

Ch. 2 - **TOWARDS PARTITION AND INDEPENDENCE 1914-1923**



Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The revival of the IRB and the planning of the 1916 Rising
- The 1916 Rising and its significance
- The revival of Sinn Féin and the 1918 general election
- The establishment of the First Dáil
- The War of Independence
- The role of Michael Collins

Useful Terms

Abstention: standing for election but then refusing to take up the seat won in parliament.

IRB: Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secret oath-bound society whose aim was to create an independent Irish republic.

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

Blood sacrifice: when a person consciously sacrifices their own life for the good of their country.

Internment: the imprisonment of people who have not been first tried by a court. It is usually preventative rather than a punishment for a crime.

Martyr: a person killed because of their beliefs.

Rebellion: rising or insurrection; using force to try to overthrow the existing government.

Insurgent: a rebel, a person fighting to overthrow the government.

Sedition: conduct or speech encouraging people to rebel against the government/authorities.

Sinn Féin: meaning 'We Ourselves', political party founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905.

By-election: A by-election is held, when a vacancy occurs in a constituency, due to death or resignation of the sitting MP.

Ard-Fheis: annual convention of a political party.

Useful Terms

Dáil Éireann: an independent Irish parliament, which met for the first time on 21 January 1919.

Decree: an official order, decision made by a government. Such an order usually has the force of a law.

Government bond: an individual lends money to the government in return for a guarantee that they will be paid the original investment with interest.

TD: Teachta Dála, a member of Dáil Éireann, a member of parliament.

Partition: the division of Ireland into two separate states.

Discrimination: the unfair treatment of a group of people on the basis of race, religion or political beliefs.

Sectarianism: A strong support for a religious group, which often causes conflict with other religious groups.

UVF: Ulster Volunteer Force: paramilitary group set up by Ulster Unionists to defend the threat of Home Rule.

Special Constables: A new police force set up to help the RIC deal with violence in Northern Ireland.

Shipyard expulsions: July 1920: Catholic workers were expelled from their jobs in the Belfast shipyards.

Belfast Boycott: nationalist policy of boycotting goods and services from Northern Ireland in protest of the shipyard expulsions.

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.

2.1.1 *The* **EASTER** *Rising* 1916

Planning a Rising

- For the **Supreme Council, or governing body, of the IRB**, planning a rising was a matter of extreme urgency. They did not know how long World War I was going to last, and it was essential from their point of view to attack British rule in Ireland while Britain was involved in the war. **Thomas Clarke, Seán Mac Diarmada, Joseph Plunkett** and other leaders of the Supreme Council approached their task at two levels. On the surface, they would encourage anti-British feeling and exploit the difficulties encountered by **Redmond**. By the middle of 1915, Redmond's popularity had fallen considerably. War casualties were high, and there was no immediate prospect of Home Rule. In June 1915, he refused an invitation to join a coalition government in Britain. Although this decision was supported in Ireland, Redmond's position was weakened because **Carson** joined the government at the same time. From then on, unionists had a strong influence right at the heart of the British Government.
- For the IRB, this was further proof that the peaceful attainment of Home Rule was a distant prospect. At a hidden level, members of the Supreme Council plotted an actual rising. They initially planned it for the autumn of 1915 but later changed the date to **Easter 1916**. **MacNeill** and other non-IRB members of the Irish Volunteers were kept in the dark concerning these plans.

Planning a Rising

- The IRB men sent **Sir Roger Casement** as their secret agent to Germany to enlist the Kaiser's (German Emperor) help. Casement had been a British diplomat until 1912 and had been knighted by **King George V** for his humanitarian work. He had highlighted the horrific exploitation of native peoples in Africa and South America. By 1914 he had abandoned his loyalty to Britain and had joined the IRB. His mission to Germany was only partly successful. He tried but failed to persuade Irish prisoners of war who were in the British Army to obtain their release from German prisoner-of-war camps by joining him to fight against Britain. The German authorities did not believe that the IRB had the capacity to stage a serious rising in Ireland. As a result, they agreed to send only a shipload of arms and ammunition instead of the large numbers of troops and weapons that Casement had hoped for. In planning the rising, the IRB decided to recruit two highly influential, talented, but vastly different men - **Patrick Pearse and James Connolly**.

KEY CONCEPT: PHYSICAL FORCE

Between 1912 and 1949 this refers to the threat or use of physical force to achieve political objectives in Ireland. It covers the activities of the **Ulster Volunteers** in attempting to prevent the introduction of Home Rule and the **Irish Volunteers** in arming in its support.

From the **Easter Rising of 1916 to the end of the Civil War in 1923**, physical force was a constant factor in Irish affairs whether it emanated from insurgent groups like **the IRA** or state forces such as **the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries**.

Following the establishment of both states North and South, physical force remained a threat to society in the form of civil unrest in Northern Ireland and the activities of republican and loyalist paramilitaries.

Patrick Pearse and the Irish Nation

- By 1914, **Patrick Pearse** was one of the leading public figures in Ireland spreading the belief that Ireland was a separate nation with its own ancient culture and that it was entitled to complete independence. Born in Dublin in 1879, the son of an English stonemason, Pearse attended the **Christian Brothers' school at Westland Row**; he then went on to the **Royal University and King's Inns**, where he qualified as a barrister. While growing up, he was deeply influenced by the **Irish cultural revival**, most especially by the **Gaelic League**. He wrote books in the Irish language and edited the Gaelic League newspaper, **An Claidheamh Soluis**. Pearse was convinced that the language was at the heart of Ireland's identity and remarked that a country without its language was a country without a soul. His deep interest in education led him to study the school systems of different countries and to found his own school, **St Enda's**, in Dublin. Here, great emphasis was placed on the **Irish language and on Irish history and culture**. In his writings, Pearse often returned to the theme of a hero who was willing to die for his country. He frequently used religious imagery to portray love of country as a sacred duty. He even compared a hero dying for his country to Christ dying on the cross to save the human race.

Patrick Pearse and the Irish Nation

- By 1915, Pearse had become convinced that only the shedding of blood could restore Ireland's honour. He believed that English influence in the country was destroying Irish identity and that if patriots died for Ireland, it would change the outlook of the Irish people. This idea is known as **blood sacrifice**. Whereas other leading members of the IRB concentrated on staging a successful rising, Pearse believed that even if the rising failed, the blood shed by the rebels would encourage future generations to rise against British rule. At a time when many people in Europe glorified sacrifice during World War I, Pearse was quite explicit in his views. He praised the war, remarking: "*It is good for the world that such things should be done. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed by the red wine of the battlefields.*"
- Although he had supported **Home Rule in 1912**, Pearse changed his mind when the emergence of the **Ulster Volunteers appeared to threaten its implementation**. He enthusiastically joined the newly formed **Irish Volunteers in November 1913** and was sworn into the **IRB** at around the same time. From then on, his writings became more and more dominated by the theme of **blood sacrifice**.

Patrick Pearse and the Irish Nation

- In July 1915, during a famous oration over the grave of the old Fenian **Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa**, Pearse expressed the view that a risen Irish nation could only come about as a result of armed rebellion: "Life springs from death, and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations." He concluded the speech with the observation that '**Ireland unfree shall never be at peace**'. The **British authorities in Dublin Castle** regarded this as a typical speech by an extreme separatist with limited public appeal. They realised that a major rebellion was already at an advanced stage of preparation. While Pearse was expressing romantic and idealistic notions of Irish freedom, **James Connolly** was also committed to armed rebellion, but for much more practical reasons.

KEY CONCEPT: BLOOD SACRIFICE

This concept is the belief that spilling blood in pursuit of Irish independence was an admirable and justified act. In Irish history, it is very much associated with **Patrick Pearse**. He believed that the Irish people were losing their distinctive identity and that even an unsuccessful rebellion in which rebels were killed in battle or executed *would inspire future generations to fight to secure complete independence for Ireland*. It was heavily criticised by those who accused Pearse of being prepared to use violence without hope of victory and for associating Christ's resurrection at Easter with the Irish people rising in rebellion against British rule.

James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army

As a socialist, **James Connolly** had hoped that workers in different European countries would refuse to fight one another in **World War I**. When this hope failed to materialise, he concentrated on the notion that Irish workers could never be properly treated under British rule. In his view, a successful rising against Britain would be a prelude to a more equal society in Ireland. After the departure of **James Larkin** to America in 1914, Connolly came to control the **Irish Transport and General Workers' Union** as well as the **Irish Citizen Army**. By 1915 there were about **200 members of the Citizen Army**, and Connolly grew more anxious and appeared willing to lead them on their own in a rebellion. This would interfere dangerously with the plans of the **IRB** and possibly lead the authorities in **Dublin Castle** to imprison hundreds of leading separatists because of the threat they posed to the war effort against Germany. To prevent this, the IRB recruited Connolly in early 1916 and made him a member of the **Military Council**, the small group that was planning the rising. In the months leading up to Easter 1916, therefore, the plotters hoped to involve both the **Irish Volunteers** and the **Irish Citizen Army** in the rising.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why had Redmond's popularity declined by the middle of 1915?
2. Why did the IRB consider the planning of a rising to be a matter of urgency?
3. What role was played by Roger Casement in the IRB's plans?
4. What did Pearse mean by 'blood sacrifice'?
5. Why did the IRB include James Connolly in their plans for a rebellion?



Preparing for the Rising

For the leaders of the **IRB on the Military Council**, **Eoin MacNeill** was a serious obstacle to success. MacNeill would support a rising only if it had a serious hope of succeeding. This depended on significant assistance from Germany, including the landing of German troops in Ireland. Right until the final days before the rising, the IRB kept MacNeill in the dark about their plans. The authorities in **Dublin Castle** were deceived by the secrecy of the Military Council of the IRB. Aware that previous rebel movements had been full of British spies, **Thomas Clarke**, **Seán Mac Diarmada** and the other leaders kept strict control over information. The Irish Chief Secretary, **Augustine Birrell**, and the Under-Secretary, **Sir Matthew Nathan**, did not regard the Irish Volunteers as a serious threat. They believed that the Volunteers had insufficient arms to stage a rebellion. **Redmond** had advised them not to move against the Irish Volunteers, as this would only make them more popular and damage recruitment to the British Army. On Wednesday 19 April 1916 the Military Council published a forged note known as the '**Castle Document**' in the newspapers. It was written on official Dublin Castle notepaper and contained a list of people that the British authorities were supposedly planning to imprison. As the names included leading members of the Irish Volunteers, MacNeill at once gave orders to his followers to resist arrest.

Preparing for the Rising

On Thursday 20 April, **Pearse** admitted to MacNeill that a rising was planned. On the following day, Good Friday 21 April, Pearse, Mac Diarmada and **Thomas McDonagh** visited MacNeill and told him about the imminent arrival of a German ship with arms and ammunition. MacNeill now realised that a conflict could not be avoided and repeated his orders of the previous Wednesday to resist imprisonment. On the same day, the German ship the **Aud** arrived in **Tralee Bay** in Co. Kerry. When it failed to rendezvous with Irish Volunteers, the captain sailed to **Cork Harbour** and sank the ship with all the armaments on board.

When **Casement**, returning from Germany, landed from a German submarine at **Banna Strand near Tralee**, he was immediately arrested. Ironically, he was coming to try to stop the rising because in his view the arms sent by the Germans were totally inadequate.

Having learned of the fate of the Aud, MacNeill tried to prevent a rising. On Easter Sunday 23 April, he published a notice in the **Sunday Independent** cancelling all Volunteer manoeuvres planned for that day. On Sunday evening the members of the IRB Military Council met in **Liberty Hall in Dublin**. Despite the loss of German arms, they were determined to go ahead and planned the rising for the following day, **Easter Monday 24 April 1916**.

The 1916 Rising Breaks Out

As groups of **Irish Volunteers** and **members of the Irish Citizen Army** moved to various positions around Dublin city on the morning of **24 April 1916**, few onlookers believed that anything unusual was going to happen. People were used to seeing both groups engage in marches and drills. However, this time they were intent on real fighting. A number of strategic buildings were occupied, including the **General Post Office (GPO)** on Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street), which the rebels chose as their headquarters. At noon the **tricolour flag** was raised over the GPO, and **Patrick Pearse**, who had been chosen as Commander-in-Chief, came outside to read the **Proclamation of the Irish Republic**.

Because of all the confusion of the previous days, the Easter Rising was mostly confined to Dublin, although some Volunteer activity also occurred in areas such as **Ashbourne in Co. Meath, Galway and Wexford**.

The 1916 Rising Breaks Out

In Dublin, the Volunteers and Citizen Army seized seven strongpoints throughout the city: the **GPO, the Four Courts, the South Dublin Union, the Mendicity Institute, the Royal College of Surgeons, Jacob's Factory and Bolands Mills**. An attempt to capture **Dublin Castle** failed, although - unknown to the Volunteers - it was very poorly defended at the time.

The **British** soon rushed in reinforcements from **Athlone, the Curragh Camp** and Britain. **General Sir John Maxwell** was sent to take control with full powers to put down the rebellion. Gradually, British forces encircled the city centre and moved on the rebel positions. A gunboat, **Helga**, sailed up the **River Liffey** to shell the GPO and Liberty Hall.

There was considerable loss of life, injury and damage to property, especially in the **O'Connell Street** area. Over **450 people**, including nearly **300 civilians**, were killed. Appalled at the suffering of civilians, Pearse agreed to an unconditional surrender on **Friday 28 April**, and **Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell**, holding a white flag, carried this message to the British Army. His instructions were then carried to the other garrisons, ordering them to surrender as well.

TIMELINE OF THE 1916 RISING

- **Wednesday, 19th April:** The **Military Council of the IRB** published the forged '**Castle Document**'.
- **Thursday, 20th April:** **Patrick Pearse** informed the leader of the Irish Volunteers, **Eoin MacNeill**, that a rising was being planned.
- **Friday, 21st April:** The German battleship the **Aud** arrived off the coast of Kerry. It failed to link up with the Irish Volunteers, was captured by the **British Navy** and sunk by its captain in **Cork Harbour**. **Roger Casement** was arrested after landing at **Banna Strand** in Co. Kerry.
- **Saturday, 22nd April:** **Eoin MacNeill** cancelled Volunteer activities planned for the following day, Easter Sunday.
- **Sunday, 23rd April:** MacNeill's orders cancelling Volunteer activities appeared in the **Sunday Independent** newspaper.
- **Monday, 24th April:** An armed rising broke out, mostly confined to Dublin. The Commander-in-Chief of the rebel forces, **Patrick Pearse**, read the **Proclamation of the Irish Republic** outside the **General Post Office (GPO)** in Dublin.

Reaction to the Rising in Ireland and Britain

At first, people in Dublin and throughout Ireland were very confused. Because of the disruption to newspaper production, and **censorship by the British Army**, very little concrete information was available. As a result, wild rumours, such as that of a **German invasion**, were in circulation. Once the Rising was over, however, people began to discover what had really happened. There were different reactions to this knowledge. While some nationalists admired the rebels, many were appalled at the death and destruction. **Volunteer prisoners** were jeered by local crowds on the streets of Dublin. **Unionists** were extremely angry, as they regarded the Rising as a betrayal while Britain was engaged in a life-or-death struggle against Germany. The **British Government** similarly condemned the Rising in Parliament and was determined to punish the leaders severely.

For **Redmond**, it was a devastating shock. It flew in the face of his efforts to gain Home Rule by supporting the British war effort. He condemned it in Parliament as a German plot. Another leading member of the Home Rule Party, **John Dillon**, had been trapped in Dublin during Easter Week. He wrote to Redmond to warn him to advise the British Government against a wholesale shooting of rebels. In Dillon's view, public opinion was against the Rising but could easily change if the British reaction was excessive. His observations were to prove prophetic.

Executions and Imprisonment

Once the Rising was crushed, **General Maxwell** immediately set about punishing those involved. About **1,800 rank-and-file Volunteers and Citizen Army members** were sent to prison in England and Wales. The leading **170 were tried by court martial**, and ninety were sentenced to death. The executions began on **3 May** with the shooting of **Pearse, Clarke and McDonagh**. They continued over the next week in groups of two or three. **Dillon** rushed to London and praised the bravery of the rebels in the House of Commons. He called on **Asquith** to stop the executions, warning him: "You are washing our whole life work in a sea of blood." By this Dillon meant that the peaceful Home Rule movement might be replaced by physical force republican organisations. Asquith decided to go to Dublin and call a halt to the executions. The shooting of **Mac Diarmada and Connolly** on **12 May** marked the end of this policy. The remaining death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Included in this group were **Countess Markievicz and Éamon de Valera**. In all, **fifteen people had been executed**, including all seven signatories of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. As a result of the executions, public opinion began to swing around in favour of the rebels. Huge crowds attended **Requiem Masses** for the dead leaders. As Pearse had prophesied, the executed rebels were seen as martyrs and were held up as examples to be followed by future generations.

Key Personality: PATRICK PEARSE (1879-1916)

Patrick Pearse was born in **Dublin in 1879**, the son of an Irish mother and an English father. He was educated by the **Christian Brothers at Westland Row** and then went on to study at the **Royal University, Dublin, and King's Inns**, where he trained as a barrister. After practising law for a short period, Pearse became actively involved in the **Gaelic Revival**. He joined the **Gaelic League in 1895** and became editor of the League's journal, **An Claidheamh Soluis, in 1903**. He used its pages to attack the increasing Anglicisation of Ireland and to promote the revival of the Irish language. He was a prolific writer of articles, poems and plays. As well as being a writer, Pearse was an educationalist. He condemned the Irish education system as '**the Murder Machine**' and opened a school - **St Enda's** - in Rathfarnham in order to put his own ideas into practice. His school was bilingual, and he implemented a broad curriculum that included drama and nature study. He strongly promoted Irish history and culture and taught his pupils about legendary heroic characters such as **Cúchulainn**. Although Pearse initially supported the cause of Home Rule, he soon became disillusioned with parliamentary politics and believed that full Irish independence could be achieved only by armed rebellion. The Gaelic League played an important part in Pearse's path to extreme nationalism. He became a founder member of the **Irish Volunteers in 1913**. Shortly afterwards he joined the **IRB and became a member of the Military Council**, which planned the **Easter Rising of 1916**.

Key Personality: PATRICK PEARSE (1879-1916)

As a revolutionary, Pearse was an idealist and a visionary. In his writings, he blended nationalist and Christian imagery: just as Christ had died on Calvary to save mankind, he believed his own martyrdom would advance the cause of Irish freedom. Pearse believed in '**blood sacrifice**' - the view that the spilling of blood for the cause of freedom was a necessary and cleansing act. Pearse commanded the **Easter Rising of 1916** from his headquarters in the **GPO** and read the **Proclamation of the Irish Republic** on the street outside. He surrendered on **28 April** because of the high number of civilian casualties. Pearse - revolutionary, educationalist and poet - was executed on **3 May 1916**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What role was played by Patrick Pearse in the Gaelic Revival?
2. What were his views on the Irish education system and how did he set about putting his own ideas on education into practice?
3. What was Pearse's path to involvement in extreme nationalism?
4. What role did he play in the Easter Rising of 1916?
5. What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of Pearse as a nationalist leader?

The Legacy of 1916

- The **1916 Rising** was undoubtedly one of the most controversial events in Irish history. **Unionists and many supporters of Home Rule** condemned it. Home Rulers argued that Ireland already had democratically elected MPs and that even the delay in granting Home Rule did not justify violence. They also pointed out that a tiny minority in the **IRB** had decided on the Rising without any mandate from the people. Later **revisionist historians** supported these viewpoints. In a famous article published in 1972, the Jesuit priest **Fr Shaw** strongly criticised the 1916 Rising and especially the attempts by **Patrick Pearse** to link it with the Christian faith. Fr Shaw objected strongly, for example, to the connection between **Christ rising from the dead** at Easter and the Irish people rising in rebellion in search of freedom.
- Another factor that led to a revision of attitudes to 1916 was the violence in **Northern Ireland from 1968 onwards**. Certain commentators believed that the central message of 1916 had been the glorification of violence for political ends.

The Legacy of 1916

- Supporters of the 1916 Rising, on the other hand, argued that Irish people were entitled to take up arms in a struggle for freedom. They pointed to the fact that Home Rule was effectively killed off by the **unionists and the Ulster Volunteers**. Echoing Pearse's beliefs, they argued that Home Rule was inadequate; that only a fully independent republic was desirable; and that this could never be achieved without violence.
- As history students, we are entitled to examine and consider all the various viewpoints. However, in studying the 1916 Rising, we must always ensure that we study it in the context of the time. For example, during World War I, the notion of dying for one's country had a different meaning from the same concept today. Above all, we must avoid allowing present-day ideas to distort our vision of the past. When guided by sound historical principles, the 1916 Rising can be a good test of a student's ability to be objective about past events.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the attitude of Eoin MacNeill towards a rising?
2. What was the significance of the 'Castle Document'?
3. How did MacNeill try to prevent a rising?
4. What happened in Dublin on the morning of 24 April 1916?
5. How did ordinary people react to the rising?
6. What was the view of the Home Rule Party?
7. How did public opinion change as a result of the executions?
8. Give two examples of how the legacy of 1916 proved controversial.

YouTube Links

- The Irish History Podcast: The Calm Before the Storm (35 mins)
 - <https://irishhistorypodcast.ie/dublin1916/>
- Animated Easter Rising in 8 mins
 - <https://youtu.be/rT8uFIbNrHw>
- James Connolly and the Easter Rising (46 mins)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emmkjGSP9ks>

The Aftermath of the Rising

- After the defeat of the Rising, the **British Prime Minister, Asquith**, made one further attempt to reach a compromise between **unionists and nationalists**. He did not want the Irish Question to continue absorbing the undue attention of the British Government in the middle of its titanic struggle on the **Western Front**. He also hoped to entice the **neutral United States of America** to join the war on the Allied side. A successful policy in Ireland would influence opinion in America in Britain's favour. Asquith therefore gave his most able minister, **David Lloyd George**, the task of seeking a compromise in Ireland.
- Having negotiated separately with **Redmond and Carson**, Lloyd George got both to agree that the area in Ulster to receive special treatment would consist of **six counties**. These included **Fermanagh and Tyrone**, which had nationalist majorities. However, while Redmond understood that the exclusion of the six counties from Home Rule would be only temporary, Lloyd George promised Carson that it would be permanent. As a result of agreeing to the exclusion of Fermanagh and Tyrone and being tricked by Lloyd George, Redmond lost a lot of his remaining popularity in Ireland. His apparent acceptance of **partition** alienated nationalists throughout the country, but especially in Ulster.

Lloyd George Becomes Prime Minister

- In December 1916, **Asquith was forced out of office**, and Lloyd George became Prime Minister at the head of a coalition government. Lloyd George's initial challenge was to lead Great Britain to victory in World War I. However, he was to remain in power until October 1922 and to make decisions that would have a deep impact on the future development of Ireland, north and south.
- On becoming Prime Minister, Lloyd George decided to make a friendly gesture towards Ireland. He ordered the release of most of the **1,800 participants in the 1916 Rising** who had not been considered important enough to be put on trial. After their release from prison camps in England and Wales, the prisoners returned to Ireland to huge demonstrations of support. Most of them were determined to continue the struggle for an independent Ireland. The continuing decline of the **Home Rule Party** and the actions of the British Government in Ireland during 1917 and 1918 were to facilitate greatly the growth of more extreme nationalism. This was represented by two organisations - the **revived Irish Volunteers** and a new **Sinn Féin**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. State two reasons behind Asquith's decision to seek a compromise in Ireland after the defeat of the Easter Rising in 1916.
2. Who was given the task of negotiating with the Home Rule Party and the Unionists?
3. What parts of Ulster were to be excluded from immediate Home Rule?
4. How did Lloyd George deceive John Redmond in this regard?
5. What impact did this episode have on Redmond's reputation?



The Re-emergence of the Irish Volunteers

- Among those **Irish Volunteers imprisoned after 1916**, the determination to continue the struggle for independence remained strong. As the senior surviving commandant from the Rising, **Éamon de Valera** could expect to play a leading role on his release from prison. However, other leaders began to emerge as well. **Michael Collins**, who had been a rank-and-file Volunteer during Easter Week, showed leadership qualities during his imprisonment. In particular, he argued that the old-style open fighting between two forces was a thing of the past. In fighting the superior forces of the British Empire, he argued, the Irish should adopt **guerrilla warfare**, whereby the Volunteers would attack and then escape into the countryside. Collins also believed that the **IRB** should be revived, and he succeeded in dominating it from 1917 onwards. His views were shared by other Volunteers such as **Richard Mulcahy**, who had been prominent in the Rising in **Ashbourne, Co. Meath**.
- **Cathal Brugha**, who had been badly wounded during the Easter Rising, was another key figure in the rebuilding of the Irish Volunteers. Totally committed to an Irish republic, he believed that it could be achieved only by force. Unlike Collins, he believed that the continued existence of the IRB would lead to a divided leadership. In his view, there should be only one united movement, openly committed to the achievement of an Irish republic. Unlike the Volunteers before 1916, however, the revived Irish Volunteers in the changed circumstances from 1917 onwards were willing to work closely with a political party the newly revived **Sinn Féin**.

The Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin

- Once the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis was over, the **Irish Volunteers** held a convention in October 1917. Many Volunteers were also members of Sinn Féin. **De Valera**, the new President of Sinn Féin, was elected **President of the Volunteers** as well. He was assisted by a twenty-member Executive Committee that included **Brugha, Collins and Mulcahy**. From then on, Sinn Féin and the Volunteers co-operated closely in the struggle for independence.
- Their initial aim was to replace the **Home Rule Party** as the main force in Irish nationalism. When this had been achieved, they would then confront the **British Government** and demand independence. However, the achievement of both of these aims depended upon the conclusion of **World War I**. Its continuation and the pressing need for soldiers would lead the British Government to commit a serious political error in Ireland in 1918, when it attempted to introduce **conscription** against the wishes of the vast majority of the population.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why was de Valera expected to play a leading role in the struggle for independence after his release from prison?
2. What type of fighting did Michael Collins recommend to his fellow volunteers?
3. What was the attitude of Collins to the IRB?
4. How did Cathal Brugha and Collins differ on the future of the IRB?
5. How did the Easter Rising affect the fortunes of Sinn Féin?

The Irish Convention

- In the spring of 1918, **Lloyd George's Government** was engaged in a further futile attempt to introduce Home Rule on the basis of agreement between nationalists and unionists. This took the form of the **Irish Convention**, which met in Dublin, under the chairmanship of **Sir Horace Plunkett**, between July 1917 and April 1918. All political groups were invited, but **Sinn Féin boycotted** the convention. **Carson and the Ulster unionists** would not compromise on the permanent exclusion of six counties from Home Rule. Although **Redmond and Lord Midleton**, the leader of the southern Irish unionists, made strenuous efforts to reach agreement, their efforts failed. **Redmond died** in March 1918, and **John Dillon** succeeded him as leader of the **Home Rule Party**. In April, the Irish Convention broke up without reaching any agreement. This further weakened the prestige of the Home Rule Party and strengthened the position of Sinn Féin. At the same time, Sinn Féin was about to receive a massive boost in popularity from the British Government's handling of the conscription issue.

The Conscription Crisis

- Although **conscription** - compulsory entry to the armed forces - was introduced in Great Britain in 1915, it was not extended to Ireland. After the 1916 Rising, this situation became increasingly unpopular in England, Scotland and Wales. In the spring of 1918, the **British Government** was under intense pressure to extend conscription to Ireland. Due to the withdrawal of Russia from the war, the Germans were able to divert troops to the Western Front and launch a spring offensive. Desperately in need of more troops and forced to increase the level of conscription in Britain, **Lloyd George** finally decided to introduce a **Conscription Bill for Ireland**.
- Despite the objections of **Dillon and the Home Rule Party**, the bill was passed by the British Parliament. As a result, Dillon led his fellow Home Rule MPs out of Parliament and home to Ireland. The struggle against conscription now moved to Ireland. The **Conscription Crisis** was eagerly taken up by **Sinn Féin** as a golden opportunity to advance the party's popularity. The failure of the Home Rule Party to prevent its introduction and the withdrawal of the Home Rule MPs from Parliament seemed to prove that Sinn Féin's argument in favour of abstention was correct. Under the leadership of **de Valera**, Sinn Féin soon assumed control of a mass movement of protest throughout Ireland.
- Practically all nationalists in Ireland were outraged at the introduction of conscription. Even those who supported joining the British Army during the war believed that it should be on a voluntary basis. The **Catholic bishops** met at Maynooth and condemned conscription. **Trade unions** organised a general strike in protest. It was Sinn Féin and the **Irish Volunteers** who gained most, however. The Volunteers pledged to resist conscription by force, if necessary, and thousands of new recruits joined their ranks.

The German Plot

- In the middle of the crisis in May 1918, the **British Government** claimed it had uncovered a '**German plot**' to start a new rebellion and arrested around a thousand **Sinn Féin members**, including **de Valera and Griffith**. The government also banned Sinn Féin, the **Gaelic League** and other nationalist organisations. Most nationalists in Ireland did not believe in the existence of a 'German plot' - in their view, it was a ploy used in order to crack down on Sinn Féin. Such actions by the British Government merely served to increase the popularity of the party.

The Impact of the Conscription Crisis

- By the summer of 1918, with the collapse of the German offensive on the Western Front, the **British Government abandoned its plans to introduce conscription in Ireland**. The episode had served to discredit the British Government further among nationalists in Ireland. It also seriously undermined the position of the **Home Rule Party**. In 1917-18, the party had won three by-elections and had begun to challenge Sinn Féin once again. The **Conscription Crisis** totally reversed this trend. For Sinn Féin, the Conscription Crisis was of fundamental importance. Many people in Ireland believed that the threat of the **Irish Volunteers to resist conscription forcibly** had influenced the British Government's decision. As the leading party involved in the successful opposition to conscription, Sinn Féin was in a position to prepare for the forthcoming **general election** with confidence.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the purpose of the Irish Convention?
2. What was the attitude of Sinn Féin to the Convention?
3. Why did the Convention fail to reach an agreement?
4. What was the German Plot?
5. How did the Conscription Crisis advance the cause of Sinn Féin?

The 1918 General Election

- **World War I** finally ended on **11 November 1918**. Shortly afterwards, **Lloyd George** called a general election throughout the **United Kingdom**. As no election had been held during wartime, this was the first general election since December 1910. In Britain, Lloyd George, in coalition with the **Conservatives**, won a huge victory. He campaigned on his success in winning the war and on his promise '**to make Germany pay**'. However, although he was to continue as Prime Minister of a coalition government, his **Liberal** followers held only **136 seats**, compared with **338 held by his Conservative allies**. This dependence on Conservative support influenced his policy towards Ireland, especially as the Conservatives were close allies of the **unionists**.

Ireland and the 1918 General Election

- In Ireland, the 1918 general election was fought on a totally different basis from the rest of the United Kingdom. Here, there were two main contests. In **Ulster**, there was the traditional struggle between **unionists and nationalists**; in the rest of the country, the contest was between the **Home Rule Party and Sinn Féin**. Because of favourable boundary changes, the number of unionist MPs increased from eighteen to twenty-six. The **Unionist Party** was still led by **Sir Edward Carson** and still totally opposed to Home Rule. For the eight seats in Ulster with nationalist majorities, the **Home Rule Party and Sinn Féin** agreed to contest only four each. They did this to avoid splitting the nationalist vote and letting a unionist candidate in. However, their choice of the **Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Logue**, as a mediator between both parties merely served to deepen unionist suspicions concerning the links between the Catholic Church and nationalist politicians.
- Throughout most of the country, the 1918 election was a straightforward contest between the **Home Rule Party under Dillon and Sinn Féin under de Valera**. Sinn Féin persuaded the **Irish Labour Party** not to contest the election in order to avoid splitting the more radical vote and allowing Home Rule candidates to be elected.

Ireland and the 1918 General Election

- Sinn Féin enjoyed many advantages facing into the 1918 election:
 - Most of its candidates and members were young and enthusiastic.
 - It had built up an extensive network of branches throughout the country.
 - It had the active support of the **Irish Volunteers** and their women's section, **Cumann na mBan**.
 - Sinn Féin members claimed to be the heirs of the martyrs of 1916 and to want to complete the work that the 1916 rebels had started.
 - Changes in the electoral law ensured that many young voters were now voting for the first time. All men over twenty-one and all women over thirty could now vote.
 - Sinn Féin was credited with taking the lead in preventing the introduction of conscription into Ireland.
 - Most leading members of the Home Rule Party were old compared with the Sinn Féin leaders.
 - The local branch structure of the Home Rule Party had declined.
 - Many people believed that **Redmond** had been too favourable to the British Government.
 - For a majority of Irish nationalists, Home Rule no longer offered a sufficient degree of autonomy from Great Britain.
 - The British 'first past the post' system of voting favoured Sinn Féin. When all the votes were finally counted in December 1918, Sinn Féin emerged with **seventy-three seats**, the Unionists with **twenty-six** and the Home Rule Party with **six**. In terms of votes, however, the two nationalist parties were much closer.

The Significance of the 1918 General Election

- The 1918 general election was a massive victory for **Sinn Féin** and the death knell of the **Home Rule Party**. It represented a significant shift in popular support for an independent Irish republic.
- The 1918 election was also historic in another sense. For the first time, **women in the United Kingdom were allowed to vote and to stand for election**. One Sinn Féin candidate, **Countess Markievicz**, became the first woman elected to the **Westminster Parliament**. However, because of the Sinn Féin policy of abstention, she refused to take her seat. For those searching for a solution to the Irish Question, the results of the 1918 general election appeared ominous.
- **Unionists** remained implacably opposed to any form of Irish self-government. They were now opposed not, as before, by a constitutional Home Rule Party prepared to accept Home Rule within the British Empire. Instead, they faced Sinn Féin, which had close links with the **Irish Volunteers** and which demanded complete separation from Britain in the form of an Irish republic. As a first step in their struggle to achieve that aim, the newly elected Sinn Féin MPs proposed to **abstain from the Westminster Parliament** and to set up their own parliament in Dublin instead.

The First Dáil: 21 January 1919

- On **21 January 1919** Sinn Féin invited all **105 Irish MPs** to a meeting in the **Mansion House, Dublin**. As expected, the twenty-six **Unionist and six Home Rule MPs** ignored this summons and continued to attend the **Westminster Parliament**. However, twenty-seven Sinn Féin MPs attended and formed the **First Dáil**. The remaining members were either in prison or 'on the run' from the British authorities.
- This meeting of the First Dáil was extremely significant. The existing **Irish Republic traces its existence back to that meeting**. The First Dáil conducted its business in the **Irish language**. The **Declaration of the Irish Republic of Easter 1916** was read out and approved. The Dáil then sent a message to the **Paris Peace Conference**, which met after World War I. It asked the nations of the world to recognise Irish independence. **Seán T. O'Kelly** was chosen as the Dáil's delegate to the conference. Although Sinn Féin hoped to gain the support of the US President, **Woodrow Wilson**, this was highly unlikely. The **British Government** would be sure to prevent any hearing being given to O'Kelly at the peace conference.
- The First Dáil also passed the **Democratic Programme**. This was a commitment to improve facilities for the poor, to invest in health and education and to develop trade and industry in order to create employment. It was included partly at the behest of the **Labour Party leader, Thomas Johnson**, in return for Labour's agreement not to contest the 1918 general election. Although the aims of the Democratic Programme were admirable, they were merely aspirations and did not commit the Dáil to any concrete proposals.

The First Dáil: 21 January 1919

- As **de Valera** was in prison in England, **Brugha** was elected as temporary President of the Dáil Government. On his escape, de Valera returned to Dublin and attended a meeting of **Dáil Éireann** on 1 April. He was elected President of the Dáil by the fifty-two Sinn Féin **TDs** present. As members of the Dáil, they abandoned the old British letters MP (Member of Parliament) in favour of the Irish form TD (Teachta Dála, or Member of the Dáil). De Valera then appointed a **Cabinet of ministers**.
- The Sinn Féin ministers were to face immense difficulties in the years ahead. The **British Government** immediately declared the Dáil and the Sinn Féin Government illegal and sought to arrest those involved. However, despite these difficulties, the various departments endeavoured to function throughout the country over the following three years. On the day on which **Dáil Éireann** first met, **21 January 1919**, its political approach towards achieving independence was to be matched by a military endeavour. A group of Irish Volunteers in **Co. Tipperary attacked a police convoy** and thereby began the **War of Independence**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did Sinn Féin and the Home Rule Party perform in the 1918 general election?
2. When did the First Dáil meet and what decisions were made by it?
3. How did the British Government react to the establishment of the First Dáil?

YouTube Links

- Frongoch University of Revolution (45 mins)
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l0l2zp35_A&t=1239s
- Frongoch from a Welsh perspective (3 mins)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsgP6EHVr08>
- Laffan very good here

2.2. *The War of Independence*

The Outbreak of Hostilities

- Whereas some **Sinn Féin members**, such as **Griffith**, favoured a policy of passive resistance to British rule, the **Irish Volunteers** favoured armed attacks on the police and British Army. Although key Volunteer leaders such as **de Valera, Collins, Brugha** and **Mulcahy** were also leaders of Sinn Féin, the Volunteers had their own independent structures. In January 1919, the most pressing problem for Volunteer units throughout the country was a shortage of arms and ammunition.
- On **21 January 1919**, a local group of Volunteers under the leadership of **Seán Treacy** and **Dan Breen** shot dead two policemen in **Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary**, and captured their guns and the explosives they had been guarding. Although these Volunteers were acting on their own authority, their actions were not condemned by Volunteer headquarters. Other units soon followed suit and began to attack police barracks in search of arms.
- Because they were loyal to **Dáil Éireann and the Declaration of the Irish Republic**, the Volunteers now changed their name to the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)**. At first, the Dáil was slow to accept responsibility for the actions of the IRA members, over whom it had no control. However, two years later, in April 1921, **Dáil Éireann accepted full responsibility for all such actions** up to that date.

KEY CONCEPT: IRBIIRA

The **Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)** or the **Fenian Movement** was a secret, oath-bound organisation, which attempted to establish an Irish Republic by means of violent rebellion. It organised the **Fenian rising (1867)** and the **Easter Rising (1916)**.

The **Irish Republican Army (IRA)** was the name adopted by the Irish Volunteers during the War of Independence. Unlike the IRB, **the IRA had close links with Dáil Éireann**, which gave approval to its actions against British forces between 1919 and 1921.

While individual Volunteers around the country were arming themselves as best they could, in Dublin Collins was assuming a decisive role in the prosecution of the armed struggle.

Michael Collins' Role

- While **de Valera** was in America between June 1919 and December 1920, gathering support and financial backing for the Irish cause, **Griffith** took his place as acting President of **Dáil Éireann**. He presided over the underground **Sinn Féin** system of government until his arrest in November 1920. As Minister for Finance, **Collins** raised a loan through public subscription in order to keep the government system functioning and to purchase arms for the **IRA**.
- Collins' main function, however, was his successful deployment of **counter-intelligence** against British rule in Ireland. All previous rebellions in Ireland had been characterised by the presence of British spies at the heart of the revolutionary movements. In 1919, Collins was determined to turn the tables on the British and to infiltrate their headquarters in **Dublin Castle**. With the help of numerous spies, he gathered detailed information about British plans and intended troop movements. He used these to warn the IRA of imminent attacks and to plan successful ambushes.
- While successfully spying on the British, Collins was also determined to eradicate British attempts to spy on the IRA. In July 1919, he formed an elite '**Squad**' of twelve IRA men, who were used to assassinate British detectives, spies and those who informed on the IRA to the British authorities. Members of the 'Squad' operated in broad daylight. As a result of their activities, the flow of information to the British authorities in Dublin Castle decreased considerably.

The Response of Lloyd George

- Throughout 1919, the situation continued to deteriorate for **British forces in Ireland**. The members of the police force (the **Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC)**) came in for special attack. Although the RIC's officer corps was mainly English and Protestant, most of the rank-and-file members were Irish Catholics. As attacks on them continued, many resigned or turned a blind eye to **IRA** activity. Some even passed secret information to the IRA. By the end of 1919, most small barracks had been burned out by the IRA, and the police were concentrated in larger population centres.
- In response to this challenge, **Lloyd George** decided on a twofold approach. On the one hand, he would try to introduce Home Rule and give adequate guarantees to the unionists. At the same time, however, he was determined to crush **Sinn Féin, Dáil Éireann** and the IRA. He appointed a new, tough Chief Secretary, **Sir Hamar Greenwood**, and placed **General Macready** in charge of the British Army in Ireland. Where possible, Lloyd George refused to use the British Army against the IRA. He refused to recognise the IRA as a real army, describing it as a gang of murderers. As such, he wished to use the police against it. As the RIC was weakened and demoralised, he proposed to strengthen it by recruiting new officers and men in England - the **Auxiliaries** and the '**Black and Tans**'.

The 'Black and Tans' and the Auxiliaries

- In order to strengthen the deeply demoralised RIC, Lloyd George recruited policemen in Britain for duty in Ireland. As unemployment was high, many former soldiers were glad to join the new force, which offered a chance of adventure and higher than average wages. The first recruits arrived in Ireland in March 1920 and soon became known as the '**Black and Tans**' because they dressed in a combination of the RIC's dark green uniform and the khaki brown of the British Army. By the end of 1920, there would be over 5,000 of them in Ireland.
- In August 1920, the Black and Tans were joined by a newly recruited force of police officers known as the '**Auxiliaries**'. These were mostly former British Army officers and soon numbered around 1,500 men. They were given more freedom of action than the RIC or Black and Tans, were extremely ruthless and were detested by the local population.
- The arrival of the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries marked the beginning of a new phase in the '**War of Independence**'. They travelled from place to place, usually in army vehicles known as '**Crossley tenders**', and carried out reprisals in areas where IRA ambushes had taken place. The civilian population had to bear the brunt of their activities as they engaged in drunken sprees, robbed premises and burned buildings.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What event occurred at Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary on 21 January 1919 and what was its significance?
2. What initiative did Michael Collins take as Minister for Finance in 1919?
3. What measures were taken by Collins to establish an efficient spying system in Ireland?
4. How did the British Government respond?

The Response of Sinn Féin and the IRA

- The response of the leaders of **Sinn Féin and the IRA** to the activities of the Black and Tans was both political and military. While the IRA engaged in armed attacks, Sinn Féin made strenuous attempts to influence world opinion in favour of Ireland's right to independence by various propaganda methods.
- Throughout 1920, Sinn Féin secretly published accounts of events in Ireland, with its printing presses under constant threat of raids by British forces. **Desmond FitzGerald and Erskine Childers** were in charge of the propaganda department. They published a newspaper, the **Irish Bulletin**, and sent reports on Black and Tan atrocities to foreign newspapers. In the autumn of 1920, however, the republican side achieved its most significant propaganda victory when worldwide attention was centred on the hunger strike and death of **Terence MacSwiney**, the Lord Mayor of Cork.

The Response of Sinn Féin and the IRA

- **Terence MacSwiney** was a leading member of Sinn Féin and the IRA in Cork and became Lord Mayor of the city in March 1920, following the death of his friend and predecessor, **Tomás Mac Curtain**. Mac Curtain had been shot dead in his home by a group of RIC men on 18 March 1920. His death led to an increase in anti-British feeling and an increase in tension throughout the Cork area.
- When MacSwiney was arrested in August 1920, he refused to recognise the British-controlled court and immediately went on a hunger strike. He was transferred to **Brixton Prison** in London, where he died on **25 October 1920**. He believed that by sacrificing his life for Ireland, he would help bring about independence, remarking that it was not those who inflicted the most, but those who could suffer the most who would win in the end. **Lloyd George** and the British Government had refused all pleas to release him. Both his hunger strike and his funeral in Cork received extensive coverage in Ireland, Britain and further afield.

Kevin Barry

- On the day **MacSwiney** was buried, **1 November 1920**, Dublin city was the scene of another significant event in the War of Independence. **Kevin Barry**, an eighteen-year-old medical student and **IRA Volunteer**, was hanged for his part in an ambush. In the attack on a bakery that supplied British forces, a seventeen-year-old soldier was killed. During his imprisonment, Barry was ill-treated, and all appeals for mercy because of his age were ignored. His execution became a signal for anti-British demonstrations, and a ballad kept his memory alive as a republican martyr.

'Bloody Sunday', 21 November 1920

- On Sunday **21 November 1920** Michael Collins' '**Squad**' shot dead eleven British spies. That afternoon, a group of **Auxiliaries** drove into **Croke Park**, where a football match between Dublin and Tipperary was taking place. They opened fire on the crowd, killing twelve people and wounding around sixty. One of those killed was **Michael Hogan**, a member of the Tipperary team.
- That evening, three IRA prisoners in **Dublin Castle**, **Peadar Clancy**, **Conor Clune** and **Dick McKee**, were shot. The official account claimed that it had happened while they were 'trying to escape'.
- Events such as the deaths of Terence MacSwiney and Kevin Barry and the shootings in Croke Park turned public opinion in Ireland more and more against the British Government and in favour of Sinn Féin and the IRA. This made it easier for republican fighters to conduct their campaign of guerrilla warfare throughout the country.

Guerrilla Warfare: The Flying Columns

- As the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries proved a more difficult enemy than the traditional RIC, the IRA in the countryside adopted special tactics to attack them. They continued with their guerrilla warfare, which involved ambushes on lorries from behind ditches and random attacks on individual policemen in city streets. However, IRA forces were now gathered into special units known as **flying columns**. These were small groups of Volunteers, heavily armed and under the leadership of a single powerful individual. They usually consisted of about thirty men, who could rarely go home; instead, they stayed in safe houses provided by sympathetic people in the countryside.
- There were flying columns in various parts of the country under leaders such as **Seán MacEoin**, **Ernie O'Malley** and **Liam Lynch**. One of the most ruthless of all was the one in west Cork under the leadership of **Tom Barry**. Barry, who had served in the British Army during World War I, was an extremely capable and ruthless guerrilla leader.

The Kilmichael Ambush and the Burning of Cork City

- The most famous ambush involving **Barry's flying column** took place at **Kilmichael in Co. Cork on 28 November 1920**. An entire group of **Auxiliaries** travelling in two lorries was wiped out. The circumstances of their deaths were controversial, as Barry later claimed that one of them had given a false sign of surrender and that this led to the killing of the whole group. This view was disputed by other members of the flying column. Although the Kilmichael ambush was regarded as a victory by the IRA, it led to a significant British reaction.
- On **8 December 1920** four of the counties with the highest level of IRA activity - **Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Kerry** - were placed under **martial law**. In effect, the **British Army** replaced the ordinary courts in these areas. On **11 December** the **Black and Tans and Auxiliaries** wrought a terrible vengeance on **Cork city**. In the aftermath of the Kilmichael ambush and following an ambush near the **Victoria Barracks** in the city some hours earlier, groups of drunken Black and Tans and Auxiliaries set fire to important buildings in the city centre. Although the **Chief Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood**, claimed in the House of Commons that the people of Cork had set fire to their own city, the British Government later paid **£3 million in compensation** for the damage caused by its forces.
- Also in December 1920, while the War of Independence was still at its height, the **British Parliament** passed a law that was to have a profound impact on the future of Ireland, north and south.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the attempts by Sinn Féin to use propaganda as part of its struggle for independence.
2. Who was Terence MacSwiney and why did he go on hunger strike in August 1920?
3. How was the death of Kevin Barry a significant event in the War of Independence?
4. What were flying columns and how effective were they in the War of Independence?
5. In what respects was November-December 1920 an eventful period in the War of Independence?

The Government of Ireland Act (1920)

- The **Government of Ireland Act (1920)** was debated in the British Parliament during 1920 and finally became law on **23 December**. Its most important provision was the **partition, or division, of Ireland** into two states: **Northern Ireland**, consisting of six counties - **Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry** and **Tyrone**; and **Southern Ireland**, consisting of the remaining twenty-six counties.
- There were to be two **Home Rule parliaments** in Ireland, with one based in **Belfast** and the other in **Dublin**. All members of these parliaments would have to swear loyalty to the **King of England**.
- The **King's representative, the Viceroy**, would sign the laws passed by these parliaments. They would have no control over war and peace, foreign affairs, the army and navy, coinage or the post office. The Government of Ireland Act also provided for a **Council of Ireland**, to be made up of representatives of both parliaments. Not since the **Act of Union (1800)** had a law been passed that was to have such a profound effect on the lives of people in Ireland.

The Government of Ireland Act (1920)

- The Act was very favourable to the **Ulster unionists**. They had succeeded in persuading **Lloyd George's Government** to include all of Fermanagh and Tyrone and Derry city, areas with nationalist majorities, in the new state of Northern Ireland. At the time, their allies in the **Conservative Party** were part of the Coalition Government in London and gave the unionist case strong support. In contrast, nationalist Ireland was very poorly represented at Westminster. With the **Sinn Féin MPs** refusing to take their seats, only a few remaining **Irish Home Rule MPs** objected to the partition of Ireland contained in the Government of Ireland Act.
- **Lloyd George** pressed ahead with the Government of Ireland Act, despite the massive opposition to it from nationalists throughout Ireland. Having satisfied unionist demands, he hoped to reach a settlement with Irish republicans based on recognition of partition and the inclusion of all of Ireland within the **British Empire**.

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KEY CONCEPT: PHYSICAL FORCE

Partition is one of the most important concepts in Irish history during the twentieth century. It refers to the division of Ireland into two states in 1920. This division was demanded by Ulster unionists as a means of avoiding Home Rule for all of Ireland. It was opposed by all nationalists and by southern unionists. Partition was introduced by the British Parliament under the **Government of Ireland Act (1920)**, which divided the country into Northern Ireland (six counties) and Southern Ireland (twenty-six counties). Southern Ireland later developed into the Irish Free State and the Republic of Ireland.

The Return of De Valera

- In December 1920, **de Valera** returned to Ireland from America after an absence of more than a year. Although on the run from the British authorities, he began to exert an influence on the course of the **War of Independence**. He believed that peace negotiations should be opened with the **British Government**. He also disapproved of some of the guerrilla tactics of the **IRA**. He supported the **Minister for Defence, Cathal Brugha**, who wanted more large-scale attacks against the British. This was opposed by **Collins**, who believed that such attacks would lead to serious loss of life on the part of the IRA Volunteers. There was considerable personal rivalry between **Brugha and Collins**. Brugha, as Minister for Defence, believed that he was Collins' superior, but Collins refused to acknowledge this. De Valera's support for Brugha was part of the growing rivalry between himself and Collins.
- In May 1921, de Valera persuaded the IRA to launch a large-scale attack on the **Customs House in Dublin**, the centre where British local government records were stored. Although the Customs House was burned, the IRA suffered serious casualties, with over eighty men killed, wounded or captured.

The Return of De Valera

- This episode contributed to the desire on the part of IRA leaders for a truce. Throughout the period between January and July 1921, the British forces in Ireland were putting considerable pressure on the IRA. The balance of casualties began to shift, with more IRA men and civilians being killed, compared with Crown forces. Many of the captured Volunteers were being executed, and the IRA was powerless to stop the executions. With stocks of arms and ammunition running low, even the most militant IRA commanders began to consider the advantages of de Valera's policy of negotiations with the British Government. At the same time, for reasons of its own, **Lloyd George's Government** began to consider the advantages of peace in Ireland.

Towards a Truce

- In the spring of 1921, the **British Government** was coming under increasing pressure from world opinion over atrocities by the **Black and Tans, the Auxiliaries** and other Crown forces in Ireland. Influential figures in **America** and in British dominions such as **Canada, Australia** and **South Africa** voiced their concerns. So too did Protestant and Catholic Church leaders in England, Scotland and Wales.
- In May 1921, developments in Ireland pointed the way towards a cessation of hostilities. Elections were held to the parliaments of **Northern Ireland** and **Southern Ireland** under the **Government of Ireland Act**. In the south, **Sinn Féin candidates** were not opposed. Voting took place only in **Trinity College, Dublin**, where four unionists were elected. Sinn Féin candidates refused to take their seats in the Parliament for three reasons: because they would have to take an oath of loyalty to the King; because the Parliament had limited powers; and because of the **partition of Ireland**.
- In Northern Ireland, **unionist candidates** achieved an overwhelming victory and went on to form a government under the leadership of **James Craig** as Prime Minister. The fact that the unionists were satisfied with the arrangements for Northern Ireland enabled **Lloyd George** to consider dealing with Sinn Féin to end the hostilities and determine the future of the rest of Ireland.

Towards a Truce

- In May 1921, the **Viceroy, Lord French**, was replaced by the first Catholic Viceroy, **Lord Fitzalan**. This was regarded as a conciliatory gesture towards Irish nationalists. With the refusal of Sinn Féin to consider involvement in the southern Parliament elected in May 1921, the British Government now faced the prospect of continuing with direct rule in most of Ireland, against the wishes of the vast majority of the population. This would involve committing huge resources in terms of soldiers, armaments and finance. At a time of financial depression and rising unemployment in Great Britain, Lloyd George could ill afford to make this commitment.
- Consequently, his government edged its way towards a truce with the IRA. In June 1921, the **South African Prime Minister, General Smuts**, while visiting London, strongly urged the British Government to move towards a peaceful, diplomatic solution to the conflict in Ireland. On **22 June, King George V** visited Belfast to open the first session of the Parliament of Northern Ireland. In his speech he made a strong plea for peace throughout Ireland. Three days later, **Lloyd George wrote to de Valera**, suggesting that peace talks should take place between them.

The Anglo-Irish Truce, July 1921

- **Lloyd George** wished to open talks with both **de Valera** and **Craig** in London. However, de Valera considered himself President of the Irish Republic, including the six northern counties, and refused to regard Craig as his equal; he also demanded a ceasefire as a prelude to talks. The British Government agreed, and on **8 July 1921** de Valera met **Sir Nevil Macready**, the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in Ireland, to discuss a cessation of hostilities. It was agreed that a truce would come into effect on **11 July** and that the **IRA** could continue to hold on to its arms. At noon on that day, the truce came into effect, bringing to an end a period of violence that had lasted for two and a half years.
- By agreeing to the truce, Lloyd George had made certain concessions. He had agreed to allow the IRA to keep its arms; he recognised implicitly that the **Government of Ireland Act (1920)** did not go far enough in giving freedom to southern Ireland; he also faced the prospect of negotiating with men such as **Collins**, whom he had condemned as murderers.
- However, de Valera, Sinn Féin and the IRA also had to make concessions. By agreeing to the truce, they had accepted that they could not inflict a complete military defeat on the British forces in Ireland. In these circumstances, they would have to compromise on two crucial areas of concern: the degree of independence from Great Britain and the treatment of Northern Ireland. Despite these difficulties, the willingness of Great Britain, one of the biggest world powers, to accept a truce with a largely guerrilla movement represented a considerable achievement for Sinn Féin and the IRA.

The Role of Women in the War of Independence

- Throughout the War of Independence, women played a central part involving a wide variety of roles. The activities of **Irish suffragettes** inspired many women to become involved in the struggle for independence. Improving opportunities in education also played a part. Some prominent female participants were doctors; others were involved in university lecturing. Female clerical workers such as typists provided Michael Collins and others with crucial information from the headquarters of the British administration in Dublin Castle.
- **Cumann na mBan**, founded in April 1914, was the main militant republican organisation for women. During the War of Independence, its members were extremely active, particularly as spies and couriers, carrying messages for the IRA. They also provided safe houses for Volunteers 'on the run' and tended to the sick and wounded.
- Women also figured prominently in the propaganda war against the British Government. Relatives of prominent executed leaders, such as **Kathleen Clarke** and **Mrs Margaret Pearse**, were prominent public figures. Women were also leading participants in the publications of republican newspapers and in the organisation of **Dáil courts**.

The Role of Women in the War of Independence

- Towards the end of the War of Independence, six female Sinn Féin **TDs** were elected unopposed to the Second Dáil: **Countess Markievicz, Mrs Kathleen Clarke, Mrs Margaret Pearse, Mary MacSwiney, Dr Ada English** and **Kathleen O'Callaghan**.
- In any assessment of the success of the republican side in bringing the British Government to agree to a truce, followed by negotiations, the contribution of women features prominently.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the most important provision in the Government of Ireland Act (1920)?
2. How was the Act favourable to unionists?
3. Explain the tensions between Collins and Brugha in the spring of 1921.
4. State two factors in the decision of the British Government to agree a truce in July 1921.
5. State three areas in which women played an important role during the War of Independence.

Key Personality: **CONSTANCE MARKIEVICZ (1868-1927)**

Constance Gore-Booth was born in London on **4 February 1868** and was educated privately at the family home in **Lissadell, Co. Sligo**. She studied painting in London and Paris, where she met the Polish aristocrat **Count Casimir Markievicz**. She married him in 1900, thereafter assuming the title **Countess Markievicz**. On settling in **Dublin in 1903**, Countess Markievicz became actively involved in the various cultural revival movements of the time, including the **Gaelic League**, the **Abbey Theatre** and **Sinn Féin**. She joined **Maud Gonne's Inghinidhe na hÉireann** and in 1909 founded **Fianna Éireann**, which inculcated nationalist ideals in the young. She took the side of the workers during the **1913 strike and lockout** and maintained a soup kitchen at **Liberty Hall**. Markievicz joined the **Irish Citizen Army** and was second-in-command at the **College of Surgeons** during the **Easter Rising of 1916**. She was sentenced to death for her part in the Rising, but the sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. However, she was released in 1917 and immediately resumed her involvement in extreme nationalism. She was elected **Sinn Féin MP** in the general election of 1918. Although she did not take her seat, she was the first woman elected to the **Westminster Parliament**. Markievicz was appointed **Minister for Labour** in the **First Dáil**. She strongly opposed the **Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921** and campaigned against it at home and abroad. She was a founder member of **Fianna Fáil** in 1926. She died in Dublin on **15 June 1927**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe Countess Markievicz's early life and upbringing.
2. What cultural revival movement did she participate in after settling in Dublin in 1903?
3. What role did she play in the Irish Citizen Army?
4. What position did she have in the First Dáil?
5. What contribution did Countess Markievicz make to Irish affairs?

The War of Independence: An Assessment

- The **War of Independence (1919-21)** is undoubtedly one of the most controversial episodes in Irish history. The ruthlessness of the targeting of civilians by both sides and the widespread intimidation suppressed critical voices at the time. The treatment of the minority **Protestant community** by sections of the **IRA** in many parts of the country led to a widespread departure for England. The vague relationship between **Dáil Éireann** and individual IRA units for most of the war led to questions concerning the legitimate use of force. The ill-treatment and shooting of hostages, prisoners and informers by both sides was a marked feature of the struggle.
- Until the 1960s, historical discussion in the Republic of Ireland was largely favourable to the republican side in the War of Independence. The war was seen as a necessary fight in the struggle for independence. However, from the 1970s onwards, partly because of the violence in **Northern Ireland**, historians began to re-examine the issues. Certain **revisionist historians** have argued that Irish nationalists could have achieved freedom by peaceful means within the British Parliament. When discussing the War of Independence, it is important to assess people and events by the standards and values of the time and not by those of later generations. Whatever position one adopts having considered the evidence, it is hard to deny that the **truce of July 1921** was an important turning point in the country's development towards full independence.

YouTube Links

- Irish History Podcast 11 episodes so far. All relevant. (20 -25 mins)
 - <https://irishhistorypodcast.ie/category/war-of-independence/>
- The Burnings of Cork (52 mins)
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TFGn_KiVUU