

University of Arizona

Ireland and Empire: The Application of Dominion Status as Solution to the Irish Question and
the Coming of Civil War

History 498H

Travis R May

4 May 2011

Advised by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Miranda Spieler", is written over a horizontal red line.

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Last updated: Nov 15, 2009

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Introduction

Thousands of British citizens waited reverently as the Bishop of Kensington read the Lord's Prayer and then a prayer for the King in London's Hyde Park on 24 May 1929. As the Bishop concluded his blessing, their Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin stepped forward to the railing of the podium, prepared for the occasion with a speech. He spoke with purpose and clarity, declaring that "His Majesty King George is everybody's King!"¹ On this day, the annual celebration of Queen Victoria's birth known as Empire Day, his words carried particular meaning, reverberating around the globe to listeners throughout the far-flung British Empire.

Baldwin continued, stating that:

Imperial Power has decked itself in many forms in the course of the world's history. But often Empire meant loss of dominion. Governments built on foundations of tyranny and oppression have flourished, decayed and perished. The British Empire has shown that the lessons of the fate of empires have not been lost. We have loosened the formal bonds of unity with the great dominions. The destinies of their peoples are guided by their own Governments... When we meet together in equal freedom we are united by common allegiance to the Crown. In that model unity lies our strength."²

In Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, the politically autonomous former colonies known as dominions of which Baldwin spoke, these words were acknowledged eagerly.³ Empire Day signified to citizens of these dominions the great amount of freedom over their own affairs that they had been granted within the British Empire prior to their involvement in the Great War of 1914-18 and their formal promotion to partners in empire with Britain in its aftermath. In Ireland however, by then also a dominion known as the Irish Free

¹ "Great Britain: Empire Day," *TIME*, June 3 1929, 35-36.

² "Celebrations of Empire Day: Prime Minister's Message," *The Times*, May 25, 1929.
<http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu>.

³ "Empire Day Oversea," *The Times*, May 25, 1929.
<http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu>.

State, there significantly less cause for celebration, as the attainment of dominion status in 1921-22 had come belatedly and with a heavy cost.

In the pre-1914 dominions, the attainment of dominion status had been celebrated in honor of the full degree of autonomy and indeed power that it afforded them within the framework of the British Empire. In Ireland, by marked contrast, Britain's proffering of dominion status in 1921 had dramatically split opinions, producing a divide that would ultimately spark the bloody Irish Civil War of 1922-23. This very different reaction to the proposed application of dominion status can be attributed to Ireland's unique position within the British Empire and its correspondingly unique trajectory towards dominion status prior to 1921. Quite unlike the case in the other dominions, Irish history had been defined by centuries of British oppression. Additionally, the legacy of the Great War and its aftermath had been perceived very differently in the dominions and Ireland. While the dominions had experienced the war and the subsequent Paris Peace Conference as effective partners in Empire, Irish hopes for even limited self government as represented by the Third Home Rule Bill had again been quashed by mismanaged British policy. This final failure of constitutional nationalism set the stage for large scale physical force nationalism in Ireland, which was met with brutal coercive measures adopted by Britain during the Anglo-Irish War. Dominion status was only offered by British government to Ireland after these violent measures taken to suppress Irish nationalism had failed.

In sum, the long history of the British domination of Ireland, when combined with recent tantalizing taste of republicanism experienced by Irish nationalists in the form of the First Dail established during the Anglo-Irish War, laid the groundwork for a severe disagreement among Irish nationalists on the merits of accepting dominion status for Ireland. This disagreement,

uniquely in Ireland when compared to the already-constituted dominions, culminated in a full-blown civil war.

Section 1: The nineteenth century origins of dominion status and the development of the wider British Empire

Britain was, at the close of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the world's only remaining global power. In the nineteenth century, sometimes known as the *Pax Britannica*, the Royal Navy made safe the seas for commerce and facilitated the expansion of the Empire, which grew rapidly as settlers migrated or in some cases were forcibly transported abroad from Great Britain to the penal colonies and others on the Australian continent, while many more migrated to the already established colonies in British North America, the vital strongpoint defending passage to India at the Cape of Good Hope, and elsewhere. This pattern of outward migration would, in time, significantly alter the character of the British Empire as the white settler colonists increasingly sought to obtain a greater measure of control over their own affairs, leading ultimately to the creation of dominion status for the white settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, and South Africa. But it is important to note that, by the close of the century, the British Empire was a much larger entity than simply the metropole and the white settler colonies: vast stretches of Africa and Asia had been seized by agents of the Crown, not to mention the various islands and outposts elsewhere around the globe under the Union Jack. In these other imperial lands, outside of the white settler colonies, the actions of British authorities would consistently demonstrate that the path to responsible government and dominion status was not open to all of the empire's diverse inhabitants.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, several British settler colonies had grown to sufficiently in size and political complexity to be capable of administering responsible government free from the interference of Crown authorities on matters of purely domestic significance.⁴ This development arose first in the colonies that would ultimately comprise Canada, which had been British possessions longer than any of the other British possessions that would eventually gain dominion status. Following the grant of responsible government to the colony of Canada in 1849, which at that time included only the modern day provinces of Ontario and Quebec, Canadian ministers began to consider the possibility of forming a union with the other independently operated colonies in British North America. The Quebec Conference of October 1864, held by representatives of the various Canadian colonies, proposed just this: the creation of a federation between the so-called Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick with Canada proper. The British North America Act of 1867 passed by the British Parliament at Westminster formalized this federation, and the new entity became known officially as the Dominion of Canada. The term “dominion” as used in this context for the first time had been chosen by representatives at the Quebec Conference symbolically as a biblical reference to the 72nd Psalm, and in a practical sense as less likely to draw the ire of the neighboring United States than the other proposed name for the new federation, the Kingdom of Canada.⁵ The new Canadian dominion enjoyed an unprecedented amount of freedom within the British Empire, including the right of the new Canadian Parliament to pass any legislation that was not in direct violation with pre-existing imperial legislation as per the provisions of the Colonial Laws Validity Act in 1865. This curtailed the power of judges to enact a sort of imperial judicial review on all of the dominions’ legislation and granted the parliament of

⁴ Arthur Berriedale Kieth, *The Sovereignty of the British Dominions* (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1929), 38-40.

⁵ P. Mc G. Bulwer, *Commonwealth History* (London: Blandford Press, 1967), 66-67.

Canada and later the other dominions a great amount of freedom in determining domestic policy.⁶ However, it would take another fifty years and the maturation of the Australian colonies and New Zealand before dominion status truly began to take on a significant constitutional meaning within the context of the British Empire.

The latter nineteenth century also saw the continued development of the separate Australian colonies and the gradual if sometimes halting moves towards their unification. The Australian continent, not unlike British North America, had been colonized in piecemeal fashion throughout the century, producing not one single British settlement but six independently-minded colonies that only gradually came to accept the desirability of union.⁷ In 1889, Sir Henry Parkes, the PM of New South Wales, proposed the creation of a Dominion of Australia along similar lines to those followed by Canada in the 1860s. Throughout the 1890s, the prospect of this merger was discussed at great length by the leaders of the various colonies, many of whom were worried by the prospect of the creation of a centralized authority in Australia. Ultimately, a comparatively decentralized federation that afforded the states more rights than in the Canadian case was agreed upon and called into being by the British Parliament's Australian Commonwealth Act on 1 January 1901. From the perspective of the British Empire, the authority maintained by the individual states was of less consequence than the unified power held by the new Australian Commonwealth, which, despite its decision to refer to itself as a Commonwealth, effectively attained the same status as Canada after federation.⁸ This class of settlement, which after 1901 included both Australia and Canada, remained intentionally ill-

⁶ Kieth, *The Sovereignty of the British Dominions*, 46-49

⁷ Bulwer, *Commonwealth History*, 94.

⁸ *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire, A-J*, ed. James S. Olson and Robert Shadle (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 86-89.

defined, but clearly existed at an intermediate point on the continuum between total autonomy and direct or indirect administration from the London metropole.

While the white settler colonies gradually gained responsible government and federated over the course of the mid to late nineteenth century, a very different story played out in the other corners of the empire that illustrated the immense obstacles faced by non-white peoples attempting to achieve a measure of self-government within the British imperial system. Non-whites in colonies without a large white settler population were never afforded the same opportunities as those extended to the white settler colonies to establish legislative bodies that would be responsible for the administration of local government, and as such the executive position of the Governor appointed by British colonial authorities in London gained paramount importance in the administration of these colonies. Known as a Crown colony or alternatively as Dependency, this administrative unit within the British Empire encompassed a wide variety of colonies that had been acquired at different times and under vastly different circumstances, by the close of the nineteenth century encompassing both Britain's earliest possessions in the West Indies and its most recent in East, West, and Southern Africa. For all of their differences, the most noteworthy characteristic of all the Crown colonies was the absence of a large enough white population to keep the non-white populace in a subordinate position. Without a significant white population to dominate local politics, there could be no consideration of the creation of a local legislative body, or even, as was the case of several colonies within the West Indies, the retention of a pre-existing local representative system once the non-whites threatened to gain the franchise and consequentially a majority voice in local politics.

Crown colonies were acquired by the British Empire in a number of different ways in the nineteenth century. Firstly and most straightforwardly, there were those acquired directly as

spoils of war, such as the capture from the Netherlands of Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) during the Napoleonic Wars and subsequent administration of the island. Secondly, there were those ultimately ceded to the British government from chartered companies. Much of the massive British territorial expansion in Africa during the 1880s and 1890s can be attributed to this development, as gigantic swaths of land in West, East, and Southern Africa that would eventually become the Crown colonies of Nigeria, Uganda, and Southern Rhodesia (among many others) fell under direct British government control following their initial administration by the Royal Niger Company, the British East Africa Company, and the British South Africa Company respectively.⁹ Finally, many of the colonies in the West Indies reverted to Crown colony status in the 1860s after voluntarily rejecting their right to local legislative control, which in the cases of Barbados and Jamaica had been guarded fiercely since the mid sixteenth century. The somewhat complicated motivations behind their willing surrender of power are too complicated to investigate thoroughly here, suffice it to say that the single most important factor was the white minority's fear that the overwhelming non-white majority of former slaves and their descendants would abuse the legislative independence in the likely occurrence that it would fall into their hands following enfranchisement.¹⁰ White British fear of the consequences of non-white legislative power ensured that none of the Crown colonies were given a serious opportunity to establish self-governing legislative bodies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, just as the white settler colonies, ostensibly part of the same British Empire, were achieving effective internal autonomy from Britain. Racism played an integral role in determining the structure of the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

⁹T.o. Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558-1983* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 241-249

¹⁰ W.P. Morrell, *British Colonial Policy in the Mid-Victorian Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 377-432 and Jack P. Greene, *Exclusionary Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 50-76.

The lack of a representative legislative body within any of the Crown colonies necessarily vested a much greater degree of power in the office of the Governor than was the case in any of the white settler colonies, but the degree to which this power was actively implemented varied greatly across the empire. In instances where indirect rule was implemented, such as in Nigeria, this essentially meant that the Governor simply presided over the largely undisturbed pre-existing native tribes and kingdoms, often leaving them to their own devices so long as they swore fealty to the British Crown. In Crown colonies where greater direct rule was exercised, the Governor's position sometimes mirrored that of a Roman proconsul, enjoying vast powers within what was essentially his personal fiefdom. In either case, the residents of the Crown colonies, both the white minority and non-white majority, were largely excluded from political participation in the colony's affairs.

The Crown colonies were not the only administrative units within the British Empire that enjoyed less freedom than the white settler colonies. Both Egypt and India, the Crown Jewel of the Empire, legally occupied intermediary ground between the entirely dependent Crown colonies and the effectively internally autonomous white settler colonies, albeit in different ways. Egypt, which before British rule had been effectively independent but remained nominally tied to the decrepit Ottoman Empire, had been seized by British forces in the early 1880s after defaulting on debts.¹¹ This occupation, which was initially intended to be temporary in order to facilitate repayment, effectively dragged on for seventy years, despite the British government's attempts to disguise the true nature of its colonial power as a 'veiled protectorate'.¹² India, whose administration was transferred after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 from the East India

¹¹ Lloyd, *The British Empire*, 202-203.

¹² Valerie Pakenham, *The Noonday Sun: Edwardians in the Tropics* (London: Methuen London Ltd, 1985), 23.

Company to the government in the form of the British Raj, also operated in an interesting position somewhere between Crown colony direct rule and the real autonomy enjoyed by the white settler colonies. Of all of the British controlled territories outside of the white settler colonies, India perhaps had the best claim to responsible government: it was a large, economically vital portion of the empire that provided Britain with a substantial portion of its military power all at virtually no cost to the British taxpayer. Nevertheless, the India Office, a substantial bureaucratic organ, effectively administered India without the meaningful input of native Indians, despite the protests of groups such as the Indian National Congress who desired a greater share of control over their own affairs within the framework of the empire.¹³ Again, the racial component is evident in the treatment of both Egypt and especially India, the latter of which would actively continue to pursue avenues towards acquiring self-government in the empire through the first decades of the twentieth century.

As evidenced, the path to self-government and ultimately what was to become known as dominion status was effectively barred to the non-white portions of the empire. This also included, rather surprisingly given modern conceptions of race, Ireland, which had long been a problematic area for English government authorities even before being brought into the United Kingdom coercively by Britain. The Act of Union of 1800 was debated by the dependent and predominately Protestant Irish parliament only after the British government employed bribery and patronage extensively to entice the majority of its membership into the unionist camp. Those who did not agree to go along with the union scheme were summarily dismissed from office, and their families were at risk of political reprisal as well. The end result of these

¹³ Lloyd, *The British Empire*, 267-268.

politically corrupt machinations was that Ireland renounced its right to a separate parliament and joined with Britain, Scotland, and Wales in a Union on 1 January 1801.¹⁴

The inhabitants of Ireland were not considered truly “white” in the same sense that Anglos were by many in British government, and consequentially were not considered fit for responsible government in the late nineteenth century, despite vocal Irish protests to the contrary. A proposition known as Home Rule, which would have given Ireland a degree of self-government less than that already enjoyed by white settler colonies¹⁵, was repeatedly bandied about by both Irish figures in Parliament and their Liberal British peers in the late nineteenth century as a solution to the ongoing Irish dilemma, but did not come to fruition. The uncertain legal status of Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom proper whose residents desired a great deal of political autonomy but were offered a pittance and not even ultimately allowed to enjoy that would continue to haunt British authorities into the twentieth century as Irishmen and British alike searched for a satisfactory answer to the Irish question.

The position of the Crown colonies, of Egypt and India, and even of Ireland was quite obviously a far cry from the autonomy enjoyed by the white settler colonies, which by the early twentieth century had begun to push for an official recognition of their special place within the empire. Delegates from the white settler colonies of the British Empire attended the Colonial Conference of 1907 with the intention of finally providing a basic name for the status previously achieved by both Canada and Australia to avoid future ambiguity and facilitate the continued evolution of the empire. In addition to the reimagining of the regularly-held “Colonial

¹⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998, Politics and War* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 23-25.

¹⁵ Lloyd, *The British Empire*, 268.

Conferences” as “Imperial Conferences,”¹⁶ it was decided finally that the term “colony” would be entirely excised from their collective vocabularies when referring to the former colonies that had acquired self-government and total control of domestic affairs and replaced by “dominion,” and that “dominion status” would constitute the internal autonomy already enjoyed in Canada and Australia.¹⁷ Importantly, the door was left purposefully open for other developing white colonies to join the new dominion community, allowing for the inclusion of both New Zealand and Newfoundland later in 1907 and the newly-minted Union of South Africa in 1910. Just as significantly, there were no attempts to determine the specifics of that which exactly constituted dominion status. As such, dominion status as it was now known remained essentially nebulous and open for constant reevaluation, continuing to occupy the murky constitutional area between a dependent colony of Britain and a sovereign country.

Each having already achieved essential domestic self-government from Britain, the capacity of the dominions to work in concert with one another to achieve greater autonomy in the theater of foreign affairs became the main area of the reassessment of their status following 1907. The first instance of their willingness to take collective action to demand a more prominent role in the foreign affairs of the British Empire took place at their next formal meeting, the Imperial Conference of 1911. Proposals calling for the establishment of an Imperial Council and ultimately an Imperial Parliament were championed by Sir Joseph Ward, the PM of New Zealand. He envisioned a great permanent Imperial Parliament that would oversee the Empire’s foreign policy, drawing its membership from both Great Britain and the dominions (not to be confused with the British Parliament at Westminster, sometimes fashioned as the Imperial

¹⁶*The Development of Dominion Status, 1900-1936*, Edited by Robert MacGregor Dawson (London: Frank Cass and Co Ltd, 1965), 152-153.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 548.

Parliament).¹⁸ While serious objections raised by British PM H.H. Asquith and others ensured that this greater Imperial Parliament never advanced beyond the basic proposal stage of development, the dominions did not leave the Imperial Conference empty-handed. Asquith acknowledged that the dominion PMs needed to be privy to matters of importance related to the foreign affairs of the Empire. As such, it was agreed:

That the dominions shall be afforded an opportunity of consultation when framing the instructions to be given to British delegates at the future meetings of the Hague Conference, and that Conventions affecting the dominions provisionally assented to at the Conference shall be circulated among the Dominion Governments for their consideration and...that a similar procedure where time and opportunity and the subject-matter permit, shall as far as possible be used when preparing instructions for the negotiation of other International Agreements affecting the Dominions.¹⁹

This agreement marks an important step forward for the dominions, which as constituent elements of the British Empire had never previously been given a meaningful voice in or even been informed adequately of British foreign policy.

The Great War of 1914-1918 expedited the dominions' move towards full external autonomy from Britain. Meanwhile, Ireland, India, and to a lesser degree the other British colonies also had a significant role to play in the coming conflict. It was not unreasonable for them also to expect a reevaluation of their position within the empire following their contributions in the war. The Irish question especially proved difficult to solve, erupting into open conflict in the war's immediate aftermath with important ramifications for the wider empire.

¹⁸ *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire*, 548-549.

¹⁹ *The Development of Dominion Status*, 157.

Section 2: Ethnic and Unionist Factors behind Britain's Reluctance to grant Ireland Greater Autonomy in the late Eighteenth Century and Ireland's discontented role in Empire

It is significant that, even as the white settler colonies gained effective internal autonomy over their affairs in the mid to late-nineteenth century, Ireland was repeatedly denied the same opportunity by the British government, despite Liberal Party efforts to grant Ireland at least a measure of autonomy in the form of Home Rule. Ireland's unique status as an ostensible part of the homeland that was governed in a manner similar to a Crown colony left it in an ambiguous area between several different legal forms of rule in the Empire, with the debate over whether it was Britain's only European colony or an integral part of the Union continuing to rage in the academic world today. Less ambiguous, however, is that the Irish exclusion from the select group of colonies that were allowed by Britain to advance from direct British rule to responsible government and eventually to the even greater freedom and flexibility afforded by dominion status was the product of several interconnected factors of varying importance. Strategic factors, economic considerations and especially ethnic bigotry all played roles of varying significance in the often-acrimonious relationship between Britain and Ireland in the late nineteenth century. Additionally, and perhaps most decisively, the unique problem of "rebellious Loyalism"²⁰ among the Unionists of Ireland, primarily comprised of Protestants who were concentrated in the northeast region of Ulster, contributed greatly to the British Conservative party's refusal to grant Ireland self government as proposed in the Home Rule Bills of the 1880s and 1890s, much less to entertain notions of allowing Ireland to develop politically along the lines of the dominions.

²⁰ David Hempton, *Religion and political culture in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

The economic ties between the two Ireland and Britain were significant and had important political ramifications. These would only be magnified during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While British motivations to keep Ireland within the empire had economic basis, most notably the condition that Ireland as a member of the Union was obligated to pay a share of the imperial debt, Ireland remained a relatively small island within an unparalleled imperial system, which ensured that economic factors were rarely at the forefront of Britain's desire to retain Ireland in the empire, although they played a large role in the propaganda of Irish republicans who desired independence.²¹ As such, it is clear that economic considerations were not at the center of Britain's decision to force Union upon Ireland, and would remain secondary to other considerations for the duration of the Union. Fear of isolation from the Atlantic by means of French intervention in Ireland during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars motivated Britain's decision to coerce Ireland into Union. Then and later, strategic geographical considerations and others, including racial thought and the influence of Ulster Unionists, continued to outweigh the economic, especially as the empire expanded in the late nineteenth century and the revenue collected in Ireland, whose population had effectively been halved by death and flight since the Great Potato Famine of 1840s, became a smaller and smaller percentage of the imperial treasury.

Anti-Irish bigotry peaked in the late nineteenth century in Britain. The Irish were routinely subject to vicious caricature as subhuman creatures worthy of derision in the British press, and British social Darwinists and scientific racists alike slowly began to identify them as intrinsically inferior to Britons of Anglo-Saxon stock. While this evidence might initially seem to suggest that the British were bigoted against all non Anglo-Saxons Europeans, this was not the

²¹ Ibid. and

case in the empire. Simultaneously, in the self-governing colonies, significant non Anglo-Saxon white groups like the South African Boers and the Canadian Quebecois received significantly better treatment than the Irish received under Union with Britain, in the South African case ultimately making up the majority government in the new dominion. As such, some have alleged that the British were actively racist against the Irish, and Irish “whiteness” within the context of the empire has been an issue up for evaluation. While the academic debate over whether this discrimination is best identified as racism in the same manner as that suffered by blacks and other non-whites in the British imperial experience or something else continues to rage, what is certain is that the Irish were regarded distinctly and overwhelmingly negatively as an ethnic group by the British. This harsh ethnic discrimination vividly differentiates the Irish political experience in the nineteenth century from that of settlers in the predominantly white self-governing colonies, and contributed to the denial of Home Rule to Ireland before the war and ultimately to the very different routes taken by Ireland and the white settler colonies to dominion status.

English and later British discrimination against the Irish had deep roots stretching back centuries, but it was not until the mid nineteenth century that it began to resemble modern racism. There were several reasons for this transition. The Great Potato Famine of the 1840s forced the emigration of millions of Irish, substantial numbers of whom resettled in English, Welsh, and Scottish industrial centers across the Irish Sea. This brought the disadvantaged Irish into immediate contact with the resentful working classes of Britain on a previously unparalleled scale. The squalor in which the Irish were obligated to live spawned disease and death, and this, when combined with the cheap competition for scarce labor jobs that the Irish represented and longstanding English mistrust of Catholicism, fostered widespread ethnic bigotry bordering on

racism in the working classes of Britain, as evidenced in the favored periodicals of the period. Additionally, the advent of scientific racism in the middle of the century facilitated the promulgation of anti-Irish bigotry, especially among the educated British upper classes. Scientific realism was utilized by pseudo-intellectuals as a political tool to rationalize the ascendancy of European races over their colonial subjects. The Irish, occupying a curious place in the British empire in some ways more analogous to colonized nonwhites than colonial whites, were perhaps unsurprisingly regarded unfavorably as uncouth Celts in several of these scientific racial analyses. This identification as an uncivilized people unfit for responsible government set them in stark contrast to the white settlers of Anglo-Saxon blood in Australia, Canada and elsewhere, who were regarded by the British as capable of administering self-government.

The Great Potato Famine has been described as a 13th century calamity befalling a nineteenth century people. Certainly the degree of death and destruction it wreaked on overpopulated and economically-insecure Ireland was reminiscent in many ways of the biblical horror associated with a medieval plague. For the hundreds of thousands of Irish who were forced across the Irish Sea to seek work in Britain, the tragedy did not end upon their debarkation. Dreadful living conditions awaited them, and the reception given by the working class citizens of the industrialized cities of Glasgow and Liverpool was far from warm. In the absence of modern epidemiology, the Irish as a people and not their terribly unsanitary slum dwellings were perceived to be harbingers of disease and blight by the British working classes. Moreover, by 1861 Irish-born accounted for 8.8 percent of the British workforce, almost entirely within the field of unskilled labor.²² This influx of cheap, desperate labor posed a significant

²² Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 119.

threat to the livelihood of the native British working classes, who responded in an overtly hostile fashion by castigating the Irish as a people.

Labor competition was not the only reason for British working class contempt for the Irish. Other factors, including traditional English fears of Catholic subservience to Rome, also figured prominently into anti-Catholic bigotry at midcentury. “Popery” had been judged to be a menace to public order in England since the Reformation, and Ireland’s overwhelmingly Catholic population was commonly suspected of disloyalty to the Crown in this vein. The inadvisable reestablishment of a Catholic hierarchy in England by the Roman Catholic Church in 1850, when coupled with the mass immigration of displaced Irish, laid the groundwork for a hotbed of anti-Catholic and consequentially anti-Irish sentiment among the xenophobic working classes.²³ Religion, as we shall see, also became an increasingly important issue in the debate over Home Rule between its proponents in parliament and those who opposed it, in turn supporting the efforts of the overwhelmingly Protestant Unionist minority in Ireland to retain the Union.

Popular periodicals of the era offer the most revealing glimpse into the largely derogatory views of the Irish endorsed by the working classes of Britain during the period. Michael de Nie’s *The Eternal Paddy* examines editorials in three of the most prominent periodicals of the era, *Punch*, *Judy*, and *Fun*, in an attempt to gauge the feelings of the British populace. In these magazines’ cartoons, Irish subjects are nearly universally treated with contempt. Some are portrayed merely as drunken, bumbling financial burdens reliant on the industry of the upstanding British worker for their livelihoods, clearly commentary related to the Poor Laws of

²³ Ibid., 115-17.

the period.²⁴ Other portrayals, especially those dealing with incipient Irish republicanism in the form of the American-backed Fenian movement of the 1860s, are far more sinister, and depict the Irish subjects as grotesque beasts more monster than man, although nearly universally armed with pistol and characterized as assassins.²⁵ Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, a cartoon in an 1868 issue of *Fun* entitled “Natural Allies” reveals the degree to which the Irish were looked upon as racially and culturally inferior to their British neighbors. A typical dastardly Fenian republican, armed to the teeth, is depicted conspiring with a spear-holding black tribesmen, doubtless one of the many restless and feckless non-white imperial subjects.²⁶ The equation of the Irish with non-white colonial subjects, who due to their backwardness were considered to be entirely incapable of any form of self government, speaks volumes to the degree to which they were discriminated against and viewed as something less than white in the way that Anglo-Saxons were. The result of these brutal caricatures of the Irish was the further entrenchment of the images of barbarism and treachery that the British working classes already associated with their Irish opposites.

Anti-Irish ethnic bigotry was by no means limited to the lower classes in Britain. The educated, however, went to greater lengths to legitimize their discriminatory viewpoints by couching it in pseudo-scientific terms. Scientific racism, arising in the early nineteenth century and buoyed in popularity in the late 1850s and 1860s at least partially in response to the publication of Darwin’s influential *On the Origin of Species*, was the ideological basis for at least some of the British elite’s contempt for the Irish, or Celts as they were often identified.

²⁴ Michael De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

Phrenology and related pseudo-sciences related to skull-measurement were often reputed to have identified the Irish as retaining a “negro type of cranium,” quite inferior to the skulls of their Northern European Anglo-Saxon neighbors.²⁷ Noted Scottish anatomist Robert Knox, among other “educated” men of the mid nineteenth century, viewed the Irish with a certain disdain. He characterized the Celts as driven by “furious fanaticism; a love of war and disorder; a hatred for order and patient industry; no accumulative habits; restless, treacherous, uncertain.”²⁸ This viewpoint, espoused by Knox and others, was taken to heart by elements of the educated British upper classes.

Knox and his scientific racist peers made clear distinctions between different white European “races” and their characteristics. The apparent “whiteness” of Ireland to the modern observer, it can then be deduced, belies the racial gulf between the Anglo-Saxons and Celts as perceived by an educated nineteenth century observer, a racial disconnect that bolstered arguments against responsible government for Ireland. While it may indeed be going too far to equate the Irish experience within the British empire to that of non-whites in that the Union afforded them opportunities for representation entirely unavailable to non-white imperial subjects in Africa and Asia²⁹, what is clear is that the Irish suffered from a great amount of slanderous ethnically-motivated prejudice, especially from the time of the Famine onwards as refugees flooded into Britain and into direct conflict with the British working classes. Discrimination against the Irish and commonplace British attitudes that the Irish were culturally

²⁷ D.G. Patz, “Anti-Catholicism, Anti-Irish Stereotyping, and Anti-Celtic Racism in Mid-Victorian Working Class Periodicals,” *The North American Conference on British Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 1986), 614.

²⁸ G Jahoda, “Intra-European Racism in Nineteenth Century Anthropology,” *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2009), 9.

²⁹ Jahoda, “Intra-European Racism.”

and even racially inferior certainly contributed to Britain's longstanding disinclination to extend Home Rule to the Irish.

Finally, the influence of the militant Unionist movement simply cannot be underestimated when one examines the rationale behind Britain's decision not to grant Ireland Home Rule in the period leading up to the Great War. The Unionist faction in Ireland, with its support base located in the Northeast province of Ulster, was adamantly opposed to any reevaluation of Ireland's constitutional place within the United Kingdom. Additionally, the movement had strong political support from the Conservative party at Westminster, who had set themselves up as pro-Unionist and by extension pro-Empire in opposition to Gladstone's Liberal Home Rule measures, as well as support from other British sources including the military. Support for Unionism then took on several different dimensions, both as a life and death struggle for Irish Unionists to retain their professed nationality by remaining within the United Kingdom, and as a profoundly political issue tied to the Conservative Party's ongoing struggle to wrest power from the Liberal Party, who had staked their political fortunes on the success of Home Rule.

Of Ireland's roughly 4 million inhabitants in 1911, 1.1 million individuals identified themselves as Protestant, with the vast majority of these located in the Ulster region.³⁰ Many of these peoples were the descendants of 17th century English colonists, who had been granted land in Ireland and especially Ulster by the Stuart monarchs. The Unionist movement in Ireland cut across classes and included wealthy landowners in the south of Ireland, influential industrial magnates in Ulster's largest city, Belfast, and blue-collar workers employed by the industrial

³⁰ Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War I and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998).

sector in Ulster. What nearly all of these persons shared, regardless of economic background, was their Protestant faith. Religious considerations, in addition to economic ones, fed the rhetoric of Unionist politicians. As such, “Home Rule means Rome Rule”³¹ was an oft-repeated maxim of Unionists, who strove to undermine the nationalist campaign for self-government by any means necessary in order to retain their place within the United Kingdom, where they enjoyed protection from the resentful Catholic majority through their association with Britain and its military power and their representation in the Parliament at Westminster. Although fear of unchecked Catholic rule and the potentially ruinous economic consequences it might have for Protestant citizens fueled a great deal of Unionist dissatisfaction with the Home Rule movement, Unionist leaders were adamant that their chief motivating factor in their dissent was their cultural affinity with the British. Unionists identified themselves nationally as British citizens or as stylized “West Britons” in an imperial setting while simultaneously retaining their unique Irish national heritage.³² They saw no contradiction in maintaining these nationally Irish and the imperially British separate cultural identities, and as such were loath to surrender their place within the United Kingdom for fear that it would quash a part of their national character.

Irish Unionists found many a sympathetic ear in Great Britain, where the Conservative Party and the Liberal Unionists that broke with Gladstone’s Liberals became their natural allies in Parliament after Gladstone’s Liberal Party championed Home Rule initiatives beginning in the 1880s. This alliance of Conservatives, Liberal Unionists and Unionist representatives from Ireland managed to defeat the first Home Rule Bill in the Commons in 1886, and the Conservative majority in the House of Lords quashed the Second Home Rule Bill in 1893. They

³¹ Ronald Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire of Expansion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 167.

³² Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland*, 9-10.

were not, however, able to defeat the Third Home Rule Bill outright when debate regarding its enactment began in 1912 as a result of Liberal Party political promises to the Irish Parliamentary Party. This imminent renewed threat of Home Rule and the potentially ruinous consequences of its implementation for Ulster Unionists galvanized the movement in the 1910s as never before.

Unionists, like their nationalist opposites, were prepared to employ both political and physical force strategies to meet their objectives, the obvious distinction being that these efforts when utilized by Unionists were intended to protect their close association with Britain and the Empire while the nationalists struggled for greater autonomy. Unionist political parties, like the Irish Unionist Alliance and the significantly more influential Ulster Unionist Party had arisen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in direct response to the increasing activity of their nationalist opponents in the Irish Parliamentary Party. Physical force was also contemplated by Unionists as efforts within Parliament to implement Home Rule gained steam in the 1910s, resulting in the formation of the Ulster Volunteers in 1912. This militia represented the very real threat that Ulster Unionists would resort to violence to resist efforts to implement Home Rule in Ireland. In a document known as the Ulster Covenant authored in September 1912, some 450,000 Unionists pledged to “stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children position of equal citizenship within the United Kingdom.” The language of the Covenant condemned the efforts of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the Liberal Party to pass Home Rule for Ireland as a “conspiracy” that would surely prove “disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster...subversive to our civil and religious rights, destructive to our citizenship

and perilous to the unity of empire.”³³ Ulster Unionists, it is evident, regarded Home Rule as an infringement upon their rights as British subjects and its support in British government as a great betrayal, and were prepared to combat Home Rule efforts with violent force and to establish a provisional government in Ulster should it become necessary to do so to protect their rights from the Catholic Irish majority.

Militant Unionism in the years before the Great War became a polarizing issue in Britain. While Liberals continued to generally support the Home Rule movement, many members of the Conservative Party approved of the threat of violence to thwart Home Rule for the whole of Ireland and admired the tenacity and conviction of their Unionist colleagues from Ulster. Rudyard Kipling, one of the great British literary proponents of Empire, was whole-heartedly supportive of the Unionists. He expressed his opinions eloquently if dramatically in his poem “Ulster 1912,” a withering condemnation of the perceived evils of Home Rule. Kipling, narrating from the point of view of a Unionist Ulsterman, declared that:

“The faith in which we stand
 The laws we made and guard
 Our honor, lives and land
 Are given for reward
 To murder done by night,
 To treason taught by day,
 To folly, sloth and spite,
 And we are thrust away.”³⁴

³³ *Great Irish Speeches of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Michael McLoughlin (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1996), 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Kipling goes on to further illustrate that the Home Rule movement is synonymous with treason, and that the loyal Unionists of Ulster are to be “sacrificed” and cast from the Empire despite their continued loyalty.

Support for Unionism and, by extension, the maintenance of imperial rule, espoused by many Conservatives, also held sway in the British Army, who identified more closely with the Unionists whom they might potentially have to fight than with nationalist proponents of Home Rule, whom they regarded cagily as a threat to imperial unity. As the Home Rule Bill steadily gained steam throughout 1913 and into 1914, discontent with the implications of Home Rule grew in the Army. Finally, in March 1914, the situation reached a dramatic climax. In an incident known as the Curragh Mutiny, British Army units tasked with planning the seizure of strategic points and depots in Ulster upon the outbreak of a Unionist rebellion refused to obey their orders, and many officers resigned their commissions as an act of open dissent. One of the most prominent officers in the so-called Mutiny, Brigadier-General Hubert Gough, expressed the opinions of many in the British military when he stated that “if it came to a civil war, I would fight for Ulster rather than against her.”³⁵ That the British military threatened to back Unionists in Ulster regardless of whether or not Home Rule had the legal sanction of the Westminster Parliament speaks volumes to the degree to which the Unionist movement had divided public opinion in Britain.

British support of the Unionist minority in Ireland was a distinctive variable in the ultimate failure of Home Rule efforts prior to the Great War. Unlike anywhere else in the Empire, including in the dominions, the devolution of power to a local government had the

³⁵Conor O’Clery, *Ireland in Quotes* (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 1999).

potential to inflict hardship on a loyal, white Protestant population who considered themselves essentially British in national character and who very adamantly did not desire responsible government, at least as proposed under the conditions of Home Rule. Additionally, the bloc of Irish Unionist politicians was a valued ally to the Conservative Party within the political arena at Westminster. As such, it remained both ideologically sound and politically expedient for Conservatives in the British government to oppose responsible government for Ireland in the form of Home Rule, which stalled its progress until the very eve of the Great War.

Ireland's unique relationship with Britain and the strategic, economic, ethnic, and Unionist factors that differentiated it from the pre-1914 dominions all contributed to the ultimate failure of British government to grant Ireland any measure of self-government in the nineteenth century and in the years leading up to the Great War. As such, even as the issue continued to linger during the war in Ireland, the dominions increasingly took their place as autonomous partners to Britain in the Empire.

Section 3: The dominions at war

As Irish leaders struggled bitterly with one another for the right to chart the best course for the island's political future, the United Kingdom's and indeed the world's attention was monopolized by the unfolding horrors of the general war on the European continent. The advent of the Great War in August 1914 unleashed violence between the great powers on a scale unprecedented since Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, necessitating for the first time the marshalling of all of Great Britain's imperial resources and peoples for the common war effort. The British dominions, which by 1914 had achieved the right of internal self-government, answered the King's call to service dutifully. Their role in the British Empire's prosecution of

the Great War increased their power in relation to Great Britain and laid the groundwork for future changes to the imperial system.

The story of the dominions' increasing prominence in the imperial system predates the outbreak of the Great War by several years. At the 1911 Imperial Conference, dominion representatives were for the first time brought into the confidence of the British government on foreign policy matters.³⁶ The British decision to hold a meaningful dialogue with the dominion leaders marks an important watershed in the maturation of the dominions. The direction that this development would take, however, remained unclear: while many of the dominion leaders favored progress along the road towards achieving true parity with the United Kingdom and one another as equals in a Commonwealth alliance, certain elements within the British government continued to favor the creation of a formal Federalist imperial System, with a supreme imperial parliament and central authority located at Westminster. The war would force an evaluation of this issue.

The dominions committed themselves to the British war effort in the United Kingdom's declaration of war on August 4th. However, despite their legal status as combatants, how much the dominions would choose to actively contribute to the war effort was far from certain. In late 1912, Canadian P.M. Robert Borden stated that only the "actual invasion of our soil, or...the action of the Parliament of Canada" would mobilize Canadian troops. He emphasized that, while Canadian troops had seen action in both wars with the Americans in defense of Canadian soil, none had taken part in the imperial expeditions to the Crimea or the Sudan.³⁷ Practically then, by 1914 the dominions had achieved a measure of autonomy sufficient to determine for themselves

³⁶*The Development of Dominion Status*, 12-13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

whether or not to commit troops to the imperial war effort on the battlefields of Europe, regardless of the wishes of the parliament at Westminster.

Despite murmurings of discontent that ultimately overflowed into an active if short-lived rebellion in South Africa in late 1914, each of the dominion governments chose to honor their commitments to the British government and the imperial system by taking active roles against Germany and her Central Power associates when war came. The service of the dominions would have important ramifications for the British imperial system both during the war and in its aftermath as the costly sacrifices made by the young men of the Empire on the battlefield ultimately facilitated its transformation into an organization of equals, the British Commonwealth, although this was a process that would take the better part of a decade of negotiation and bargaining by all parties.

The youth of the dominions fought decisively in many of the conflict's most vicious battles in the Dardenelles, the Levant, and the Western Front. By the Armistice of November 1918, 984,612 men from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Newfoundland had served or were in the process of training for service in the war.³⁸ The war came with a high price: many of the men paid with their lives for their governments' decision to stand by Great Britain in its hour of need. More than 140,000 of them never returned home from the war's many battlefields, and tens of thousands of others were scarred mentally and physically by the horrors of modern, mechanized warfare.³⁹

While the vast majority of those who served were volunteers, especially early in the war before the unsavory nature of trench warfare stemmed the initial outbreak of imperial fervor, by

³⁸ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, 1918* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co, 1918), 322.

³⁹ Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (Hampshire: Palgrave and Macmillan Co, 2003), 136.

the later stages of the conflict the prospect of conscription to overcome severe manpower shortages became a contested issue to various degrees in several dominions, much as it was in Ireland in 1918. The separate dominions treated the subject very differently based on the temperaments of their peoples and governments, as evidenced by the wholesale adoption of conscription largely without incident by New Zealand in 1916 on the one hand and the refusal of the government in the Union of South Africa to even consider introducing compulsory military service during the war for fear of provoking Nationalist rebellion on the other. In between these two extremes were the cases of Canada and Australia. In Canada, where a sizeable French-speaking population in Quebec remained effectively excluded from participation in the parliament at Ottawa, conscription was heatedly debated before its ultimate implementation late in the war. In Australia, on the other hand, measures to introduce conscription put forth by P.M. Billy Hughes in 1916 and 1917 were narrowly defeated via public referendum. The heated debates surrounding conscription in Australia, one of the dominions most famous for its commitment to and sacrifices on behalf of the imperial war effort during the Great War, illustrates that support for the war in the dominions was not entirely unreserved. Dominion leaders and their constituents were in a position to determine their own policies regarding compulsory service, unlike the Irish, who were not meaningfully consulted before British actions precipitated the conscription crisis of 1918.

The nearly unfathomable human cost of the war and the countless personal tragedies of those who were lost weighed heavily on the minds of policymakers in Great Britain and the dominions, where politicians struggled to rationalize the Empire's role in the destruction wrought by the war. While Great Britain had intended to suspend the machinery of the annual Imperial Conferences for the duration of the war, by late 1916 it had become clear that the

leonine efforts of dominion men in service of the Empire during the war and additionally the necessities of logistically orchestrating a world war required increased meaningful consultation between the center of the Empire at Westminster and the dominions if Great Britain expected to receive similar cooperation from the dominions in the future, underscoring the Empire's gradual reconstitution. A novel solution to the dilemma of how to involve the dominions in imperial planning was found in the creation of the Imperial War Cabinet and the satellite Imperial War Conference in late March 1917.

While the Imperial War Conference, presided over the Colonial Secretary, provided a forum for chiefly imperial-related matters to be discussed by dominions leaders and representatives of the Crown colonies during the war, the more influential Imperial War Cabinet truly granted the P.M.s of the dominions access into the halls of power via consultation with the War Cabinet. Issues related to the Empire's continued prosecution of the war and of acceptable terms for a future peace were for the first time formally available to the dominion leaders for deliberation, and ultimately they would meet with the British War Cabinet and representatives from India fourteen times between late March and early May, 1917.⁴⁰ While the Imperial War Cabinet was generally greeted with enthusiasm by dominion leaders, it was seen by British P.M. Lloyd George and most other participants as an essentially "elastic" body that had grown "out of the necessities of the war," and not chiefly as a permanent solution to the question of how to constitute the British Empire. That the Imperial War Cabinet and the Imperial War Conference were envisioned as temporary measures is further evidenced by Resolution IX passed by members of the Imperial War Conference, which stated that the "readjustment of the constitutional relations of the component parts of the Empire" was "too important and intricate a

⁴⁰ Max Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897-1921* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1987), 220.

subject to be dealt with during the War.” However, while the delegates did not wish to tackle the onerous task of reevaluating the construction of the Empire during wartime, they did feel obligated to suggest that the future settlement be sweeping in its acknowledgement of dominion importance within the Empire:

Any such readjustment, while thoroughly preserving all existing powers of self-government and complete control of domestic affairs, should be based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth...should recognize the right of the Dominions...to an adequate voice in foreign policy and in foreign relations, and should provide effective arrangements for continuous consultation in all important matters of common Imperial concern, and for such necessary concerted action, founded on consultation, as the several Governments may determine.⁴¹

Resolution IX vividly illustrates the greater influence achieved by the dominions as direct result of the war, and not coincidentally the language of the document would later be used by British and dominion policymakers as they attempted to reconcile classical notions of Empire with the emerging idea of a looser Commonwealth association during the 1920s.

The Prime Ministers of the dominions and their assigned delegates who participated in the Imperial War Cabinet generally had similar feelings as their associates at the concurrent Imperial War Conference. General Jan Smuts, who had gained notoriety fighting the British in the Second Boer War but who was now one of the staunchest allies of the British imperial alliance in the South African government, in his capacity as South Africa’s representative in the Imperial War Cabinet advocated for a future reevaluation of the relationship between the dominions and the U.K. along the lines proposed in Resolution IX, and he was supported not only by other dominion leaders, but by the government of Lloyd George as well.⁴² The widespread popularity of this decision effectively ended the machinations of Lord Alfred Milner

⁴¹ *The Development of Dominion Status.*

⁴² Beloff, *Britain’s Liberal Empire*, 220.

and other British policymakers who had continued to favor a centralized Federalist constitution for the Empire. The events of the war had effectively made this proposed structure of the Empire obsolete and untenable: the dominions, having sacrificed so much economically and in terms of manpower for the British Imperial war effort, were extremely unlikely to agree to an Imperial structure that envisioned them as satellites of the seat of power in Westminster. By 1917, further autonomy within a relatively loose new Commonwealth structure was rapidly becoming the most palatable course of action for the dominions, although it is important to reemphasize the point that the dominions did not always act in unity: their interests often failed to overlap or even ran counter to one another. This ultimately created a situation in which the overall composition of the Commonwealth organization was in constant realignment between the more conservative dominions, those pushing for further reforms, and the legally equal United Kingdom, although this would take place only after the significant participation of the dominions at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

Section 4: The dominions at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and during the immediate postwar period

Dominion representation at the Paris Peace Conference in the Great War's aftermath in early 1919 only further emphasized their growing legal and practical autonomy within the imperial structure. The dominions and representatives from the British government in India were each granted proper representation at the negotiating table akin to that afforded minor nations such as Serbia and Belgium that had also participated in the war. To this effect, the Union of South Africa, Canada, Australia, and India were each ultimately granted two seats, and New Zealand received one, in addition to a rotating seat for the dominion P.M.s as a member of Lloyd

George's British Empire Delegation.⁴³ This dual representation was possible only after the British overcame initially staunch American resistance to the idea of the inclusion of the dominions individually at the conference and in the League, as the American President Woodrow Wilson and his advisers suspected that the British might be attempting to pack the proceedings with favorable representatives. The insistence of Lloyd George that any other solution would be entirely unacceptable to dominion leaders and, by extension, the United Kingdom finally persuaded Wilson to endorse the arrangement.⁴⁴ Subsequent events would prove that the Americans need not have worried, for although the dominions did indeed participate meaningfully in the Peace conference, furthering their legal claims of equal partnership with the United Kingdom, internal divisions on important issues ensured that the British Empire Delegation seldom acted as a monolithic entity. The dialogue and debate between the various dominions and the United Kingdom at the Paris Conference over key issues was representative of the increasing prominence of the dominions not only within the British Empire but also as actors in their own right on the world stage.

The dominions did not squander their newfound role in the international arena at Paris in 1919. While it is important to note that the most momentous decisions contemplated at the Paris Peace Conference were almost universally made in seclusion by the so-called "Big Four" of Lloyd George, Wilson, Clemenceau, and Orlando as the leaders of the major powers of the British Empire, the United States, France, and Italy respectively⁴⁵, dominion leaders nevertheless proved highly influential and industrious as leaders of various committees charged with

⁴³ *The Development of Dominion Status*, 32.

⁴⁴ R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance, 1918-1939* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

hammering out the exact details of the peace proceedings. Diverse issues including the creation of the League of Nations, the coercive policy that forced Germany to pay hefty reparations for its role in initiating the war, and the fate of the Central Powers' captured colonies were all tackled by dominion leaders to various extents, underscoring their importance in Paris as individual actors that were aligned with but by no means in total agreement with the policy adopted by the British Empire.

The creation of a new order to stabilize the uncertain relationship between the great powers following Germany's ruin was among the most important difficulties facing the delegates as they arrived in Paris in January 1919. Jan Smuts, one of South Africa's two delegates and a man of considerable administrative talent, had already hurriedly authored a comprehensive paper proposing an outline for a body known as the League of Nations in December 1918 to this effect.⁴⁶ Smuts hoped that the League, which would serve as an international arbiter of disputes and conflicts between the countries of the world, could usher in a new era of unparalleled global prosperity. The realization of this unprecedented organization, which thoroughly fascinated President Wilson and others who hoped to prevent the outbreak of war in the future, became a priority in Paris and ultimately a central pillar of the Treaty of Versailles. Smuts's influence as a member of the committee charged with crafting the League's Covenant was instrumental, and although he would later be deeply unsatisfied with certain aspects adopted by the Treaty that he himself had authored, including the issue of the costly reparations forced without recourse upon Germany, his role was characteristic of the degree of power available to motivated dominion delegates at Paris.

⁴⁶ George Curry, "Woodrow Wilson, Jan Smuts, and the Versailles Settlement," *The American Historical Review* 66, no. 4 (1961), 968 and Smuts, *Selections from the Smuts Papers IV*, 8-9

France's insistence that Germany should be made to bear the enormous cost of the war which they had initiated by violating Belgian neutrality was in 1919 one of the most acrimoniously debated features of the Treaty of Versailles⁴⁷, and its consequent role in embittering and galvanizing the German people behind the charismatic leadership of one Adolph Hitler has only increased its ominous historical significance. While France, which had been devastated by the war nearly as much as her German rival, viewed Germany's culpability for starting the war and the threat of future German aggression as adequate justification for placing the burden of paying for the war on Germany's shoulders, the debt-owning United States and war-drained Great Britain were both much less eager to place further barriers in the route to Europe's economic recovery.⁴⁸ The dominions took an active role if secondary role in the ensuing debate. Billy Hughes, the fire-breathing Australian P.M., was adamant that Germany pay for the war's cost. Smuts, after creating the formula that calculated the cost of reparations, had a change of heart and began emphasizing the importance of bringing the new German republic unencumbered as an equal member in the League of Nations for the future of peace in Europe. While the ultimate outcome of these discussions is testified in large measure by the rise of Nazism in Germany following the Weimar Republic's economic ruin and the sixty million dead of the Second World War, from the standpoint of the dominions the importance of the reparations debates was clearly their ability to espouse independent voices and opinions on the issue and the move, however gradual, in the direction of complete dominion autonomy on matters of foreign policy.

Finally, the issue of determining the fate of the captured German colonies and the former Ottoman lands was of direct importance to the dominion leaders at the conference. Dominion

⁴⁷ Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire*, 286-288.

⁴⁸ Kieth, *The Sovereignty of the British Dominions*, 315-324.

military forces had been solely responsible for the capture of several of these colonies, including the South African seizure of German South-West Africa and the joint Australian/New Zealander actions that had taken German-held islands in the Pacific, and had participated to a significant degree in other actions in the Levant and in German East Africa. Dominion leaders were loath to cede these captured holdings to British control or alternatively to the trusteeship of the incipient League of Nations, as they were among the few concrete gains made during the war that could be demonstrated to the weary and skeptical voters in their various constituencies.⁴⁹ The insistence of the South Africans, Australians, and New Zealanders that they should retain these territories was troublesome for the British in Paris, in that it placed them in an uncomfortable position between the demands of their dominion leaders and the interests of the United States. Wilson, in his famous Fourteen Points, had adamantly declared that one of the Allied goals in the war was the right to self-determination for subjugated peoples. While he would later clarify that he had meant for this right to extend only to the white peoples that had been subjects of the collapsed Austro-Hungarian Empire in Central and Eastern Europe, American public opinion and his personal desire to save face, in addition to French desires, required that the distribution of the former Central Powers' holdings at least appear to be made along lines less crude than simply parceling them out wholesale to the victors.⁵⁰

In order to assuage the concerns of the Americans and the French, new provisions drafted by Smuts as part of the League of Nations charter were utilized to delineate the status of the captured colonies, much to his chagrin, as he had hoped to secure the direct annexation of

⁴⁹ *The Development of Dominion Status*, 35.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Ingham, *Jan Christian Smuts: The Conscience of a South African* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 103.

German South-West Africa for the Union.⁵¹ The captured territories were classified as Mandates, of which there were to be three designations. Type “A” mandates, primarily comprised of former Ottoman lands in the Levant, were “provisionally recognized as independent nations, subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they were able to stand alone.” Type B territories, located in equatorial Africa, were “at a stage that the Mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory.”⁵² The creation of type “C” mandates, which included German South West Africa and former German Pacific colonies on New Guinea and Samoa, neatly sidestepped the contentious issue of annexation and ultimately satisfied the demands of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand respectively, as their coveted new possessions were classified as unfit for self-government and likely to remain in that state for a century or more.⁵³ Although this compromise meant that the former German and Ottoman lands were *de jure* subject to League oversight, practically this was never an issue and it allowed for their *de facto* annexation by the powers which had captured them during the war as quasi-colonies. While unable to secure direct annexation over the territories, the important roles played by Smuts and also the ever-vocal Hughes in the creation of the League of Nations Mandate system clearly established the credentials of the dominions as self-motivated actors on the international stage.

After all was said and done, dominion representation in Paris led directly to individual dominion membership in the League of Nations, a noteworthy development in that it made permanent the international status that they had enjoyed in Paris during the Peace Conference.

⁵¹ Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2001), 101.

⁵² Elizabeth Van Maanen-Helmer, *The Mandates System in Relation to Africa and the Pacific Islands* (London: P.S. King and Son Ltd., 1929), 41.

⁵³ Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, 103.

Each of the delegates signed the Treaty of Versailles in the palace's Hall of Mirrors on 28 June 1919 as individual representatives of their respective dominions, and at the insistence of Canadian P.M. Robert Borden the Treaty was subsequently ratified in each of the dominion parliaments.⁵⁴ While it is true that the British delegation's decision to sign the Treaty for 'the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas' legally bound the dominions to the Treaty, thus divesting them of full signatory status⁵⁵, the symbolic implications of their individual ratifications of the Treaty as separate entities from the British Empire were nevertheless extremely significant. The dominions had for the first time effectively secured an enduring role in international affairs, which laid the groundwork for the bargaining which finally produced essential autonomy for the dominions from Britain in the 1920s and early 1930s in the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Treaty of Westminster of 1931.⁵⁶

Section 5: The Great War in Ireland, the death of Home Rule, and the seeds of the Irish Revolution

Even as the Great War and the subsequent Paris Peace Conference solidified the position of the dominions as partners of Britain within the empire, paving the way for their future formal recognition as such in the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and their ultimate attainment of sovereignty over their own external affairs, Ireland remained locked in a disadvantageous constitutional position within the British Empire. While the 1800 Act of Union granted Ireland's subjects legislative representation in the Parliament at Westminster, the British government denied to the Irish the opportunity to practice any form of devolutionary government for over a century. When the Third Home Rule Bill was finally passed in September 1914, it appeared to

⁵⁴ *The Development of Dominion Status*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance*.

mark a clear victory for John Redmond and his nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party and an important benchmark on the way to limited self government.

What Redmond and his contemporaries in Britain and Ireland failed to foresee, however, was the attritional nature of the 1914-1918 War and the rise of militant Irish nationalism in the interim. By autumn 1918 as the war drew to an unsatisfying conclusion, the political climate had changed entirely in Ireland from when the Home Rule Bill had been passed. A series of blunders made by the British in Ireland during the Great War, including the execution of the leaders of the doomed Easter Rising and the decision to expand conscription to Ireland, had sealed the fate of Redmond's foundering Irish Parliamentary Party in 1918. Their sound defeat at the polls in the 1918 elections by Sinn Fein candidates ended any possibility that Home Rule might prove a viable solution to the Irish question and provided the more radical nationalists with a mandate to create a new Irish Republic and to defend this fledgling government with physical force from British reprisal, prompting the Anglo-Irish War.

The Easter Rising was a tragic miscalculation and a costly failure to the Irish nationalist movement. As the men of the Irish Volunteers who had participated in the violent Rising of April 1916 were led in handcuffs through the streets of Dublin by British soldiers, angry mobs of Irishmen gathered to berate and curse them for the destruction that their doomed rebellion had wrought. Several blocks had been pounded by heavy artillery pieces for days as British soldiers attempted to dislodge the Irish Volunteers from their positions in the General Post Office and elsewhere in the city, souring the already ambivalent citizens of Dublin to the prospect of revolution.⁵⁷ Within three years time, however, the leaders of very same Rising would be

⁵⁷ T. Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow: A Joint Biography of Collins and De Valera* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1998), 31.

canonized by many Irishmen and other participants in the rebellion would form the head of the fledgling Irish Republic's democratically-elected parliament, the Dail Eireann. While the Easter Rising ultimately contributed to popular Irish aspirations for greater autonomy than that afforded by Home Rule, it was the British government's mishandling of the situation after the rebels had surrendered and not the short-lived rebellion itself that galvanized Irish support. The unwise decision of the British government to execute most of the Easter Rising's leaders transformed the men from isolated radicals with no popular support base into martyrs who were apotheosized by the leaders of the Irish Republic that came into being in early 1919.

The Easter Rising was the work of a small, determined cadre of dedicated republican revolutionaries.⁵⁸ Tom Clarke, Sean MacDermott, and Patrick Pearse, leaders of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secretive militant nationalist organization devoted to republican principles, managed to infiltrate and subvert the leadership of the less radically republican but far larger and more influential Irish Volunteers nationalist organization.⁵⁹ Together with James Connolly, a leader of the Socialist Irish Citizen Army, they plotted an armed insurrection against British rule, aiming to use the pressure put upon the Empire by the strain of the Great War to their advantage by procuring German arms.⁶⁰ They launched their rebellion on 24 April 1916, Easter Sunday.

The actual results of the Rising were predictable, even to elements of its leadership. While the force of some 1,200 armed insurrectionists had initial successes and managed to surprise an unsuspecting British garrison while securing strategic points around Dublin,

⁵⁸ Tim Pat Coogan, *1916: The Easter Rising* (London: Cassell, 2001).

⁵⁹ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 272-274.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 318.

including their headquarters at the General Post Office where they remained unmolested for several days, the British military response was eventually decisive. After three days of intense fighting, the rebellion had been suppressed and its leadership forced into unconditional surrender. Ultimately more important than how long the men of the Rising held ground against the British in Dublin, however, was their republican political manifesto. Penned eloquently by Pearse, a poet and writer, the declaration of the Provisional government of the Irish Republic declared the “right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible.”⁶¹ This sentiment, a far cry from the conciliation with Britain espoused by Redmond and the Home Rulers in the Irish Parliamentary Party, called for the establishment of an entirely independent Irish Republic located outside of the British imperial sphere. It would become the basis for the much more effective physical force action taken by Sinn Fein and its military wing, the Irish Republican Army, in the coming Anglo-Irish War, and the question of whether or not any relationship with Britain’s Empire, even one so comparatively advantageous as dominion status, would form the basis of the ideological rift among Irish nationalist leaders that preceded civil war.

Far from representing the wishes of ordinary Irishmen, the Rising leaders carried out their schemes without popular support during the early years of the Great War, a time of near unparalleled prosperity in Ireland.⁶² The destruction wrought by their armed insurrection more than adequately explains the immediate civilian reaction of disgust in the Rising’s aftermath. Several hundred citizens of Dublin had been killed during the fighting, provoking an impassioned response that required, in the words of one British officer, that the “prisoners

⁶¹ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*.

⁶² *A New History of Ireland VI England under the Union II, 1870-1921*. Edited by W. E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 207-208.

needed more protection from the crowd than the soldiers did.”⁶³ But derision and scorn was not to be the rebellion’s popular legacy in Ireland. Maladroit British policy in dealing with the rebels very quickly turned public opinion from popular condemnation of the Rising to anger with British government, marking the first step along the gradual road towards the dissolution of the constitutionalist Irish Parliamentary Party and the popular embrace of large scale physical force nationalism.

British efforts to punish the Rising’s participants very quickly proved disastrously miscalculated. Initially, 90 rebels were sentenced to death by British government, who tried the Rising participants via secret courts martial that lacked any degree of impartiality or transparency, frustrating even those who agreed that the Rising had been an illegal action deserving of punishment. That the number of executed ultimately totaled only 16, including the execution of Roger Casement, a British civil servant who acted as liaison between the Irish and Germans, after a sensational trial, did little to assuage the concerns of even formerly sympathetic elements of the Irish population. The manner in which the rebels were executed, hastily by firing squad without consideration for rights to priests or families, shocked the Irish public and convinced them that the British retribution had been too draconian by far.⁶⁴ This, when combined with the mass internment of the surviving rebels in squalid camps in Britain, did much to heighten the memories of the executed revolutionaries while damaging British prestige in Ireland. IPP leader John Redmond perceived the danger of losing public opinion in Ireland and warned his fellow Parliamentary delegates at Westminster in May that the impact of British reprisals against the Rising’s leaders could poison the efforts of constitutionalist nationalists to solve the Irish question by means of implementing Home Rule. He stated, vividly but

⁶³ T Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, 31.

⁶⁴ *A New History of Ireland*, 218-222.

presciently, that the executions would let “loose a river of blood...between two races who, after nearly three hundred years of hatred and of strife, we had nearly succeeded in bringing together.”⁶⁵ The rise of the Sinn Fein party in the Rising’s aftermath at the expense of his own IPP gave credence to his assertion that the British reaction to the Rising would be more damaging to the peaceful pursuit of self government than the Rising itself. It would only take one more crisis, the attempted implementation of conscription to Ireland, to decisively tip the balance of public opinion away from constitutional nationalist efforts and towards physical force nationalism, as espoused by Sinn Fein.

The Great War, which had begun largely unintentionally as a conflagration of imperial jealousies and tangled alliances, had gradually been recast and justified by the Allied powers to their citizenry as a war for the rights of small nations against a despotic foe. The German invasion and occupation of neutral Belgium, whose sovereignty had been guaranteed by all of the major European powers, was depicted largely fictitiously but devastatingly effectively by the Allied media as a grotesque panoply of German horrors and atrocities, and the noble quest to achieve justice for Belgium’s defenseless and victimized citizens was utilized extensively by Allied propaganda for recruitment purposes. Additionally, Wilson’s Fourteen Points, delivered via speech to a joint session of Congress in January 1918, touched repeatedly on the U.S. war aims of self-determination for oppressed colonial peoples and the protection of the rights of small nations.

This was a message absorbed eagerly by Irish nationalists, who had slowly reorganized under new leadership in the prison camps and elsewhere since their decisive defeat during Easter Week, 1916. The British government’s massively unpopular decision to expand conscription to

⁶⁵ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, 325.

Ireland in April 1918 while continuing to avoid the implementation of Home Rule provided the nationalists with a ripe opportunity to test the veracity of these stated war goals, in the process further undermining British authority, undercutting the moderate nationalist position in Ireland and consequentially winning over the same Irish nation that had been highly critical of the conduct of the Easter Rising leaders to the now-Sinn Fein dominated nationalist movement during the General Election of 1918.

As was to be the case in the dominions, conscription was a highly polarizing issue in Great Britain. By early 1916, however, the massive casualties suffered by Kitchener's Armies of early war volunteers on the battlefields of Belgium and France necessitated its implementation in the United Kingdom, with the noteworthy exclusion of Ireland, which was deemed too politically volatile to include. The situation had become considerably more dire by March 1918 as the Germans launched their great Spring Offensive in a last ditch effort to break the Allied lines before the arrival of more American soldiers permanently shifted the balance of power away from their favor. Instituting conscription in Ireland, the last great reservoir of untapped manpower available to the British military, suddenly became a priority for P.M. Lloyd George's government as Field Marshal Haig and his commanders screamed for every last available soldier to stem the brutal German onslaught.⁶⁶

Lloyd George, who had previously been opposed to applying conscription to Ireland, felt obliged to reverse himself in this great emergency, even if this meant finally entertaining demands for the realization of Home Rule, set aside at the outbreak of the war, over the objections of Unionists. He failed to appreciate that events, including the consolidation of Irish

⁶⁶ Alan J. Ward, "Lloyd George and 1918 Irish Conscription Crisis," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (March 1974).

nationalist movements under the Sinn Fein banner in 1917 while Unionists remained staunchly opposed to any devolution of power to an Irish legislative body, were rapidly making the terms of Home Rule irrelevant. The passing of the Military Service Bill in Parliament in early April at Lloyd George's behest without any concrete promises or provisions for the implementation of Home Rule effectively cut the legs out from under the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party. Although they left Parliament in opposition to this measure, the IPP, which had already been under siege from the physical-force advocates Sinn Fein at the polls, lost further legitimacy in the eyes of Irish people following this failure. As such, even as conscription pushed more Irish voters into the arms of the radical nationalist camp of Sinn Fein, the middle ground of peaceful constitutional reform was fatally undermined by the British refusal to grant Home Rule.

Further complicating matters was publication of the results of the Irish Convention on the same day as the decision to implement conscription. The findings of the Convention, which had been tasked by the British government with the purpose of crafting a Home Rule acceptable to the wide variety of Irish interests, were entirely undercut by the furor surrounding the Conscription Crisis.⁶⁷ That the Convention had not included delegates of Sinn Fein, which had increasingly come to represent the majority of southern Irishmen, and therefore likely arrived at a relatively moderate conclusion that would not have satisfied the demands of radicals is undeniable. Nevertheless, Lloyd George's government's decision to essentially shunt aside the findings in favor of passing conscription is a telling insight into their priorities. Moderate propositions for Home Rule that had been endorsed by large numbers of Irishmen before the war

⁶⁷ Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland*, 220

were disregarded and not given a chance to succeed by the British government, frustrating and radicalizing many of the Irish and bolstering Sinn Fein's numbers.⁶⁸

In universal protest to the implementation of conscription in Ireland, leaders of the various Irish political parties met for a conference at the Mansion House in Dublin on 18 April 1918. There they drafted several documents decrying the illegitimacy of the conscription of Irishmen into the British army. In a powerfully succinct declaration drafted by Sinn Fein leader Eamon de Valera, the conference delegates condemned the British action in the strongest possible language:

We deny the right of the British Government, or any external authority, to impose compulsory service in Ireland against the clearly expressed will of the Irish people.

The passing of the Conscription Bill by the British House of Commons must be regarded as a declaration of war on the Irish nation. The alternative to accepting it, as such, is to surrender our liberties and to acknowledge ourselves slaves.

In the next passage, de Valera drew from the language employed by President Wilson in his Fourteen Points address, highlighting the hypocrisy of the Allied war aims to secure rights for the small nation of Belgium while denying those same liberties to the Irish nation:

It is in direct violation of the rights of small nationalities to self-determination, which even the Prime Minister of England – now prepared to employ naked militarism to force his Act upon Ireland – himself officially announced as an essential condition for peace at the Peace Conference.⁶⁹

This would not be the last attempt by de Valera to hold the Allies accountable to the standards for which they were ostensibly fighting the war. In a direct appeal to President Wilson authored

⁶⁸ Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath, 1916-1923: Years of Revolt* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 30-31.

⁶⁹ Eamon de Valera, *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera, 1917-1973*, Edited by Maurice Moynahan. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, pgs 12 and 13.

by de Valera and issued by the Mansion House in May 1918, he would again employ this language by reminding Wilson of his pledge to aid small nations, stating that, “In the fourth year of a war ostensibly begun for the defense of small nations, a law conscribing the manhood of Ireland has been passed, in defiance of the wishes of our people.”

In addition to holding the Americans and British accountable to their promises to protect the rights of small nations, de Valera and his associates cite legal precedent and a long list of grievances in their censure of the extension of conscription to Ireland. In the same letter to Wilson, de Valera asserts that, because the language of the Act of Union of 1800 stipulates that no major changes should be made in the law without precedent, that conscription is an extralegal development because:

British military statecraft has hitherto rigidly held by a separate tradition for Ireland. The Territorial military system, created in 1907 for Great Britain, was not set up in Ireland. The Irish Militia was then actually disbanded, and the War Office insisted that no Territorial force to replace it should be embodied. Stranger still, the Volunteer Acts (Naval or Military) from 1804 to 1900 (some twenty in all) were never extended to Ireland. In 1880, when a Conservative House of Commons agreed to tolerate Volunteering, the measure was thrown out by the House of Lords on the plea that Irishmen must not be allowed to learn the use of arms.⁷⁰

Additionally, de Valera, never one afraid to impart a history lesson on his audience, used the letter as an opportunity to air the long list of abuses suffered by the Irish under British rule. He therefore enumerated the grievances in detail, detailing:

...the story of the destruction of our manufactures, of artificial famines, of the fomentation of uprisings, of a hundred Coercion Acts, culminating in the perpetual Act of Repression, obtained by forgery, which graced Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Year in 1887. In

⁷⁰ Laurence O’Neill, *No Conscription! Ireland’s Case Re-Stated* (Dublin: Mansion House Conference, 1918).

our island the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, the repression of free speech, gibbettings, shootings, and bayoneting, are commonplace events.⁷¹

The letter to Wilson from the Mansion House delegates, while concerned immediately with the expansion of conscription, reads as a plea for a general intervention by the United States on the side of the Irish against the British. It represents the first stage in a long-term strategy to secure U.S. support for Ireland that would continue during the Anglo-Irish War, culminating with de Valera himself visiting America in an attempt to obtain official recognition for the Irish Republic.

Efforts by the Mansion House Conference and the political bodies it represented to resist conscription were hampered by mass arrests carried out by British authorities on 16 May. These arrests, justified unconvincingly by the British as a necessary response to the realization of a dire “German Conspiracy” in Ireland, provoked further agitation among an already incensed Irish people.⁷² As a result, by mid June, Lloyd George’s government was forced to abandon the attempt to apply conscription in Ireland. Of the 150,000 men that British analysts had initially estimated could be wrung out of Ireland for service, only 10,000 Irishmen came forward as volunteers between April and October 1918. This figure did was not nearly enough to offset the British Army’s garrison in Ireland, which had to be increased from 25,000 men in March to over 100,000 in the summer of 1918 to combat growing disaffection and keep the peace.⁷³ The marked increase of the British military presence in Ireland further angered the Irish population and provided ample propaganda material for Sinn Fein, whose membership continued to burgeon throughout 1918. Whereas Sinn Fein had suffered a series of election defeats in early 1918 before the full effects of the Conscription Crisis were felt, possibly representing a turnaround

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² T Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, 60-62.

⁷³ Ward, “Lloyd George and the 1918 Irish Conscription Crisis,” 125-127.

from their incipient success in late 1917, the badly mishandled British response reversed this trend and galvanized their Irish support base by late 1918.⁷⁴ In the General Election of December 1918, they swept a majority in dramatic fashion, securing 73 of 105 Irish parliamentary seats, in the process defeating the traditional Irish Parliamentary Party.⁷⁵

As such, the Conscription crisis can be viewed as a multitude of failures for the British government in that it proved to be figurative the nail in the coffin of the increasingly moribund Irish Parliamentary Party, it ostracized a large percentage of the remaining moderate Irish nationalists and drove them into the radical Sinn Fein camp, and it provoked an increase in the British military presence in Ireland, which further alienated any remaining Irish occupying the middle ground, all while failing to produce troops to send to the Western Front. Sinn Fein's success in the polls throughout 1918 and especially their landslide victory as a party in the pivotal General Election can be attributed in large measure to the ill-will generated by the attempted introduction of conscription to Ireland.⁷⁶ The importance of Sinn Fein's meteoric rise in popularity cannot be overstated, and its implications for Home Rule were grim indeed. Physical force nationalists had gained a mandate from the Irish people, and their aims were much more ambitious than the relatively limited autonomy allowed by Home Rule.

Through a series of blunders beginning with the mishandling of the Easter Rising's aftermath in 1916, continuing through the Conscription Crisis and culminating in the death of the IPP and the triumph of Sinn Fein at the polls in late 1918, the British government had effectively destroyed any possibility that the small autonomy afforded by Home Rule would continue to have any desirability in the nationalist camp after the war. With Home Rule buried and the Irish

⁷⁴ Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland*, 229.

⁷⁵ Costello, *Irish Revolution*.

⁷⁶ T Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, 65-67.

people increasingly belligerent under the militant nationalist leadership of Sinn Fein, who were clamoring for the formation of an entirely independent Irish Republic outside of the British Empire, two realistic options remained available to British policymakers in addressing the Irish question: an attempt at conciliation by offering greater autonomy, i.e. dominion status, with all the freedom that it entailed, or the application of coercive force to bring them into line. Flush with success in the Great War, unaware of the full resolve of the physical force Irish nationalists, and mindful of continued Unionist disdain for anything approaching dominion status, the British government elected to suppress the nationalist revolutionaries. Their decision to employ coercive measures yet again to suppress Irish discontent, when combined with the Irish nationalists' experimentation with republicanism, sowed the seeds of discord in Ireland when dominion status was finally offered in 1921, facilitating the creation of a large number of Irish nationalist republican hardliners who would not be satisfied with the compromise of dominion status.

Section 6: Coercive Action - Britain's conduct during the Anglo-Irish War

The beginning of the Anglo-Irish War or Irish War of Independence is often retrospectively marked from the fatal shootings of two Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) officers by an Irish Republican Army unit at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary on 21 January 1919.⁷⁷ This is a somewhat misleading categorization. Despite the abstention of Sinn Fein MPs from participation at Westminster and the ratification of the Irish Republic by many of these same figures after forming the independent First Dail Eireann, and the increasingly bold actions of IRA units against RIC targets, the high tensions in Ireland were hardly perceived as an outright war by British policymakers in the Lloyd George government for the duration of 1919,

⁷⁷ Costello, *Irish Revolution*, 39.

preoccupied as they were with grave matters elsewhere such as the Peace Conference at Paris and the threat of Bolshevism escaping Russian quarantine. The British clearly believed that peaceful constitutional reform could still remedy the deteriorating situation in Ireland, as the government finally put aside the Third Home Rule Bill in favor of a new Government of Ireland Bill that contained similar provisions with one major caveat that was intended to allay the misgivings of Unionists: the creation of two regional parliaments, one for the south and one for Ulster province, that would in turn send representatives to an Ireland-wide parliament.⁷⁸ They failed to fully appreciate the ramifications of the radical swing in public opinion that had preceded the General Election of December 1918 or those of Sinn Fein's consolidation of power in Ireland.

Throughout 1919, Sinn Fein made exhaustive preparations for the prosecution of a large scale, long-term military action against British government representatives and their Unionist allies in Ireland.⁷⁹ They gathered small arms, transformed the existing Irish Volunteers into the Irish Republican Army and formed new military units, and slowly but surely brought the doctrine of physical force nationalism to the Irish public. In response, in late 1919 first the Sinn Fein political party and then later the entire Dail were declared illegal by British government, but this was not nearly enough to stem the nationalist tide. By 1920, Sinn Fein's military wing in the IRA and their civilian side in the form of their overwhelming majority in the Dail government had become a large and influential enough force in Ireland that British government was forced to decisively react against the increasing wave of intimidation and assassination carried out by IRA units against informers and collaborators.

⁷⁸ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary: Volume 3: Ireland, 1918-1925*. Edited by Keith Middlemas (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

In response to this escalated violence, coercive policy was employed by the British to suppress the nationalists, whom the British did not at least initially perceive to be a significantly different threat than previous failed insurrectionary movements in Ireland. This coercion had several dimensions, including the suppression of Irish public dissent under the provisions of the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA) and its successor, the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act, the introduction of two new primarily British-constituted units to supplement flagging membership in the RIC, the Auxiliaries and the “Black and Tans”, and the declaration of martial law in several Irish counties in late 1920 and early 1921 in conjunction with the reinforcement of the British military presence in Ireland.

By mid 1920, the breakdown of the Dublin Castle administrative regime of British control in Ireland was nearly complete.⁸⁰ Civilian authority of British government had been almost entirely usurped by the functions of the new Republican government, and the civilian officials were left in charge of virtually nothing outside of Dublin as IRA operated with impunity in large swaths of the countryside. Additionally, the judicial branch of the government had ceased to function almost entirely, making it exceedingly difficult to try suspected insurrectionists as criminals, which they officially were in the eyes of British policymakers given that the Irish Republic was never acknowledged and that the revolution was simply a rebellion. Lloyd George’s government attempted to remedy this deteriorating situation by introducing legislation that expanded the power of the military to try suspected rebels. The Restoration of Order in Ireland Act of August 1920, building upon the provisions of DORA, gave the military the power to try certain prisoners in courts martial if they were suspected of assassination or

⁸⁰ Eunan O’Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1987), 210-212.

other egregious political crimes.⁸¹ The Act was a success in that it resulted in an increase in the number of convictions related to IRA membership and drove many IRA men into hiding. From seclusion, however, after reorganizing and rearming, they remained just as dangerous as ever to British interests.⁸²

As the civilian government apparatus disintegrated in Ireland under the pressure of open revolt, the RIC underwent a severe crisis as a policing organization. Its members were targeted for intimidation and assassination, as begun at Soloheadbeg in January 1919. By 1920, resignations were increasing dramatically as RIC men feared for their lives and their family's wellbeing while recruiting simultaneously failed to find adequate replacements.⁸³ This dearth of trained and willing policemen produced a crisis which was ultimately solved by British policymakers via the introduction of non-Irish supplementary police forces to Ireland. These two new units of Temporary Constables, the Black and Tans and the Auxiliary Division, were drawn primarily from the ranks of unemployed British Great War veterans, the former from the rank and file soldiers who joined at the promise of 10 shillings a day and the latter from the officer corps, who were offered even more in compensation.⁸⁴ Neither had any experience conducting police work and both were shortly to gain infamy in Ireland for their brutal treatment of suspected IRA operatives and, as frustration mounted, the general civilian population of Ireland.

Examples of atrocities committed by the emergency RIC units while on station in Ireland are numerous, especially as they encountered fierce resistance from mobile IRA units that they were largely powerless to prevent. Suspected IRA men were beaten and tortured nearly to death

⁸¹ *A New History of Ireland*, 603-605.

⁸² Costello, *Irish Revolution*, 83.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸⁴ Richard Bennett, *The Blacks And Tans* (Essex: Anchor Press Ltd, 1976), 37 and John S. Ainsworth, "British Security Policy in Ireland 1920-1921" *Australian Journal of Irish Studies*, 1-2.

when captured alive, ostensibly to obtain valuable information about the whereabouts of other IRA operatives but more often than not simply as an outlet for the strain that the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans found themselves under in a hostile land.⁸⁵ Civilians were also liable to brutal treatment at the hands of the RIC, occasionally receiving beatings from drunken RIC members.⁸⁶ In admittedly rarer instances, innocent civilians were summarily executed by RIC units, especially after instances of local IRA ambushes.⁸⁷ This tendency towards repressive and sudden violence, no doubt fostered in the trenches and muddy battlefields of Flanders and France, irreparably damaged relations between the RIC and civilians in certain districts of Ireland. Barry Egan, the Deputy Mayor of Cork, summed up the feelings of civilians in the counties that had been hardest hit by the violence of the Anglo-Irish War when he stated that it was not among the soldiers, but in “the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries that there are some really dangerous characters. They may have been gallant soldiers and ex officers – but they are criminals for all that – and drinking away 1£ or 30/ a day.”⁸⁸

The strong association between alcohol use and violence committed against the civilian population, however, should not give the impression that all incidents of abuse were perpetrated by inebriated, renegade RIC members. On the contrary, while disaffection and substance abuse were rampant in the British supplementary elements of the RIC, recklessly violent behavior was on the whole condoned and occasionally even encouraged by the RIC’s command apparatus. An

⁸⁵ *Irish Historical Documents*, edited by Alan O’Day and John Stevenson (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1992).

⁸⁶ Violet Bonham Carter, *Champion Redoubtable: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter, 1914-1945*, edited by Mark Pottle (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998)118-119.

⁸⁷ Robert Kee, *The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 698-700.

⁸⁸ Carter, *Champion Redoubtable*, 128.

example of this official sanction of police violence is to be found in a speech given in June 1920 by RIC Divisional Police Commander Lt. Colonel Bruce Smyth to his men in Munster:

Now, men, Sinn Fein has had all the sport up to the present, and we are going to have the sport now...you may make mistakes occasionally, and innocent persons will be shot, but that cannot be helped, and you are bound to get the right parties sometime. The more you shoot, the better I will like you, and I assure you, no policeman will get into trouble for shooting a man.⁸⁹

Official authorization of indiscriminate violence certainly accommodated disorder and abuse of power in a situation already rife with that possibility.

By late 1920, the situation had grown even worse. A surgical strike by IRA operatives against 14 British agents in Dublin on 21 November, known afterwards as Bloody Sunday, incensed the RIC to the point of riot. Later that afternoon, a unit of Black and Tans stormed into a crowded football stadium and opened fire on a crowd of onlookers in an act of retribution, killing 12 civilians in what was to be known as the Croke Park massacre.⁹⁰ In December, the whole of Cork City, the third largest city in Ireland, was put to the torch by combined force of Black and Tans, Auxiliaries, and regular Army troops in a large-scale military riot, in response to an IRA ambush.⁹¹ Bloody Black and Tan and Auxiliary reprisals, official and unofficial, continued into the first half of 1921, leaving a bitter legacy that poisoned support in certain quarters for dominion status when it was offered conditionally by Britain as part of the peace treaty later that year.

Finally, the application of martial law in certain especially querulous sections of Ireland is representative of coercive British policy during the Irish Revolution. While the whole of Ireland was never put under martial law during the Irish Revolution due to Lloyd George's desire

⁸⁹ O'Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 48.

⁹⁰ *A New History of Ireland*, 250.

⁹¹ Costello, *Irish Revolution*, 100-103.

to keep Dublin open for potential negotiations with the supposedly “reasonable” elements within Sinn Fein (as opposed to the reviled “gunmen”), large sections of the south of Ireland were placed under martial law. In the southwest province of Munster, Counties Cork, Tipperary, Limerick, and Kerry were placed under martial law in December 1920. By the end of January, Counties Clare, Waterford of Munster and Wexford and Kilkenny of Leinster Province joined the list.⁹²

In the counties placed under martial law, jurisdiction was placed in the hands of the 6th Division, with its commandant General Strickland serving as military governor. Strickland devised a series of courts martial by which all offenses could be tried, with the most serious crimes of association with the IRA dealt with swiftly by drumhead courts martial to pass capital offenses on the perpetrators. In this way, 32 capital convictions were reached and 14 IRA operatives were assassinated between December 1920 and the truce that began in July 1921.⁹³ Curfews were enforced rigorously by British military authorities, and public gatherings thoroughly monitored or banned after IRA actions. Additionally, some 200 houses were razed in official reprisals by British soldiers between January and June 1921.⁹⁴ In summary, the British military authority enacted repressive measures in attempt to quell IRA action in the affected regions. That these measures met with a certain amount of success is perhaps less important than the damage it did to British relations with the civilian population and the opportunities it afforded Sinn Fein in the ongoing propaganda war.

When coercive measures ultimately failed to bring the Irish nationalists to heel during the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921, the extension of dominion status to at least part of Ireland finally

⁹² Ibid., 103.

⁹³ John Ainsworth, “British Security Policy,” 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

became an issue of serious discussion. Lloyd George was adamant that nothing could be contemplated that would result in “Ireland an independent sovereign state.”⁹⁵ He was willing, by mid 1921, to discuss terms with the moderate elements of Sinn Fein so long as Ireland could be retained within the Empire. By that time, however, even the favored position within the Empire and near total internal autonomy afforded by dominion status would not be enough truly placate the Irish people, who were divided over its implementation to the point of civil war. Beyond their obvious frustration with the long record of British misconduct and misrule in Ireland, the experience of many of the Irish nationalist Sinn Fein leaders in the provisional Irish Republican government had important ramifications for the Treaty debates over whether or not to accept dominion status. The ideological commitment to republicanism had been bolstered by the founding of the Dail Eireann, which a vocal faction was loath to disavow in favor of a new dominion government that took the form of first a provisional government during the transfer of power and then eventually the Irish Free State.

Section 7: To “Let Down” the Republic - The Influence of Republicanism during the Anglo-Irish War and the Treaty Debates in the coming of Civil War

By the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and Ireland in early 1919, the Irish physical force independence movement had a long history of association with republicanism stretching back to the Fenian movement of the 1860s.⁹⁶ The establishment of the Dail Eireann as a republican government entirely independent from British interests finally gave these physical force nationalists the government that they had long coveted. Although the actual operation of the Dail government was not without frustration or shortcoming for Irish republicans, by mid

⁹⁵ O’Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 50.

⁹⁶ Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dail Eireann, 1919-22* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1995).

1920 it had begun to function in certain parts of the country as an alternative government at least as capable as the deteriorating British administration run from Dublin Castle, operating courts of justice and organizing independent police forces to replace the fleeing RIC.

This relatively brief phase of effective operation, when combined with the truce period between July and December 1921 in which the Dail government operated free from British interference, provided the more radical physical force advocates with a beguiling example of functioning independent republican government in Ireland that they were unwilling to surrender. When the Treaty reached by moderate delegates of the Dail with British representatives in December 1921 asked them to do just that, in the republic's place accepting dominion status within the British Empire, a significant vocal minority of Irishmen and indeed a majority of the IRA that had fought the British for independence rejected the Treaty's provisions and pressed onwards for the maintenance of the Republic, despite the will of the majority to the contrary and the relatively generous degree of autonomy and imperial prestige offered by dominion status. This disagreement over the terms of the Treaty, made possible at least in part because of earlier British refusals to tender any form of self government, be it Home Rule or dominion status, to the Irish, resulted in the fratricidal Irish Civil War.

The First Dail Eireann, comprised of Sinn Fein party members and other pro-independence Irish MPs who abstained from the Parliament at Westminster following the December 1918 General Elections, came into being as an entity on 21 January 1919.⁹⁷ The Dail's representatives issued a statement, which solemnly declared that:

We, the elected representatives of the ancient Irish people in National Parliament assembled, do, in the name of the Irish nation, ratify the establishment of the Irish

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Republic and pledge ourselves and our people to make this declaration effective by every means at our command.⁹⁸

Immediately, a connection between the founding of the Dail and the essentially theoretical Irish Republic of the Easter Rising was established, a bond which many Irish freedom fighters would find hard to break when the conditions of the Treaty rejected republicanism in favor of dominion status within the Empire.⁹⁹ It is important to note that, in 1921, these were two mutually exclusive possibilities; only much later, after the Second World War, would British policymakers countenance the inclusion of a republic into the Commonwealth scheme. This strong connection between the nationalist physical force movement with republicanism even at the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish War was succinctly espoused by Cathal Brugha, a prominent Sinn Fein member and Cabinet Member in the Dail government during the war, when he stated at the opening session of the Dail that “what is asserted in this Declaration” was that the Irish were “now done with England.”¹⁰⁰ This sentiment would only be further engrained by two and a half years of further bitter conflict with Britain. As such, when the Irish delegates to the peace talks returned with a treaty that enshrined Ireland as an entity within the British Empire, even under the relatively favorable terms of dominion status, the true republicans were outraged to the point of going to war with their former friends and associates.

The actual operation of the Dail government after it had been established was far from ideal. The entire body often found it impossible to meet for extended periods of time due to British pressure and the incarceration of Dail representatives by British authorities.¹⁰¹ Even the Cabinet, which included perhaps the two most famous leaders of the Revolution, Eamon de

⁹⁸ O’Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 46.

⁹⁹ Costello, *Irish Revolution*.

¹⁰⁰ O’Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 46.

¹⁰¹ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland*.

Valera as President and Michael Collins as Chief of Intelligence of the IRA and Finance Minister, was forced to conduct its business clandestinely, which created problems in setting up and maintaining effective programs. Money issues also troubled the republican government, as the Dail elected not to anger or place at potential disadvantage its constituency by collecting income taxes. While the collection of some 5 million dollars by pro-Irish independence movements in the U.S. provided the Dail with a certain amount of cash to conduct their business, its 300 permanent employees and their duties never came near the scope of even the moribund Dublin Castle government's 12,000 full-time staff.¹⁰²

Despite difficulties, by the summer of 1920 certain areas of Ireland beyond Dublin were effectively brought under the control of the Dail government, in part aided by the speedy collapse of the Dublin Castle regime. A British observer in Ireland commented in July 1920 that the Dail government was effectively administering government, given their limited resources:

Sinn Fein rules the County (of Limerick) – and rules it admirably. Petty thefts, or indeed crimes of any kind, are dealt with by the Sinn Fein courts, who try the accused with perfect fairness, and administer justice in the most thorough fashion... The fact is that everybody is going over to Sinn Fein, not because they believe in it but because in it, but because it is the only authority in the County; and they realize that if their lives and property are to be secured, they must act with Sinn Fein.¹⁰³

The Dail had indeed authorized the creation of a series of courts to administer justice at a local level, at first delegating these responsibilities to Sinn Fein county officials but later taking up responsibility for their operation themselves.¹⁰⁴ The operation of these courts, when combined with the creation of ad hoc police forces in the vacuum left by the RIC's hasty retreat from many affected areas, served in the summer of 1920 as the high water mark of the Dail's effective

¹⁰² Ibid., 156-160.

¹⁰³ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland*.

administration of government.¹⁰⁵ While their influence was limited to certain rebellious counties, their very existence was of great significance to the republican faction that refused to accept the Treaty in late 1921 – early 1922.

The truce that began in July 1921 as Irish delegates met with British representatives also contributed to dissent over the Treaty later that year by fostering an atmosphere of military triumph. Due to the lack of British operations, the IRA and the Dail government were able to operate freely in the open for the first time. In the estimation of Michael Hayes, a nationalist who participated in Irish government from the Rising of 1916 through the 1960s, this celebratory attitude of open “marching and drilling and parading” directly led to later republican intransigence over the Treaty. The “absence of British activity” in late 1921 “created the illusion that we actually had a Republic, free to meet and that the newspapers were actually free to print what was said in the Dail,” in stark contrast to the coercive repression meted out by British security forces against suspected nationalists during the Anglo-Irish War.¹⁰⁶ This atmosphere of triumph or complacency was entirely unjustified according to IRA Director of Intelligence and Treaty delegate Michael Collins and IRA Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy, among others, who were more than aware that a immediate resumption of hostilities with Britain, actively threatened by Lloyd George should the Treaty fail, would be devastating for the war-weary Irish republic.¹⁰⁷ Despite these warnings, many republicans were blinded to the realities of the situation by the allure of the Irish Republic’s halcyon days, when it had been unmolested by British government and allowed to bloom to its fullest extent.

¹⁰⁵ Costello, *Irish Revolution*, 190-205.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Hayes, “Dail Eireann and the Irish Civil War,” *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 58, No. 229 (Spring 1969), 16.

¹⁰⁷ Costello, *Irish Revolution*.

For all of these reasons, when the Irish delegates led by Michael Collins and Sinn Fein founder Arthur Griffith returned in December 1921 with the Treaty in hand that guaranteed dominion status for Ireland, a concession momentarily greater than any previously wrangled from British policymakers, they faced determined resistance from many of their former fellows. Opposition to the Treaty came from many quarters, from the moderate to the radical.

Some who took up the anti-Treaty cause, like supporters of President of the Irish Republic Eamon de Valera, did so because they disagreed with the exact nature of the relationship between the Irish state and the British Empire as established by the Treaty's provisions. The Treaty, as it stood, required an oath to "H.M. King George V, his heirs and successors by law, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations."¹⁰⁸ De Valera, who had refused to attend the Treaty negotiations himself under the apparent belief that he would have the final say over the matter (this despite the fact that he granted the delegates full plenipotentiary powers), was aggravated by this arrangement, claiming that the oath meant that the power of the Irish executive was "derived from Great Britain" and that, as such, the "Irish people's Ministers will not be the Irish people's Ministers but his Majesty's."¹⁰⁹ He continued to support an alternative to the Treaty as agreed upon by the Irish and British delegates, a solution that he termed "Document No. 2" or "external association." This alternative arrangement would allow Ireland to retain its status as a republic, including retaining control over its foreign affairs, while also acknowledging that Britain and Ireland shared common aims by recognizing the British monarch as head of the association known as the British Commonwealth of Nations, of

¹⁰⁸ O'Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 56.

¹⁰⁹ De Valera, *Speeches and Statements*, 81-83.

which the Irish Republic would become a member.¹¹⁰ Dominion status, as prescribed under the Treaty, was according to de Valera impossible to apply to Ireland for a variety of reasons, ranging from the geographic to the cultural.¹¹¹ His external association scheme, however, allowed a limited degree of coordination with the British Empire, which was significantly more than many other diehard opponents of the Treaty were willing to consider. Increasingly, as it became clear that the majority supported adopting the Treaty and his support base waned, de Valera became handcuffed to the interests of the more radical anti-Treatyites, reducing him from a powerful figure within Irish politics to a mere figurehead of the anti-Treaty faction during the Civil War.

The radical anti-Treaty faction, in contrast to de Valera, was unwilling to accept any arrangement in which Ireland lost its claimed status as a republic and remained in anyway associated with the British Empire. They viewed the Treaty as an affront to their sacred Irish Republic, and employed dramatic rhetoric in the excoriating the proposed acceptance of dominion status. Representative of this was Minister of Republic Sean Etchingham's assertion in the Dail that acceptance of the Treaty would "be a renunciation of your principles...the burial service over the grave of the Irish nation."¹¹² While it remained a secondary issue to the furor sparked by the oath and the apparent renunciation of the republic, many republicans also bemoaned the inclusion of a provision in the Treaty that allowed Ulster the freedom to secede from the new Irish dominion, retaining its place within the United Kingdom and effectively legitimating the partition of Ireland that had begun following the breakdown of order in the south during the Anglo-Irish War. An anti-Treaty Sinn Fein Dail deputy, Sean T. O'Kelly, decried that

¹¹⁰ Costello, *Irish Revolution*, 243-44.

¹¹¹ Jason K Knirck, "The Dominion of Ireland," *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2007): 229-255.

¹¹² O'Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 58.

the “two great principles for which so many have died, and for which they would still gladly die – no partition of Ireland and no subjugation of Ireland – have gone by the board in this Treaty.”¹¹³

The vitriol of the Treaty debates and the contention of the anti-Treatyites that those who supported the arrangement were traitors to the republic set the stage for bitter conflict beyond the political realm, despite the vain efforts of the Treaty’s supporters to sway their former comrades. Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, the two leaders of the Irish delegation to the Treaty negotiations, were best suited to address the discontent. Both contended pragmatically that the Treaty represented an unprecedented positive development for Ireland in its relationship with Britain. Griffith, in an address to the Dail during the debates of late December 1921, laid the facts of the arrangement down as he understood them:

We have come back from London with that Treaty...the Free State of Ireland. We have brought back the flag; we have brought back the evacuation of Ireland after 700 years by British troops and the formation of an Irish army. We have brought back to Ireland her full rights and powers of fiscal control. We have brought back to Ireland equality with England...If the Irish people say ‘we have got everything else but the name Republic and we will fight for it’ I would say to them that they are fools.¹¹⁴

Collins was equally adamant that the Treaty, for all its shortcomings, represented a clearly beneficial development for Ireland. The new Irish Free State’s constitutional status as a dominion, equal to that enjoyed by Canada, provided Ireland with a greater measure of autonomy than ever before enjoyed, except briefly and deceptively during the Anglo-Irish War.¹¹⁵ In terms similar to Griffith, he outlined the unparalleled success in ousting British troops from Ireland contingent on the Treaty:

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ O’Clery, *Ireland in Quotes*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Michael Collins, *Michael Collins: In His Own Words*, Edited by Francis Costello (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1997), 87.

England has renounced in fact all right to govern Ireland, and the withdrawal of their forces is the proof of this. With the evacuation secured by the Treaty has come the end to British rule in Ireland. The Treaty we brought home gave us the freedom we fought for, freedom from British interest and domination. The Black and Tans are no more. British military forces are gone, and these are the results of the Treaty, and we knew that December night, as we boarded the train for home, that these were the results of our many long months of arduous labours. It was a greater measure of success than any of us dared to hope.¹¹⁶

The majority of delegates in the Dail and of Irish citizens agreed with Collins, Griffith, and the pro-Treaty element that took control of the provisional government and ultimately the Irish Free State when it was established in December 1922.¹¹⁷ But neither Griffith nor Collins, nor indeed many of their allies and enemies in the Dail, would live to enjoy the fruits of their labor, the implementation of dominion government in Ireland. The hostility that had simmered at a barely controlled level between those who supported the Treaty and those who stood against it finally erupted into a fully-realized civil war in June 1922 that saw the executions of more Irishmen by the state than had been killed by Britain in the Easter Rising and the Irish Revolution combined.¹¹⁸ Before the war's conclusion in the spring of 1923, Griffith would be buried by the exhaustion of running a provisional government under the strain of civil war and Collins would be felled by an assassin's bullet, depriving the fledgling dominion of two of its most charismatic and effective leaders. This individual loss of life and the larger calamity of the civil war and its aftermath can be attributed to the intransigence of diehard republicans and their commitment to the republican ideal, regardless of the cost or of the apparent desirability of the alternative, dominion status for Ireland.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁷ Costello, *Irish Revolution*, 286.

¹¹⁸ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland*, 339-40.

Conclusion

Dominion status, when applied to the difficulties of the Irish situation, had very different implications than when it had been adopted elsewhere in the British Empire, producing discord and civil war rather than celebration and unity. British domination and deceitfulness in Ireland during the nineteenth century and through the Great War had sown the seeds of a popular revolution in Ireland in its aftermath. When it was finally acknowledged by Lloyd George's government in mid 1921 that coercion could not stem the tide of Irish unrest and that a compromise needed to be reached, dominion status was finally offered to Ireland. By this time, however, a committed, vocal minority of the Irish population, including the greater part of the IRA, saw any retreat from the republican principles espoused by the creation of the Dail Eireann government as an unacceptable defeat. The effective autonomy afforded by dominion status and the benefits of association with the British Empire meant little when weighed against their ideological principles. The anti-Treatyites, emboldened by their experience with republican government during the war and the truce, were willing to fight their former comrades in arms to prevent the implementation of dominion status within the British Empire in order to preserve their dreams of an independent Irish Republic. Culpability for the ruinous Irish Civil War that followed then must be attributed both to the long history of British misrule in Ireland and to the intransigence of Irish republicans, who were unwilling to accept even a favorable position within the British Empire as a "stepping stone" to eventual independence. Ironically, de Valera, one of the men most responsible for failing to avert civil war in his capacity as President by choosing to side with the anti-Treaty faction, would prove that Collins and Griffith had been right all along by gradually removing Ireland from Britain's orbit via constitutional means in the 1930s. By that time, however, only their legacies and the fading memories of all those who had perished in

the Civil War remained, a shadowy reminder of a generation of Irish patriots lost before their time.

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