

# Chapter 2: The Pursuit of Independence, 1918-1921

## Introduction

Following the Easter Rising of 1916, nationalist sentiment in Ireland shifted dramatically. British repression, the conscription crisis, and growing support for Sinn Féin led to the emergence of a new political landscape. This period saw the collapse of the Home Rule movement, the establishment of Dáil Éireann, and the escalation of conflict into the War of Independence.

## 1. The Decline of the Home Rule Movement

### Why Did Home Rule Decline?

- The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), led by **John Redmond**, had supported Britain in World War I, expecting Home Rule as a reward.
- The executions of the **1916 Rising leaders** and Britain's repressive policies led to public disillusionment with the IPP.
- The **Conscription Crisis of 1918** further alienated Irish nationalists from Britain.

### Impact of World War I on Irish Politics

- Approximately **200,000 Irishmen** served in the British Army.
- Economic difficulties and rising food prices caused resentment towards British rule.
- The rise of **Sinn Féin** as the main nationalist party.

## 2. The Rise of Sinn Féin

### Sinn Féin's Growth

- Originally founded by **Arthur Griffith** in 1905 as a political movement advocating for dual monarchy.
- Following the Easter Rising, Sinn Féin was mistakenly blamed for the rebellion, boosting its profile.
- The party was reorganised by **Éamon de Valera**, **Michael Collins**, and **Cathal Brugha**, shifting towards republicanism.

### The 1918 General Election

- The first election held after World War I.
- **Sinn Féin won 73 of 105 Irish seats**, while the IPP was decimated.
- Sinn Féin MPs refused to take their seats in Westminster, instead establishing **Dáil Éireann**.

## 3. The First Dáil (1919)

### Formation of the Dáil

- **21 January 1919:** Sinn Féin MPs met in Dublin's Mansion House and declared an **Irish Republic**.
- **Éamon de Valera** was elected **President of the Dáil** (though he was in prison at the time).
- The Dáil set up departments to govern the country, including finance, foreign affairs, and justice.

### The Declaration of Independence

- Read aloud by **Cathal Brugha**, asserting Ireland's right to self-determination.
- Sent delegations abroad to seek international recognition, including to **Woodrow Wilson's USA**.
- Most countries, including Britain, ignored the declaration.

## 4. The War of Independence (1919-1921)

### The Opening Shots

- **21 January 1919:** An IRA ambush in **Soloheadbeg, Tipperary**, killed two RIC officers.
- This marked the start of the **War of Independence**, also known as the Anglo-Irish War.

### Tactics of the IRA

- Led by **Michael Collins**, the IRA adopted **guerrilla warfare** tactics.
- Small, mobile **flying columns** carried out ambushes and assassinations.
- **The Squad**, Collins' secret unit, targeted British intelligence officers.

### British Response

- The British deployed the **Black and Tans** (ex-soldiers) and **Auxiliaries** (former army officers).
- These forces were infamous for reprisals, burning homes and attacking civilians.
- **Bloody Sunday (21 November 1920):** The IRA assassinated **14 British spies** in Dublin; the British responded by opening fire at Croke Park, killing **14 civilians**.

## 5. The Political and Legal Struggle

### Dáil Government & Counter-Government

- The Dáil operated a **parallel government**, collecting taxes and running courts.
- British authorities **declared the Dáil illegal** in 1919.
- De Valera toured the **USA in 1919-1920**, raising funds and seeking recognition.

## *The Government of Ireland Act (1920)*

- Britain attempted to implement **Home Rule** by partitioning Ireland.
- **Two parliaments** were created: one in **Dublin** (never functioned) and one in **Belfast** (led by James Craig).
- Partition was deeply unpopular among nationalists, but **unionists in the North supported it**.

## *6. The Truce and Treaty Negotiations*

### *Steps Towards a Truce*

- By mid-1921, both sides sought an end to the violence.
- The British government, led by **David Lloyd George**, realised it could not fully defeat the IRA.
- **11 July 1921**: A truce was agreed between the IRA and Britain.

### *Negotiating the Anglo-Irish Treaty*

- Sinn Féin sent a delegation to London, including **Arthur Griffith**, **Michael Collins**, and **Robert Barton**.
- The Irish delegation was split between those willing to compromise and those insisting on a full republic.
- **6 December 1921**: The **Anglo-Irish Treaty** was signed, creating the **Irish Free State** while keeping ties to Britain.

### *Conclusion*

- The period from **1918 to 1921** was one of political transformation and armed conflict.
- The War of Independence led to the signing of the **Anglo-Irish Treaty**, setting the stage for the Civil War.
- The Treaty divided nationalist Ireland and shaped the country's future for decades.

### *Key Terms*

- **Sinn Féin**: Nationalist party advocating for Irish independence.
- **Dáil Éireann**: The revolutionary Irish Parliament established in 1919.
- **IRA**: Irish Republican Army, military wing of the independence movement.
- **Guerrilla warfare**: Small-scale, hit-and-run military tactics used by the IRA.
- **Black and Tans**: British forces known for their brutality in Ireland.
- **Partition**: Division of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland).