

Ch. 1 - Unionists and Nationalists in Ireland 1910-1918



Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The campaign for Home Rule and unionist opposition to it
- The impact of World War I on Ireland

Useful Terms

Act of Union: this Act, passed in 1800, made Ireland part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Dublin parliament was abolished, and Ireland was to rule directly from Westminster.

The Conservative Party: believed in the preservation of traditional institutions, favoured free enterprise, private ownership, maintaining the Empire and opposing Home Rule. In 1912 it became the Conservative and Unionist Party.

The Liberal Party: believed the government should be active in supporting social and political change – favoured free trade, equality before the law, and increasing the power of parliament, while reducing the power of the Crown.

Constitutional monarchy: when a country is governed by a parliament and a king or queen (the Crown), who has limited powers.

Bill: a draft proposal of a law presented to parliament for discussion.

Act: when a bill passes the House of Commons and House of Lords and is given Royal Assent (signed by the monarch) it becomes an Act – a law of the land.

Sovereignty: when a country is a fully independent state, the power of a country to rule itself.

Suffrage/franchise: the right to vote in elections.

Ethnic identity: a distinctive identity felt by a group of people who share cultural characteristics such as a common race and language, practices and beliefs.

Allegiance: loyalty and devotion to a cause, person or movement.

Useful Terms

Unionists: believed that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was good for Ireland and wanted to keep it. **Ulster unionists** were willing to see Ireland partitioned, if it meant Ulster could remain in the United Kingdom.

Nationalists: believed that the United Kingdom was not good for Ireland and it would be better if Irish people were allowed to rule themselves.

Home Rule: a form of self-government. Under Home Rule, Ireland would remain in the United Kingdom but have a local parliament to deal with Irish affairs such as health, education or transport.

Moderate/constitutional nationalists: wished to achieve self-government for Ireland by peaceful means, e.g. the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP)/ the Home Rule Party.

Extreme/militant nationalists: were willing to use physical force/violence to achieve their political aims. They wished for complete separation from Britain. They were often referred to as republicans, **IRB** or Fenians.

Physical force: the use of violence to achieve political aims.

IRB: the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secret oath-bound society founded by James Stephens to create an independent Irish republic.

Home Rule: a form of self-government. Ireland would remain in the United Kingdom but have a local parliament to deal with Irish affairs such as health, education and transport.

Useful Terms

Balance of power: when a large party fails to achieve a majority and needs the support of a smaller party to form a government. The smaller party has the balance of power, as their support determines who can form a government.

Parliament Act 1911: an act that removed the House of Lords' veto. The Lords could now only delay bills passed in the House of Commons.

Sectarian violence: violence caused by religious conflict between groups usually living in the same state, e.g. violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Allegiance: loyalty and devotion to a cause, person or movement.

Solemn League and Covenant: a pledge taken by Ulster unionists to resist the passing of Home Rule, by whatever means necessary.

Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF): a paramilitary (armed) group set up by Ulster unionists to defend them from the threat of Home Rule.

Irish National Volunteer Force (IVF): a paramilitary group set up by nationalists to ensure the implementation of Home Rule.

Mutiny: a refusal to obey the orders of the authorities (usually refers to sailors or soldiers).

IPP: Irish Parliamentary Party (Home Rule Party).

Partition: Ireland would be divided. Some Ulster counties would remain in the United Kingdom and the rest of Ireland would have its own parliament in Dublin.

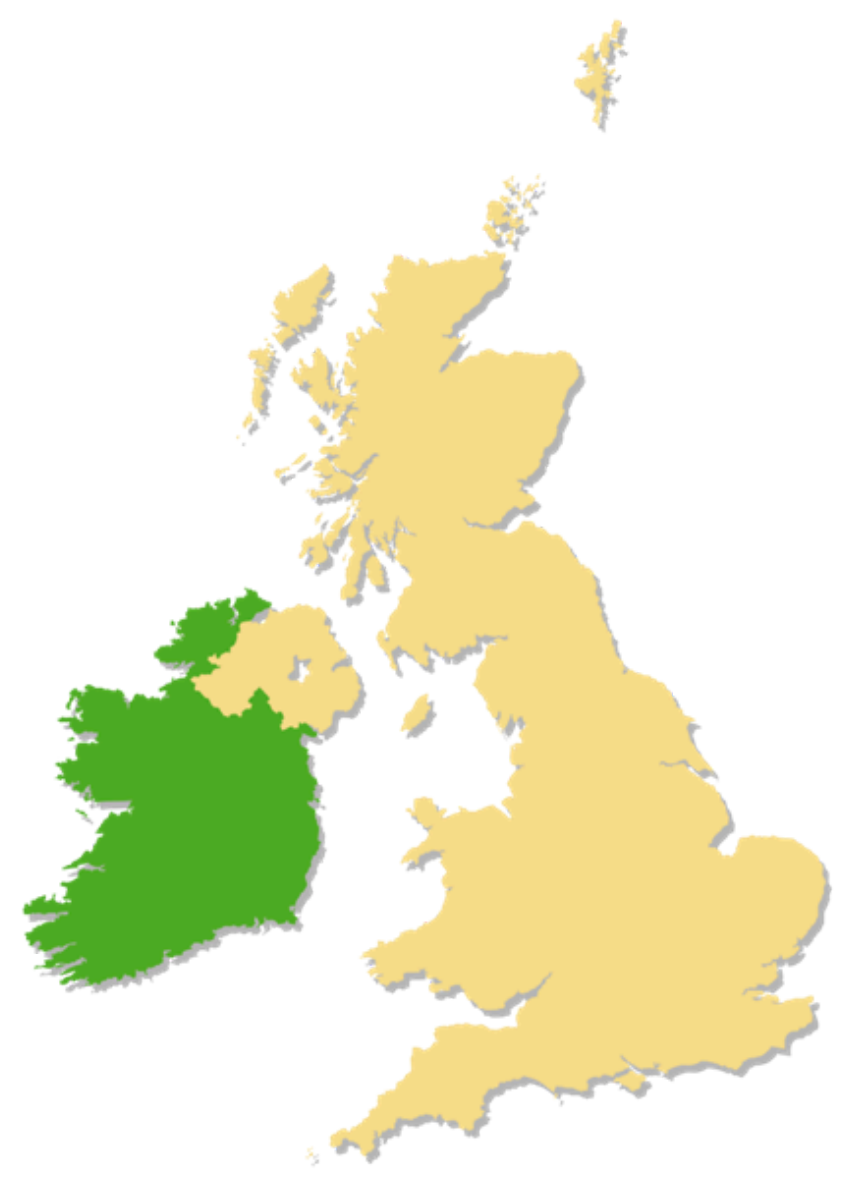
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Ireland then and now

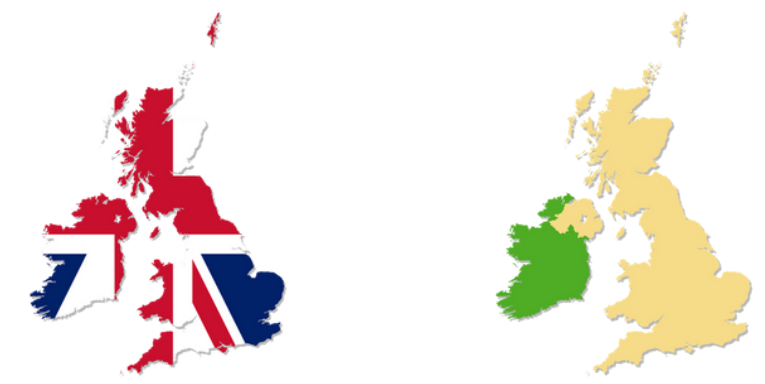
Ireland in 1910



Republic of Ireland today

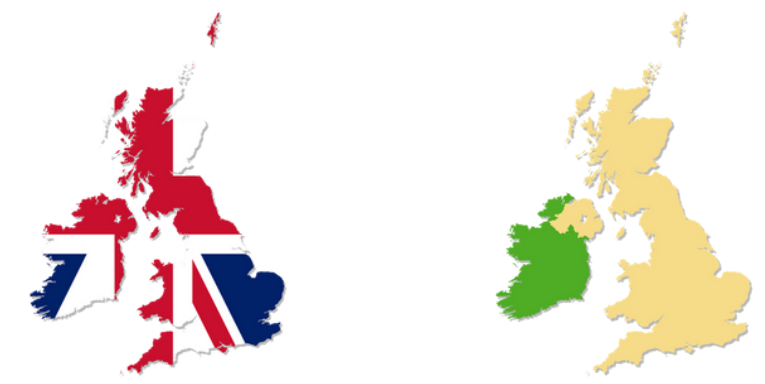


Ireland then and now



	Ireland in 1910	Republic of Ireland today
State	All 32 counties of Ireland were part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.	Ireland today is divided into two states: 26 counties form the Republic of Ireland, while the six counties of Northern Ireland are part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Head of state	King George V of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.	President elected by the people.
Flag	Union Jack	Tricolour
Parliament	The House of Commons and the House Lords in Westminster in London.	The Oireachtas, consisting of the Dáil and Seanad, in Leinster House in Dublin.
How laws are made	Passed by the Commons and Lords, signed by the King.	Passed by the Oireachtas, signed by the President.
How the government is formed	The King appointed the Prime Minister, who appointed two ministers to run Ireland – the Lord Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary.	The Dáil elects the Taoiseach. The President then appoints him/her by giving them the seal of office.

Ireland then and now



	Ireland in 1910	Republic of Ireland today
How the government works	From Dublin Castle, the Chief Secretary was responsible for 50 departments, boards, and commissions.	A cabinet of ministers is appointed. A minister oversees each area of government, e.g. finance or education.
Economy	Ireland was a rural country. Over 60 per cent of the population lived in the countryside. The majority of the workforce worked in agriculture.	Today Ireland is a more urbanised country, with most people living in towns and cities. The workforce is more diversified, working in industry and services.
How taxes are decided	Taxes were decided by the British Chancellor of Exchequer to suit Britain, whose economy was very different from Ireland's.	The Irish Minister for Finance prepares a budget to suit Irish conditions and it is approved by the Dáil.
Who are the police?	There were two police forces: the armed Royal Irish Constabulary throughout the country, and the unarmed Dublin Metropolitan Police in Dublin.	Garda Síochána

The Act of Union of 1800

- The Act of Union was passed in parliament on 28 March 1800, received royal assent on 1 August 1800 and came into effect on 1 January 1801.
- The Act of Union united the kingdoms of Ireland and Britain to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
- Decisions for Ireland concerning taxes, trade, education and social welfare were made at Westminster, London. The British MPs greatly outnumbered the Irish MPs and had little interest in or knowledge about Ireland. Policies made in Westminster suited the more industrialised Great Britain.

The United Kingdom Parliament at Westminster

The House of Lords

- A seat in the House of Lords was hereditary. It passed from father to son. A lord had his seat for life; therefore, the Lords was not influenced by elections or public opinion. Most members of the House of Lords were wealthy and saw little reason for change.
- The Conservative Party had a majority in the House of Lords.
- Sometimes, politicians, judges or generals who had served the state were given a lifetime peerage. They could sit in the House of Lords, but this title was not hereditary. Their sons would not inherit the seat.
- After the Act of Union, 28 Irish Lords sat in the House of Lords.



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The United Kingdom Parliament at Westminster

The House of Commons

- Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons were elected by limited **suffrage** in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.
- The leader of the biggest part in the Commons became Prime Minister of the UK. He appointed his followers as Ministers.
- Only men over 21 who were the heads of a household could vote.
- By the 1900s, Ireland was represented by 103 MPs.
- The House of Commons was dominated by two large political parties: the **Liberal Party** and the Conservative Party.
- The Irish MPs joined either the **Home Rule Party** (also known as the Irish Parliamentary Party or IPP) or the **Unionist Party**.
- The two Ministers for Ireland were the **Lord Lieutenant** and the **Chief Secretary**. They were responsible for the **Royal Irish Constabulary (RUC/police)**, the civil service, the courts, education, transport, etc.



UNIONISTS AND NATIONALISTS

- Since the 1870s, Irish people had been divided about whether it was good or bad for Ireland to be part of the UK.
- Unionists thought **Ireland gained** from being in the United Kingdom, which was then the greatest power in the world. They wanted to keep the union between Britain and Ireland.
- Nationalists thought it would be better for Ireland to have its **own parliament** that could make **laws suited to Irish conditions**.

Who were the nationalists?

- About 75% of Irish people were nationalists. They wanted Ireland to have a parliament that would decide on Irish laws and taxes.
- There were several reasons why a person might be a nationalist:
 - **Religious:** Most nationalists were Catholics, who made up 75% of the population. They felt the predominately Protestant UK discriminated against them. They wanted to run their own affairs.
 - **Ethnic:** Most nationalists **felt Irish, not British**. They wanted Ireland to be run by Irish people, not by British people.
 - **Economic/social:** Outside east Ulster, the Irish economy had declined since the Act of Union 1800. Through the 19th Century, Ireland experienced famine, poverty, and emigration. Nationalists felt they could do a better job of managing the Irish economy than the British had.



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Extreme/militant nationalists

- More extreme, radical nationalists wanted to cut all ties with Britain and set up an Irish republic. They were known as republicans or separatists. They believed that Britain would never leave Ireland peacefully and that they would have to use force to achieve independence.
- The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), whose members were known as
- Fenians, was founded by James Stephens in 1858. The men who joined it took a secret oath to fight for an Irish republic. The IRB had strong support among the Irish diaspora (Irish emigrants and their descendants) in America. Until the return of the prominent IRB leader Tom Clarke from America in 1910, the IRB remained an inactive force.

Moderate/constitutional nationalists

The Irish Parliamentary Party or the Home Rule Party

- By 1900, most Irish nationalists wished to use moderate, constitutional methods to achieve self-government. They believed they needed to elect MPs who would highlight the Irish question in Westminster.
- From 1882 to 1891, Charles Stewart Parnell was the leader of the Home Rule Party (founded by Isaac Butt in 1870). The Home Rule Party proposed setting up an Irish parliament that would control Irish domestic matters such as education, health and roads - but Ireland would stay in the United Kingdom. The Crown would remain Head of State and Westminster would still control international issues like foreign policy and trade.
- In the 1880s support for the party grew, as Parnell attracted both extreme and moderate nationalists.
- Parnell became known as the 'uncrowned king of Ireland'. In the 1885 election, he promised to support Liberal Prime Minister Gladstone in return for Home Rule. Gladstone introduced the First Home Rule Bill in 1886, but it was defeated in the House of Commons.
- In 1890, the party split following a divorce scandal involving Parnell and Katharine O'Shea. Parnell died in 1891 and the party did not reunite until 1900.

Moderate/constitutional nationalists

The Irish Parliamentary Party or the Home Rule Party

- In 1893, Gladstone introduced his Second Home Rule Bill. This time it was passed in the House of Commons by 347 to 304 votes but was then vetoed by the House of Lords, 419 to 41. It was clear that the conservative House of Lords was a stumbling block for Home Rule. Gladstone retired in 1894, which was another blow for the Home Rule Party, as his successor had little interest in Ireland. In 1895 a Conservative government was formed, and Home Rule was shelved.
- In February 1900, the Home Rule Party reunited under the leadership of John Redmond and John Dillon. They made a good team. Redmond was a skilful politician and worked well in Westminster. Dillon preferred to stay in Ireland and keep in touch with Irish issues on the ground. After 1906 'Wee Joe' Devlin, MP for West Belfast, became the main spokesperson for nationalists in Ulster.
- In the 1900 election, the Home Rule Party won 81 seats in Westminster. There was renewed hope for the Home Rule Party in 1906, when the Liberals returned to government. (We will read more about this in Chapter 2.)

Moderate/constitutional nationalists

The First Sinn Féin Party

- The late nineteenth century in Ireland saw the emergence of other forms and expressions of nationalism.
- One new political organisation, Sinn Féin, was founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith.
- Griffith studied the experience of other countries. He proposed the Hungarian Policy in his 1904 book *The Resurrection of Hungary*. To achieve greater independence from Austria, Hungarian politicians followed a policy of abstentionism from the imperial parliament in Vienna. This led to a system of dual monarchy, with the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The two countries had separate parliaments but were linked by one monarchy.
- Griffith hoped that dual monarchy would please unionists who wished to remain in the United Kingdom. He also wanted to develop the Irish economy. He promoted the policy of protectionism. By imposing taxes on British goods, Irish goods would be more competitive, thereby fostering home industry. Although flawed, the policy was popular among nationalists.

The growth of cultural nationalism

- The late 1800s saw a growth in nationalism across Europe. In Ireland many young people grew tired of traditional politics. The Home Rulers were arguing among themselves. The IRB was an inactive force. Many nationalists were concerned about the loss of Irish identity and Irish culture.
- In the 1880s and 1890s, many movements became popular because they encouraged cultural nationalism and the development of an Irish identity, while stopping the growing anglicisation of the country.
- The Gaelic Athletic Association was founded in 1884 by Michael Cusack. The aim of the GAA was to provide an Irish athletics association and to develop Irish sports such as football, hurling and handball.
- The Gaelic League was set up in 1893 by Eoin MacNeill and Douglas Hyde. Its aims were: to preserve Irish as a national language and to restore it as the language spoken by the people; to encourage the study of existing Gaelic literature; and to cultivate and publish modern Irish literature.
- The Anglo-Irish Literary Revival also occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory founded the Abbey Theatre. Writers began to produce Irish literature written in English.
- While none of the above movements was political, the growing awareness of an Irish identity helped foster support for the nationalist cause.

Who were the Unionists?

- About 25% of Irish people were unionists. Although in a small minority over the whole of Ireland, they formed a majority in the four north eastern counties (**Antrim, Down, Armagh** and **Derry**).
- There were several reasons why a person might be a unionists
- **Religious:** Most Irish Protestants were unionists. In the whole UK, Protestants were a majority but in Ireland, they were only 25% of the population. If Ireland had its own parliament, Protestants would be heavily outnumbered and they feared they would suffer discrimination or persecution. They felt safer in the UK where they were part of the majority.
- **Ethnic:** Many unionists were descended of British people who had settled in Ireland during the Irish plantations of the 16th and 17th Centuries. They felt British as well as Irish and wanted to remain part of the British state where they felt at home.
- **Economic/social:**
 - Most of the big businesses (e.g. Guinness, Jacob's and Harland and Wolff) were unionists.
 - They sold what they produced to Ireland and feared an Irish parliament would interfere with trade between the two countries.
 - In the northeast of Ulster, the economy prospered after 1860, while other parts of Ireland such as Dublin declined. There were many jobs in the linen and shipbuilding industries.
 - Protestants, who were in a majority in the northeast, did especially well. They feared that would change if Ireland left the United Kingdom.

Divisions within unionism

Southern unionists

- Unionists were not evenly distributed across the country. Outside Ulster, unionists were very much in the minority. They were mainly (but not all) comfortably off landlords, whose needs had been largely addressed by the Land Acts. Outside Dublin, they rarely won a seat in an election but used their wealth to campaign against Home Rule in Britain. When Home Rule became a very real threat in the early twentieth century, these southern unionists were more inclined to compromise than the unionists in Ulster.

Divisions within unionism

Ulster unionists

- Unionists in Ulster were in a much stronger position. They were in a slight majority across the province but in a significant majority in the north-east. They included all classes and creeds. In 1905 the Ulster Unionist Council was set up to help unify Ulster's unionists-workers and employers, farmers and landlords and the many different Protestant denominations - Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists.

Divisions within unionism

The Orange Order

- The Orange Order was an exclusively Protestant organisation set up in the 1790s. It was revived in the 1880s to resist Home Rule and to preserve the Protestant constitution of the United Kingdom and its Protestant ruler.
- The Orange Order had branches in the south but it was inevitably strongest in Ulster. Members of the Orange Order held marches, carried banners and demonstrated against Home Rule and for the union. When unionists across the island united in the Unionist Party, the Orange lodges were very effective at getting the Protestant vote out (persuading Protestants to go out to vote) and thereby helping to secure unionist seats - although almost all were in Ulster.

Divisions within unionism

Organisation of unionists

- Unionists did not organise themselves politically until the First Home Rule Bill in 1886. Even then the Lords' veto meant the union was safe. However, in the early years of the twentieth century, the threat of Home Rule seemed more dangerous. In 1910 the Unionist Party invited Edward Carson to lead them. He proved an excellent choice, rallying support both in Ireland and amongst Conservative MPs in Britain.

1.2 HOME RULE CRISIS

The Home Rule Crisis

The introduction of the **Third Home Rule Bill** in the British Parliament in **April 1912** was a milestone in the political development of modern Ireland. It was nearly twenty years since the defeat of **Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill** by the **House of Lords** in 1893.

This time **nationalists** throughout Ireland were distinctly hopeful that the bill would pass and that Ireland would obtain its own parliament. Under the **Parliament Act of 1911**, the peers in the House of Lords could no longer reject a bill passed by the House of Commons - they could only delay its passage into law for two years.

In 1912, a **Liberal Government** under **Prime Minister Henry Asquith** was in power. Dependent on the votes of the **Irish Home Rule Party** to stay in power, Asquith had drawn up the Home Rule Bill in consultation with **John Redmond**, the leader of the Home Rule Party. Therefore, the votes of **Liberal, Home Rule and Labour Party MPs** would guarantee the passage of the Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons. The House of Lords, dominated by the **Conservative Party**, which was strongly **unionist**, was bound to reject it but could now only delay it for two years.

The introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912 was a landmark in Irish history for both **nationalists and unionists**. It provoked massive opposition from **Irish unionists** determined to prevent the introduction of Home Rule at all costs. For nationalists also, it was a significant development. If the third attempt to achieve Home Rule by peaceful means failed, it was possible that the **physical force republican tradition** of Irish nationalism - already experiencing a revival - might grow in popularity.

The Third Home Rule Bill, 1912

The bill itself was very like those defeated in 1886 and 1893. Ireland was to have a **Home Rule Parliament** with very limited powers. To preserve the link with Britain, Ireland would continue to elect **forty MPs** to the imperial Parliament at **Westminster**. The country was still under the **British monarch** and part of the **Empire**. The **British Army** and **Royal Navy** would remain in Ireland. The **Westminster Parliament** was still responsible for **foreign policy, issues of war and peace, taxation, coinage, and the post office**.

Despite the limited self-government involved, **nationalists** were willing to accept the bill. The **Home Rule Party leader, John Redmond**, spoke eloquently in favour of it in the House of Commons and declared that its passage into law would mark the beginning of a new era of friendship and co-operation between **Great Britain and Ireland**. Even certain more extreme nationalists, such as **Patrick Pearse**, were prepared to accept the Home Rule settlement because it gave Irish people control over areas such as **education and language policy**.

However, **unionists** regarded the prospect of Home Rule as a deadly threat not only to their prosperity but to their very freedom and sense of identity. The passage of the bill through the **House of Commons** in 1912 was a signal for the start of a campaign of **unionist resistance**.

Unionist Opposition to Home Rule

Throughout Europe around 1912 national feeling was intense, as people of different nationalities prided themselves on their distinctive identities. This situation was mirrored in Ireland. Just as **nationalists prided themselves on being Irish, unionists were equally proud of their British identity**. The fact that they were in a minority on the island of Ireland made them feel vulnerable and even more determined to resist threats to their identity. In their view, **Home Rule would pose serious threats to unionist wellbeing**. They opposed it on three fundamental grounds.

- **Political**: Unionists were loyal to the **British monarch** and were content to remain fully within the **United Kingdom** under a single parliament.
- **Economic**: North-east **Ulster had prospered under the Act of Union (1800)**. Unionists feared that a Home Rule Parliament in **Dublin** would destroy this prosperity.
- **Religious**: The slogan '**Home Rule is Rome Rule**' summed up unionist fears of being dominated by a **Catholic-controlled parliament** in Dublin.

Unionist Opposition to Home Rule

Although unionists outside Ulster, known as **southern unionists**, were in a small minority, they were quite powerful. They were usually **Protestant landlords, professionals or businessmen**. Some richer **Catholics**, such as landlords, judges, lawyers, and businessmen, were also unionists. Many powerful officers in the **British Army**, such as **Lord Kitchener and Sir Henry Wilson**, were from southern unionist families. In north-east Ulster, the situation was different from that in the rest of the country as unionists were in a majority, and their cause enjoyed support from **Protestants in all classes of society**. The powerful, anti-Catholic **Orange Order** played a key role in fostering a sense of exclusive Protestant identity in opposition to Home Rule. At this time of crisis for unionists, they were led by two extremely able politicians, **Edward Carson**, who was a southern unionist, and **James Craig** from Co. Down.

The Campaign Against Home Rule

Carson and Craig were both completely committed to preventing the introduction of Home Rule.

The Campaign Against Home Rule

Sir Edward Carson (1854-1935) became leader of the **Unionist Party** in 1910. Born in Dublin, he attended **Trinity College** and then studied law. During the **Plan of Campaign** he was one of the principal lawyers employed by **Arthur Balfour** to defend the interests of the British Government and the landlords. He later went to live in London, where he became one of the leading barristers in the country and featured in some famous court cases.

Carson's main political ambition as a southern unionist was to keep all of Ireland directly under the **Westminster Parliament**. He had powerful allies in the **British Conservative Party**. From 1912 onwards he was to use his ability as a public speaker and his organisational skills to muster support in Ireland and throughout Great Britain in the struggle to prevent Home Rule.

James Craig

Carson's main assistant in the Unionist Party was Sir **James Craig** (1871-1940). Craig belonged to one of the leading industrialist families in Belfast. Like Carson, he hoped that the unionist campaign would prevent the introduction of Home Rule in any part of Ireland. However, whereas Carson was a southern unionist, **James Craig was a northern unionist**. In effect, if he could not prevent the introduction of Home Rule in southern Ireland, he was determined to keep as much of Ulster as possible in the Union.



Adapted from Modern Ireland (Fourth Edition) by Gerard Brockie and Raymond Walsh, Gill Education.

Marshalling Support for the Unionist Cause

Unionist demonstrations took place throughout Ulster during 1912. Meetings also took place in London and other British cities. At these, **Carson, Craig** or other **Unionist Party leaders** were usually joined by members of the **British Conservative Party**, which was then in opposition. Its leader, **Andrew Bonar Law**, was descended from **Ulster Protestants** and had a deep interest in the cause of the unionists. Bonar Law and other Conservatives took the unusual step of actually saying that they would support unionists who broke the law in opposition to Home Rule.

Carson and Craig threatened rebellion and claimed that if the Home Rule Bill were passed, unionists in Ulster would attempt to take over the running of the area themselves. Before Carson and Craig could reach this point, they had to demonstrate publicly the extent of their support and also to establish some military group that would carry out their aims. The response to these needs took the form of the **Solemn League and Covenant**, and **the Ulster Volunteers**.

The Solemn League and Covenant

On **28 September 1912**, vast numbers of men throughout **Ulster signed a pledge against Home Rule**. At the same time, unionist women signed a similar declaration. Some people felt so strongly about the issue that they signed the pledge with their own blood. Known as the **Solemn League and Covenant**, it was based on the covenant, or agreement, between **God and the Jewish people in the Old Testament** of the Bible. The unionists regarded themselves as **God's chosen people** and believed that they were being threatened by their enemies, namely **Catholics and nationalists in Ireland** and the **Liberal Party in Great Britain**.

In the Solemn League and Covenant, unionists refused to accept that Home Rule was being passed democratically by a majority in the **British Parliament**. Instead, they regarded it as an illegal conspiracy against their **Protestant way of life**. In the Covenant, they pledged themselves to **refuse to recognise the authority of any future Home Rule parliament in Ireland**.



The Ulster Volunteers

To give substance to this threat, a military group known as the **Ulster Volunteer Force** was set up. The Ulster Volunteers began as local groups drilling and parading. Unionists discovered an old law that allowed **Justices of the Peace** to permit groups to arm and drill to defend the monarch. As most Justices of the Peace were unionists, they readily granted such permission. In early 1913, **Carson and Craig** took control of these local groups, which were united to form the Ulster Volunteer Force.

The founding of the Ulster Volunteers was an important turning point in Irish history. Since the defeat of the **Fenian rising in 1867**, violence for political aims had all but disappeared. Although the **Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)** remained in existence, it had little impact on public life. The decision of the **Ulster unionists** to take up arms altered the situation radically. Although professing loyalty to Great Britain, they now threatened to use violence against a law passed democratically by the **British Parliament**. This decision merely played into the hands of their greatest enemies - extreme nationalist separatists. If unionists were willing to arm themselves to prevent the introduction of Home Rule, then certain Irish nationalists would advocate the use of arms to ensure the success of Home Rule. Thus, decisions were taken in 1913 that paved the way for the following ten years of violence and division throughout Ireland.

KEY CONCEPT - ULSTER UNIONISM

Ulster Unionism was based on the belief that Ulster should remain an integral part of the United Kingdom. Originally Ulster unionists had joined with unionists in the rest of Ireland in trying to prevent Home Rule for all of the country. When this became unlikely they concentrated on excluding as much of Ulster as possible from Home Rule. As a result of pressure from both inside and outside parliament **they succeeded in having six counties excluded from Home Rule and continuing to be part of the United Kingdom. These were to form the state of Northern Ireland established under the Government of Ireland Act (1920)**. Ulster unionists went on to rule Northern Ireland and to dominate political life there in the years ahead. Ulster Unionism derived great strength from the fact that it drew support from practically all sections of the Protestant community throughout Northern Ireland.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the Parliament Act (1911) pave the way for the passing of the Third Home Rule Bill?
2. Why was the introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill a landmark in Irish history?
3. What was proposed by the Third Home Rule Bill?
4. Why were unionists so opposed to its introduction?
5. Who emerged as the two main leaders of unionism?
6. What was the Solemn League and Covenant?
7. Why was the Ulster Volunteer Force established?

The Nationalist Response

The Formation of the Irish Volunteers

Throughout 1913, as the **Ulster Volunteers grew in strength**, nationalists became more and more alarmed. They were also uneasy at the possibility that the **British Government might exclude all or part of Ulster from Home Rule**.

In November 1913, Professor **Eoin MacNeill** called for the formation of an organisation of nationalist volunteers to counter the pressure coming from the Ulster Volunteers. MacNeill was a nationalist from **County Antrim**, a founder of the **Gaelic League** and a professor of early Irish history. In a famous article entitled '**The North Began**', which appeared in the Gaelic League newspaper, **An Claidheamh Soluis**, he praised the Ulster Volunteers for standing up for their principles and called on nationalists to form a volunteer group of their own to put pressure on the **British Government** to introduce Home Rule for all of Ireland.

The Nationalist Response

The Formation of the Irish Volunteers

On **25 November 1913** the **Irish Volunteers** were founded at a meeting held at the **Rotunda Rink in Dublin**. Over 3,000 Volunteers joined on the first night, and MacNeill was elected leader, with a **Provisional Committee** to assist him. Unknown to MacNeill, most members of this committee were members of the **IRB**. The secret society regarded the Irish Volunteers as offering an ideal opportunity to plan a rebellion against British rule in Ireland.

This aim was at variance with the objectives of MacNeill and most ordinary Volunteers, who were prepared to accept the granting of Home Rule. The Irish Volunteers grew rapidly and had over **70,000 members by June 1914**. The **British Government** now faced a worsening crisis in Ireland. Two sets of Volunteers faced one another with diametrically opposed aims. In this situation, **Asquith** set about attempting to reach a compromise between unionists and Home Rule nationalists.

The Search for a Compromise

In attempting to avoid civil war in Ireland between **unionists and nationalists**, the **British Government** focused on the possibility of special treatment for **Ulster**. Two main difficulties presented themselves: the definition of Ulster; and whether exclusion from Home Rule should be a temporary measure or a permanent arrangement. Although Ulster was traditionally regarded as a bastion of unionism, not all of the province's nine counties were dominated by unionists. Three counties - **Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan** - had overwhelming nationalist majorities. Four other counties - **Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry** - had clear unionist majorities. Two counties, however - **Fermanagh and Tyrone** - were divided almost equally, although they had slight nationalist majorities. By 1914 **John Redmond** had come to accept that Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry would have to be excluded in some way from Home Rule. Similarly, **Carson** agreed that Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan would be included under Home Rule.

However, both sides were determined to keep all of Fermanagh and Tyrone. Redmond's suggestion of '**Home Rule within Home Rule**', i.e. that Ulster could have special treatment within a Home Rule settlement, was rejected outright by unionists, who wished to remain under the **Westminster Parliament**. Redmond then offered a **six-year period of exclusion** for Ulster, but Carson rejected this too, remarking that it was like a death sentence with a six-year stay of execution. As the political situation remained deadlocked, both sets of Volunteers in Ireland continued to strengthen their position.

The Crisis Deepens

Whatever decisions were taken on the future of Ireland would have to be implemented on the ground by the **British Army**.

The Curragh Mutiny

Unionist morale received a huge boost from an incident known as the '**Curragh Mutiny**'. Most **British Army officers** had conservative and unionist political sympathies, and unionists hoped that they would refuse to obey orders to march into Ulster to enforce Home Rule. In March 1914, fifty-eight British officers in the Curragh threatened to resign their commissions. They mistakenly believed that they were about to be ordered to march against the **Ulster Volunteers**. The **British Government** assured them that no such operations were planned. The incident greatly weakened the position of **Asquith's Government** in its dealings with unionists. Many nationalists took the view that they would have to rely more and more on their own resources in order to achieve a degree of self-government.

Gun-Running Operations

On 24-25 April the **Ulster Volunteers** succeeded in landing vast quantities of arms, which had been imported from Germany, at **Larne, Bangor** and **Donaghadee**. The incident was known as the **Larne Gun-Running**, and the British Government made no attempt to arrest or punish those involved.

In June 1914, **John Redmond** moved to gain control of the **Irish Volunteers**. He was alarmed that such a powerful organisation was outside his control. **MacNeill** and other leaders agreed to allow Redmond to appoint twenty-five members to the Provisional Committee, in order to avoid a split in the Volunteers.

On 26 July 1914 the Irish Volunteers landed arms and ammunition in Co. Dublin in an incident known as the **Howth Gun-Running**. The arms had been transported on **Erskine Childers' yacht, Asgard**. Unlike in Ulster, where the authorities took no action, the police and the **British Army** attempted to intervene in this case. Later in the day, British troops opened fire on jeering crowds in **Bachelor's Walk** in Dublin city, killing three people and wounding thirty-eight. Nationalists contrasted this with the attitude of the authorities to the Larne Gun-Running.



Failure to Agree

As the deadline when **Home Rule would become law (September 1914)** approached, the **British Government** made one last effort to find a compromise. **King George V** offered **Buckingham Palace** as a setting for a conference between the British Government, the **Conservative Opposition**, and **unionist and nationalist representatives**. **Asquith** and **Lloyd George** for the Liberal Government were joined by the Home Rule leaders, **Redmond and Dillon**. On the other side sat the Conservative leaders, **Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne**, and **Carson and Craig** for the Unionist Party. The **speaker of the House of Commons** chaired the meeting. No agreement whatsoever could be reached on **Fermanagh and Tyrone**. As a result, the **Buckingham Palace Conference** broke up in complete failure on **24 July**. By then, however, Europe was on the road to war. Within ten days, **World War I had broken out**, with Great Britain joining the war on **4 August 1914**.

The Outbreak of World War I

When war broke out, the **British Government** decided to pass the **Home Rule Bill** but to suspend its coming into effect until the end of hostilities. This partly pleased both **unionists and nationalists**. Unionists were given a guarantee that, when the war was over, the situation of **Ulster** would be looked at again. For nationalists, the passing into law of Home Rule on **18 September 1914** was a victory of sorts. They expected the war to be over soon, and then, after nearly fifty years of struggle, Home Rule would finally come into operation.



Unionist Reaction to the Outbreak of War

For **Carson, Craig and other unionist leaders**, the war was an opportunity to show their loyalty to king and country. They advised the **Ulster Volunteers to join the British forces**, and many answered this call. As the leaders of the British Army were sympathetic to the unionists, they allowed the Ulster Volunteers to join in groups and to retain certain badges and emblems. A special division of the British Army, the **36th (Ulster) Division**, consisted largely of recruits from the province.

Nationalist Reaction to the Outbreak of War

With the outbreak of war, **Redmond** had a much more difficult decision to make than Carson or Craig. Although he was personally sympathetic to the British cause, many nationalists would be reluctant to become involved in fighting on Britain's side. However, in August and September 1914 there was a wave of sympathy for **Belgium** throughout Ireland. Britain had gone to war over the issue of Belgian neutrality, and the British press highlighted German atrocities against this small Catholic country. Against this background and because he hoped that a grateful Britain would grant Ireland Home Rule as a result, Redmond took the momentous decision to advise his followers to join the British forces. In a speech at **Woodenbridge in Co. Wicklow** in September 1914 Redmond strongly advised members of the **Irish Volunteers to join the British Army**. His speech caused a bitter split in the Irish Volunteers. A huge majority of them, around **170,000 members**, followed Redmond and became known as the **National Volunteers**. They were now commanded by **Colonel Maurice Moore**, and around **25,000 of them joined the British Army**. The leader of the Irish Volunteers, **Eoin MacNeill**, and around **11,000 of his followers** refused to follow Redmond. They kept the title **Irish Volunteers** and declared that World War I was England's quarrel and no direct concern of theirs.

The IRB: 'England's Difficulty is Ireland's Opportunity'

For the **IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood)** the outbreak of war in 1914 meant the arrival of a long-awaited opportunity. Basing their policy on the old slogan '**England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity**,' the IRB leaders now set about planning an armed rebellion in Ireland. The **split in the Volunteers** suited their purposes admirably. They could manipulate the smaller group of **11,000** much more easily than the larger group, which had been nominally under **Redmond's control**. At the outbreak of hostilities, most people in Ireland supported the British entry into the war. However, as the prolonged conflict developed, conditions soon changed, to the detriment of Redmond and his Home Rule followers and to the advantage of more extreme nationalists of the **republican tradition**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who formed the Irish Volunteers and why?
2. How did the IRB view the Irish Volunteers?
3. What attempts were made by the British Government to avoid civil war in Ireland?
4. What was the Curragh Mutiny?
5. What gun-running operations occurred in April and July 1914?
6. What effect did the outbreak of World War I have on the granting of Home Rule?
7. How did unionist leaders view the outbreak of war?
8. How did John Redmond and the IRB differ in their respective reactions to the outbreak of World War I?

1.13.3 IRELAND AND WORLD WAR I

Ireland and World War I

As an integral part of the **United Kingdom**, Ireland was fully involved in **World War I**. **Protestants and unionists** supported the war effort without reservation from the outset. Indeed, many Protestant families suffered severely when the only son in the family was killed. This led many of them to leave Ireland for **Great Britain** after the war.

For **Catholics and nationalists**, the decision to join the army or navy was usually based on one of two motives. Many followed the advice of **Redmond** and believed that they were fighting for Ireland's cause, as the British Government would be more likely to grant Home Rule because of their sacrifice. For others, the motivation was purely economic. For poorer soldiers, the **separation allowance** paid to their wives and children was an incentive to join up at a time when unemployment and low wages were rife throughout most of Ireland.

As the war continued and the number of casualties increased, **recruitment levels** declined in Ireland. Whereas **43,000 enlisted** between the outbreak of war and the end of 1914, this number declined to **12,000** between September 1915 and March 1916.

The War and the Irish Economy

Some sectors of the Irish economy prospered during the war. Because of food shortages in Britain due to German submarine activity, the price of **Irish food exports** rose rapidly. **Heavy industry flourished in the Belfast region**, as there was a huge wartime demand for shipping and armaments. However, people on **fixed incomes**, especially **white-collar workers** such as civil servants, clerks, and teachers, suffered as their salaries failed to keep pace with inflation. As a result, there were a number of **strikes** in these sectors.



Irish Regiments in World War I

Irish soldiers took part in many varied operations; however, they were particularly prominent in two memorable engagements. During 1915, Irish regiments such as the **Royal Dublin Fusiliers**, the **Inniskilling Fusiliers**, and the **Royal Munster Fusiliers** suffered heavy casualties in the ill-fated **Gallipoli campaign** in Turkey.

During 1916, the **36th (Ulster) Division** suffered very heavy casualties at the **Battle of the Somme**, which began in July. Indeed, right up to the end of the war in November 1918, Irish regiments remained in the thick of the fighting and suffered heavy casualties.

Historians have difficulty estimating the precise number of Irish recruits and casualties during World War I. This is partly because many Irish emigrants in Great Britain joined various regiments of the British Army, and largely 'Irish' regiments contained people without any Irish connection. However, it is estimated that around **300,000 Irish were involved in the fighting** and that there were around **30,000 Irish casualties**.

Of all the consequences of World War I in Ireland, one of the most significant was the opportunity the war created for more extreme separatists to fill the political vacuum left by the declining influence of **John Redmond and the Home Rule Party**.

Opposition to World War I

Despite the difficulties involved, a small minority of Irish separatists began to voice their opposition to Irish involvement in World War I. Although the **Defence of the Realm Act (DORA)** imposed strict restrictions on freedom of speech, this did not deter determined protesters. **Arthur Griffith**, the leader of **Sinn Féin**, publicly voiced his opposition to the war.

James Connolly and the **Irish Citizen Army** were also opposed. The banner at their headquarters at Liberty Hall declared, '**We serve neither King nor Kaiser but Ireland**'. The **Irish Volunteers**, under the leadership of **Eoin MacNeill**, continued to recruit members, to drill, and to discourage people from joining the British Army. Unknown to MacNeill, practically all his headquarters staff were members of the **IRB**. These men had one purpose in mind - planning an armed rising as soon as possible.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did many nationalists join the British Army during World War I?
2. State two ways in which the war affected the Irish economy.
3. Name two Irish regiments that fought in World War I.
4. Name two groups in Ireland opposed to the war.

