard

by Ronan Fanning

Mulcahy, Richard (1886–1971), revolutionary and politician, was born 10 May 1886 at 70 Manor St., Waterford, eldest son and second eldest among eight children of Patrick Mulcahy, post office clerk (d. 1923), and Elizabeth Mulcahy (née Slattery), both of Waterford. He was educated by the Christian Brothers, first at Mount Sion (the first school established by their founder, Edmund Ignatius Rice (qv)), and then in Thurles, where his father was transferred in 1898. Although his five sisters, four of whom became nuns, graduated from the RUI, the family's financial difficulties forced Richard to turn down a scholarship to Rockwell College; he left school at 16 to join the post office, at first as an unpaid learner with his father in Thurles before being transferred to Tralee, Co. Kerry, to Bantry, Co. Cork (where he spent time in Ballingearry in the heart of the west Cork Gaeltacht), and to Wexford.

**Nationalist apprenticeship** Mulcahy had already joined the Gaelic League in Thurles, where he also discovered the *United Irishman*, the newspaper founded by Arthur Griffith (qv). As with so many nascent revolutionary nationalists, Griffith was his guru for, as Mulcahy later wrote, 'it was Griffith who most fully painted in his weekly writings for us the traditions and the resources of Ireland, portrayed its mission and gave us for practical purposes our dream, our sense of work' (Valiulis, 4). Convinced that self-education was the path to advancement, he won promotion to the engineering branch of the post office by private study, and he was already a fluent Irish-speaker when he was transferred to Dublin in 1907. He passed the matriculation examination before enrolling for a diploma in engineering, which he took through night classes at the technical colleges, first in Kevin St. and then in Bolton St., but in 1911 the post office refused him a three-year leave of absence to take up a scholarship at the College of Science. This setback, like his inability to go to Rockwell, further thwarted his educational development.

Mulcahy's engagement with advanced nationalism proceeded apace through his membership of the Keating branch of the Gaelic League, where he met many other future leaders of the revolution: Cathal Brugha (qv) (president of the branch), Michael Collins (qv), and three of the four colleagues who accompanied Mulcahy when the national army took over the British army headquarters in Dublin in December 1922 – Gearóid O'Sullivan (qv), Diarmuid O'Hegarty (qv), and Seán Ó Murthuile (qv). Mulcahy also joined the Teeling branch of the IRB in 1907, although his membership involved no more than attending brief monthly meetings until he was instructed to join the Irish Volunteers at their inaugural meeting at Dublin's Rotunda Rink on 25 November 1913. Appointed second lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade, he trained regularly at weekends and summer camps and was promoted to first lieutenant shortly before the 1916 rising; although he was always

shy and reserved, the camaraderie of the Volunteers softened his debilitating self-consciousness.

After successfully cutting the telephone and telegraph lines in north Co. Dublin to Belfast and Britain on the outbreak of the rising on 24 April, Mulcahy was isolated from his battalion and instead joined the Volunteers' 5th (Fingal) Battalion led by Thomas Ashe (qv), who made him his second-in-command in successful raids for arms and ammunition on the RIC barracks at Swords and Donabate. Another raid on the Ashbourne barracks on 28 April, culminating in the RIC's surrender after ten of their number (including their commander) had been killed, was one of the few military victories of Easter week; it also foreshadowed the guerrilla tactics successfully adopted by the IRA in 1919. Ashe's force was the last to surrender, and he and Mulcahy were among the few Volunteer officers to emerge from the rising with enhanced military reputations. Mulcahy was interned in Knutsford in Cheshire from 3 May to 17 June and then in Frongoch in north Wales, Sinn Féin's 'university'; but he saw little there of Collins and was outside the IRB's higher echelons; he was released on 23 December with the last batch of untried political prisoners.

Although he was appointed officer commanding of his old company in the Volunteers, there was no military action, and Mulcahy devoted the spring and early summer of 1917 to fund-raising for the Gaelic League in Cork and Kerry (largely as a cover for Volunteer reorganisation) before spending some time in UCD's medical faculty with financial support from the Irish National Aid Fund, established by Kathleen Clarke (qv). He was part of a small group which met to organise a Volunteer convention planned for October. Encouraged by the success of Éamon de Valera (qv) in the Clare East by-election on 10 July, the Volunteers had again begun public drilling and planned a series of political meetings on 5 August in defiance of the governmental ban. Many Volunteer leaders were arrested, including Thomas Ashe, who went on hunger strike in Mountjoy jail, where he died after being forcibly fed. Mulcahy was put in charge of all military aspects of his funeral, on 30 September, which was attended by uniformed and arms-bearing Volunteers from all over Ireland. The funeral gave Mulcahy a national profile among the Volunteers and marked the beginning of his close association with Collins, who had delivered the graveside address; it also testified to the organisational skills and administrative competence which he had acquired 'in that flower of Victorian bureaucratic skills, the British post office . . . they kept files like civil servants' (Garvin, 95). The upshot was the reorganisation of the Dublin battalions into the Dublin Brigade, of which Mulcahy was appointed commanding officer; he was then appointed director of training and a member of the executive at the Volunteer convention on 27 October. When the executive met to establish a GHQ staff to direct military activities in March 1918, Mulcahy was appointed chief of staff.

**IRA chief of staff** Within weeks the British government's threat to impose conscription in Ireland boosted the standing of the Volunteers and Sinn Féin, and that Mulcahy evaded capture in the 'German plot' arrests further enhanced his

personal stature; unlike so many of his contemporaries, he was never jailed again, notwithstanding the government putting a price of £10,000 on his head. He attributed his selection as the Sinn Féin candidate for the Dublin (Clontarf) constituency in the December 1918 election to 'Collins and the IRB element' (Valiulis, 32) and attended the inaugural meeting of the first dáil on 21 January 1919. He was a member of the dáil thereafter until 1961 (Dublin North-West, 1921–3; Dublin North, 1923–37; Dublin North-East, 1938–43; Tipperary, 1944–8; Tipperary South 1948–61) and was fortunate in that his two electoral defeats (in 1937 and 1943) occasioned only brief absences because he regained his seat in the elections of 1938 and 1944.

While remaining chief of staff, Mulcahy was also appointed minister for defence in the dáil cabinet of January 1919. He held this post until April 1919, when he was replaced by Cathal Brugha in de Valera's first cabinet, and became instead assistant minister for defence; Brugha, who continued running his own business, remitted his ministerial salary to Mulcahy, so enabling him to function as a full-time chief of staff. But the Squad (the team of secret agents handpicked by Michael Collins in his capacity as director of intelligence), though theoretically attached to the Volunteers' GHQ, in fact worked directly to Collins; they had little contact with, and scant respect for, Mulcahy. Hence the incident when Liam Tobin (qv), hotfoot from having shot dead Alan Bell (qv), the magistrate investigating Sinn Féin bank accounts, called on him in UCD to conceal his gun, and Mulcahy (shocked that he might be so casually compromised) demurred; for a moment, Tobin joked in later years, the chief of staff was on the brink of following Alan Bell into the next life. Mulcahy likewise warned the active service units in Dublin that if an attack could be traced to them they might be disowned by the dáil government (Laffan, 283). Yet he was insistent on the importance of Dublin, stating that 'no number nor any magnitude of victories in any distant provincial areas can have any value if Dublin is lost in a military sense' (Hopkinson, *Irish war of Independence*, 97), an order of priorities that created tensions with the IRA in the provinces, especially in Cork. There could be problems, too, with some of Collins's senior IRB associates, among whom Mulcahy was never numbered, but, while this led to issues of authority after Collins's death, his unstinting admiration for Collins inured him against resentment. He instead spoke positively of not having to exchange unnecessary information with Collins or 'to be questioning him. Over many matters we exercised a constructive and Cistercian silence' (Valiulis, 48).

Mulcahy reacted with bemusement when de Valera, on his return from America on Christmas eve 1920, criticised 'the odd shooting of a policeman here and there' from a propagandist perspective and instead advocated 'one good battle about once a month with about 500 men on each side' (Mulcahy, 146–7). This strategic preference, redolent of 1916, led to the the mass attack on Dublin's Custom House in May 1921 – the same month that Mulcahy warned his officers that it was 'inviting disaster to think of engaging the enemy with large numbers' (Valiulis, 58); it also led to the death of six and the capture of more than eighty members of the IRA's Dublin brigade. Mulcahy remained as chief of staff after the truce in July 1921

brought the war to an end, notwithstanding tensions arising from rancorous disputes with Cathal Brugha, the dáil's minister for defence, and from de Valera's efforts to reorganise the army shortly before the Anglo–Irish treaty on 6 December 1921 split the revolutionary nationalist movement asunder. He later spoke eloquently of how the split destroyed the revolutionaries' 'gregarious society' and the 'unity of purpose' of the revolution, which had been greatly extended first by the rising and then by the truce. 'The treaty, if accepted, would have extended it more; as it was it destroyed its roots' (Fanning, 8).

Mulcahy supported the treaty from the outset because of his conviction that, while the IRA might resist for six months or so, they could not defeat the British; they had 'not been able to drive the enemy from anything but from a fairly good-sized police barracks', as he famously told the dáil on 22 December. 'We have not that power'; there was 'no alternative to the acceptance of this treaty. I see no solid spot of ground upon which the Irish people can put its political feet but upon that treaty' (*Dáil Éireann . . . debate on the treaty . . . 1921*, 142–3). His position became pivotal when he succeeded Brugha as minister for defence following the dáil's ratification of the treaty on 7 January 1922. Aware that the recruitment of the forces that became the national army and the Garda Síochána had only just begun, he met anti-treaty IRA officers on 18 January without reference to either the provisional or the dáil government. Playing for time, he at first accepted their demand for an army convention to reaffirm the IRA's allegiance to the republic and to appoint an army executive independent of the dáil. But there was no equivocation about his advice, endorsed by the dáil cabinet in mid March, that the convention must be prohibited as 'tantamount to an attempt to establish a military dictatorship'; the dáil was 'the sole body in supreme control of the army' (Fanning, 11). Yet, unlike Griffith and Kevin O'Higgins (qv), he backed Collins's efforts at conciliation in the talks with de Valera that led to the pact election agreement of 20 May, which eased his own task of prolonging talks about army unity with anti-treaty IRA officers while simultaneously endeavouring to 'have the British cleared out of the Curragh, Cork, and part of Dublin' (Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 103). Mulcahy had meanwhile also supported Collins's aggressive northern policy of arming the IRA; he organised the payment of £3 a week to sixty Volunteers in Belfast to protect catholic areas during rioting as early as 24 February, and he was also involved in arming the IRA for their Northern Ireland offensive in May 1922. But he knew nothing of the plans for the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson (qv) on 22 June, and, incensed when told by Liam Tobin that 'it was "our lads" who did it', he threatened to resign (O'Regan, 63, 71). With the outbreak of civil war, and the subsequent formation of a war council on 12 July 1922, Mulcahy again became chief of staff as well as remaining as minister for defence, and he urged Collins to 'change their northern policy to a peace one' (Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 248).

**National army commander-in-chief** Collins's death, on 22 August, pitched Mulcahy, who succeeded him as commander-in-chief, into the limelight when he filled the leadership vacuum with a morale-raising funeral oration against reprisals.

His instincts for conciliation again surfaced in his secret but unsuccessful meeting with de Valera on 5 September without the knowledge of his cabinet colleagues, who saw it as a breach of collective responsibility; Kevin O'Higgins was particularly critical, as he regarded Mulcahy's simultaneously holding the posts of minister for defence and commander-in-chief as corrosive of civilian authority over the army. But this marked the end of Mulcahy's quest for compromise, and he backed the public safety act (28 September) establishing military courts empowered to impose the death penalty. He was ever afterwards pilloried as the principal architect of the draconian policy of reprisals for IRA atrocities; it was on his recommendation, for example, that when one deputy, Seán Hales (qv), was shot dead and another wounded on their way to a meeting of the dáil on 7 December, an emergency cabinet meeting unanimously agreed that four IRA leaders, jailed in Mountjoy since the summer, should be taken out of their cells and shot next morning without legal process of any kind. He opposed unsuccessfully the establishment of the Cumann na nGaedheal party at the end of 1922, arguing that the political climate was not propitious for forming a new party.

As minister for defence in 1923–4, Mulcahy 'resigned himself to the realities of the army he inherited from Collins and ignored its excesses' in the interests of balancing 'the internal stability of the army against the application of rigorous discipline' (O'Regan, 105, 179). The embryonic relationship between a guerrilla force such as the pre-treaty IRA and the national army – to say nothing of the Squad and of the IRB – made for a loose command structure with inherently weak discipline. This was compounded by competing claims to loyalty created by the civil war and, after the war ended, by resentment at the demobilisation of two-thirds of a force of nearly 60,000 officers and men. But ministerial colleagues – above all, O'Higgins – grew impatient with what they saw as his temporising reluctance to assert civilian authority over a corrupt, inefficient, and ill-disciplined army. These tensions erupted in the so-called army mutiny of March 1924, when a group of disaffected officers issued an ultimatum on behalf of the 'IRA Organisation' (IRAO) to the government, seeking the removal of the army council (headed by Mulcahy) and the suspension of army demobilisation and reorganisation. Mulcahy, again acting without the knowledge of the executive council, ordered a search of the home of Joe McGrath (qv), a ministerial colleague sympathetic to the IRAO. The government, without reference to Mulcahy, responded by appointing the garda commissioner, Eoin O'Duffy (qv), to command the army. The upshot was the resignation from the executive council of both McGrath and Mulcahy, who stepped down voluntarily when informed by O'Higgins that the executive council wanted the resignation of the army council. Mulcahy's selfless and dignified response to his own humiliation averted the prospect of a mutiny, and copper-fastened the primacy of civilian over military authority as well as the democratic legitimacy of the infant state. For he was 'an unconditional democrat' who 'killed people for the nascent Irish democracy that [he] saw as menaced by the anti-treatyites', and 'throughout his life he consistently held to the view that the ordinary people of Ireland would always get their politics right in the long run' (Garvin, 205, 60).

**Return to politics** The departure of Mulcahy and McGrath from the government marked the demise of those who had fought their way to leadership in the revolution. The nucleus of those who remained were lawyers and UCD professors rather than old soldiers, men who personified what Mulcahy later called 'a Ballsbridge complex' (Fanning, 52, 102), and he complained that ministers such as O'Higgins, Hogan, and FitzGerald 'had a superior feeling with regard to the whole of us [the army]' (O'Regan, 91).

So straitened were his circumstances that Mulcahy had to borrow £100 from the president of the executive council, W. T. Cosgrave (qv), and he also received financial support from other Cumann na nGaedheal colleagues. In 1925 his ardour for Gaelicisation found expression in his appointment as chairman of the Gaeltacht commission, and in the same year he represented the government at an Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting in New York. Five weeks in North America left him much impressed by President Coolidge and the American people (notwithstanding a rough reception at the hands of anti-treaty Irish-Americans on his arrival) and with a lifelong liking for the US. Yet this first spell in the political wilderness was short-lived, and such was his standing within Cumann na nGaedheal, as acknowledged even by O'Higgins, that an initially reluctant Cosgrave felt compelled to reappoint him to the cabinet in March 1927 as minister for local government and public health (Mulcahy, 211–13).

Local government between 1927 and 1932 was a low-profile department, especially when compared with the drama of defence in 1922–4, but Mulcahy took pride in the administrative achievements of the Irish Free State, and his ministerial role in ensuring the success of the local appointments commission has been underestimated: he resisted demands from job-hungry Free State army veterans that British army veterans in public employment be dismissed, and likewise rejected requests to 'fix' appointments, saying that, as a minister, he had no power to do so (Garvin, 168–9). But Fianna Fáil's triumph in the 1932 general election heralded another sixteen years of penury in opposition, as Mulcahy, unlike most of his senior party colleagues, was a full-time politician whose annual income in the late 1930s, made up of his dáil salary and his pension, was a mere £650 (Mulcahy, 310). When Fine Gael succeeded Cumann na nGaedheal as the pro-treaty party in September 1933, he served on its first executive and front bench from the outset; he was also a member of the national executive of the short-lived Army Comrades Association (the Blueshirts). Fine Gael and Mulcahy supported the government's policy of neutrality throughout the second world war, and he was one of the three Fine Gael members of the national defence conference established by de Valera, ostensibly to enable the three major parties to offer counsel on problems arising from the war but derided by Mulcahy as forcing him and his colleagues 'to grub for information "like hens scratching"' (Fisk, 138). Such was his stature within Fine Gael that, when Cosgrave retired as party leader in early 1944, Mulcahy was unanimously elected as his successor, notwithstanding the fact that he was not then in the dáil, having lost his seat in the 1943 election. That Fine Gael failed to contest four of the five by-elections

in 1945, because of an inability to find candidates willing to stand, was a measure of the party's weakness, and Mulcahy spent the next four years 'mobilising more active constituency support . . . Without a car, he travelled the four corners of Ireland on an auto cycle – a bicycle with a 100 cc engine to propel the front wheel. He carried two heavy leather panniers on the back carrier, and a heavy leather coat to protect him from the elements' (Mulcahy, 241).

**Party leader** By 1947 party morale had improved and Mulcahy began exploring the prospects for forming a coalition. At first he got little support – even his own son pooh-pooed the idea – but he took the initiative after the election of February 1948 and invited the other party leaders to discuss the formation of an alternative government to Fianna Fáil. The upshot was the first inter-party government of 1948–51. As the leader of the largest party in the coalition, Mulcahy had the clearest claim to be taoiseach, but his reputation as a hammer of the republicans during the civil war made him unacceptable, especially to Seán MacBride (qv), chief of staff of the IRA as recently as 1936, and to MacBride's largely republican Clann na Poblachta party; in the event it was the blander formula of the Labour Party leader, William Norton (qv), that Labour would not accept the leader of any other party as head of government, that dashed his hopes. Mulcahy responded magnanimously, much as he had done in the army crisis of 1924, and in a speech of rare generosity proposed John A. Costello (qv) as taoiseach: 'his selfless decision not just to stand aside, but to actively encourage Costello to take the post of taoiseach, must stand as one of the most noble gestures in Irish politics' (McCullagh, 30–31).

Serving around the cabinet table in 1948–51, and again in 1954–7, was not easy for Mulcahy, who was according to Noel Browne (qv), 'treated with a mixture of levity and contempt' by his Fine Gael colleagues (*Against the tide*, 151) and whose relationship with Costello ranged from uneasy to strained. One cause of contention was Costello's declaration in September 1948 of the government's intention to repeal the external relations act of 1936; the taoiseach 'has been drinking some very heady wine in Canada', commented Mulcahy, who, as leader of Fine Gael, had publicly committed the party to upholding the act and to maintaining Ireland's membership of the British commonwealth (McCullagh, 44–5, 88). He also spoke disparagingly of Costello's having 'had a hard crust of intellectualism around him' and of being unduly influenced by a coterie of advisers outside the party, such as Alexis FitzGerald (qv) and Paddy Lynch (qv) (Mulcahy, 245). His own innate catholic conservatism – he was then one of a number of ministers who were knights of St Columbanus – was evident during the controversy in 1951 over the 'mother and child' health bill introduced by Noel Browne, minister for health; he had earlier criticised the 1945 health bill as inimical to 'public liberty' and denounced the Fianna Fáil government campaign for seeking 'unconstitutional power . . . to take over family life' (McCullagh, 210–12).

Mulcahy's ministerial portfolio in both the 1948–51 and 1954–7 inter-party governments was education, a subject on which he had spoken frequently during

the 1948 election campaign, and to which he was well suited by virtue of his didactic tendencies, his commitment to the Irish language and Irish culture (one of his first acts was to double the grant of the Irish Folklore Commission), and his attachment to the religious orders (which all four of his sisters and a brother had joined). He immersed himself in the day-to-day running of the Department of Education and was insulated from the larger political aspects of government in a backwater where he was treated with contempt by other ministers and departments, most notably by the Department of Finance, although not by its minister in the first Costello-led government, the valetudinarian Patrick McGilligan (qv), who was a personal friend. He himself later spoke scathingly of what he found in the Department of Education. 'There was no sense of initiative, vision, or power. No cerebration' – no belief in the compulsory Irish policy and no policies for primary or secondary or university education. 'I often feel ashamed of myself to think that I was in the Department of Education for two periods of office and ask myself what did I do there?' (Mulcahy, 228–9).

**Final years** Mulcahy resigned as leader of Fine Gael in October 1959 and retired from active politics at the next general election, in October 1961. He spent most of the following decade collating the voluminous collection of papers he had amassed throughout his career and in compiling tape recordings to complement them. His pioneering decision, under the terms of the Mulcahy Trust established in December 1970, to make permanent arrangements for depositing his papers in the archives department of UCD, made him an exemplar for other leading politicians from both sides of the treaty divide.

Mulcahy's last years were characterised by a mounting and obsessive resentment at the success of Fianna Fáil, and in particular of Éamon de Valera, whom he always held responsible for the civil war and who was then enjoying the plaudits of the presidency in Áras an Uachtaráin. That bitterness found expression in his refusal to attend the unveiling by Seán T. O'Kelly (qv), his brother-in-law, a former Fianna Fáil minister, and de Valera's predecessor as president, of a monument to commemorate the 1916 action against the RIC in Ashbourne; and in his rejection of an invitation from a Fianna Fáil minister, Seán MacEntee (qv), to join an all-party committee on the design of the garden of remembrance in Parnell Square, Dublin (Mulcahy, 261–3).

Mulcahy married (2 June 1919), in Dublin, Josephine Mary ('Min'), sixth child and fourth daughter among twelve children of John Ryan (1844–1921), a strong farmer of Tomcoole, Co. Wexford, and Eliza Ryan (née Sutton) (1848–1930). The Ryan family was divided by the civil war; Min's youngest brother, Dr James Ryan (qv), became a Fianna Fáil minister, and two sisters, Kate (1878–1934) and Phyllis (1895–1983), were successively married to another Fianna Fáil minister, Seán T. O'Kelly; another sister married Denis McCullough (qv). The Mulcahys had six children: Pádraig, Risteárd, Elisabet, Máire, Neilli, and Seán. The family lived in Dublin at 19 Ranelagh Road, before moving for security reasons after Collins's death



to Lissenfield House, adjoining Portobello barracks in Rathmines, where two-and-a-half acres of land managed by Min made for a self-sufficiency in milk, poultry, fruit, and vegetables that tempered financial hardship. Ascetic in his personal life, Mulcahy 'attended seven o'clock mass every morning, was a sparing eater of simple food, was a keen walker, did not smoke and drank very lightly and then only on formal occasions . . . he was never happier than when he isolated himself from the world at weekend retreats at the Jesuit houses of Milltown and Rathfarnham.' The atmosphere in his home, as his second son recalled, was 'practical, busy, unsophisticated and informal' – prudish but not puritanical (Mulcahy, 310, 266, 305–6). In 1966 Richard Mulcahy moved to his last home, at 1 Temple Villas, Palmerston Road, where, aged 85, he died of cancer on 16 December 1971.

Mulcahy was one of many lower middle-class Irish nationalists whose enthusiasm for the Gaelic League and the Irish Volunteers swept them onto the crest of the Irish revolutionary wave. What marked him apart was the military application of his administrative and organisational skills; when some of his papers were captured during the war of independence, 'a British staff officer "expressed astonishment at the professional competence displayed"' (Valiulis, 236). He was 'by nature a "backroom boy", happiest when totally committed to a specific task of organisation . . . a desk man . . . (who) never fired a shot after the Ashbourne affair', a characteristic which became more obvious as he got older (Mulcahy, 54, 111). His passion for paperwork was both a strength and a weakness: since he was 'a compulsive note-taker, continually committing his thoughts, conversations and observations to paper', colleagues sometimes found him 'indecisive and introspective'. Collins complained that he wanted 'everything on paper as a geometrical problem', and Robert Barton (qv) observed that 'he was careful about details only. No imagination or sense, unobtrusive, but a hard worker' (O'Regan, 78, 88).

Mulcahy had no comparable political talents. He lacked the charisma of Collins, de Valera, or O'Higgins, and his aversion to the glare of publicity denied him the opportunity to acquire popular appeal; 'his austere, almost monastic persona had about it a quality of remoteness; he had never been a good vote-getter' (Manning, 323). It was his misfortune that the death of Collins thrust him into the centre of the political stage in a role for which he was ill-equipped and had no appetite. Insensitive political antennae and an indifference verging on distaste for forming alliances within the cabinet enhanced his vulnerability as minister for defence in the aftermath of the civil war. His jaundiced view of intermittent military interventions by civilian ministers during the Anglo-Irish war and the civil war 'reinforced his insistence on doing things "his own way", convinced that he knew better than his civilian colleagues what was good for the army' (Valiulis, 237).

Few of the countries that, like Ireland, achieved independence in the aftermath of the first world war have since enjoyed an uninterrupted history of stable parliamentary democracy. The army crisis of March 1924 was the moment when that record was

most obviously at risk. That the crisis was surmounted, that an army crisis did not in fact turn into an army mutiny, and that the stability of Irish parliamentary democracy was thereby assured, is arguably the largest achievement of Richard Mulcahy. But he paid a heavy price for doing things 'his own way': never again was he to occupy so preeminent a place in the corridors of power. For the irony was that the same factors that enabled him to sustain the larger democracy – his temporising and conciliation in calming the army, and his ruthlessness in suppressing the more wanton forms of republican violence in 1922–3 – so corroded his personal democratic credentials that he was deemed unsuitable for appointment as taoiseach in 1948. And therein lies a further irony, for his other great contribution to the vitality of Irish democracy was as the architect of Ireland's first coalition government, in which he himself was denied the first place. Coalition governments had hitherto seemed taboo, a taboo that still found expression in the coalitions of 1948–51 and 1954–7 instead being christened 'inter-party governments'. Mulcahy shattered the taboo and in so doing – another irony – tore the first hole in the straitjacket of post-treaty party politics by enabling enemies in the civil war to sit side by side around the same cabinet table. His role, as the leader of the largest opposition party, was indispensable to the creation of a climate in which coalition could flourish, a climate that became the norm in Irish politics in the decades after his death.

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GRO (birth cert.); papers of Richard Mulcahy, UCD archives (IE UCDA P7); Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (1983); Robert Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality 1939–45* (1983); Noel Browne, *Against the tide* (1986); Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish civil war* (1988); M. G. Valiulis, *Portrait of a revolutionary: General Richard Mulcahy and the founding of the Irish Free State* (1992); Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (1996); Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (1997); David McCullagh, *A makeshift majority: the first inter-party government, 1948–51* (1998); Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party 1916–23* (1999); Maurice Manning, *James Dillon* (1999); Risteárd Mulcahy, *Richard Mulcahy (1886–1971): a family memoir* (1999); John O'Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution 1921–36* (1999); Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish war of independence* (2002)