

The Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921

20th Century Irish Political History

The negotiations in London were difficult. The Irish side sought an independent 32 county republic while the British, fearful of setting an example for other countries in its Empire, wanted to give much less away.

The Irish delegates eventually signed a Treaty on December 6, 1921, with Collins expressing the belief that Ireland could gradually persuade Britain to improve on it over the following years.

According to the Treaty, Ireland would be known as the Irish Free State, not as a republic.

Ireland had to remain within the British Empire.

The six counties of Northern Ireland were allowed to remain with Britain.

All Irish TDs had to swear an Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown.

A Governor-General was to act as the Crown's representative in Ireland.

Britain kept three naval bases in Ireland for its own defence purposes.

Reaction in Ireland

Many people in Ireland felt that Collins, Griffith and the other delegates had got the best deal they could get and that the Treaty gave Ireland 'freedom to achieve our freedom', as Collins stated.

Others, however, felt that the delegates had abandoned the dream of a republic and of a united Ireland.

Debates raged in December 1921 and in early January 1922 in the Dail. Collins and Griffith argued strongly for the Treaty, while de Valera and Brugha led the opposition to the Treaty.

The dail eventually voted in favour of the Treaty by 64 votes to 57 votes. Following the vote, de Valera and those against the Treaty walked out of the Dail.

The remaining TDs who had supported the Treaty elected Arthur Griffith as President. His Provisional Government, with Collins as a leading member, began to oversee British withdrawal from the New Irish Free State, early in 1922.

