

Chapter 5: Under Fianna Fáil, 1932–1939

Introduction

In 1932, **Fianna Fáil**, led by **Éamon de Valera**, came to power, replacing **Cumann na nGaedheal**. Over the next seven years, the party dismantled aspects of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, promoted economic self-sufficiency, and increased state control over social and economic affairs. De Valera's government also faced opposition from the **Blueshirts** and managed Ireland's position during the growing tensions of **World War II**.

1. Fianna Fáil's Election Victory (1932)

Why Did Fianna Fáil Win?

- **Cumann na nGaedheal** was unpopular due to economic difficulties and its pro-Treaty stance.
- **Fianna Fáil** appealed to nationalists by promising to remove the Oath of Allegiance and reduce British influence.
- The party gained strong support from small farmers, urban workers, and republicans.

Formation of the Government

- **Éamon de Valera** became President of the Executive Council.
- **Fianna Fáil** ended **Cumann na nGaedheal's** policy of cooperation with Britain.
- **James Ryan** (Agriculture), **Seán MacEntee** (Finance), and **Seán Lemass** (Industry & Commerce) were key figures in the government.

2. Dismantling the Anglo-Irish Treaty

The Oath of Allegiance (1932–1933)

- De Valera abolished the **Oath of Allegiance** to the British King in 1933.
- The **Governor General's** role was reduced, and the office was abolished in 1936.
- The Irish Free State moved closer to full independence.

The Economic War (1932–1938)

- **Fianna Fáil** refused to pay **land annuities** (payments from Irish farmers to Britain).
- Britain responded by imposing **tariffs on Irish agricultural exports**.
- Ireland retaliated with **tariffs on British goods**.
- **Effects:**
 - **Farmers** suffered as cattle exports to Britain fell.
 - Ireland shifted towards **economic self-sufficiency** (import substitution industries).

- **Coal and fuel shortages** due to reduced trade with Britain.

Resolution - Anglo-Irish Agreement (1938)

- Negotiated by **Seán Lemass**, Ireland agreed to pay a **one-time settlement of £10 million** instead of further annuities.
- Britain returned **Treaty Ports (Cobh, Berehaven, Lough Swilly)** to Ireland.
- Marked a **step towards full Irish sovereignty**.

3. Social and Political Challenges

The Blueshirt Movement

- Led by **Eoin O'Duffy**, the **Blueshirts** were a fascist-style organisation that opposed Fianna Fáil.
- They aimed to prevent a '**communist**' takeover and held public marches.
- **Fianna Fáil banned the organisation in 1933** due to concerns about potential violence.

The IRA and Internal Security

- Fianna Fáil **legalised the IRA**, but later **outlawed it in 1936** due to its violent actions.
- The **1939 Emergency Powers Act** allowed the government to **suppress IRA activities**.

4. The 1937 Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann)

- Drafted by **Éamon de Valera**, replacing the 1922 Free State Constitution.
- **Key Features:**
 - Declared Ireland as '**Éire**', a **sovereign nation**.
 - Established a **President (Uachtarán)** as **Head of State**.
 - **Article 2 and 3:** Claimed sovereignty over **all 32 counties**, though Northern Ireland remained under British control.
 - Recognised **Catholicism's 'special position'**, reflecting the close relationship between the Church and State.

Significance

- Increased Ireland's sovereignty, though it remained in the **Commonwealth**.
- Strengthened **national identity** and **de Valera's leadership**.

5. Economic and Social Policies

Economic Protectionism

- **Seán Lemass** introduced **tariffs on foreign goods** to promote Irish industry.
- Encouraged **local production** (e.g., textiles, sugar, and cement industries).

- State-sponsored companies like **Irish Sugar Company** and **Aer Lingus** were founded.

Impact

- **Industrial growth improved**, but many businesses struggled with high costs.
- Living standards for rural communities remained **low**, with **widespread unemployment and emigration**.

Education and Social Policies

- Irish language promoted in schools.
- **Strict censorship laws** enforced in literature and films.
- Close ties between **Fianna Fáil and the Catholic Church** shaped social policies.

6. Ireland and World War II (The Emergency, 1939)

Neutrality Declared

- De Valera **refused to join World War II**, citing Ireland's sovereignty and past **British oppression**.
- The government passed **The Emergency Powers Act (1939)** to control rationing, censorship, and security.

Consequences of Neutrality

- **Avoided invasion** by both Britain and Germany.
- **Economic hardship** due to trade blockades.
- **Covert cooperation with Britain:** Shared intelligence and allowed Allied planes to use 'Donegal Corridor' airspace.

Conclusion

- **Fianna Fáil fundamentally reshaped Ireland** during this period, reducing British influence and increasing sovereignty.
- The **1937 Constitution** strengthened Irish identity and self-rule.
- The **Economic War and protectionist policies** brought challenges but laid the groundwork for long-term independence.
- De Valera's decision to **stay neutral during WWII** defined Ireland's foreign policy stance for decades.

Key Terms

- **Fianna Fáil:** Republican political party founded by **Éamon de Valera** in 1926.
- **Oath of Allegiance:** Oath to the British King, abolished by de Valera in 1933.

- **Economic War (1932-1938):** Trade dispute between Ireland and Britain over land annuities.
- **Blueshirts:** Right-wing group opposed to Fianna Fáil, led by **Eoin O'Duffy**.
- **Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937):** Irish Constitution, declaring Ireland a sovereign nation.
- **The Emergency (1939-1945):** Irish term for WWII, during which Ireland remained neutral.