

# Hope and Despair: Background Notes to Help You Get Started

## Conflicts in Ireland 1914 - 1923

The years between 1914-1922 were turbulent times in the quest for Irish independence. The Home Rule movement which had been in existence since the late eighteenth century had born little fruit. The first two Home Rule Bills were defeated in the Houses of Parliament. The third Home Rule Bill which offered autonomy under certain conditions was '*put on hold*' due to the deepening crisis in Europe which led to the Great War.

### The Great War 1914-1918

1914 - 1918 – Ireland was still part of the British Empire. About 150,000 Irishmen volunteered for the British Army during the First World War. This was in addition to the c. 50,000 Irishmen already serving at the outbreak. Although some would have undoubtedly agreed with the cause, joining the army provided a route out of unemployment for many of Ireland's unskilled workers. It is estimated that about 35,000 men lost their lives and many more were injured.

### The Easter Rising 1916

On Easter Monday 1916 a small number of Irish nationalists in Dublin launched an armed revolt against British rule in Ireland. It was quickly suppressed by the British Army. The Rising was a seminal moment in modern Irish history and helped pave the way to the nation's independence in 1922. The Easter Rising was considered a betrayal by many Irish citizens, there had been many civilian fatalities and the leaders were spat at on their way to gaol. However, support for the Republican cause grew when the leaders of the Rising were executed.

### The War of Independence 1919-1921

A General Election took place about a month after the war ended in December 1918. Sinn Fein the political party which stood for Irish independence won a landslide victory taking seventy of the one hundred and five seats demonstrating that popular opinion had moved against British rule.

Sinn Fein refused to take their seats in Westminster and instead set up the first 'Dail Eireann', an alternative parliament in Dublin comprising only of Sinn Fein members. It met at Mansion House, Dublin on 21 January 1919 and reaffirmed the 1916 declaration with the 'Declaration of Independence' and issued a Message to the Free Nations of the World, which stated that there was an "*existing state of war, between Ireland and England*".

A guerrilla war mounted against the British government in Ireland by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) followed. Alongside, the limited armed campaign there was significant passive resistance including hunger strikes by prisoners (many of whom were released in March 1920) and a boycott by railway workers on carrying British troops. There were also significant disturbances in rural areas as small farmers attempted to seize parts of large 'ranches'. This ended with a truce in July 1921.

### Negotiation for the Anglo-Irish Treaty: Autumn/Winter 1921

When the Treaty negotiations took place in 1921 the British Empire was at its peak. It extended over one quarter of the globe and ruled one in four people. The Treaty negotiations which took place in London dragged on for months.

At the beginning of December, Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister gave the Irish delegation an ultimatum, stating that if the Irish did not sign then the British would return to war within three days. The delegation signed the Treaty December 5<sup>th</sup> 1921, in London even though they were unable to discuss things with their colleagues in Dublin. This Treaty was called the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

### The Anglo-Irish Treaty January 7th, 1922

The Anglo-Irish Treaty granted Ireland dominion status as a Free State within the British Empire.

but kept the oath of allegiance to the Crown and left the question of the Irish border unresolved. In mid-December House of Commons and House of Lords in the British Parliament voted to accept Treaty. The news of the 'Peace Treaty' was greeted with some relief in Ireland and London. Not everyone was happy with the Treaty. It did not give Ireland the independence she wanted but rather awarded her dominion status to twenty six of her thirty-two counties. It retained the Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown and left the question of the six counties of Northern Ireland, who would continue to be ruled from Westminster unresolved. Later Northern Ireland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom, a right included in the Treaty. There was also to be an amnesty for all Irish prisoners which was great relief to many families.

The details of the Treaty were printed in newspapers in Ireland. These were even stuck to shop windows when the papers sold out. A cinema in Castlebar, County Mayo even put the details on the screen for people to read!

The Treaty contained some things which people found hard to accept, however, nothing could be settled until the Treaty had been voted on by the Irish Parliament.

The Treaty debates took place over December and into early January with a break for Christmas. On 7th of January 1922. The Dail (The Irish Parliament) voted to ratify the Treaty. However, the final vote of 64 to 57 in favour of the Treaty was sufficiently close to persuade those on the losing side, aligned with Eamon de Valera, to continue their campaign of opposition outside the chamber.

### **The Civil War June 22- May 23.**

The Civil War was a conflict waged between two opposing groups of Irish nationalists: the forces of the new Free State, who supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty under which the state was established, and the Republican opposition, for whom the Treaty represented a betrayal of the Irish Republic. The war was won by the Free State forces.

The Civil War may have claimed more lives than the War of Independence that preceded it, and left Irish society divided and embittered for decades afterwards. To this day, the two main political parties in the Republic of Ireland, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, are the direct descendants of the opposing sides in the War.