

## **Chapter 7**

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# The War and the Celtic Countries: Ireland Leaves the Union, 1914–1923

The First World War challenged the British state to mobilize its people and its material resources on a massive scale. But as we have seen, the British state—officially the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—formally had existed only since 1801 and even by 1914 had not achieved complete integration or blending of its peoples. Indeed, the Great War broke out during the height of revival on the “Celtic fringe.” The vital question was not only whether the British government would be able to gather and direct the money, matériel, and military forces necessary for the war effort but also whether the British state itself would hold together. In general, the answer to the second part of this vital question was “not completely”: whereas Scotland and Wales rallied to the cause and became more “British” than ever, Ireland (or more accurately, the southern twenty-six counties) under the pressure and opportunities of the war broke with the Union.

### **THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT WAR ON SCOTLAND AND WALES**

In Scotland and Wales, the national revivals had resulted in prevailing self-identities that were “British” as well as “Scottish” or “Welsh.” The British part of these dual identities was reinforced by the war experience. In order to recruit men for military service and to rally support for the war effort, the government in London emphasized “Britain” rather than “England” in all its appeals and propaganda. Kitchener’s famous recruiting poster, for instance, was meant for Britons in general. The men of Scotland and Wales volunteered for service at a rate at least equal to that in England: in all three countries (England, Scotland, Wales) the proportion of men who served was more than 40 percent of the male population between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine. Likewise, the casualty rates of Scottish and Welsh troops were about the same as those of English troops. The people of England, Scotland, and Wales bore the burdens of war equally.

The experience of war tended to break down regional horizons. The 650,000 men who served in the navy were organized without regard to regional origins. Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen sailed together as Britons. In the first years of the war, the army was different. Both because of long tradition and because of recruiting tactics, the British army was territorially organized. Scots were recruited into Scottish units (the Scots Guards, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and so on), and the Welsh into Welsh units (The Royal Welch Fusiliers, the Welsh Regiment, and so on). Officers, however, were generally assigned without reference to local origins. By the end of the war the rate of casualties and the need for rapid replacement had broken down the territorial purity of the enlisted ranks: Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen all served in the same units.

Likewise, military training moved thousands of men from one part of the British Isles to another. Scottish and Welsh soldiers trained in southern England, and English troops served in Scotland. Sometimes the results of this large-scale internal movement of soldiers had humorous results, as provincial men saw localities and heard accents other than their own for the first time. On one occasion, two English sentries in northern Scotland arrested a Gaelic-speaking woman, thinking that she was a German. On another occasion, an obviously bewildered group of Scottish troops at the Oxford railway station told a helpful inquirer, "We are going to Berlin. But we don't quite know at what junctions we are to change on the way." After the war, regional identities and loyalties were never the same again, and the sense of being part of one Britain was much stronger.

Yet the effects of the war were not homogeneous, because the economic conditions and the cultural revivals of Scotland and Wales were different. In Scotland, the economy suffered the same sort of dislocations as in the rest of Britain but with different social and political results. In the short run, the Great War vastly increased the demand for ships and munitions from the industrial area around Glasgow and the River Clyde. Clydeside became the chief munitions manufacturing center in Britain. The war also expanded production of certain specialized textiles like canvas for tenting and jute for sandbags. Unfortunately, this artificial demand only collapsed after the war. The war also deprived Scotland of its Continental markets for fish, and the Scots never gained them back. As a result of such disruptions, some 400,000 people emigrated from Scotland to England and overseas in the 1920s.

Meanwhile, the war radicalized a large segment of the Scottish working class. Shipyard and engineering workers on Clydeside were in a position to demand higher wages, and they sought to protect their status by resisting dilution of their ranks by unskilled laborers. Militant trade unionism, socialism, and even syndicalism took a strong hold. The shop steward movement, which grew up to replace the leadership of the official trade unions, gave the region the reputation of being "Red Clydeside." The Scottish working class even before 1914 had been turning in a militant direction because of unemployment and structural changes in industry. The war heightened this already growing class antagonism and therefore had the effect of breaking the long-standing Scottish working-class commitment to liberalism

and the Liberal party. In the 1920s, the Scottish working class shifted heavily to Labour, and class loyalty tended to replace Scottish national loyalty.

The general trend in Wales was similar but not identical. Initially the war was very popular in Wales. Recruiting found an enthusiastic response, as the Welsh expressed their “British” identity and at the same time sympathized with “little Belgium” and “gallant little Serbia.” Many Welsh nonconformist ministers preached anathema against the Germans, and local and national *eisteddfodau* became patriotic celebrations. Lloyd George was able to work his fellow Welshmen into near hysteria for the war. Nevertheless, a few nonconformists remained pacifists, and the Welsh coal miners generally opposed conscription. These antiwar sentiments helped turn Wales from Liberal to Labour in the last years of the war.

Changes in the structure of Welsh society and economy caused by the war also helped erode Welsh liberalism. The Great War brought about a sudden decline of traditional Welsh landed society. Wartime demand raised prices for Welsh agricultural products like grain, milk, and livestock. This raised land values, but the government controlled rents. The tenants, consequently, fared better than the landlords in wartime conditions. Meanwhile, higher taxes—both income and inheritance duties—were squeezing the landlords. For these reasons, Welsh landlords in large numbers sold off their estates to tenant farmers. The long tradition of a dominant gentry in Wales came to an end, and thenceforward Wales was farmed by owner-occupiers. As the Welsh landlords faded from the scene, so also did one of the principal reasons for popular adherence to the Liberal party, which had for half a century given voice to opposition to landlordism in Wales.

The Great War also had a major impact on Welsh industry. It stimulated the expansion of heavy industries in South Wales, coal mining above all but also iron and steel. Industrial relations worsened as Welsh coal miners raised their demands for better pay and better treatment. The miners’ ideology became more radical, with socialism and syndicalism becoming very strong. The news of the Russian Revolution in 1917 met widespread approval in South Wales. High rents and food shortages in 1918 further increased labor militancy. The resulting intense class consciousness—the Welsh equivalent of “Red Clydeside”—made impossible the traditional collaboration of Welsh laboring people with the Liberal party. As in Scotland, class consciousness replaced Welsh national consciousness.

Support for liberalism and the Liberals was being eroded by other forces. Disestablishment of the Anglican church in Wales was passed by the Liberals in 1914, though its implementation was suspended for the duration of the war. With disestablishment achieved, with the landlords selling out, and with Lloyd George ensconced in Downing Street, the future of Welsh Liberals must have seemed bright. But these achievements had exhausted the Welsh Liberal agenda; therefore, while the war was worsening class relations and accelerating a working-class trend toward Labour, the Liberals had nothing new to offer. Lloyd George was able to hold Wales for his personal branch of the Liberal party in 1918, but thereafter the Liberals in Wales collapsed.

## IRELAND AND THE GREAT WAR, 1914–1916

The war had its most dramatic impact and caused the most damage to the United Kingdom in Ireland. As the war was breaking out, both the Irish nationalists and the Ulster Unionists were building large armed paramilitary forces, and they seemed to be heading for violent confrontation as the third Home Rule bill passed through its final stages into law. Over time, events related directly to the war made Home Rule obsolete and opened the way for the radical separatist brand of Irish nationalism. This was an ironic development because the war had delayed the confrontation between Irish nationalists and Unionists and because the war was to involve a smaller proportion of Irishmen than Englishmen, Scotsmen, or Welshmen. Yet the pressures of war strained the already weak ties of Catholic Ireland to England beyond the breaking point. England's difficulty, so the Irish nationalist saying went, was Ireland's opportunity.

On the day the war broke out in August 1914, the leader of the Home Rule party, John Redmond, made a dramatic pledge to the British Parliament. The Home Rulers, he declared, stood with Britain against German militarism in the hour of crisis. Let the Irish Volunteers and the Ulster Volunteers defend Ireland while the British army concentrated on the Germans in Flanders. The leader of Ulster Unionism, Sir Edward Carson, pledged the support of the Ulstermen. These two manifestos of Irish loyalty to Britain were well received by the British and Irish publics alike.

However, when Redmond took the additional step of urging the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British army, he caused a serious split in Irish nationalist opinion. To the nationalists it was one thing to defend Ireland and another to fight for Britain in Europe. Why Redmond made his spontaneous plea is not clear; he may have wanted to win British gratitude so that at the war's end Home Rule would be implemented without the exclusion of any Ulster counties. Whatever his motive, the volunteers split apart, with about 110,000 remaining with Redmond and now calling themselves the National Volunteers, but with some 12,000 breaking away to form a new "Irish Volunteer" organization, a more militant and extremist force devoted to winning for Ireland more autonomy than simply Home Rule.

In subsequent months, Redmond recruited actively for the British armed forces. At first, Irishmen flocked to the colors. But as British losses on the Western Front mounted, and as the war settled into its bloody stalemate, Irish enlistments (at least outside of Ulster) fell off. In the end, about 112,000 Irishmen served in the British armed services during the war (about 60 percent of them Catholics and 40 percent Protestants), as compared to 688,000 Scotsmen, even though the Irish and Scottish populations were about the same size (about 4.5 million) in 1914. The British contributed to their problem of recruiting in Ireland by refusing to organize the southern Irish army units into an Irish corps with its own badges and symbols. Yet at the same time, the strongly unionist British high command allowed the Ulster Unionists to form their own purely Protestant division, the Red Hand of Ulster, which distinguished itself in many battles, including the Battle of the Somme, which afterwards was to loom large in Ulster Protestant hearts and minds.

The newly reformed Irish Volunteers meanwhile came under the secret control of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). This was the new generation of the old Fenian Brotherhood. The official head of the Irish Volunteers was Eoin MacNeill, the scholar of early Irish history and leader of the Gaelic League who had led the Volunteers before the split. MacNeill in 1913 had insisted that Irish nationalists form themselves into an armed force like the Ulster Volunteers, for he knew that one day Ireland might have to use force against Britain: “*They have rights who dare to maintain them.*” But MacNeill also believed that a rebellion against Britain would be militarily and morally wrong unless there was a real chance for success. He believed that while at war Britain would use every ounce of its power to defeat a rebellion in the British Isles. The IRB men who penetrated the Volunteers felt differently: because of the war Britain would not be able to send enough troops to put down an insurrection in Ireland. This IRB determination to overthrow British rule before the war ended led to the great watershed in twentieth-century Irish history—the Easter Rebellion of 1916.

### THE EASTER REBELLION, 1916

The chief IRB men who put themselves into leadership positions within the Irish Volunteers were Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, and Joseph Mary Plunkett. All were poets and Gaelic enthusiasts, and all were motivated by romantic dreams of the Irish revolutionary tradition. Pearse was the most fiery and most important. Trained as a barrister but devoted to poetry, Pearse in 1908 had founded a school dedicated to educating Irish boys in Irish language and literature. Like others in the younger generation of Irish cultural nationalists, Pearse believed that the sordid mediocrity of modern civilization, typified by the unheroic post-Parnell Home Rule party, needed to be purged by sacrifice. Thus he greeted the Great War with twisted warmth: “The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields.” Deeply influenced by mystical Catholicism, Pearse by 1916 had concluded that Ireland needed a blood sacrifice—a rebellion that would fail in the short run but would redeem the honor of the Irish people in the long run. Pearse, in short, combined the myth of the army of the Gael with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and so made ready to die for Ireland—and to take other, more innocent revolutionaries with him.

Pearse and the IRB were not the only Irishmen ready to rebel. James Connolly, the labor leader who headed the Citizen Army of two hundred men, believed that a rebellion *would* win, not least because as a socialist he thought the British government would not allow themselves to destroy private property in order to defeat the rebels. In the hours before the insurrection, Connolly too fell prey to the vision of noble sacrifice. Indeed, he vowed that this Citizen Army would fight even if the Irish Volunteers did not. Shortly before the rebellion began, he told a friend, apparently without regret, “We are going out to be slaughtered.”

Another advocate of rebellion was Sir Roger Casement, an Anglo-Irish career foreign service officer and a passionate Irish nationalist. Casement already had

arranged for the purchase of 1,500 rifles in Germany for the Volunteers in May–July of 1914. When the Great War broke out, Casement raised funds from the American-Irish nationalist organization, Clan na Gael, and returned to Germany for more military aid. Casement believed that Germany would want to weaken Britain by helping Ireland secure its independence. Unfortunately for the Irish rebels, Casement found the Germans skeptical and uncooperative. He was able to purchase from the Germans only twenty thousand rifles taken from the Russians on the Eastern Front.

Meanwhile, the IRB leaders set the date of the rising for Easter 1916. Knowing that MacNeill would oppose them, the IRB men kept their plans secret from him and his staff. What they planned to do was arrange for the Volunteers to turn out for training and drill on Easter Sunday, precipitate a rebellion, and then by presenting MacNeill with a *fait accompli*, force him to commit the Volunteers to the rebellion. Casement was to land with the purchased rifles and munitions just before the rising. To spur MacNeill into action, the IRB during the week before Easter forged a document that purported to be a British plan to disarm the Volunteers.

MacNeill suspected that scheming was going on behind his back, and four days before Easter he finally learned of the planned insurrection. Furious with the plotters, he cancelled the orders for the Volunteers' training exercises scheduled for Easter Sunday. Then when MacNeill heard that Casement was bringing arms from Germany, he reversed himself; but when on the day before Easter he learned that the ship carrying the rifles had been discovered and scuttled and that Casement had been arrested, he reversed himself again. MacNeill's final order against insurrection reached most of the Volunteers, but the IRB and Citizen Army leaders in Dublin—Pearse, Connolly, MacDonagh, Plunkett, and others—decided to go ahead with the rising on the day after Easter.

On Easter Monday some 1,600 men, including about 1,400 from the Volunteers and 200 from the Citizen Army, rebelled against British rule in Ireland by occupying major buildings in Dublin. Apparently they hoped that the nation would rise spontaneously to their support. They were sadly mistaken. The great majority of the Volunteers as well as the country as a whole remained quiet. The citizenry of Dublin looked on in amazement as bands of armed Volunteers seized the General Post Office (GPO) and several other buildings near the center of the city. Shortly after noon, Pearse appeared on the Post Office steps to proclaim the establishment of the provisional government of the "Irish Republic." The proclamation denounced British "usurpation" of power in Ireland and claimed "the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman" (including those in Ulster). The new Republic combined the ideals of Young Ireland with those of socialism in ringing but ambiguous phrases: "We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible."

The rebellion, as it turned out, lasted only a week. The people of Ireland did not rally to its support. Yet in the minds of some Irish nationalists to the present day, the Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916 remains the only legitimate Irish state. It holds a sacred status, hallowed by the blood of martyrs. Within a few days, the



*The Easter Rebellion: fighting in the streets of Dublin.*

British government had rushed thousands of troops to Dublin to support the Royal Irish Constabulary against the rebels. On Wednesday, the British began using artillery to blast the Republican strongholds. On Friday, the main rebel force was flushed from the burning GPO. On Saturday (April 29, 1916), Pearse surrendered, and other rebel commanders soon followed. The rising by then had cost the lives of 76 rebels, 300 civilians, and about 130 British soldiers and policemen.

### **THE ADVENT OF SINN FEIN**

The early reaction of Irish public opinion toward the Easter rising was highly unfavorable, but the British proceeded to throw away their chance to consolidate the position of constitutional Irish nationalism. Ordinary Irish men and women, especially those of the middle class, continued to support the Home Rulers, who had roundly condemned the rising. The British military forces in Ireland set about rounding up the unconstitutional nationalists. They arrested about 3,500 men and women, of whom 170 were imprisoned and 1,800 interned in England. More important, the British, who had declared martial law in Ireland, tried and convicted the leaders of the rebellion before military courts. They executed fifteen of them, one after another, in a ten-day period in May 1916. (In addition, Casement was hanged in England later that August.) Pearse, MacDonagh, and Plunkett were among those shot, as was Connolly, who had been so badly wounded that he had to be strapped to a chair to face the firing squad.

Every volley from the firing squads moved Irish public opinion one more notch toward sympathy with the rebel nationalists. After executing fifteen, the British decided that enough was enough. This decision saved the lives of Countess Markiewicz, a passionate nationalist and feminist, and Eamon de Valera, the only rebel commander to escape execution. (The U.S. government had made representations on behalf of de Valera, who had been born in New York.) But the British cessation of the executions came too late: the dead rebel leaders had been made into martyrs and now joined the pantheon of sainted revolutionary nationalists from

Wolfe Tone to Thomas Davis. Moreover, Sinn Fein, although it had not as an organization participated in the rising, won political honor, whereas the Home Rulers lost credit. In both Britain and Ireland, the rebels were often called the “Sinn Fein Volunteers.” From that point on, constitutional nationalism in Ireland was finished. As W. B. Yeats said in his great poem “Easter 1916”:

I write it out in verse—  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

With a view toward retaining Irish support for the war effort and toward placating public opinion in the United States, where Irish nationalism was a major political factor, Prime Minister Asquith deputed Lloyd George to find a quick solution to the Irish problem. Lloyd George probably was on an impossible mission, but he made the situation worse by his characteristic duplicity. He offered Redmond immediate implementation of Home Rule on condition of the temporary exclusion of six of the nine counties of Ulster. To Carson, on the other hand, Lloyd George promised permanent exclusion of the six counties. The contradiction between these promises was revealed in parliamentary debate, and the British Conservatives and Ulster Unionists rejected the arrangement anyway. Lloyd George’s efforts at reconciliation thus failed, hammering one last nail in the Home Rulers’ coffin.

Events in Ireland were now flowing strongly in favor of Sinn Fein. Under the leadership of Arthur Griffith, Sinn Fein had for more than a decade preached a separatist strategy whereby the Irish simply would refuse to cooperate with either the British Parliament or the British executive in Ireland. The IRB leaders who survived the Easter Rebellion now threw their support to Sinn Fein, which was a legal political organization, in order to take advantage of the disillusionment of the Irish public with the Home Rulers. De Valera even became president of Sinn Fein.

At the same time, the Lloyd George coalition (formed December 1916), faced with severe manpower problems on the battlefronts of the Great War, sought to apply conscription not only to England, Scotland, and Wales but also to Ireland. When in April 1918 the government decided it could delay Irish conscription no longer, Irish public opinion (except in Ulster) was solidly opposed. Even the Home Rulers opposed conscription, but because they had in 1914–1915 encouraged recruitment they now earned little credit. Sinn Fein, which led the anticonscription fight in Ireland, won yet more approval. The British responded by trying to suppress Sinn Fein, the Irish Volunteers, and even the Gaelic League. These steps proved unsuccessful. Sinn Fein’s membership grew, and party candidates fared well in parliamentary by-elections. By the war’s end in November 1918, Sinn Fein had become the most powerful political party in the southern twenty-six counties of Ireland outside Ulster.

In the British general election of December 1918, as we will see, Lloyd George's coalition, consisting of his segment of the Liberals and all the Conservatives, won a big victory over the Asquith Liberals and the Labour party. But in Ireland, the election was a resounding victory for Sinn Fein, which won seventy-three seats to six for the Home Rulers and twenty-six for the Unionists. The Sinn Fein victors, as they had promised, refused to take their seats in Parliament at Westminster. Instead, they gathered in Dublin, calling themselves the "Dáil Éireann," the Parliament of Ireland. By their theory, they constituted the Parliament of the Irish Republic, in theory the same Republic established by Pearse and the Easter Rebellion of 1916.

### **CIVIL WAR WITH BRITAIN AND THE TREATY OF 1921**

The establishment of the Dáil Éireann soon led to a period of savage civil warfare in Ireland that was to last until 1923. There were two phases in the civil war: (1) 1919–1921, in which Irish nationalists fought the British, and (2) 1922–1923, in which factions of Irish nationalists fought each other. In these years of civil war, the twenty-six counties of southern Ireland won autonomy, but the six northeastern counties of Ulster were partitioned off. At the same time, habits of brutality and killing were formed that even today stain Irish events.

The first phase of this most "uncivil" conflict was a guerrilla war between Irish nationalists and the forces of Britain. It was the inevitable result of the Dáil's decision to establish a parallel governmental structure in Ireland as an alternative to British rule. The Dáil reaffirmed in 1918 the declaration of Irish independence proclaimed at Easter 1916, and it selected representatives to the peace conference that was to meet at Versailles. Furthermore, the Dáil set up an alternative court system, a land bank, and a board to settle disputes in industrial relations. In effect, two different governments, one British and one Irish, claimed sovereignty in Ireland. The British at first tried to ignore the Dáil's actions, but in January 1919 shooting started between the Irish Volunteers—who now called themselves the "Irish Republican Army," or IRA—and British police.

For the next two and a half years, the British and Irish engaged in a brutal conflict of terrorism and counterterrorism. The Dáil, with de Valera as its president, was on the run and met only in secret. The IRA was dominated by IRB men and operated outside the effective control of the Dáil. Given the vast superiority in numbers and armament of the British forces, the IRA had to adopt the hit-and-run tactics of guerrilla warfare. They wore civilian clothes and took refuge among the Irish populace, emerging to ambush military patrols and convoys and to assassinate enemy soldiers and spies. Led by Michael Collins, an extremely able and tough fighter, the IRA developed a ruthlessness and a fanaticism necessary for survival but poisonous to the humane qualities that would be necessary in peacetime.

The British fought fire with fire. Because they rejected acknowledgment of the Dáil's existence, the British refused to admit that they were embroiled in a true war

in Ireland. To them it remained a police action but one conducted in conditions of open ferocity. Hence the government did not send the British army to Ireland but depended on the Royal Irish Constabulary and powerful supporting forces recruited in England. None of these elements exercised the discipline of the regular army. The supplementary forces, the so-called Black and Tans (from their dark green caps and tan uniforms) and Auxiliaries (or Auxis) were recruited from ex-army officers and enlisted men. In the face of IRA tactics, they engaged in ambushes, assassinations, torture, and reprisals. In order to deprive the guerrillas of popular support, these British forces took reprisals on whole Irish communities. Like their opponents, they often operated outside of control by their government, in this case London. And in 1920, the government itself sanctioned the practice of taking reprisals on Irish villages and communities. However, despite the fact that British forces outnumbered the IRA by fifty thousand to ten thousand, they were not able to win an outright victory.

British public opinion meanwhile became sickened by the killing in Ireland. By 1919 British opinion had finally accepted the idea of Home Rule for Ireland. Now, already weary of warfare and casualty lists, and having come to believe that they had fought the Great War for democracy and national self-determination, the British had no stomach for the seemingly endless brutalities in Ireland. Reprisals such as the sacking of the village of Balbriggan seemed indecent. Here appeared the British sense of fair play at its best. As the eminent writer G. K. Chesterton put it, "To burn down a factory and a row of shops because a comrade has been murdered is not self-defense—it is senseless revenge." Asquithian Liberals and Labourites urged an end to the fighting, as did an increasing number of nonconformists and Anglicans alike. Accommodation with Irish nationalism seemed the only acceptable policy for Britain—and the only way to maintain the unity of the British Empire.

Lloyd George responded to the growing antiwar sentiment by reviving Home Rule. In 1920 his coalition government, though it was dominated by Conservative Unionists, carried the Better Government of Ireland Act. It created a Home Rule Parliament for the twenty-six counties of nationalist Ireland and another one for the six northeastern counties of Ulster. In southern Ireland this act never came into operation, but it did in Ulster; thus it was the instrument by which Ireland was formally partitioned.

The Dáil and the IRA rejected the Better Government of Ireland Act on grounds that Home Rule was not enough for Ireland, and they continued fighting into 1921. Gradually, however, the IRA's resources became exhausted. By the summer of 1921, the IRA could command no more than five thousand guerrillas. Fortunately for them, had they but known it, the British also were approaching exhaustion, not of men and matériel but of willpower. Under pressure from public opinion at home and abroad, and especially in the United States, Lloyd George finally in July 1921 offered the Irish a truce and invited them to negotiate a treaty. The chief of the Imperial General Staff told Lloyd George that his only alternatives were "to go all out or to get out." And Lloyd George knew public opinion would not tolerate "going all out."

The peace negotiations between Britain and the Irish nationalists went through two stages. In the first, Lloyd George dealt with de Valera himself and offered limited “dominion status”—that is, southern Ireland would have self-government within the Empire like Canada or Australia—but the Irish dominion would have to recognize the partition of Ireland, contribute to the British war debt, and allow the British to keep military and naval bases in Ireland. De Valera said that he was no doctrinaire Republican but that these terms were not enough for Ireland.

In the second phase, de Valera stayed home and Lloyd George negotiated with a delegation from the Dáil, led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. The Irish negotiators rejected mere Home Rule, and the British regarded full independence for Ireland (the “Republican” solution) as out of the question. The most the Irish could hope for was “external association,” by which they would freely associate as a republic with the British Empire (or Commonwealth, as it was now coming to be called). What Lloyd George offered, however, was something less: dominion status, by which Ireland would have self-rule but would agree to allegiance to the British Crown as well as to membership in the Commonwealth. The Irish delegates insisted that the partition be ended, and they feared that the extreme nationalists in Dublin would never accept dominion status. After much tense negotiation, Lloyd George threatened to renew the war if the Irish delegates rejected his offer, and he was not bluffing; but he also suggested that a future boundary commission would so reduce the size of a separate Ulster that the partition would collapse. The Irish delegates felt that they had no choice and agreed to the treaty on December 6, 1921. Thus the Act of Union of 1800 and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that it created were officially ended.

### **CIVIL WAR IN IRELAND, 1922–1923**

The treaty closed an important chapter in Anglo-Irish relations, but it did not end the fighting in Ireland. When the treaty was debated in the Irish Dáil, it met strong opposition from the most militant nationalists. Many Republicans rejected dominion status because they would accept nothing less than the sacred Republic of 1916. De Valera did not insist on a republic, but he opposed the treaty on grounds that it did not go far enough toward real independence for Ireland. For him and others the symbolic matter of pledging allegiance to the British Crown was intolerable. The protreaty forces, led by the IRA commander, Michael Collins, argued that dominion status was all the Irish could get, that it represented a big advance over Home Rule, and that it would constitute a base from which Ireland could move toward full independence. After long and bitter debate, the Dáil approved the treaty by a narrow margin.

De Valera and a number of IRA commanders refused to accept the Dáil’s verdict. De Valera resigned as president of the Dáil, and with his support the dissident IRA members took up arms against the treaty and the Dáil. Thus at the same time that the protreaty forces were assuming responsibility for governing Ireland, now known as the Irish Free State, they also had to fight a civil war against many of their



*Eamon de Valera. The magnetic and somewhat mysterious Irish politician, a survivor of the Easter Rebellion, led the antitreaty forces within Irish nationalism.*

former comrades-in-arms, who resisted the Free State on behalf of the now mythical Republic of 1916.

This phase of civil war in Ireland lasted from April 1922 until May 1923. The Free Staters won a general election in June 1922 over the antitreaty faction by nearly 80 percent to 20 percent; these figures suggest the relative size of the forces. But a majority of IRA heroes from the war against the British fought against the treaty. They claimed the title of “The IRA”—that is, that *they* were the true army of the 1916 Republic. Michael Collins led the protreaty army, which now had to face the same kind of guerrilla tactics that they themselves had once employed. Ambushes, assassinations, and military executions again prevailed in Ireland. The Free State, in fact, executed seventy-seven of the antitreaty guerrillas, including several of the most prominent commanders; this was three times as many executions as the British carried out between 1919 and 1921. Collins himself was killed in an IRA ambush.

The ruthlessness of the Free Staters and the impatience of most Irish civilians with the incessant killing finally persuaded the IRA that they could not win. Urged by de Valera to make their peace with the Free State, most of the IRA simply stopped fighting and turned in their arms but without surrendering. The IRA men, however, never gave up their view that the Republic of 1916 was the only true Irish state and therefore that the treaty, the Free State, and the partition of 1920–1921 were illegitimate. Almost to the present day, they and their descendants continued their often violent struggle to restore the Republic of 1916, which theoretically ruled a *united* Ireland.

Meanwhile, in the six counties of Northern Ireland (often mistakenly called simply “Ulster”) the subordinate Parliament created by the Better Government of

Ireland Act of 1920 had come into existence. Ironically, then, the Ulster Protestant Unionists got exactly what they had resisted since 1886—Home Rule! The new Northern Ireland province of Great Britain was born in conditions of sectarian hatred and urban terrorism. The IRA in Ulster resisted the partition and the establishment of the Northern Ireland provincial government. However, the power of the Protestant Unionists, supported by the British government, was much too strong. The British government had drawn the boundary around Northern Ireland so as to exclude many Catholics and therefore to ensure a two-to-one majority of Protestant Unionists over the Catholic nationalist minority. Thus the IRA in the North had less support than in the twenty-six counties, and the nationalists in 1920–1921 had no chance either to thwart the will of the Unionists or to play an influential role in the formation of the provincial government and politics. Few of the Northern Ireland Catholics in fact wanted to play such a role, since most of them rejected the legitimacy of the province in the first place.

Taken as a whole, the years of passion and bloodshed in Ireland between 1916 and 1923 had established an autonomous dominion, but they had also partitioned the island and created a Unionist province in its most highly industrialized and prosperous region. It is hard to imagine that any of these events would have occurred but for the Great War. England's difficulty did prove to be Ireland's opportunity, but it also turned out to be the Home Rulers' catastrophe and a *united* Ireland's tragedy.

### EPILOGUE: IRELAND, 1921–1939

In the two decades following the end of the civil war in 1923, the Irish Free State succeeded in establishing itself as a workable independent country, though one with more serious economic problems and a more stagnant society than the nationalists had anticipated. The treaty (and its partition) continued to be the dividing line not only in the island as a whole but also within southern Irish politics: parties aligned themselves mainly around the issue of whether the treaty was acceptable or not. The protreaty Free Staters organized themselves as the Cummann na nGaedheal party and ruled until 1932. They proved to be a conservative, right-of-center party in a society dominated by the Catholic middle class and the Catholic church. (In the 1930s, the Cummann na nGaedheal party merged with right-wing groups to form a new right-of-center party, Fine Gael ["Family of Gaels"], which still exists.) In 1925, the Boundary Commission called for by the treaty prepared to enlarge the borders of Northern Ireland rather than cut them back as Lloyd George had promised. The Cummann na nGaedheal government quickly accepted the existing boundary. This action gave the Republicans popular ground on which to criticize the founders of the Free State.

The Free State government, meanwhile, treated the IRA as a criminal organization and in 1921 formally outlawed it. The IRA for its part continued to regard the Free State as illegitimate, and Sinn Fein refused to participate in the Dáil. De Valera, however, did not wish to remain forever in the political wilderness, and in

1925 he organized a new political party, Fianna Fáil (“Warriors of Ireland”). He and the more moderate Republicans gradually moved back into more constitutional politics. In 1927, de Valera actually took his seat in the Dáil, while insisting that he had only signed the registry book (and in pencil at that) and not taken the oath. This highly complex, aloof, somewhat mysterious but charismatic man was a curious combination of romantic, Gaelic-League nationalist and pragmatic politician. He led Fianna Fáil to victory in 1932, and over the course of the next forty years made an indelible mark on Ireland.

In office in the 1930s, de Valera (1882–1975) led the Free State toward state action in social policies, in part to counter the effects of worldwide depression, and toward more complete separation from Britain. Fianna Fáil’s social policies were not socialist, but they did commit significant funds to welfare benefits for the unemployed, widows, and orphans and to old-age pensions and housing construction. As for relations with Britain, de Valera openly criticized the partition, stopped the turnover of land purchase payments to Britain, and dropped the oath of allegiance. The British were not pleased, but they elected not to use force against the Free State.

In 1937, de Valera presented Ireland with a new constitution. It claimed that Ireland was “a sovereign, independent, democratic state”—a republic in all but name. The British already had given up the right of Parliament to legislate for the dominions by the Statute of Westminster (1931). Now, in 1937, de Valera’s new Irish constitution set up a Parliament in Dublin of two houses, with a president as the head of state and a prime minister as chief executive. In many ways this constitution, which forms the basis for today’s Irish Republic, showed the profound influence of the British example. But de Valera’s constitution also claimed sovereignty over *all* of Ireland and by Article 44 recognized the “special position” of the Roman Catholic church as the religion of the majority of the Irish people. Both provisions, like de Valera’s general “Irish-Ireland” outlook, were highly provocative to the Northern Ireland Protestants.

The relative political stability of the Free State after 1923 justified the predictions of generations of Irish nationalists: the Irish could in fact govern themselves responsibly. But in economy and society, autonomy did not work miracles. Ireland remained very much in the British economic orbit. Agriculture and industry alike were sluggish, and the Irish standard of living lagged behind that of Britain—indeed, behind that of Northern Ireland as well. Emigration continued to drain off many of the most talented young Irish men and women, so that in the 1920s, the population of the Free State fell below three million.

The Free State government vigorously tried to promote the Irish language, by preserving the Gaeltacht (the Irish-speaking conclave of the western counties) and by establishing Irish as the national language. Irish became the language of record in the courts and the Dáil’s debates, for instance, and civil servants had to be competent in Irish. But the number and proportion of Irish speakers continued to decline because of the utility of English. Increasingly, the “Irish-Ireland” point of view came to be seen by progressive Irish men and women—and especially by lit-

erary intellectuals—as the outlook of a backward, provincial, exclusively Catholic section of the people. Certainly the Free State was built on a thoroughly conservative Catholic society. The population was 95 percent Catholic, and though the Catholics made no effort whatsoever to persecute the Protestant minority, the Catholic clergy and bishops dominated education, public morality, and to a significant degree social policy.

The degree to which the Free State was a Catholic country was not lost on the Unionists of Northern Ireland. These hard-bitten folk suffered from a severe case of “fortress mentality” in the first place. Even though the Protestants of Northern Ireland outnumbered the Catholics by 1 million to 500,000, they lived in fear that they would be swallowed up by Catholic nationalist Ireland. Union with Britain became their sacred principle. Furthermore, to protect themselves in their northern fastness, the Protestant Unionists built an authoritarian, bastardized parliamentary state in which the real power resided in the Orange Lodges, the militant Protestant clubs founded in the eighteenth century. Unified in a single, monolithic party, the Unionist party, the Northern Ireland Protestants reduced Catholics to second-class citizens. They abolished the proportional representation that the British had put in the Better Government of Ireland Act; they gerrymandered local government districts to deprive Catholics of influence in local government; they set up an exclusively Protestant (and habitually brutal) police force, the B-Specials; and wherever possible they discriminated against Catholics in housing, employment, and education. Working-class and upper-class Protestants cooperated in this mistreatment of the mostly working-class Catholic people of Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, religion and nationality were stronger than class consciousness.

The Catholics of Northern Ireland contributed to this situation by refusing to recognize the legitimate existence of the province. They typically gave their allegiance to Ireland—meaning a united, nationalist Ireland. In effect they withdrew from the politics of Northern Ireland until 1932, when their representatives first agreed to sit in the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont, near Belfast. Even then it was clear that the opposition in Northern Ireland, representing as it did the Catholic minority, would never be able to become the majority and form a government. In Northern Ireland, then, genuine parliamentary government could never work. All of this came into being with the knowledge and approval of the British government, which was only too happy to leave Northern Ireland to the Unionist majority and thus for the first time in more than a century get Ireland off the British political agenda.

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