

R.J.C. Adams, *Shadow of a Taxman: Who Funded the Irish Revolution?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). 336 Pages. £65.00.

Shadow of a Taxman explores a hitherto under researched question: who funded the Irish War of Independence, 1919-21. This meticulously researched monograph offers novel insights into the subject, and in a wider sense Adams has uncovered a rich and fascinating story of contemporary politics, propaganda, peer-pressure, and power.

Adams explains that the illegal and underground Dáil cabinet sought to fund the revolution through the sale of war bonds to subscribers at home and abroad. These were known as bond certificates that were liable to be repaid in the scenario that British forces had left Ireland and an independent Irish Republic had become internationally recognised. Moreover, the war of independence was internationally crowdfunded. The funds were primarily acquired from subscribers in Ireland and America and the total sum raised exceeded expectations: £371,849 was raised in Ireland via the National Loan scheme and almost \$6m was raised via the External Loan schemes in America.

Most primary source records of the individual subscribers to the National Loan or External Loans have been destroyed or are otherwise currently inaccessible to researchers. However, Adams audit of the archival records has uncovered previously unresearched sources pertaining to both including: three registers of subscribers to the National Loan – pertaining to 1,605 subscribers from South Monaghan, 2,927 subscribers from Longford, and 1,210 subscribers from East Tipperary – and records of 3,067 subscribers to the External Loan from Manhattan. Adams painstaking efforts to cross-reference and match these records with other sources has produced large and rich sample of data.

Adams analysis of this data (which includes records of age, sex, religion, and employment information, among other things) reveals a picture of the bond certificate subscriber body that challenges some of the previously held assumptions on the subject. Adams explains finds that the median age of subscribers to the national loan ranged from 45 to 48 in the counties surveyed: a finding that poses a challenge to the notion that a generational shift underpinned the rise in popular support for Sinn Féin in this period (p.99-100). By contrast, Adams finds the subscriber base in Manhattan was predominately ‘young, single immigrants in precarious living conditions’ (p.224).

Shadow of a Taxman provides an account of the process through which funds were collected, transported, spent, and repaid. Adams explains that the organisers built on the foundations of former fundraising initiatives including the Catholic Rent, Repeal Rent and Home Rule Fund, and sometimes tapped into the organisational structure of contemporary organisations; piggybacking on their pre-existing reputational good-standing and sharing in the popular support that this afforded. The relationship between the Dáil mission and the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF) in America is the most significant example of this practice that is outlined in the work (pp.185-191).

Adams details the measures that were taken to contend with legal and security issues associated with fund-raising a revolution within and without the contested region. Discrete and centralised organisation systems proved to be essential on all counts (p.30, 137). But the illegal and underground nature of the enterprise posed different challenges at home than it did abroad, and the solutions to overcoming obstacles varied accordingly.

There were more physical and immediate challenges to the security of funds raised in Ireland which required more practical solutions. National Loan subscriber records and publicity materials were actively pursued by police in Ireland to be used as evidence of criminal wrong-doing to penalise those involved in organising or simply making financial contributions to the scheme (pp.70-72). For this reason, hiding places, escape routes and alarm bells were introduced to protect funds, records, and those involved in response to police raids of Sinn Féin clubs and the private residences of prominent members in Ireland (pp.34-37). In America, careful wording – reference to ‘bond certificates’ that would later be exchanged for real bonds – was sufficient to circumnavigate the legal impediment to the Dáil mission of raising funds for an Irish Republic that was not yet recognised by the US (p.136).

A common theme running throughout the book is that raising support was as important as raising funds (pp.21, 53, 120, 143, 153). Organisers expected that the act of purchasing a bond would generate a sense of commitment to and belief in the cause. As such, it was their intention from the outset to raise the funds they needed from as many people as possible. Bond certificates were sold in various denominations, including those small enough to meet the needs of the least wealthy subscriber – National Loan bond certificates were available from £1 and External Loan bond certificates in America for \$10 – for this reason.

Another theme that emerges throughout the work is that bond sales records were viewed to represent a tangible indication of popular support. Moreover, the successful securing of subscribers to the National Loan and External Loans was understood to imply legitimacy; the air of which had a snowballing effect on the outcome of the enterprise (pp.135). Although, peer-pressure (or manipulation) are revealed to have played a role in getting the ball rolling initially. For example, decoys in the audiences at fund-raising events would be planted to promise a first – and, often generous – donation to the pot, figures of funds raised to date could be exaggerated in promotional materials (pp.52, 149, 160, 163), and door-to-door canvassing proved an effective mechanism for converting prospective donors into willing subscribers (pp.147).

Finally, propaganda and power battles are a prominent feature of the work. Successful fund-raising drives are shown to have been a significant propaganda asset for the Dáil. Records of subscribers were referenced by the Dáil mission in America to pursue outcomes they believed would be favourable to their cause – up to and including to meddling in US elections (pp.201-204). The fact that their fund-raising success was a source of concern for their rivals and opponents is evident in Adams account of the propaganda war that unfolded between them (pp.58-72, 170-171, 191-195). The clergy are shown to influential characters throughout: their support proved to be a powerful catalyst for the raising of funds, and, in a more practical sense, their elevated status essentially provided a cloak of invisibility under which funds could be hidden and transported without impediment (10, 38-40, 73, 105-106, 176-180).

In summary, the work highly accessible – and pleasingly free of jargon – so should find broad appeal well outside of the discipline of economic history.