

# 20th Century Irish Political History

## The Civil War in Ireland 1922—1923

### Background

With the Dail deeply divided over the Treaty a similar split occurred in the IRA. IRA members who supported the new government of Griffith and Collins were called Regulars while those who backed the anti-Treaty side with de Valera were called the Irregulars.

As British forces began to withdraw from their barracks around Ireland it was often groups of Irregulars who were first to occupy these barracks.

By June 1922 many barracks and even the Four Courts in Dublin were under Irregular control. Under pressure from Britain, Griffith and Collins decided that the time had come to take action.

### The War

During a week of terrible fighting in Dublin which resulted in 64 deaths, Free State forces (Regulars) attacked the Irregulars holding the Four Courts and were victorious.

In July and August, the Free State forces (Regulars) concentrated on forcing the Irregulars out of the old British barracks they held in what was called the Munster Republic.

The Government side suffered two severe blows in August 1922 with the deaths of Arthur Griffith and the assassination of Michael Collins in an ambush at Beal na mBlath, Co. Cork on August 22nd.

The new government leaders William T Cosgrave and Kevin O'Higgins decided to take a tougher line against the Irregulars.

A Special Powers Act in October 1922 led to many arrests of Irregulars and the execution of several prominent Republican (anti-Treaty) people such as Erskine Childers and Rory O'Connor.

The Civil War continued into 1923 until de Valera and the Irregular IRA leader Frank Aiken conceded defeat.

The Civil War in Ireland had been won by the pro-Treaty side.

### Results

About 600 people were killed during the Civil War.

The Treaty was no longer under immediate threat and the pro-Treaty Sinn Fein government renamed itself Cumann na nGaedhail. The Civil War created a lasting bitterness among Irish people for several generations afterwards.

