

Crawford, (Robert) Lindsay

by Pauric J. Dempsey and Shaun Boylan

Crawford, (Robert) Lindsay (1868–1945), journalist, Orangeman, and diplomat, was born 1 October 1868 at Tonagh, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, son of James Crawford, scripture reader, and Matilda Crawford (née Hastings). Educated privately, he worked for a time in business before becoming the founding editor (1901–6) of the evangelical *Irish Protestant* and a founding member (1903) of the Independent Loyal Orange Institution of Ireland. The 'IOL' had been formed in the wake of events that followed the election (1902) to Westminster of Thomas Sloan (qv). Sloan, a shipyard worker, was highly critical of the middle-class complacency of the unionist party, and in 1902 he succeeded in defeating its Westminster candidate for the seat of Belfast South. Sloan's victory was too much for the more conservative elements within the Orange order, and he was expelled. Several of the more radical Belfast Orange lodges, including that of Donegall Road, headed by Alex Boyd (qv), split from the original and founded the IOL.

The IOL attempted to articulate a socially radical and egalitarian philosophy and Crawford became its greatest exponent and principal theoretician. He outlined the new order's democratic manifesto in *Orangeism, its history and progress: a plea for first principles* (1904). The new order gained momentum, and in May 1904 the Ulster Protestant Electoral Union was established with the aim of securing more democratic representation in parliament. Crawford, Sloan, and their followers were fiercely critical of the unionist party at Westminster, which they accused of blindly surrendering Ireland's interests for the sake of maintaining the union. On 15 June 1905 Crawford delivered a lecture that outlined his assessment of the situation in Ireland, and this was later published (24 June 1905) as a pamphlet, *Irish grievances and their remedy*, based on the report in the *Irish Protestant*. He believed that the act of union had failed and that Irish protestants had been 'frightened' out of the right to Irish citizenship. Crawford viewed unionism as utterly negative, and Irish nationalism as too much under the thumb of the catholic clergy. He stated that 'it was the failure of Irishmen, both protestant and Roman catholic, to form a true conception of nationality, that enabled English parties to sit in the market place and buy the Irish vote'. In July 1905 Crawford published what he later considered to be the greatest achievement of his life, and what became known as 'the Magheramorne manifesto'. In this polemic he called on Irishmen of all creeds to unite on a basis of nationality, focused not on religion but on Irish interests. He attacked the Ulster Unionist Council and argued for compulsory land purchase and a national university for Ireland.

The radical nature of Crawford's ideas, which could be interpreted as favouring home rule at the very least, if not a form of republicanism similar to that espoused by Theobald Wolfe Tone (qv), unsurprisingly proved too much for the unionist

community. The Magheramorne manifesto was in reality the beginning of Crawford's transition from unionist to republican nationalist. Denounced as a devolutionist document, the manifesto led to Crawford's dismissal from the *Irish Protestant* in May 1906. The IOL and Sloan continued to support him, but in November 1906 he suffered a heavy defeat at a by-election in Armagh North, which signalled that there was little support for his radicalism. He accepted a position as editor of the *Ulster Guardian* (from January 1907), the official publication of the Ulster Liberal Association, but in May 1908 Crawford's radical ideas led to his enforced resignation from the *Ulster Guardian* and his expulsion from the IOL.

Unable to find employment in Ireland, he emigrated to Canada (June 1910), where he secured a post on the editorial staff of the *Toronto Globe* (1910–February 1918). Retaining his interest in Irish affairs, Crawford, as magazine editor, recrossed the Atlantic to cover the passing of the third home rule bill in 1914 and sent back sixty despatches to Canada between April and early July. His later editorials argued that the causes of the 1916 rising were economic rather than political, and he urged clemency. To Crawford, Irish self-government was the only solution to unrest. As the political climate in Canada changed to favour the liberal unionists, so too did the *Toronto Globe*, and Crawford (who supported Sir Wilfrid Laurier) was dismissed in February 1918.

In July 1918 he became the founding editor of the *Statesman*, a journal modelled on the *Nation* (London), in which he ran articles attacking British policy in Ireland and British imperialism. Outside journalism, Crawford started the Protestant Friends of Irish Freedom in New York and was to the fore in the Self-Determination for Ireland League of Canada and Newfoundland, a movement that boasted a membership of 20,000 after just three months in existence in 1920.

Critical of the constitution of the Irish Free State, Crawford, now a self-confessed republican, accepted it as a means towards complete sovereignty. In December 1922 he was appointed acting consul by T. A. Smiddy (qv) and served as trade representative of the Irish Free State in New York (December 1922–October 1929). He died in New York in 1945.

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