

Political History Ireland in the 20th Century

1912—1922

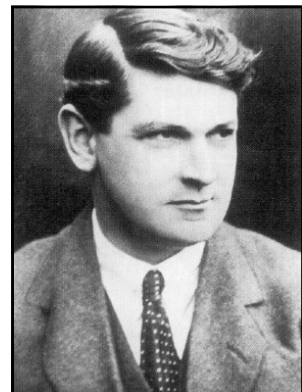
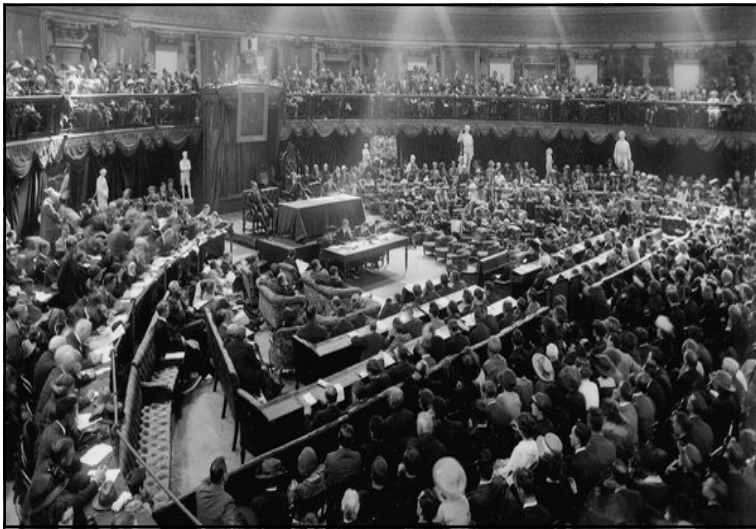
Beginnings of The War of Independence

Once Sinn Fein had won such a huge majority of seats in the 1918 general election the party decided to put its long-standing policy of parliamentary abstention into action (not to sit at Parliament in Westminster in London)

Instead of going to Westminster and even though many of the Sinn Fein MPs were in jail the remainder founded an unofficial parliament in Dublin called Dail Eireann on January 1919.

De Valera was in jail so Cathal Brugha was elected President of the Dail. The Irish Republic was declared and Dail members (TDs) were given jobs as ministers in the provisional government.

The Dail and its ministers operated illegally but successfully over the next two and a half years. It was boosted by the freeing of de Valera from jail masterminded by Michael Collins the Minister for Finance.



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The War of Independence

Sinn Fein had go from strength to strength since 1916. The IRB and Volunteers had also gained strength.

On the 21st January 1919, the day the first Dail Eireann sat in the Mansion House in Dublin 2 members of the British police force (Royal Irish Constabulary) were shot and killed in an ambush in Soloheadbeg in Co. Tipperary.

This was the first in a series of incidents in 1919 carried out by the IRB which effectively started the War of Independence in Ireland.

The Dail recognised the Volunteers as the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Michael Collins played a vital role in coordinating the efforts and activities of the IRA.

Flying Columns or groups of volunteers engaged in ambush and guerrilla tactics were the principal unit used by the IRA.

By the beginning of 1920 the British government began to take a hard line attitude towards the IRA and sent specially recruited (World War I veterans) called the Black and Tans (called this because of the uniform they wore) and the ex-officer troops the Auxiliaries to Ireland.

Attacks and retaliations were common in many areas of the country.

De Valera went to the USA where he raised several million dollars for the Dail and the IRA. Michael Collins became the most prominent figure in the Dail and the IRA commander.

Ambushes of British military forces at Kilmichael and Crossbarry were significant successes for the IRA but they resulted in retaliations by the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries.

Collins created a special squad of assassins in Dublin to target British military intelligence and on November 21, 1921 11 British agents were killed in Dublin.

This led to retaliation the same day by the British forces when they shot 12 people in Croke Park. This day became known as Bloody Sunday.



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War of Independence Towards Peace

David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister introduced the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 in an attempt to solve the problems in Ireland.

This Act was to enable two parliaments in Ireland in Belfast (to appease the Unionists) and one in Dublin (to appease the Nationalists)

The Act also heralded the foundation of the State of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and the Unionists were broadly happy with that.

However Sinn Fein and the IRA continued their campaigns for full independence of the 32 counties from Britain.

In early 1921 the British authorities viewed the cost of the war in Ireland and the international press and public opinion against the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries as major reasons why it needed to find a peaceful solution.

The Nationalist side in Ireland, the Provisional Government saw that the IRA were under pressure and could not possibly win against the might of the British army agreed to a truce from July 1921.

It was agreed that two delegations Irish and British would meet in London in October 1921 and discuss the terms of a treaty that would give Ireland independence.

De Valera chose not to join the Irish delegation which was led by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins.

