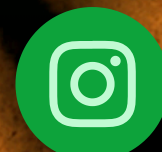


CH. 6 - IRELAND IN THE WAR YEARS
Ch. 6 - Ireland in the War Years
AND AFTER, 1939-49
and After, 1939-49



Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Irish neutrality during World War II
- Life in Ireland during the Emergency
- The impact of neutrality
- Politics in Ireland during the war years and after

Useful Terms

- **The Emergency:** Ireland during World War II. The war was never directly mentioned. It was called that because the government declared a state of emergency when the war broke out.
- **Neutral:** when a country remains out of a conflict and does not support either side.
- **Belligerent:** a country or individual taking part in a military conflict.
- **Merchant fleet:** civilian ships carrying non-military passengers or goods.
- **Rationing:** people are only given a specified amount of something that is in short supply, e.g., tea and sugar were rationed in the Irish Free State during World War II.
- **Balance of payments:** making sure a country only imports goods to the same value as the goods it exports.
- **Short time working:** due to a lack of raw materials, many businesses could not maintain their normal production rates and so workers had to work three or four-day weeks.

De Valera and the League of Nations

By **1939** Éamon de Valera had firmly established the sovereignty of the **Irish Free State**. As well as weakening **Ireland's** links with **Great Britain**, he wanted the country to have an independent voice in world affairs. The Irish Free State under de Valera played an active role in the **League of Nations**: as **President of the League in 1938**, de Valera was very outspoken concerning the growing threat of war. He supported the **League's call for disarmament** and highlighted the plight of small nations in the event of future conflict between the great powers.

The Outbreak of World War II

- On the outbreak of **World War II in September 1939**, de Valera immediately declared that the **Irish Free State** would remain **neutral**. He proclaimed this policy for a number of reasons.
 - a. In view of the continued existence of **partition**, the state would not enter the war on the side of **Britain**.
 - b. **Neutrality** in a war was seen as the ultimate symbol of **independence**.
 - c. As a small nation, **Ireland** would be vulnerable to attack, and it would therefore be safer to remain outside the conflict.
- The policy of neutrality was made possible by the return of the **Treaty ports** under the **Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1938**. Had these ports remained under **British control**, German attacks on them would have brought Ireland into the war. Declaring neutrality was a relatively easy step; maintaining it through the six years of **World War II** would be a far more difficult task.

The Outbreak of World War II

- As soon as war was declared, de Valera convened a meeting of the **Dáil** to declare a state of emergency. The government was given wide powers to deal with any threats that might emerge from inside or outside the state.
 - **Strict censorship** was introduced covering all books, newspapers and radio broadcasts. The purpose of this was to prevent the publication or broadcasting of opinions in favour of one side or the other in the war.
 - **Weather forecasts** were stopped in order to avoid giving information to ships or aeroplanes from either side.
 - The size of the **army** was increased, and volunteer corps such as the **Local Defence Force (LDF)** were established.
- While these measures were enacted to deal with threats to **Irish neutrality** from abroad, the first major challenge to the government's policy came from within the state, in the form of the **IRA**.

KEY CONCEPT: NEUTRALITY

This is a policy adopted by a country of not taking sides in a conflict or war involving other countries. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, de Valera committed the Irish Free State to a policy of neutrality primarily because of the dangers for a small state of becoming involved in such a conflict. Despite many challenges, de Valera's Government, with all-party support, successfully maintained this neutral stance and, after the war, later Irish governments continued to adopt a policy of neutrality when dealing with foreign conflicts.



The IRA Threat to Irish Neutrality

- With the appointment of **Seán Russell** as **Chief of Staff** in **1938**, the **IRA** entered a more active phase. It began a bombing campaign in **Britain** in January **1939** in order to bring about a **British withdrawal** from **Northern Ireland**. The worst atrocity in this campaign occurred at **Coventry** in August, when five people were killed. The bombing campaign ended in failure - the **British Government** refused to end partition, and **anti-Irish feeling** increased in Britain.
- Alarmed by the resurgence of the **IRA**, the **Fianna Fáil Government** introduced the **Offences Against the State Act** in June 1939. This law gave **An Garda Síochána** wide powers of arrest and interrogation. It also allowed **internment** without trial of **IRA** members. When war broke out in September 1939, the IRA approach was based on the old **Fenian slogan 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity'**. It adopted an **anti-British** stance and set about making contact with **Nazi Germany**. Russell went to **Germany** in order to persuade **Hitler's Government** to send arms and soldiers to Ireland. Several **German agents** landed in Ireland in an effort to join up with the IRA. Most were soon arrested, but one agent, **Hermann Goertz**, did succeed in making contact with the IRA and avoided capture for over a year and a half.
- **De Valera** was most concerned by the danger posed to **neutrality** by the **IRA**. He feared that the IRA's pro-German activities might provoke a **British invasion** of the Irish Free State. Consequently, ruthless action was taken against the organisation. **IRA members** were **interned** without trial. Six were **executed**, and three others died on hunger strike. As a result of de Valera's policy, the IRA was weakened considerably and did not emerge as a threat again for the duration of the war.

Wartime Diplomacy

- During the war, the **neutral Irish Free State** continued to maintain diplomatic relations with **Britain** and the **United States of America** on one side and **Germany** on the other. The safeguarding of **Irish neutrality** depended in part on the relationship that the Government established with the representative of each of these wartime powers in Dublin.

Relations with Britain

- The **British representative** in Ireland during the war was **Sir John Maffey**, who developed a good working relationship with de Valera. Once war broke out, strong pressure came from **London** for port facilities to be provided for the **British navy** in the Irish Free State. Maffey understood and carefully conveyed to the **British Government** the strength of Irish objections to this proposal. In May 1940, when **Winston Churchill** became **Prime Minister of Great Britain**, the pressure on de Valera increased considerably.
- After the conquest of **France** by the **Germans**, Britain stood alone on the **Allied** side, and it appeared that a **German invasion** was imminent. Churchill urged de Valera to abandon neutrality and join the war on Britain's side. As an incentive, he offered to work towards **Irish unity**. De Valera rejected this offer. As well as wishing to maintain **Irish neutrality**, he did not believe that the British Government would force the **Ulster unionists** into a **united Ireland** after the war.
- While adhering strictly to **neutrality** in public statements and actions, de Valera's Government showed favour to the **Allies** in a number of ways. The **Irish Army** passed on information to **Britain**; **British airmen and soldiers** who landed in the Free State were quietly sent back over the border to **Northern Ireland**, while their **German counterparts** were arrested and interned; and vital information regarding the weather was passed on to **British shipping**.

Relations with Germany

The **German representative** in Ireland during the war was **Dr Eduard Hempel**. He was sympathetic to Irish neutrality and disapproved of German contacts with the IRA, which could have resulted in a **British invasion** of the Irish Free State. During 1940 the possibility existed of a **German invasion** of Ireland. However, this danger passed after the **German invasion of Russia** in June 1941. Hempel was aware that the de Valera Government was sympathetic to the Allies. However, he did not believe that this stance warranted German retaliation against the Irish Free State.

Relations with the United States of America

The **American representative** in Dublin during World War II was **David Gray**, a relation of **President Roosevelt**. From the outset, he was strongly pro-British and was unsympathetic to **Irish neutrality**. Even before **America** entered the war, Gray believed that **Irish ports** should be made available to the **British navy**. After the entry of America to the war in December 1941, Gray urged **President Roosevelt** to put pressure on de Valera to enter the war on the **Allied** side. Relations worsened after the arrival of **American forces** in **Northern Ireland**.

The Americans reacted angrily when de Valera claimed that he should have been consulted. In the spring of 1944, the **American Government** placed strong pressure on the Irish Free State to expel the representatives of **Germany** and **Japan** from Ireland, claiming that their embassies were engaged in spying. De Valera refused and pointed out that he had already insisted on the removal of **radio transmitters** from the German legation. De Valera's defence of **Irish neutrality** in the face of **American pressure** enhanced his popular support. In addition to preserving Irish neutrality by diplomatic means, the de Valera Government faced the formidable task of coping with the social and economic challenges of life in Ireland during the war years.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What role did de Valera play in the League of Nations?
2. Why did de Valera proclaim a policy of Irish neutrality following the outbreak of World War II in 1939?
3. What steps were taken by the government to deal with any threats to Irish neutrality?
4. How did de Valera deal with the threat to neutrality posed by the IRA?
5. In what ways did de Valera's Government show favour to the Allies during the war?
6. What view was taken by the German representative in Ireland during the war?
7. What was the approach of David Gray, the US representative in Ireland?

Life in Ireland during the Emergency

The war years in Ireland became popularly known as the **Emergency** because the government declared a **state of emergency** on the outbreak of war in 1939. The war had serious **economic implications** for the Irish Free State. With major disruptions to shipping, the supply of **imported goods** and **raw materials** was drastically reduced. In order to manage the wartime economy at a time of major shortages, the government set up a new department, known as the **Ministry of Supplies**. It was led by the very able **Minister for Industry and Commerce, Seán Lemass**.

Rationing was the main method used to distribute **scarce commodities** in a fair manner. **Sugar, tea and fuel** were the first items to be rationed. The government issued **ration books** for all citizens, adults and children alike. These had to be brought to the shops in order to buy rationed items. Later in the war, **bread and clothes** were also rationed. **Fuel shortages** became widespread during the Emergency. Because little **imported coal** was available, **turf** was widely used. This was much less efficient than coal: when it was used in trains, journeys were very slow and unpredictable. A train could take twelve hours to travel between **Dublin and Cork**. **Electricity and gas** were rationed, and **petrol for private cars** was practically unobtainable.

Before the war, almost all Irish imports were brought into the country by **British ships**. Under severe pressure to import food for their own use, the British began to limit the number of ships importing goods into the Irish Free State. To meet the demands of the Irish economy, Lemass founded a new semi-state company called the **Irish Shipping Company** in 1941. The company began by buying light ships in which vital supplies could be imported. **Merchant sailors** risked their lives in the submarine-infested waters to ensure that the country was supplied with food.

Life in Ireland during the Emergency

Because of the food shortages during the Emergency, **compulsory tillage** was introduced. Although the amount of land used to grow **wheat** more than doubled, yields were disappointing because of the lack of **imported fertilisers**, which were unobtainable by 1942. The **livestock industry** also suffered because **imported animal feed** was unobtainable. The British Government kept strict control over the prices paid for **Irish agricultural exports**. During World War II, therefore, Irish farming did not experience the boom that it had enjoyed during World War I.

Like agriculture, industry also went through major difficulties during the Emergency. **Imported raw materials and parts** were in short supply, and many factory workers became unemployed or had to work on a short-term basis. **Living standards** fell as prices rose and the government kept wages down by a **Wages Standstill Order**.

As a result of the economic stagnation, the number of **Irish emigrants to Britain** increased. Many obtained jobs in **armaments factories** and other industries, where they contributed significantly to the **British war effort**. Around **50,000 people** from the Irish Free State fought in the **British forces** during World War II. They were found at every level in the **army, navy and air force**, from the top generals to the ordinary servicemen and women.

The North Strand Bombing

The only direct experience that the people of the **Irish Free State** had of the violence of warfare was a number of bombings by **German aircraft**. Most were small-scale incidents that were possibly due to mistakes by German pilots. However, in **May 1941** German bombs killed **twenty-seven people**, injured **eighty** and caused widespread devastation at the **North Strand** in **Dublin**. For many years, it was believed that the pilots had mistaken Dublin for **Belfast**. However, documents found in Germany over fifty years after the event show that the raid was intended as a **warning to the de Valera Government** because it had sent **fire brigades** to Belfast after German attacks there. For the people of Dublin, the **North Strand bombings** were a vivid reminder of the suffering being endured by civilians throughout **war-torn Europe**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the disruption of shipping affect the Irish economy during the war?
2. What role was played by Seán Lemass during the war years?
3. State three steps taken by the government to deal with food shortages during the emergency?
4. What impact did the war have on industry?
5. Why did the rate of emigration increase during the war years?
6. What happened in the North Strand in May 1941?

Politics in Ireland during the War Years and After

- Neutrality was **widely popular** in the Irish Free State. It enjoyed the support of all **political parties**. The only politician who spoke out publicly against neutrality was **James Dillon**, the deputy leader of **Fine Gael**. He called for **Irish entry to the war** on the side of Britain and was **expelled from the party** in 1942.
- Cross-party support for neutrality helped to **heal some of the Civil War divisions**. Former Civil War adversaries served in the **defence forces** together, and both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael politicians spoke from the **same platforms** in favour of neutrality. It was therefore difficult for **opposition parties** to contest general elections successfully during the Emergency.
- Despite the popularity of the policy of neutrality, de Valera and Fianna Fáil lost ten seats in the **general election of 1943**. The reason for this decline lay in **discontent over the economic hardships** of wartime conditions, with widespread shortages and rationing. Fine Gael did very badly, losing 13 seats. It seemed in danger of being overtaken by the Labour Party, which increased its representation to 17 seats. However, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael lost many of their seats to a new farmers' party called **Clann na Talmhan**. Led by **Michael Donnellan**, it was largely confined to Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. It represented the interests of small farmers, who it claimed were being neglected by Fianna Fáil.

Politics in Ireland during the War Years and After

- After the 1943 general election Fianna Fáil lacked an **overall majority**, and de Valera was elected **Taoiseach** only with the help of Clann na Talmhan. Unhappy with his minority position, de Valera awaited an opportunity to call another general election. This opportunity arrived in May 1944. After defeat on a minor issue in the Dáil, de Valera called a general election. Circumstances favoured Fianna Fáil during the **1944 general election**. De Valera's popularity increased when he refused in early 1944 to accept a request by the British and American representatives in Dublin to break off diplomatic relations with Germany and Japan. Fianna Fáil also benefited from a weak and divided Opposition. Fine Gael had recently changed its leader: W.T. Cosgrave had retired, and the new leader, Richard Mulcahy, was not a member of the Dáil at the time. The party's electoral progress was hampered by poor organisation and an unenthusiastic campaign. Internal divisions in the Labour Party - centring on the conflict between the leader, William O'Brien, and James Larkin - damaged its electoral prospects.
- The general election of 1944 resulted in a **victory for Fianna Fáil**. With 76 seats, Fianna Fáil was the only party to increase its number of TDs since the 1943 election, and with a clear overall majority, de Valera was once again elected Taoiseach. He was now given a mandate to continue leading the Irish Free State through the difficult circumstances of the Emergency.

The End of the War

- In the face of mounting pressure from **Great Britain and the United States**, de Valera maintained **Irish neutrality** to the end. When the **President of the USA, Franklin D. Roosevelt, died** on 12 April 1945, de Valera called on the **American representative to express his sorrow**. However, when **Hitler committed suicide** on 30 April, de Valera once again observed the strict protocol of neutrality by calling on the **German representative, Dr Hempel, to express his condolences**. He did this against the advice of his officials, and his action was **deeply resented in America and Great Britain**.
- Tensions between the **British and Irish Governments over the policy of neutrality** were reflected in **Winston Churchill's victory speech** on 13 May 1945. In his broadcast, Churchill **strongly criticised de Valera**:
 - *Had it been necessary we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr de Valera... With a restraint and poise to which, I venture to say, history will find few parallels, His Majesty's Government never laid a violent hand upon them, though at times it would have been quite easy and quite natural, and we left the de Valera government to frolic with the German and later with the Japanese representatives to their heart's content.*

The End of the War

- De Valera's reply three days later is widely regarded as one of his finest speeches:
 - *Mr Churchill makes it clear that in certain circumstances he would have violated our neutrality and that he would justify his action by Britain's necessity. It seems strange to me that Mr Churchill does not see that this, if it be accepted, would mean that Britain's necessity would become a moral code... It is indeed hard for the strong to be just to the weak. But acting justly always has its rewards... Could he not find in his heart the generosity to acknowledge that there is a small nation that stood alone, not for one year or two, but for several hundred years against aggression... a small nation that could never be got to accept defeat and has never surrendered her soul?*
- De Valera's restrained response to Churchill was widely acclaimed it expressed the widespread support that neutrality enjoyed throughout the country.

Irish Neutrality: An Assessment

- The successful pursuit of **Irish neutrality** was a powerful expression of the **independence and sovereignty of the Irish Free State**. Neutrality had many **short-term and long-term consequences**.
 - Although the **Irish Free State** was spared the worst ravages of war, living standards were almost at **subsistence level**, and the economy remained **stagnant** for many years to come.
 - During the **Emergency**, the widespread support for neutrality from people of **different political views** helped to heal some of the **Civil War divisions**.
 - Although neutrality acted as a **unifying force in the south**, it had the effect of **deepening divisions between north and south**. The widely different experiences of war in each part of the island **reinforced partition**.
 - Although neutrality marked Ireland's pursuit of an **independent foreign policy**, **Allied resentment** ensured **diplomatic isolation** in the immediate post-war years. Ireland's application to join the **United Nations** was **vetoed by the USSR** (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1946, and the country remained largely **marginalised** in world affairs.
- Despite many difficulties both within and outside the state, de Valera had successfully maintained Irish neutrality. In the view of many historians, this arguably constituted his **greatest achievement**.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did a policy of neutrality help to heal some of the Civil War divisions?
2. Why do you think de Valera called a general election in 1944 and what was its outcome?
3. What criticism did Churchill make of de Valera and his government at the end of the war?
4. What was the tone of de Valera's response?
5. What effect did neutrality have on divisions between north and south?
6. What was the significance of neutrality in terms of Ireland's foreign policy?

KEY CONCEPT: SOVEREIGNTY

This concept refers to a **fully independent state** with full control over its internal affairs and its relations with other states. The head of such a state, especially if it is a **king or queen**, is often referred to as a **sovereign**. In Ireland between 1912 and 1949, **North and South** took different paths. In **Northern Ireland**, sovereignty lay with the **King** and the **Parliament at Westminster**. In those years, **Southern Ireland** moved gradually towards a different sovereignty: from complete inclusion in the **Union** until 1922 to **dominion status** (under the **Anglo-Irish Treaty**) to finally complete **sovereignty or independence** following the **Republic of Ireland Act (1949)**.



PREPARING AN ANSWER QUESTION

How well did Irish governments cope with the social and economic problems they faced, 1923-1945? (LC 2016)

General Guidelines

1. Take note of the very broad time span in this question, stretching from the foundation of the Irish Free State through to the Emergency during World War II.
2. The focus of this question is on social and economic issues and the successes/failures of various Irish governments in dealing with them. Aspects to be considered here would include agriculture and industry, unemployment and emigration, housing and living conditions.
3. This question is best answered in a chronological manner, covering successive periods of 1923-1932, 1932-1939 and 1939-1945. You should consider the relevant social and economic aspects within the framework of the three periods. An analytical rather than an narrative approach is required here.

ANSWER THE QUESTION, using the following structure as a guide:

Paragraph 1 (Introduction): Define here the social and economic aspects you will be addressing in the question. Refer to the different economic perspectives throughout the period of free trade and economic protection. Note in particular elements of continuity and change in the years covered by the question.

Paragraph 2: Note the economic and social challenges and difficulties faced by the Cumann na nGaedheal Government in 1923 following the partition of Ireland and the civil war. Refer to the economic conservatism of the government throughout the 1920s and its advocacy of free trade.

Paragraph 3: Consider here the successes and failures of Cumann na nGaedheal's policies in the areas of agriculture and industry: in particular, critically assess how effective these policies were in dealing with the challenges facing those sectors of the economy.

Paragraph 4: Refer to the shortcomings in the conservative social policy of the Cumann na nGaedheal Government dealing with the challenges of high unemployment, emigration, poor housing and inadequate healthcare.

Paragraph 5: Consider here the major challenges posed by the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and critically assess the responses of the Cumann na nGaedheal Government to this major economic downturn.

Paragraph 6: Consider here the changes in economic and social policy implemented by Fianna Fáil after 1932, including support for economic protection, the rise in industrial employment, improvements in housing and social welfare and the challenges posed by the Economic War.

Paragraph 7: Refer here to the social and economic challenges posed by the Emergency 1939-1945. Note how effective the government was in meeting those challenges, with particular reference to rationing, shipping and compulsory tillage.

Chapter 8 (Conclusion): In evaluating the approaches of successive governments to economy and society, make note of elements of both continuity and change. Contrast radical political change during this period with the failure of successive governments to meet the social and economic challenges of the time, as reflected in the high rates of unemployment and emigration.

Ireland After the Emergency, 1945-1949

- Although **World War II** ended in May 1945, the economic difficulties associated with the **Emergency** continued. Due to the shortage of **fertilisers** during the war, most of the land was unproductive, and **farming** was at a very low ebb. Weather contributed further to the worsening situation: a wet summer in **1946** was followed by a severe winter in **1947**. **Grain production** fell, and a **fuel crisis** occurred. **Bread rationing** was reintroduced in 1947, and **food prices** rose. With the government continuing to control **wages** and with prices rising, the **standard of living** fell. As soon as goods became available abroad after the war, the level of **imports** increased, while the level of **exports** fell. This resulted in a **balance of payments problem** for the government. In these circumstances of economic hardship, discontent with **Fianna Fáil** increased. The party had been in power continuously since 1932 and was seen to be out of touch with the realities of everyday living. Against this background of discontent, a new political party emerged to challenge the political dominance of Fianna Fáil.

The Rise of Clann na Poblachta

- On 6 July 1946 **Clann na Poblachta** was founded in Dublin. It grew out of committees formed to help **IRA prisoners**. Many republicans, frustrated by the futility of an armed campaign to end **partition**, joined the new party to pursue their aims by political means.
- From the beginning, therefore, Clann na Poblachta pursued a strongly republican agenda. The leader of Clann na Poblachta was **Seán MacBride**, the son of **Major John MacBride**, who was executed in 1916, and **Maud Gonne**, a prominent republican supporter. Seán MacBride had been **Chief of Staff of the IRA** between 1936 and 1938 but left it in 1939 because he disagreed with the bombing campaign in England. Although as a barrister he continued to defend republican prisoners, he himself now decided to follow the path of constitutional politics.
- As well as pursuing republican policies, Clann na Poblachta called for radical **social and economic reforms**. They advocated a massive **house-building programme**, improved **educational services** and increased investment in the **health service**. Clann na Poblachta appealed to several different sections of the community. These included those who were disillusioned by the old **Civil War division** between **Fianna Fáil** and **Fine Gael**. The party also gained the support of many primary school teachers in the wake of a bitter **teachers' strike** in Dublin in 1946. As discontent with Fianna Fáil grew, Clann na Poblachta saw its popularity increase. The party won a number of by- elections, including the election of its leader, Seán MacBride, to the Dáil.
- De Valera, fearing the electoral challenge posed by Clann na Poblachta, called a **snap general election** for February 1948, before the new party had an opportunity to prepare its organisation.

The 1948 General Election

- The election of February 1948 was the most exciting since 1933. The wave of support enjoyed by Clann na Poblachta posed the first serious threat to Fianna Fáil. Clann na Poblachta ran a very enthusiastic campaign and had high expectations of major electoral success. However, the party's lack of experience, together with the radical nature of some of its policies, impeded its success. In putting forward too many candidates, Clann na Poblachta's resources were overstretched. When the votes were counted, the new party won ten Dáil seats, including six in the Dublin area - far fewer than expected. Although Fianna Fáil had declined to 68 seats, it was still the largest party in the Dáil. It appeared highly unlikely that de Valera would lose his position as Taoiseach. However, this was exactly what occurred, as the other parties in the Dáil reached an agreement among themselves to exclude Fianna Fáil and form an **inter-party government**.
- The **First Inter-Party Government** included a wide array of parties and Independents:
 - **Fine Gael**
 - **Labour**
 - **Clann na Poblachta**
 - **Clann na Talmhan**
 - **National Labour**.

The 1948 General Election

- In the course of negotiations, it became clear that the leader of Fine Gael, **Richard Mulcahy**, would not be accepted as Taoiseach by Clann na Poblachta because of his Civil War record. Mulcahy agreed to stand aside in favour of **John A. Costello**, an eminent barrister who had been Attorney-General in the Cumann na nGaedheal Government. The leader of the Labour Party, **William Norton**, became **Tánaiste** and **Minister for Social Welfare**. Mulcahy became **Minister for Education**, and **Seán MacBride**, leader of Clann na Poblachta, was appointed **Minister for External Affairs**. Clann na Poblachta was given a second ministry, which was filled by **Noël Browne**, who became **Minister for Health**. **James Dillon** represented the independents who supported the government and became **Minister for Agriculture**.
- As it was composed of so many parties with vastly different policies, the new government was not expected to last very long. However, it worked quite well, and Costello succeeded in leading the government with a sense of unity and purpose.

The Declaration of an Irish Republic, 1949

- The most dramatic development during the term of office of the **First Inter-Party Government** was the **declaration of a republic** in 1949. A decision to leave the **British Commonwealth** was taken in principle shortly after the **1948 general election**.
- Although **Fine Gael** had traditionally been a pro-Commonwealth party, **Costello** agreed with **Seán MacBride** and **William Norton** that the **External Relations Act (1936)** should be repealed, thereby breaking the remaining link with the British Commonwealth. Costello believed that making the country completely independent would 'take the gun out of Irish politics'.
- Costello announced his intention to declare a republic under controversial circumstances. In September 1948, while on an official visit to **Canada**, the **Taoiseach** announced the government's intention to repeal the External Relations Act. While **de Valera** and **Fianna Fáil** criticised the making of such an important announcement outside the state, they did not oppose it in the Dáil, even though some believed that it would make the ending of **partition** more difficult.
- The formal declaration of an **Irish Republic** took place on **Easter Monday 1949**. Although there was nothing to prevent a member state leaving the Commonwealth, the **British Government** was annoyed with the Irish action. The **Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee**, claimed that he had not been consulted in advance. The British response was contained in the **Ireland Act**, passed at **Westminster** in 1949. Under this Act, **Irish emigrants** to Britain continued to enjoy the rights of British citizens, and **freedom of travel** continued to exist between the two countries. The position of **Northern Ireland** in the United Kingdom was further strengthened by this Act. Its constitutional status could only change with the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Ireland continue to experience economic difficulties after the war?
2. Name the new political party founded in 1946 and state who its leader was.
3. What policies were adopted by the new party?
4. What parties made up the First Inter-Party Government and who was elected Taoiseach of the new government?
5. What important declaration was made in 1949?
6. How did the British Government respond to this declaration?

KEY CONCEPT: REPUBLIC

A **republic** is a fully independent democratic state without a monarchy and with an **elected president** as head of state. First proposed by **Wolfe Tone** in the **United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798**, republicanism involved a complete separation between **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. It was usually associated with groups such as the **Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)** who were willing to use physical force to achieve their aims. After the **proclamation of an Irish republic in 1916**, many **Sinn Féin** and **IRA** members refused to compromise and take an **oath of allegiance to the King of England** as part of the **Anglo-Irish Treaty settlement of 1921**. Between 1922 and 1949 various steps were taken in the **Irish Free State** towards greater independence. Finally in **1949** a completely independent **Irish republic** was declared in the twenty-six counties of **Southern Ireland**.



The Declaration of an Irish Republic, 1949

- **Both the Republic of Ireland Act and the Ireland Act reinforced partition**, and neither succeeded in taking the **gun out of Irish politics**. In the years ahead, the **IRA** conducted violent campaigns to end partition. The declaration of a **republic** brought an end to a period of ambiguity and uncertainty in **Anglo-Irish relations**. It greatly diminished the importance of **constitutional issues** in Irish electoral politics. From then on, **social and economic issues** would assume greater importance in **Irish political life**. The period between the **Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921)** and the **Republic of Ireland Act (1949)** had thus witnessed the gradual and steady transformation of southern Ireland from **dominion of the British Empire** to **Irish Republic**.

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS, 1923-49

1. The Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) was the basis upon which Anglo-Irish relations developed. Irish governments used it as a 'stepping stone' to achieve more independence within the British Commonwealth.
2. In 1923 the Cumann na nGaedheal Government succeeded in having the Treaty registered as an international agreement at the League of Nations despite British objections.
3. Boundary Commission Settlement between the Irish Free State and Great Britain - border remained unchanged and financial settlement.
4. Imperial conferences - Balfour Declaration (1926): concept of co-equality within the Commonwealth. Statute of Westminster (1931) marked the end of British involvement in the internal affairs of the Irish Free State.
5. De Valera and Fianna Fáil refuse to pass on land annuities to Britain: the beginning of Economic War (1932-8).
6. Gradual dismantling of the Treaty 1932-37: abolition of Oath of Allegiance to the King; abolition of office of governor-general; External Relations Act (1936); new Constitution (1937).
7. Irish neutrality during World War II: ultimate symbol of Irish sovereignty.
8. The Declaration of a Republic (1949): departure of Irish Free State from the British Commonwealth.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Ireland continue to experience economic difficulties after the war?
2. Name the new political party founded in 1946 and state who its leader was.
3. What policies were adopted by the new party?
4. What parties made up the First Inter-Party Government and who was elected Taoiseach of the new government?
5. What important declaration was made in 1949?
6. How did the British Government respond to this declaration?

Key Personality: ÉAMON DE VALERA (1882-1975)

Éamon de Valera was born in **New York** on **14 October 1882**. His father, **Vivion de Valera**, was a Spaniard, and his mother, **Kate Coll**, was an immigrant from **Co. Clare**. Following the death of his father when he was less than three years old, his mother sent the young **Éamon** home to Ireland to be brought up by relations in **Bruree, Co. Limerick**. He was educated at **Bruree National School**, the **Christian Brothers' school** in **Charleville, Co. Cork**, **Blackrock College** and **University College, Dublin**, where he studied **mathematics**. He became **Professor of Mathematics** at **Carysfort College**. De Valera joined the **Gaelic League** in **1910** and became a member of the **Irish Volunteers** in **1913**. He reluctantly became a member of the **IRB** and was commander of the rebel forces at **Bolands Mills** during the **Easter Rising of 1916**. He was arrested after the Rising and sentenced to death. He was reprieved, primarily because of his **American citizenship**, and sentenced to life imprisonment instead.

As the most senior surviving figure of the 1916 Rising, de Valera became the undisputed leader of the resurgent independence movement. With the aid of **Michael Collins**, he escaped from **Lincoln Gaol** in **February 1919**. As **Príomh-Aire**, or **Prime Minister**, of the republican government set up by the **Dáil**, he appointed a **Cabinet** of ministers. From **June 1919 to December 1920**, in the midst of the **War of Independence**, de Valera toured the **United States of America** seeking money and recognition for the new republic.

When a truce was declared in **July 1921**, de Valera went to **London** for discussions with British Prime Minister, **David Lloyd George**. Although the talks did not produce a settlement, both sides agreed to appoint a delegation for negotiations, which would begin the following October. De Valera made one of the most controversial decisions of his career in choosing not to be part of the Irish delegation appointed to negotiate a treaty.

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De Valera led the opposition to the Treaty in the **Dáil**. He saw it as a betrayal of the Irish republic and objected particularly to the **Oath of Allegiance** to the British Crown. He also believed that the Irish delegation did not have the right to sign the Treaty without the prior approval of the Cabinet and Dáil. When the Treaty was accepted by a small majority of the Dáil, de Valera led the anti-Treaty Sinn Féin representatives in opposition to it.

De Valera became marginalised during the ensuing **Civil War**, which was fought between the forces of the new **Irish Free State** and the anti-Treatyite **IRA**. Once the institutions of the Irish Free State were set up and began to function, de Valera became increasingly frustrated by the abstentionist policies of **Sinn Féin**, whose elected representatives refused to enter the Dáil. In **1926**, he resigned from Sinn Féin following the defeat of his motion calling on the party to enter the Dáil if the Oath of Allegiance were abolished. He immediately set up a new political party, **Fianna Fáil**.

Describing the Oath of Allegiance as an empty formula, Fianna Fáil TDs entered the Dáil in **August 1927**. Their combination of good organisation, radical social policies and republican credentials, coupled with the political and economic difficulties besetting the Cumann na nGaedheal Government, ensured electoral success in the **1932 general election**.

Key Personality: ÉAMON DE VALERA (1882-1975)

Fianna Fáil, under the leadership of de Valera, was in government continuously from **1932 to 1948**. During this period the de Valera Government dismantled the **Anglo-Irish Treaty** and enacted a new **Constitution**. The **Economic War** with Britain in the 1930s proved disastrous for Irish agriculture. However, the agreement that ended the Economic War paved the way for **Irish neutrality** during **World War II** by allowing the return of the three Treaty ports to Ireland. The maintenance of Irish neutrality through six years of war was arguably one of de Valera's finest achievements.

The **First Inter-Party Government** held power from **1948 to 1951**. De Valera was **Taoiseach** again in **1951-4 and 1957-9**. He resigned in **1959** and was replaced by the very able **Seán Lemass**. De Valera was **President of Ireland** for two consecutive terms, from **1959 to 1973**. He died in the care of the **Franciscan Order** in **1975**.

De Valera was the dominant political figure in twentieth-century Ireland. He was a revolutionary in constitutional terms, presiding over the dismantling of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the enactment of the **1937 Constitution**. However, in social and economic terms, he was deeply conservative, with a distinctly rural and traditional vision of Irish society.

Questions

1. What role did de Valera play in the 1916 Rising?
2. What part did he play in the War of Independence?
3. How did he view the Treaty?
4. How did de Valera set about dismantling the treaty between 1932 and 1948.
5. What do you consider to be the main successes and failures of de Valera as a political leader?

