

## Introduction

Creating a new state is never easy, creating a new state when the coffers are low provides even more complexity. The new state had to contend with many problems which it had inherited from British Rule. This included unemployment, emigration, lack of a native industrial base and uneven geographical development. There was a lack of housing and overcrowding was rife.

The Free State would come close to bankruptcy in its first year in office. This would result in cuts to public service pay and pensions. Below you will find of events that happened in the first eighteen months of the new state which should give you a few ideas for your writing. Please note they are not in chronological order.

I took this information from the RTE series '*Beyond the Bullets - Real Life During The Civil War*'. At the time of writing, it was available via the RTE player.

Anne Curtis, Director, Green Curtain Theatre.

## The Handover and the Beginnings of a New State

The acceptance of the Treaty meant the creation of the machinery for the Irish Free State.

- The seat of administration at Dublin castle was handed back to Ireland ending centuries of British rule.
- The last of the Crown (British) Troops left Ireland meaning there would be no more checkpoints or barricades.
- The new police force the Civil Guard was open to recruits between 21 and 26 who '*speak Irish*'. Their wage of £3.10/- a week was above the average industrial wage. The police will not be armed. This causes concern amongst the recruits but only one guard is killed during the civil war. There were many guns in circulation. Police stations are burned down. The force was later renamed 'An Garda Síochána' which translates to 'Guardians of the Peace'.
- The post boxes were painted green and new stamps printed as Ireland set up its own mail service. It wouldn't be long before this service was in severe financial difficulty.
- The government announced that Irish will become compulsory in school and will be required for entry to the Civil Service.
- Winston Churchill announces that the British government will no longer pay the Irish old age pension '*to people over seventy without means*'.
- The Irish Airforce was launched in 1923. The first aircraft had been purchased to rescue Michael Collins from London should the Treaty negotiations go awry.
- The Royal Ulster Constabulary comes into existence in the northern counties with a target to recruit one third Roman Catholics, this target is never reached. Catholic refugees from the north fled to the south as violence is mounted against them.
- Votes are extended to women over twenty-one.
- The Inland Revenue is set up. Collecting taxes becomes important given that the upheaval in 1922 resulted in the loss of taxation. The Revenue office is set on fire.

## Trade and Commerce

- Import duties came into being. Duties on beer spirits tobacco and wine will account for a large amount of the state revenue.
- Custom posts appear in the north bringing with it smuggling.
- The world's first recorded assembly line was set up when a factory in Limerick received an order for the government for £40,000 pounds for the Free State army uniforms.
- Postal workers strike in protest at a wage cut.
- Government passes law banning workers right to strike violent clashes with the army. Phased wage reduction.

## Love and Marriage

- Arranged marriages are common and costly. Breach of promise could you lend you a fine of anywhere between £200-£500.
- Number of marriages increases with late marriages more common in farming families.
- Bigamy is not uncommon and is viewed harshly by the courts.

## Health and Medicine

- Tuberculosis was widespread. Ireland leads the campaign for a new vaccine.
- Insulin has been discovered giving hope to people with diabetes.
- A '*death from want*' was recorded in Donegal. Department of Local Government responds by providing emergency funding to deal with distress.

## Employment

- Unemployment is rife and stands at 100,000. The Labour Party described this as '*a national emergency as serious as the outbreak of war or a plague*'. Some T.Ds think that this unemployment encourages many young men to join the fighting as they have little else to do.
- A public works scheme including road building is set up. However this has mixed results, for whilst roads are being built, railways, canals, and roads alongside other infrastructure is being destroyed.
- Although 97% of the population of Catholic, most of those are in professional occupations: doctors, barristers, bank officials and solicitors came from the Protestant class.
- Pay differential between men and women is huge.
- Most women are employed in domestic service. The average annual wage for a maid was between £9 and £20 per annum. Cooks are paid anything between £18 and £40 per annum.

## Agriculture

- Tenant farmers resent having to pay rent to landowners.
- There was a slump in cattle prices, this was particularly bad in Leitrim.

## Crime

- Suicide is a crime and offenders often come up before the courts.
- 80% of the cases that come before the lower courts in Dublin are for theft. Shopkeeper is fined for watering down milk.
- Civic guard is under pressure. Lawlessness continues in certain rural areas cattle rustling is rife.
- Violent land grabbing takes place by the Anti-Treaty IRA. The special infantry court is set up by the government to crack down on the land grabbing. Introduction of The Land Act 1923 goes some way to resolving these problems. The Bill empowers the land Commission to decide on the compulsory acquisition and redistribution of land. Some larger landowners will see their holdings carved up smaller uneconomic farms will be expanded in the hope of bringing peace to the countryside.
- Homes of pro Treaty politicians were targeted.

## Leisure and Entertainment

- The popularity of cinema is growing. Charlie Chaplin is becoming a worldwide star. Ireland's Jimmy O'Dea also about to hit the big time.
- First technicolour film was leaved.

- Cinema is on the increase and there's a call for a censor. The first film censor James Montgomery admits that he knows nothing about films but will '*take The Ten Commandments as his guide*'. He goes on to ban 18,000 films in his seventeen years in the role.
- Sunday cinema was also banned.
- Pantomimes took place over Christmas 2021 in Dublin and Cork and other towns.
- Public libraries and children's libraries continue to develop.
- Car ownership is on the increase. No driving test is necessary, and you can buy a licence for 5/-. Speed limits are raised from 14 to 20 mph.
- First inflatable tyre comes into circulation.
- BBC goes on air.
- Clery's Store in Sackville St Dublin opens six years after it suffered severe damage in the Easter Rising of 1916.

## Sport

- Michael McTighe from county Clare becomes the light heavyweight champion of the world. The fight is held in La Scala Theatre and Opera House, Dublin in front of 15,000 people in spite of threats from the IRA. The fight goes ahead and there is a small explosion near the front door.
- There is a return to Croke Park for the GAA finals that weren't played in 1920-22.
- 'Be Careful' aged thirteen becomes the oldest horse to win the Grand National.

