

Unsettled Island:
Irish Nationalism, Unionism, and British Imperialism in the Shaping of Irish Independence,
1909-1922

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ABSTRACT

Unsettled Island: Irish Nationalism, Unionism, and British Imperialism in the Shaping of Irish Independence, 1909-1922

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This dissertation analyzes the convoluted process by which Irish nationalists, Irish unionists, and British politicians negotiated Irish self-government in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In December 1909, a modest form of self-government known as home rule within the British Empire for all of Ireland became a practical issue in United Kingdom politics again, after the failure of two previous home rule bills in 1886 and 1893. After a decade that witnessed a world war and a revolution in Ireland, two new Irish polities emerged by June 1922. Northern Ireland, a majority-unionist state comprised of six counties in the province of Ulster, acquired a limited form of home rule within the United Kingdom. Covering the rest of the island, the Irish Free State secured significant control of its domestic affairs as a dominion of the British Empire, though not the complete independence demanded by Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which had waged the revolution.

How did the main political parties and actors in Britain and Ireland arrive at this settlement, especially as it was so different from how elites had envisioned Irish self-government in 1909? Using archival material and public discourse, this dissertation seeks to answer this question by methodically analyzing the political decisions taken by British and Irish political parties and movements between 1909 and 1922. It challenges historical conceptions that the settlement enacted by the Government of Ireland Act (1920) and the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) was an inevitable evolution in Anglo-Irish relations, that it marks the British government's recognition of the Irish right to self-determination, or the triumph of Irish democracy. Instead, I argue that the settlement was highly contingent upon prevailing political circumstances, heavily influenced by British interests, and often defied the democratic demands of Irish people, both nationalist and unionist. Partition, the separation of Ireland into two different states, was achieved through the acquiescence of British politicians to the demands of Ulster unionist leaders, without reference to public opinion in any part of Ireland.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

At the beginning of December 1909, Ireland was an integral part of the United Kingdom. Since 1801, the island's elected representatives had sat in the House of Commons at Westminster, while Irish peers sat in the House of Lords. Many Irishmen served in the British Army or in positions within the imperial civil service, acting as administrators in other parts of the Empire, such as India and Egypt. But by 1922 there were two parliaments in Ireland. The Irish Free State was constituted as a dominion within the British Empire, governing twenty-six of the island's thirty-two counties. Northern Ireland, comprising the remaining six counties in the northeast of the island, remained an integral part of the United Kingdom but had its own local parliament. In 1912, then-Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George spoke against an amendment that would administratively divide the island, or "tear up Ireland into little bits."¹ Seven years later, a government headed by Lloyd George introduced legislation at Westminster to do just that.

The radical changes in Ireland's political status during this period—the end of the Union with Britain and partitioning the island into two states—raise a number of historical questions. How did political leaders' mindsets change so dramatically that they were willing to contemplate both Irish self-government and partition? How did political actors arrive at the particular settlement that emerged by 1922? Why did they prioritize certain ideas or policies and discard others? How did the priorities of Irish nationalists, unionists, and British politicians influence the development of the settlement? How did politicians express their ideals, and rationalize compromises of them?

Scholars sometimes interpret Ireland's departure from the Union (but continued inclusion in the Empire), along with the "two-state solution" achieved by partition, as inevitable and positive developments in Anglo-Irish relations. Components of this argument include the idea that the British government was sure to grant a modest measure of Irish self-government, known as home rule, contingent on partitioning some part of the northern province of Ulster. Proponents of this interpretation tend to disagree primarily on the details, such as the points at

¹ David Lloyd George, "Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament.)," House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 13 June 1912 vol 39 cc1064-131, Hansard 1803-2005, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

which these results became inevitable.² However, numerous settlements were mooted between 1909 and 1922, and the form of government eventually enacted in Ireland was sometimes not even the likeliest outcome.

Addressing these and related issues necessitates combining the perspectives of Irish nationalists, unionists, and successive British governments to analyze their influence on and reactions to the various settlement ideas raised in this period. Scholars sometimes focus on just one of these groups, but contemporaries' perceptions of and relationships with one another significantly impacted their political ideas and actions. Therefore, understanding how the settlement of Ireland developed up to 1922 necessitates a multifaceted analysis of these perspectives. The private papers of leaders or influential members of political parties provide key sources for explicating the mindsets behind Irish nationalism, unionism, and British party politics. Each of these groups influenced segments of the press, therefore newspapers provide a crucial means of understanding how competing interests promulgated their messages in the public sphere, and wanted to be perceived by contemporaries. Parliamentary debates and retrospective publications such as memoirs provide other means of assessing how political actors wished their actions would be interpreted. Combining these sources, this thesis provides an analytical narrative of the political decisions taken during the period, methodically explicating why individuals made the choices they did, and how these decisions and calculations contributed to the constantly developing settlement of Ireland. First, it is necessary to provide a general background and overview of events.

From the 1880s, the call by Irish nationalist parties for self-government was embodied in the phrase, "home rule." In 1885, Charles Stewart Parnell's pro-home rule Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) won 85 out of Ireland's 103 seats in the United Kingdom Parliament at Westminster, and one in Britain. He justifiably claimed that the majority of Irish people demanded self-government. Home rule became practical politics later that year, as Liberal Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone announced his "conversion" to the principle. He introduced the First

² Eugenio Biagini, "The Third Home Rule Bill in British History," in *The Home Rule Crisis, 1912-1914*, ed. Gabriel Doherty (Cork: Mercier, 2014), 435-437; Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 134, 357; R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 49, 272; Tom Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2005), 25-27; Alvin Jackson, "Irish Unionism, 1905-21," in *Nationalism and Unionism: Conflict in Ireland, 1885-1921*, ed. Peter Collins (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1994), 45; Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-22* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), 1.

Home Rule Bill in 1886, but it was defeated in the House of Commons. A second effort in 1893 passed the Commons, only to be defeated by the Lords.

Gladstone's pro-home rule stance split Britain's Liberal Party. During the first home rule crisis in 1886, social reformer Joseph Chamberlain led a significant portion of Gladstone's supporters into the new Liberal Unionists. The Conservative Party also opposed home rule, despite the often-overlooked fact that their leaders had toyed with the idea of supporting it before Gladstone declared in favor.³ The rise of Parnell's IPP destroyed liberalism in much of Ireland, while conservatism increasingly equated with unionism in both islands. Irish Conservatives won eighteen seats in 1885, all but two of them in the northern province of Ulster, which contained approximately 73.9 percent of the island's Protestant population.⁴ The proportion of Irish home rulers and Unionists in Parliament varied little after the 1885 election. Apart from Trinity College Dublin and an occasional victory in South Dublin, Irish unionists' parliamentary strength lay entirely in Ulster. The Union became a major dividing line in British and Irish politics; it was assumed that individuals who joined the Liberals supported Irish nationalists' aspiration to alter the relationship between Britain and Ireland, while those identifying as Irish Unionist, British Conservative, and Liberal Unionist supported the political status quo.

Initially, Conservatives and Liberal Unionists agreed on the issue of the Union alone, while differing widely on domestic policy. But by 1909, their cooperative relationship had developed to the point that the Conservatives changed their name to the "Conservative and Unionist Party." Liberals and Irish nationalists often referred to Conservatives and Liberal Unionists as "Tories," a term that only referred to the former prior to 1886. By the 1910s the terms "Conservative" and "Unionist" were practically interchangeable. They often derided their Liberal opponents as "radicals."

Irish self-government became a live issue again in December 1909, when Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith announced his administration's commitment to introducing new home rule legislation. He presented the Third Home Rule Bill to Parliament in April 1912. The measure reached the statute book in September 1914 and thereby technically became law, but was never implemented. The resistance of Irish unionists, encouraged by their British allies and

³ As late as November 1885, Gladstone expected the Conservatives to declare for home rule. See W. E. Gladstone to Lord Rosebery, 15 November 1885 in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Lloyd, 1908), II:358-359.

⁴ United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/5/48 and BL/39/5/50.

concentrated in Ulster, caused a political crisis with potential repercussions throughout the United Kingdom, as unionist militancy threatened to provoke civil war in Ireland to prevent home rule. Between 1911 and 1912, northern unionists established a militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), seemingly giving substance to their threats. In 1912 a group of nationalists formed another armed body, the Irish Volunteers, ostensibly to safeguard home rule. Pro-unionist calls for all or part of Ulster to be excluded from the Home Rule Bill grew, but Asquith's Cabinet could not reach an agreement with Irish nationalists and unionists on what area to leave out, or for how long. Some Irish unionists outside Ulster—generally referred to as southern unionists—also objected to this de facto partitioning of Ireland by exclusion. In August 1914, however, the First World War intervened, and all parties in the United Kingdom agreed to a political truce to meet this greater crisis.

IPP leader John Redmond encouraged nationalists to support the British war effort as a means of guaranteeing home rule when peace was restored. Despite the careful framing of this recruiting call, Irish nationalist enthusiasm for the war effort quickly waned. Irish unionist recruitment also dwindled after the first few months of the conflict.⁵ Nationalist support for the war effort was also dampened as Asquith formed a coalition government in May 1915, incorporating a number of Unionists who were vociferous opponents of home rule.

A minority of Irish nationalists subscribed to the more militant tradition which believed that the only appropriate form of self-government was an independent republic, entirely separate from the British Empire. In many ways, the home rule movement was a result of a failed 1867 uprising by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), a secret society also known the Fenians. Despite its failures and fluctuations in its popularity, the Fenian movement survived, in part due to its international connections, particularly with the United States. On Easter Monday, April 24, 1916, members of the IRB used the Irish Volunteers to launch a rebellion. They were joined by the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), a small socialist and republican militia originally formed to protect striking workers. The rebellion primarily took place in Dublin, where the rebels seized a number of buildings and proclaimed an Irish Republic. Smaller-scale actions took place in other parts of the country. The British Army suppressed what became known as the Easter Rising after a week of fighting that destroyed much of Dublin's city center. The government placed Ireland under martial law. Fifteen insurgents were executed by firing squad, and another was hanged in

⁵ War Office recruitment figures are in National Library of Ireland (NLI), John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,259.

London. About 3,500 people were arrested, and 1,800 of them interned or imprisoned. The Rising was erroneously attributed to Sinn Féin, a small advanced nationalist party that was among the most vocal critics of the IPP establishment and the British war effort.

A number of factors combined to produce a profound change in Irish public opinion after the Rising. Many had grown tired of the European war, in which the IPP was deeply implicated. There was increasing popular frustration at continual delays in implementing home rule, which Redmond had promised. To some the Rising's ideal of an independent republic was more attractive than the comparatively meager British offer of limited self-government, while the seemingly heavy-handed government response to the rebellion angered many more. Moreover, further attempts to enact home rule over the next two years came to naught. The First World War ended on November 11, 1918, and a United Kingdom general election followed. The British results showed an overwhelming majority for Lloyd George's coalition government of Liberals and Unionists. Sinn Féin won a decisive victory in Ireland. This virtually destroyed the long-dominant IPP, which won just six seats. Sinn Féin declared a clear mandate for their policy of abstention, or refusing to take their seats at Westminster. They convened an alternate assembly, Dáil Éireann, in Dublin on January 21, 1919. This all-Sinn Féin body affirmed the existence of the Irish Republic declared in 1916, issued a declaration of independence, and professed the Dáil's right to govern Ireland.

The island had been enduring a low level of violence since 1916, which politicians sometimes called a "disturbed" state.⁶ After the Dáil's establishment, the aggressiveness of some Irish Volunteers, which was evolving into the IRA, combined with government attempts to suppress republican institutions, caused this state of disturbance to develop into the War of Independence. Throughout 1919, IRA raids, ambushes, and assassinations of government officials grew more frequent. The regular police, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), were reinforced by British recruits known as "black and tans" for their combination of military and police uniforms. By July 1920, recruitment opened for an even more militaristic policing organization, the Auxiliary Division RIC or "Auxies." These formations and the British Army

⁶ Thomas O'Donnell and John Clynes, "Flour," House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 14 March 1918 vol 104 cc459-60; John O'Connor, T. P. O'Connor, H. Samuel, and Edward Shortt, "Government of Ireland," HC Deb 05 November 1918 vol 110 cc1962-2069, Hansard 1803-2005, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

struck out haphazardly at civilians in what were termed “reprisals,” involving the destruction of property, random shootings, and assassinations of republicans.

Meanwhile, Lloyd George’s administration formally partitioned Ireland through the Government of Ireland Bill, which passed in December 1920. The measure established two home rule parliaments, one for the six northeastern counties dubbed, “Northern Ireland,” and another for the twenty-six called, “Southern Ireland.” King George V traveled to Belfast to open the Northern Ireland Parliament in June 1921. Sinn Féin largely ignored what nationalists dubbed the “partition act.” The Cabinet was under pressure from segments of the British public and political classes, as well as the international community, to halt the chaos in Ireland. Lloyd George’s administration had maintained contact with members of Sinn Féin throughout the conflict, and back-channel negotiations resulted in a truce on July 11, 1921.

Over the next six months, representatives of Sinn Féin negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty with the British Cabinet. Signed on December 6, 1921, it granted the twenty-six counties dominion status within the British Empire, with reservations designed to meet British security fears. The agreement’s supporters hailed it as granting a practically independent state. Treaty opponents, including Sinn Féin President Eamon de Valera, derided the new Irish Free State’s inclusion in the British Empire and an oath of allegiance to the monarch that all legislators would be compelled to take. This entailed the disestablishment of the Irish Republic they had built, and for which republicans had fought and died. The Dáil approved the agreement by a slim seven-vote majority on January 7, 1922. Sinn Féin and the IRA split along pro- and anti-Treaty lines.

Political attempts to heal the split failed. The anti-Treaty IRA seized buildings in Dublin in April 1922 to assert their opposition to the agreement, and occasionally committed provocative acts against the Free State’s Provisional Government. On June 22, unionist Field Marshal Henry Wilson was assassinated in London by IRA members. The British government blamed the anti-Treaty IRA, and prepared to take military action against them if the Free State did not do so. Free State forces began bombarding anti-Treaty IRA positions in Dublin on June 27, sparking the Civil War.

Irish Settlements and Democracy

Whether the establishment of the Irish Free State, through the Anglo-Irish Treaty, can be described as a “democratic” settlement has become a major point of contention among

academics. However, only a few scholars broaden this debate to include the entire period in which forms of Irish self-government were debated throughout the United Kingdom, querying whether concepts such as consent and democratic governance were priorities of any of the settlements that fall into the category of “home rule” after December 1909.

One historian who does address these ideas beginning with the home rule crisis is Ronan Fanning. In *Fatal Path* (2013), Fanning proceeds from an assumption that Ulster unionists were entitled to as large a measure of “self-determination” as their nationalist counterparts, implicitly validating their right to separate treatment from the rest of the Irish populace. According to Fanning, the failure of John Redmond’s nationalist and H. H. Asquith’s Liberal parties to recognize the Ulster unionist right to self-determination caused the home rule crisis.⁷ This is similar to historian Patrick Buckland’s 1972 argument that the Treaty acknowledged the right of Northern Ireland to stand out from the Irish Free State.⁸

By insisting that Ulster unionists were equally entitled to “self-determination,” and portraying partition as a fulfilment of that right, historians problematically validate British and Irish unionist propagandists who sought to portray the northern province as homogeneously Protestant, unionist, and unanimous in its opposition to home rule.⁹ While unionist rhetoric constantly promulgated this image, the reality was far more complex. The large Ulster nationalist population objected to partition, as did some unionists. Among partitionist unionists, there was little initial agreement over whether the excluded area should consist of four, six, or nine counties. For some, exclusion should mean continued rule from Westminster, while others wanted a local administration in Belfast. Therefore, there was no accepted definition of “Ulster,” or of a northern unionist political ideal. Painting a picture of a united Ulster containing a homogeneously Protestant and unionist population craving self-determination is anachronistic. Moreover, if self-determination had been a goal of British policy, it should have applied to northern nationalists as well as to unionists. This would have resulted in a different territorial composition of Northern Ireland, or legislative safeguards for northern nationalists.

British politicians used the language of self-determination, particularly as the First World War drew to a close, but it is unclear what they meant. Political scientists Alan Ward and Bill

⁷ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 12, 61, 66, 134, 188, 352.

⁸ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism: Two, Ulster Unionism and the Origins of Northern Ireland, 1886-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 126.

⁹ Fanning quotes examples of this propaganda in *Fatal Path*, 51, 70.

Kissane imply that British politicians equated “self-determination” with “self-government.”¹⁰ By this definition, giving self-government to one part of Ireland in which nationalists were the majority, and to another in which unionists predominated, granted self-determination to each of the island’s largest political traditions. However, Lloyd George defined self-determination as government by “the consent of the governed.”¹¹ He likely used this phrase to please U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, but there were implications for his government’s Irish policy. In the northern context, the refusal to implement plebiscites denied anyone there—nationalist or unionist—a chance to register their consent or dissent in the form of government proposed for them. Limitations on what the British administration would grant to the rest of Ireland, combined with the threat of coercion, precluded the principle of free choice there as well.

There is a considerable corpus of literature analyzing whether the parties that implemented the Anglo-Irish Treaty were committed to democratic ideals. Soon after the Irish Free State’s establishment, pro-Treaty publicists began developing arguments to legitimize the new regime. This legitimization was all the more necessary as many Free State supporters had been involved in working for the Irish Republic, which their new government had replaced. Historians echo some of the arguments established by these pro-Free State interlocutors. Writing in 1924, P. S. O’Hegarty claimed that compelling the British government to ask for a truce during the War of Independence was Sinn Féin’s great victory. This represented British “surrender” and an acknowledgment of Ireland’s historic nationality.¹² He asserted that self-government had been the goal of every nationalist movement since Jonathan Swift, and that was what the Treaty delivered.¹³ Similarly, historian R. F. Foster argues that the truce marks the IRA’s victory.¹⁴ Arthur Mitchell asserts that the Treaty “must be viewed as a British defeat and an Irish victory,” because it forced the Empire to recognize an Irish nation-state.¹⁵

O’Hegarty and another early chronicler, Piaras Béaslaí, set further trends in historical writing by blaming the Irish Civil War on the irrationality and stubbornness of Eamon de Valera

¹⁰ Alan J. Ward, “A Constitutional Background to the Northern Ireland Crisis,” in *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Reconciliation*, 42; Bill Kissane, “The Doctrine of Self-Determination and the Irish Move to Independence, 1916-1922,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 8, no. 3 (Oct. 2003): 343.

¹¹ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

¹² P. S. O’Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Fein: How It Won It, and How It Used It* (Dublin: Talbot, 1924), 63-64.

¹³ O’Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Fein*, 79-80.

¹⁴ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 502.

¹⁵ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland*, 339.

and the anti-Treaty faction. O’Hegarty blamed the conflict on de Valera’s machinations and IRA militarism.¹⁶ Béaslaí described the “insane irresponsibility” of de Valera and the anti-Treaty party.¹⁷ In this vein, some historians classify Treaty supporters as realists, willing to abandon abstract demands to accrue practical, material benefits. Conversely, the anti-Treaty faction are often portrayed as idealists, purists, or zealots, unwilling to compromise their impractical demand for an Irish Republic.¹⁸

Other analyses build on this assumption that opposition to the Treaty was irrational and inherently negative. Several scholars identify an anti-democratic mindset within Irish nationalism, particularly fueling resistance to the Treaty.¹⁹ Jeffrey Prager equates anti-Treaty republican resistance to the new state with resistance to democracy. He highlights the roles of both pro-Treaty Cumann na nGaedheal and de Valera’s anti-Treaty Fianna Fáil in establishing Irish democracy, essentially validating the democratic credentials of the two parties that dominated the Republic at the time he was writing in 1986.²⁰ The historiographical tendency to treat opposition to the Treaty as reflective of an anti-democratic mindset is reminiscent of O’Hegarty’s claim that activists working against the Treaty were defying the immutable voice of the Irish people.²¹

David Fitzpatrick’s *The Two Irelands* (1998) modifies the anti-democracy argument by providing a number of comparisons between the Free State and Northern Ireland in the Treaty’s aftermath. Both states were immediately threatened with civil war, and neither hesitated to curtail civil liberties and apply coercive methods to reestablish order in their respective territories. For Fitzpatrick, this willingness to employ the “tyranny of the majority” is a legacy

¹⁶ O’Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, 72-74, 82-83.

¹⁷ Piaras Béaslaí, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1926), II:309-313.

¹⁸ Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 278-279, 283; Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 348-370; F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 442-445; Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 331-336.

¹⁹ George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1995), 331; Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Helicon, 1983), 6; Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 136; Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2005), 76; Garvin, 1922, 3, 131, 144; J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 67; Robert Lynch, *Revolutionary Ireland, 1912-1925* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 14, 131.

²⁰ Jeffrey Prager, *Building Democracy in Ireland: Political Order and Cultural Integration in a Newly Independent Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 187-188, 207-209.

²¹ O’Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, 117.

of Ireland's long experience with British parliamentary democracy.²² This interpretation ignores the fact that successive British governments insisted that a future Irish administration—whether under home rule or the Treaty—institute safeguards that enhanced unionists' influence out of proportion to their democratic strength. The British Cabinet did not insist on similar protections for Northern Ireland's nationalist population, despite calls for them. Therefore, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the British government considered that the “tyranny of the majority” should apply when that majority consisted of Protestant unionists, but not Catholic nationalists.

There was a widespread conviction in United Kingdom politics that a minority could overturn the will of a majority. After an electoral defeat in 1906, Unionist leader Arthur Balfour told his followers that it was their duty to “see that the great Unionist Party shall still control, whether in power or whether in opposition, the destinies of this great Empire.”²³ In other words, Unionists had a right to govern regardless of what happened at the ballot box. Balfour's successor Bonar Law declared in 1912, “there are stronger influences than Parliament [sic] majorities.”²⁴ Historians chide de Valera for saying in 1922, “the people had never a right to do wrong,” but he operated in a context in which minority resistance was acceptable and, as he witnessed of northern unionists and home rule, could be successful.²⁵

Frank Pakenham's *Peace by Ordeal* (1935) remains the only work devoted solely to a chronological account of the Treaty negotiations. It was also one of the first assessments written by a non-participant to take a negative view of the settlement, noting ongoing Irish dissatisfaction with their country's relationship to the British Empire.²⁶

The long years spent in government office by anti-Treaty leader and later Fianna Fáil party founder Eamon de Valera gave him ample time and resources to influence the period's historicization. Historian Patrick Murray points out that as early as 1923, while imprisoned by the Free State, de Valera began outlining a historical work chronicling the previous seven years.²⁷ In 1925, de Valera suggested that fellow republican Dorothy Macardle write the book that

²² David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 205.

²³ Arthur Balfour at Nottingham, *The Times* (London), 16 January 1906.

²⁴ Andrew Bonar Law, “Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament.)” HC Deb 18 June 1912 vol 39 cc1503-618, Hansard 1803-2005.

²⁵ Joseph M. Curran, *The Birth of the Irish Free State, 1921-23* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 175; Laffan, *Resurrection of Ireland*, 381; Townshend, *The Republic*, 359.

²⁶ Frank Pakenham [pseud. Earl of Longford], *Peace by Ordeal: An Account, From First-Hand Sources, of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), 278-279, 285.

²⁷ Patrick Murray, “Obsessive Historian: Eamon de Valera and the Policing of His Reputation,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 101C, no. 2 (2001): 59.

became *The Irish Republic* (1937).²⁸ This work takes the anti-Treaty line in analyzing the agreement. Macardle had significant access to de Valera and his papers, therefore her work is valuable as an exposition of his mindset, but its partisan bias must be kept in mind when using it.²⁹ The same can be said of de Valera's official biography, written in 1970 by Pakenham and T. P. O'Neill.³⁰

Scholars who challenge the conception that "pro-Treaty" equals "pro-democracy" while "anti-Treaty" equals "anti-democracy" include Bill Kissane, John Regan, and Gavin Foster. Kissane points out that Cumann na nGaedheal governments resorted to extralegal and extra-constitutional means to defend the Irish Free State in its early days, indicating that their commitment to democratic ideas and institutions was lukewarm at best.³¹ Far from the pro-Treaty party consolidating Irish democracy in 1922 through the Civil War, Kissane says that the conflict "derailed" it.³² John Regan indicates that a pro-Treaty Dáil majority was not inevitable following the agreement's signing.³³ He supports de Valera's argument that the threat of British coercion should the Dáil reject the Treaty negated the idea of a free choice for a sovereign nation.³⁴ Foster adds that this threat of force offended a powerful sense of republican liberty subscribed to by the anti-Treaty party, who soon claimed sole possession of the moniker, "republican."³⁵

Arguments

This dissertation makes three major claims. The first of these is that the form of Irish self-government was changeable and contingent upon prevailing political circumstances. Far from being "inevitable" at any point during the prolonged crisis, the two major facets of the Irish

²⁸ BMH, WS No. 457, Dorothy Macardle.

²⁹ Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, With a Detailed Account of the Period, 1916-1923* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 526-527, 588-593.

³⁰ Murray, "Obsessive Historian," 62-63.

³¹ Bill Kissane, "Defending Democracy? The Legislative Response to Political Extremism in the Irish Free State, 1922-39," *Irish Historical Studies* 34, no. 134 (Nov. 2004): 156-157.

³² Bill Kissane, *Explaining Irish Democracy* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002), 28-29.

³³ John M. Regan, "The Politics of Reaction: The Dynamics of Treatyite Government and Policy, 1922-33," *Irish Historical Studies* 30, no. 120 (Nov. 1997): 543-544.

³⁴ John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 68-70.

³⁵ Gavin Foster, "Res Publica na hÉireann?: Republican Liberty and the Irish Civil War," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 26-27.

settlement—partition and the island’s relationship to the British Empire—were negotiable throughout the period. Second, British party politics and imperial interests played decisive roles in shaping the settlement. From 1909 to mid-1911, members of both British parties sought ways to cooperate against home rule, or to enact Irish self-government in whatever form best fit their political priorities. After October 1913, both British parties displayed a bias that favored conciliating Ulster unionists, to the detriment of Irish nationalists and southern unionists. The third point is that the final settlement was based neither on democratic practice nor on the principle of self-determination. There were a number of opportunities for the British government to assess how people in Ireland wished to be governed, particularly in those parts of Ulster under consideration for partition. Successive British administrations chose not to do so, and instead framed their policies in accordance with public feeling in Britain. The settlement reached between 1920 and 1922 was not designed to grant self-determination to any section of the Irish populace, whether nationalist or unionist. Throughout the period under review, every proposed arrangement was faced with the question: would the British government allow it or implement it? This question precluded self-determination.

To demonstrate the manifold contingencies that contributed to the settlement that emerged by 1922, I provide a detailed analytical narrative of political negotiations and decisions beginning in December 1909, when Irish self-government became a practical issue for the first time since the failure of the Second Home Rule Bill in 1893. I will proceed through the third home rule crisis (1911-1914), the First World War (1914-1918), the War of Independence (1919-1921), the Treaty negotiations (July-December 1921), and the formulation of the Free State Constitution (1922), analyzing the process by which decisions regarding Ireland’s future were taken and the motivations for those choices. The analysis offered here emphasizes the role of British interests and party politics in shaping the form of Irish self-government. Drawing on the imagery of the 1689 relief of Derry, F. S. L. Lyons has called the Irish “Protestant” ethos, “the myth of siege, but it was no less the myth of deliverance from siege.”³⁶ Unionists expected that their deliverance from home rule would come, as relief had come to Derry, from Britain. The vast majority of British people and politicians believed they had a right to a decisive voice in Irish governance, and successive governments exercised that right.

³⁶ F. S. L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 136.

Chapter one charts the earliest phase of the third home rule crisis, too often ignored by historians, from Asquith's public commitment to Irish self-government in December 1909 to the passage of the Parliament Act in July 1911. I argue that both British parties were eager to exclude Irish nationalists *and* unionists from the decision-making process, in order to decide Ireland's future between themselves. Asquith pledged to introduce a home rule bill, but tried to avoid having to redeem his promise. British unionists were explicit that if they made a deal to enact some form of self-government in Ireland, their Irish adjuncts would have no choice but to accept it.

In **chapter two**, I argue that a considerable body of nationalist opinion was disappointed with the Third Home Rule Bill. Many expected the legislation to grant Ireland the same status within the Empire as Australia, Canada, and South Africa, a constitutional arrangement known as dominion home rule. The bill did not do so, as many contemporaries were explicit that the British establishment must retain considerable control over Irish political and economic affairs. Throughout 1911 and 1912, British and Irish unionists conducted an elaborate campaign against any form of self-government. Northern unionists maintained that their goal was to stop home rule entirely, not to achieve some form of separate treatment if it became law. However, their parliamentary representatives supported an amendment to exclude four Ulster counties from the bill's operation, convincing many that this would solve the problem.

Ulster unionist pledges to resist home rule—and declarations from their British counterparts to support them—convinced many observers that United Kingdom politics had reached a crisis point. I argue in **chapter three** that Bonar Law and other unionist leaders deliberately aggravated the situation in an effort to force a general election. They increasingly blamed the crisis on the idea that the Irish nationalists and Asquith's Cabinet refused to grant special treatment to Ulster, particularly by excluding the province from the legislation. Unionist leaders' private correspondence suggests that they did not want a settlement involving exclusion, but when the Cabinet took them up on their rhetoric they were forced into negotiating on this basis. Asquith made several offers of temporary exclusion between 1913 and 1914, gradually expanding his concessions relating to the area and time period. When Redmond objected, the Prime Minister simply cut him out of the decision-making process. The outbreak of the First World War temporarily created an artificial semblance of unity among the UK's political parties, but placing the Home Rule Bill on the statute book angered Irish unionists, while continual

delays in its implementation disillusioned many nationalists with the political process as represented by the IPP.

The 1916 Easter Rising brought Irish discontent back to the forefront of British politics. This failed rebellion was immediately followed by an attempt, initiated by Asquith and negotiated by Lloyd George, to obtain Redmond's and Carson's consent for a form of immediate home rule. I argue in **chapter four** that the long-term result of this episode was that Lloyd George—who had supported some form of Ulster exclusion since 1912—settled on a formula that became his personal policy regarding Ireland. He supported Carson in advocating the partitioning of six counties in Ulster from the rest of Ireland. This administrative separation would last until Westminster decided otherwise, and Lloyd George and Carson even began to develop ideas for a system of self-government for the excluded area. After the collapse of these negotiations, Lloyd George instituted an Irish Convention with the apparent power to frame a new constitution for the island. I argue that this attempt had a real chance of success, but failed with disastrous results for Irish unionism outside of Ulster.

Sinn Féin's institution of a republican government in Ireland, and its outlawing by the British government, led to the escalating violence of the Irish War of Independence. Some historians argue that Sinn Féin leaders could have achieved a similar settlement to that eventually embodied in the Anglo-Irish Treaty at any point, if they had just been sensible enough to negotiate with the British government. I argue in **chapter five** that, in fact, the reverse was true. The British Cabinet's reluctance to grant concessions to the Irish republicans, epitomized by Lloyd George, proved the biggest impediment to a truce between 1920 and 1921. While debating the terms of the Government of Ireland Bill, the Cabinet was directly confronted with the question of whether its policy should include promoting Irish unity. Several members of the administration claimed that this was their goal, but, on the advice of the Ulster unionist leaders, they chose the course least likely to produce that result. The bill passed Parliament despite the obvious fact that the majority in both parts of Ireland did not support it.

Despite his reluctance to grant concessions to Sinn Féin, by July 1921 it was apparent that Lloyd George's coercion policy had failed. Some historians assert that, by the time Irish republican leaders began meeting with British Cabinet members to negotiate a settlement, the broad outlines were already set: partition had been irreversibly established by the Government of Ireland Act and the British would not contemplate any constitutional arrangement beyond

dominion home rule. In **chapter six** I highlight evidence that the British Cabinet was willing to consider alterations to both of these facets. I argue that Lloyd George and his colleagues chose not to do so in an attempt to safeguard their domestic political position. British threats of renewed war in Ireland played a significant role in the acceptance of the Anglo-Irish Treaty by the Sinn Féin negotiating team, and by the Dáil. Such rhetoric resurfaced after the new Irish Free State's provisional government attempted to enact a constitution that declared their country a sovereign entity. The new Irish government's failure to expand its powers as outlined in the Treaty contrasts starkly with the British Cabinet's treatment of Northern Ireland. The Unionist administration in the six counties was granted a de facto equality of status with the Free State, and given free reign within its own territory despite its formal status as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

This long process of negotiation and political accommodation shows that there was not a steady, inevitable march from home rule to dominion status, or from a united Ireland to the two-state solution. At each stage numerous ideas for Ireland's future were raised and considered. The decisions that were taken were made for specific reasons, some ideological, others political, and still others because the decision-makers believed that they had no viable alternative.

Cultural Identity and Politics in Britain and Ireland

While this dissertation is primarily concerned with politics, other sources of identity exercised an influence over individuals' political values and choices. I engage with three major political traditions: Irish nationalism, Irish unionism, and British nationalism, which often manifested as imperialism.³⁷ All of them had important characteristics in common: they were influenced by religious ideology and organizations; were willing to sanction violence in pursuit of their goals; and contained a multiplicity of opinions while attempting to present a united front. Recognizing that these groups shared some motivations and had continuities in outlook enables a more thorough understanding of their actions, particularly as they interacted with one another.

The Irish nationalist drive for self-government was the spark that set in motion the events described from December 1909. The majority of Irish nationalists were Catholic, and some

³⁷ For the convergence of British nationalism and imperialism see Chris Williams, "The United Kingdom: British Nationalisms during the Long Nineteenth Century," in *What is a Nation?: Europe, 1789-1914*, ed. Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 281-282.

members of this political tradition were informed by religious belief and practice. Many historians trace this to Daniel O’Connell’s mobilization of the Catholic masses against the last of the penal laws, which resulted in winning the right for members of this faith to sit in Parliament through the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829).³⁸ Some scholars go further, arguing that a religious identity, tending toward exclusion or even sectarianism, was one of Irish nationalism’s defining characteristics.³⁹ Sean Connolly asserts that a long history of sectarian conflict makes Ireland unique in western Europe.⁴⁰ Theoretician of nationalism Ernest Gellner calls religious identification the only significant cultural differentiator on the island.⁴¹ Other commentators reject this totalizing analysis, particularly by acknowledging that the tradition within Irish nationalism that can be described as IRB, Fenian, or republican frequently clashed with the Catholic Church.⁴²

Certainly, some Irish nationalists did espouse a vision of Irish nationality as exclusively Catholic. Historians frequently cite D. P. Moran, editor of the weekly newspaper *The Leader*, as epitomizing this tendency in the first quarter of the twentieth century.⁴³ However, Patrick Maume and P. J. Matthews assert that later commentators sometimes exaggerate his influence by portraying him as *the* mouthpiece of the “Irish-Ireland” movement, of which Sinn Féin was a part. Others within that movement, and in Irish nationalism more generally, opposed Moran’s ideas.⁴⁴ Historian R. F. Foster cites the formation of the Catholic Association of Ireland in 1902

³⁸ Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 136-137; Oliver MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 90-93.

³⁹ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 562, 581; D. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 149, 154, 220, 364; English, *Irish Freedom*, 442; Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 328; Tom Garvin, “National Identity in Ireland,” *Studies* 95, no. 379 (Autumn 2006): 248; Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5, 21; Emmet Larkin, “Church, State, and Nation in Modern Ireland,” *American Historical Review* 80, no. 5 (Dec. 1975): 1275-1276; Alan O’Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 5.

⁴⁰ Sean Connolly, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dundalk: Dundalgan, 1987), 1.

⁴¹ Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 72-73.

⁴² M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882-1916* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 14; Owen McGee, *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), 330-331; Oliver P. Rafferty, *The Church, the State and the Fenian Threat, 1861-75* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999) xi-xiii; J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923-1979* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 8-12.

⁴³ English, *Irish Freedom*, 239; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 454; Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy*, 59-61; Charles Townshend, “Historiography: Telling the Irish Revolution,” in *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923*, ed. Joost Augusteijn (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 11.

⁴⁴ Patrick Maume, *D. P. Moran* (Dundalk: Dundalgan, 1995), 53; P. J. Matthews, “A Battle of Two Civilizations?: D. P. Moran and William Rooney,” *Irish Review* 29 (Autumn 2002): 28-29.

as an indication of “the ascendancy of a sectarian frame of reference.”⁴⁵ This is an overstatement, but even if one accepts this logic, then the multiplicity of Protestant political organizations in Britain must show that sectarian politics was even more vibrant there.

Far from being unique to Irish nationalism, a coupling of religious and political identities was common to the other two major political traditions with which it engaged in this period: Irish unionism and British nationalism, or imperialism. That Irish unionists were overwhelmingly Protestant is well known. Less often acknowledged is the extent to which unionism relied on religion as an ideology and an organizational base. Protestant churches were at the forefront in organizing opposition to Irish self-government, and clergy were involved in each step of that resistance, even helping to recruit and train the militant UVF. There were Catholic Irish unionists, but while Protestants regularly inhabited the upper echelons of nationalism—both within the IPP and Sinn Féin—the unionist elite was almost exclusively Protestant.

British nationalism was built to a large extent on chauvinistic Protestantism.⁴⁶ Historians who recognize this sometimes imply that this was true of the formative period of British nationalism, but that the religious aspect faded sometime in the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The Catholic Relief Act is a commonly cited landmark.⁴⁸ The effect is that some historians portray a progressively secularizing Britain in which sectarian politics played little role by the twentieth century.⁴⁹ However, other scholars recognize that the equation of Britishness with Protestantism survived well into the 1900s.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 453.

⁴⁶ Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1, 5; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 29-87.

⁴⁷ Bew, *Ireland*, viii, 562; G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832 to 1868* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 380-383; D. G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 298-302; Williams, “The United Kingdom,” 278-280.

⁴⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 361; Alvin Jackson, “Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800-1960,” in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 131; W. J. Sheils, “Catholicism from the Reformation to the Relief Acts” in *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, eds. Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 251.

⁴⁹ Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*, 3; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 316; Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 214; Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 234-240.

⁵⁰ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 7-10; Matthew Grimley, “The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and ‘National Character,’ 1918-1945,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 4 (Oct. 2007): 884-906; Hugh Kearney, “Contested Ideas of Nationhood, 1800-1995,” *Irish Review* 20 (Spring 1997): 19.

Many British and Irish Protestants, whether conservative or liberal, equated Catholicism with tyranny and intellectual confinement. They represented Protestantism as the inverse: an ideology that promoted individual freedom.⁵¹ A London Catholic wrote of “Englishmen” in 1910, “Catholicism stands to them for the principle of darkness, slavery and retrogression: Protestantism for light, liberty and learning.”⁵² Some historians argue that the participation of British Catholics in the First World War won them more widespread acceptance.⁵³ However, this did not eliminate anti-Catholicism, or revoke the idea of Britain as essentially Protestant. Michael Snape asserts that the main factors in continuing resentment against Catholics after the war were Pope Benedict XV’s neutrality and the ongoing Irish conflict.⁵⁴

Protestantism and anti-Catholicism regularly intruded into twentieth-century British politics. Debates on education, in particular, were often tinged with religious feeling. Political operatives and commentators analyzed the electorate by religion, particularly in the broad categories of “conformist,” meaning members of the Church of England, and “non-conformist,” referring to all other Protestants. Protestant clergy regularly pronounced on political issues.

British Protestantism and anti-Catholicism as political forces were most evident in the home rule debate. This is largely due to the unionist strategy—employed by both British and Irish politicians—to use these passions to overturn Asquith’s government. Lord Balfour wrote in 1910, “All the Protestant societies are preparing for the fray...People fancy we are no longer animated by the No Popery cry, and that our old-fashioned bigotry is dead. No greater mistake: it is merely dormant.”⁵⁵ Two years later, when the anti-home rule campaign was well under way, James Craig wrote to the United Protestant Societies in London, “they knew that if the flag of Protestantism was carried through England and Scotland the old feelings would be aroused.”⁵⁶ Unionist Party leader Andrew Bonar Law told Asquith in 1913, “one of the strongest feelings in

⁵¹ Sheridan Gilley, “The Roman Catholic Church in England, 1780-1940,” in *A History of Religion in Britain*, 346.

⁵² Robert Hugh Benson, “A Catholic Colony,” *Dublin Review* (London) 146, no. 292-293 (Jan. 1910): 384.

⁵³ Stuart Mews, “Religious Life between the Wars, 1920-1940,” in *A History of Religion in Britain*, 450; Andrew Soane, “The First World War and Perceptions of Catholicism in England,” *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 23 (2014): 149.

⁵⁴ Michael Snape, “British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War,” *Recusant History* 26, no. 2 (Jan. 2003): 329, 350-352.

⁵⁵ David Lindsay [pseud. Lord Balfour, Lord Crawford], *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and tenth Earl of Balfour, 1871-1940, during the years 1892-1940*, ed. John Vincent (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 162, entry for 20 July 1910.

⁵⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

England and Scotland was Protestantism, or dislike of Roman Catholicism.”⁵⁷ British Protestantism and anti-Catholicism were a barrier to Irish self-government, particularly due to their employment by the Unionist Party, but these forces existed independently of Irish issues.

Neither chauvinistic Protestantism nor anti-Catholicism motivated all British people at all times. Moreover, one is not dependent on the other. Not all Protestants disliked Catholics or Catholicism. Also, an individual did not have to be religious to view Catholicism negatively. Members of minority faiths including Catholics and Jews inhabited the highest levels of British politics and society. However, the convergence of religion and politics was a common theme within all three traditions: Irish nationalism, Irish unionism, and British nationalism, or imperialism.

Historians struggle to explain why Irish nationalists engaged in violent revolt during this period.⁵⁸ R. F. Foster ascribes this in part to a culture of violence within nationalism.⁵⁹ After the outbreaks in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, some scholars saw it as their duty to counter a perceived glorification of force in accounts of Irish history.⁶⁰ Denouncing violence in one’s own context is understandable, but projecting contemporary opinions into the past produced concerns over the credibility of the resulting historical interpretations.⁶¹ Paul Bew justifiably describes republican aggression toward Irish unionists as “self-defeating,” but explains state violence against Northern Ireland’s Catholic nationalists as a quest for security.⁶² Peter Hart asserts that by 1922 the IRA inhabited a “gangsterish culture of violence.”⁶³ What this leaves unsaid is that that culture was also inhabited by forces loyal to the British government and to Northern

⁵⁷ UKPA, BL/33/6/80, Andrew Bonar Law, “Notes of a Conversation with the P.M.,” 15 October 1913.

⁵⁸ Joost Augusteijn, “Accounting for the Emergence of Violent Activism among Irish Revolutionaries, 1916-21,” *Irish Historical Studies* 35, no. 139 (May 2007): 327-344; David Fitzpatrick, “The Geography of Irish Nationalism, 1910-1921,” *Past & Present* 78 (Feb. 1978): 113-144; Peter Hart, “The Geography of Revolution in Ireland, 1917-1923,” *Past & Present* 155 (May 1997): 142-176.

⁵⁹ Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 180, 217-218.

⁶⁰ Richard P. Davis, *Arthur Griffith and Non-Violent Sinn Fein* (Dublin: Anvil, 1974), xi; Roy Foster, “Anglo-Irish Relations and Northern Ireland: Historical Perspectives,” in *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Reconciliation*, ed. Dermot Keogh and Michael H. Haltzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28-29.

⁶¹ Ciaran Brady, “‘Constructive and Instrumental’: The Dilemma of Ireland’s First ‘New Historians,’” in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism, 1938-1994*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), 16-20; John Regan, “Southern Irish Nationalism as a Historical Problem,” *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 197-223.

⁶² Bew, *Ireland*, 577-579.

⁶³ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111.

Ireland's unionist administration. Neither the threat nor the reality of political violence in this period was the purview of any one party or tradition; all shades of opinion engaged in both.

That Irish unionists were willing to countenance violence is obvious by the establishment of the UVF, but this tendency manifested itself in other ways. Irish unionists encouraged the government to utilize the apparatus of state violence against their nationalist opponents. Once northern unionists were given their own state they actively militarized it, primarily by establishing the Ulster Special Constabulary.

British unionists consistently pledged to support their militant Irish counterparts. Some Britons privately expressed hopes that the Irish question would resolve itself through violence between unionists and nationalists. There was a widespread conviction within British governing circles that force should be the main arbiter in Irish issues. After the Curragh mutiny in 1914, "no coercion of Ulster" became a byword in British politics, but events showed that members of both major parties were willing to coerce Irish nationalists. Lloyd George was determined to confront Sinn Féin with state violence from the 1918 conscription crisis. The Cabinet sanctioned the UVF's transition into the Special Constabulary, and formed the paramilitary Auxiliary RIC. Instituting "official" reprisals in January 1921 was an admission that the British government had lost control of its servants, who were engaged in spontaneous punitive violence against their citizens in Ireland. The threat of force was ever-present during the Treaty negotiations, and Lloyd George's government planned to coerce the twenty-six counties into accepting their revisions to the Free State Constitution as late as June 1922.

Another characteristic common to the three political traditions examined here is their ability to subsume minority opinions within their overall ideologies and structures. Each tradition contained divergent opinions on what their goals should be and the appropriate means for achieving them, but at the same time strove for the appearance of unanimity. Despite the existence of numerous nationalist groupings, the IPP in its time and Sinn Féin after them claimed to speak for "Ireland," "the Irish people," and "the Irish nation." Some British and Irish unionists opposed self-government on the ground that it was not the demand of a united nation, making a show of maximum unity even more important for Irish nationalists.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ In a work first published in 1935, George Dangerfield asserted that the fatal flaw of home rule was that it did not come from a united nation. *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn, 1961), 75-76.

Like Irish nationalism, unionism was not monolithic. It is tempting to divide it into its constituent northern and southern elements from the outset, however, at the beginning of the period under examination, individuals within each declared themselves dedicated to one another. It is anachronistic to assume a simple geographical divide within Irish unionism from 1909. This tradition contained a range of stances: some unionists wanted to obtain safeguards that would ensure their influence within a home rule government, others asserted that a simple negative to self-government should trump all other arguments. Irish unionists attempted to portray themselves as cohesive at all times. The Ulster Unionist Council did not report on their debates, only their unanimous resolutions, and did not even keep a record of dissenting opinions in their private minutes. Unionists could not portray themselves as representing “Ireland,” but they did depict their movement as representative of the island’s quality, property, and industry. Northern unionists frequently described themselves as representing “Ulster” and “the Ulster people,” eliding the province’s large nationalist population.

The divisions within British nationalism or imperialism were obvious in the party system. Some commentators often assume different levels of imperialism within the British parties; the Unionists were overtly imperialistic, the Liberals less so.⁶⁵ The rapidly growing Labour Party is often assumed to have been the least committed to the Empire. However, during this period there was virtual unanimity between the parties that the Empire was a positive political and economic organism.⁶⁶ Ireland, while administratively an integral part of the United Kingdom, was also a part of the Empire. Any reconceptualization of its status was assumed to affect the other parts of both structures. A consensus on Empire is evident in the philosophy of the “New Liberals,” also known as “Liberal imperialists,” who dominated Asquith’s government. Labour—whom the Unionists derided as “socialists”—played the smallest role in Irish policy during this period. Their spokesmen criticized the Irish policies of Lloyd George’s government, particularly partition, but explicitly called for a settlement, “within the Constitution and

⁶⁵ Simon J. Potter mentions but does not necessarily endorse the contemporary assumption that party affiliation determined imperialism. *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), 166-174.

⁶⁶ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 286-287; David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), 24-25.

principles of the British Empire.”⁶⁷ Thus, every major British party agreed that an Irish settlement must safeguard the Empire.

Like Irish nationalists, British parties frequently claimed to speak for “the people” or “the nation.” This group was sometimes identified as “British,” but politicians more often claimed to speak for “England” or “the English people,” emphasizing the importance of the “predominant partner” in determining the destinies of the United Kingdom and the Empire.

As will be seen in the following chapters, the ideologies and mindsets of these different traditions, how they viewed and interacted with one another, and even the prejudices this contact sometimes engendered, impacted the decisions taken on their behalf as surely as political exigencies. These motivations and prejudices influenced the debates surrounding every potential political settlement analyzed in this thesis, including the Third Home Rule Bill, the Irish Convention, the Government of Ireland Act, the Anglo-Irish Treaty, as well as the innumerable ideas suggested by the press, the public, and government officials to supplement or replace these major alterations to Ireland’s political status.

⁶⁷ *The Times* (London), 27 January 1920; Ivan Gibbons, “The British Parliamentary Labour Party and the Government of Ireland Act 1920,” *Parliamentary History* 32, no. 3 (2013): 506-521; Ivan Gibbons, “The Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921: The Response of the British Parliamentary Labour Party and Labour Press,” *Labour History Review* 76, no. 1 (April 2011): 1-15.

CHAPTER 1

“THE HOLLOWEST POLITICAL CANT:” BRITISH PARTIES, HOME RULE, AND THE PARLIAMENT ACT, DEC. 1909- JULY 1911

Introduction

Profound political changes in the United Kingdom between December 1909 and July 1911 made Irish self-government within the British Empire a practical possibility. At the beginning of this period, neither of the two main British groupings, the Conservative and Unionist Party or the Liberals, were actively working in the interests of home rule. While the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) tended to cooperate with the Liberals, many contemporaries and subsequent historians have portrayed this as a firm and almost perpetual alliance. This relationship supposedly began with Liberal Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone’s switch from opposition to support for Irish self-government in 1885 and continued for the next three decades, with the British party simply waiting for an opportune time to introduce another home rule bill.

Some historians have revised this impression to a degree, but they only differ as to the timing of the Liberal-IPP alliance. Alan O’Day asserts that the Liberals ceased to actively campaign for home rule prior to a decisive electoral victory in 1906, but remained ideologically wedded to the concept.¹ Alvin Jackson writes that the Liberals as a party were attentive to Irish interests, and it was only Prime Minister H. H. Asquith who was indifferent to self-government after taking office in 1908.² Paul Bew implies that the alliance was suspended after Gladstone’s death in 1898, but renewed following the January 1910 election.³ These and other analyses assume that a firm alliance between the Liberal Party and the IPP was natural, therefore the introduction of another home rule bill was inevitable. This chapter will argue that there was no alliance between the Liberals and Irish nationalists during the third home rule crisis. Asquith’s administration only committed itself to Irish self-government as a last resort in order to stay in office and reduce the power of the House of Lords. Home rule as a policy went against the religious and political proclivities of several of the most influential Cabinet members, who preferred to cooperate with British Unionists rather than Irish nationalists.

¹ Alan O’Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 208.

² Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 106.

³ Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 20, 61.

British unionists were also more ambivalent toward their Irish adjuncts than often portrayed. Historians have tended to assume that British Conservatives and Liberal Unionists were unalterably committed to the Union after 1886.⁴ The flirtations of individual Unionists with various incarnations of self-government, particularly federalism, show that many of them were not averse to a settlement that would result in an Irish legislature. The major stipulation was that both of the major British parties must agree to it. The idea of Britain, particularly England, as the “predominant partner” in the constitutional relationships that comprised the United Kingdom was very strong. Contemporary discourse reveals a widespread belief that if members of the two major parties came to an agreement on some form of home rule, the Irish—whether nationalist or unionist—would have to accept the results.

While Irish unionists, particularly those in Ulster, emphasized their role in stopping home rule on two previous occasions, they realized that they were relatively impotent without British support. Irish nationalists also recognized that they had to win over popular opinion in Britain. However, unionists were more integrated into British social, economic, and political structures than most nationalists. Parliamentary Irish Unionists were full members of the Conservative and Unionist Party, but as a small part of this larger entity they played a minor role in deciding what legislation did or did not pass. By the end of this period, Unionists did not control the Commons and had seen the Lords’ veto power destroyed. Therefore, they increasingly contemplated extra-parliamentary agitation to stop legislation they considered objectionable.

Without a firm alliance with the Liberals, there was no major British party on which the IPP could rely. Few politicians in the “predominant partner” were ideologically wedded to home rule, and many in all parties were angered by Redmond’s perceived dictation of United Kingdom policy. By the end of the period, attempts at cooperation between the two main British parties had failed, and Asquith’s Liberals—relying on the IPP to maintain its parliamentary majority—were committed to producing and passing a home rule bill. The reduction of the Lords’ powers, partly a result of pressure by the Irish nationalists, made home rule practical politics. Despite their early willingness to make a deal on home rule, the passage of the Parliament Act drove British unionists closer than ever to their Irish counterparts.

⁴ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 11; Jackson, *Home Rule*, 65; Patricia Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland: The Ulster Question in British Politics to 1914* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 19.

Over the course of the debate on the United Kingdom's constitution, parliamentarians, the press, and the public raised the issues that would dominate British and Irish politics until 1922: what form Irish self-government should take, what relationship a self-governing Ireland should have with Britain, and how to treat Irish unionists, particularly in the province of Ulster.

Asquith's Government and Home Rule

In late 1909, Herbert Henry Asquith's Liberal government faced a dilemma. He and his Cabinet had a program of far-reaching social reform that included passing the 1909 "people's budget." The overwhelmingly conservative House of Lords had vetoed or significantly amended several government bills in the past. However, when they voted down the 1909 budget, Asquith and his supporters argued that they had overstepped their authority. It was for the Commons to develop budgets or "money bills" and, while the Lords possessed the power to veto any bill, the efficient running of the country demanded that they ease the passage of financial legislation. The Lords' defenders argued that their role was to amend bills or force elections on controversial legislation.⁵ If the country genuinely favored a measure that the Lords had vetoed, the government should call an election, make that bill the main issue, win the vote, and the upper chamber would pass the bill into law. Asquith argued that the Lords were motivated by politics, not patriotism. In dissolving Parliament, he said, "all this talk about the duty or the right of the House of Lords to refer measures to the people is, in the light of our practical and actual experience, the hollownest outcry of political cant. We never hear of it...when a Tory Government is in power."⁶ Asquith called an election for January 1910, intending to obtain a mandate not just for passing the budget but reducing the power of the upper chamber.

Adding to the Prime Minister's difficulties, Westminster's Irish nationalist MPs were growing restless. The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and Labour usually supported Asquith's Liberals. After the 1906 election, the government had not relied on the support of the 83 Irish nationalists or 29 Labour MPs, as their 400 Liberals easily outnumbered 157 Conservatives and Liberal Unionists.⁷ An election might alter the balance of power, and IPP leader John Redmond wanted to be in a position to capitalize if it did. Moreover, the people's budget was unpopular in

⁵ *Spectator* (London), 16 April 1910.

⁶ H. H. Asquith, "House of Lords (Refusal to Pass Finance Bill)," House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 2 December 1909 vol 13 cc546-81, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁷ F. W. S. Craig, ed., *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 581.

Ireland as it would increase taxation on what many considered an overtaxed population, and the IPP wanted something in return for not opposing it in the Commons.⁸

In October 1909, Redmond began asserting publicly that the Liberal government must make home rule for Ireland a prominent issue at the next election.⁹ On November 27, he wrote to Cabinet member John Morley that if Asquith did not declare in favor of home rule, not only would the government lose the IPP's support, they would not recommend that the Irish in Britain vote for Liberal candidates at the upcoming election.¹⁰ Chief Secretary for Ireland Augustine Birrell assured Redmond that the Cabinet had agreed at a December 1 meeting that they would declare home rule "the live policy of the Party, without limitation or restriction."¹¹

Nine days later at London's Albert Hall, Asquith announced that he was for setting up "a system of full self-government for purely Irish affairs." He assured his audience that the issue could be addressed soon after the election, as, "in the new House of Commons the hands of the Liberal Government and the Liberal majority will be in this matter entirely free." At the same time, Asquith said that he would not resume his role as Prime Minister unless he had a mandate to reduce the power of the House of Lords.¹² With this speech, Asquith seemed committed to introducing a home rule bill, as well as doing everything in his power to see that it passed both houses of Parliament and reached the statute book.

There is nothing to suggest that this was the inevitable course of Asquith's political life. There is an impression, expressed by some contemporaries and by historians, that Gladstone's "conversion" to home rule committed the Liberals to Irish self-government in perpetuity.¹³ Some scholars argue that the Liberals never removed the issue from their program, but passing home rule was simply a practical impossibility between 1893 and 1909.¹⁴ While this may have been

⁸ For an Irish unionist statement that Ireland was overtaxed see Arthur Samuels in Dublin, *The Times* (London), 5 January 1910.

⁹ John Redmond at Ashton-under-Lyne, *The Times* (London), 13 October 1909; John Redmond at Barrow-in-Furness, *The Times* (London), 14 October 1909; *The Times* (London), 19 November 1909.

¹⁰ National Library of Ireland (NLI), John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,207/2, John Redmond to Lord Morley, 27 November 1909.

¹¹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,169/2, Augustine Birrell to John Redmond, 1 December 1909.

¹² Asquith in London, *The Times* (London), 11 December 1909.

¹³ D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1995), 277, 282; David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13; Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (London: Collins, 1978), 276; Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6-7; David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), 22.

¹⁴ Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland*, 24-25; H. W. McCready, "Home Rule and the Liberal Party, 1899-1906," *Irish Historical Studies* 13, no. 52 (Sept. 1963): 316-348.

the case, it is evident that many Liberals had little interest in or compassion for Irish self-government, and after the failure of the Second Home Rule Bill it could be a political liability.

Wilfrid Blunt, an English poet, socialite, and home ruler, told Redmond in February 1910 that he did not think that Asquith, or Cabinet members Edward Grey or Richard Haldane, were “really in earnest about Home Rule.” He considered Lloyd George and Churchill to be far more reliable on the issue. Redmond agreed.¹⁵ That the IPP leader doubted the Prime Minister’s sincerity might have surprised contemporaries.

Some of Asquith’s biographers take his support for Irish self-government so much for granted that they do not question his earnestness on the issue.¹⁶ After all, Asquith had voted for both of Gladstone’s home rule bills. In one of his memoirs he described himself as “a convinced home ruler.” This was certainly how he wanted to be viewed.¹⁷ However, describing his first election campaign in 1886, after Gladstone’s commitment to home rule split the Liberal Party, Asquith wrote, “we had to demonstrate our title, as against some of our old comrades in arms, now disguised in their Unionist war-paint, to the true Liberal succession.”¹⁸ In other words, he supported Irish self-government because he was a good party soldier, not necessarily because he believed in the principle. Moreover, Asquith disliked Parnell’s tactics in playing the major British parties against one another. He described the IPP’s voting recommendations to the Irish living in Britain as bribery, and viewed Parnell’s obstructionism and connections to the Land League’s “moonlighting” with distaste.¹⁹

Asquith identified himself with a particular grouping within the Liberal party. In domestic policy they called their doctrine “new liberalism,” but in foreign affairs they were often called “liberal imperialists.” Cabinet member Herbert Samuel explained their paternalistic thinking when he wrote, “The same motives which led us to be social reformers at home made us favour, for the backward peoples, a stage of colonial administration, as the best means of helping them to reach a higher level of civilization. Besides, the existence of the British Empire assured,

¹⁵ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), II:289, entry for 13 February 1910.

¹⁶ Stephen Bates, *H. H. Asquith* (London: Haus, 2006), 17-18, 34; Colin Clifford, *The Asquiths* (London: John Murray, 2002), 10; Jenkins, *Asquith*, 41, 67; J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1932), I:169-170, 268-269.

¹⁷ H. H. Asquith [pseud. Earl of Oxford and Asquith], *Fifty Years of British Parliament*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1926), I:169.

¹⁸ H. H. Asquith [pseud. Earl of Oxford and Asquith], *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1928), I:124.

¹⁹ Asquith, *Fifty Years of British Parliament*, I:66-67, 89-90, 133-134.

over nearly a fourth part of the globe, internal peace and tranquility.”²⁰ Some Irish nationalists were also attracted to the imperialist position, and tried to portray home rule as beneficial to the Empire as a whole.²¹ Asquith became a member of Liberal Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s Cabinet in 1905. MP Rufus Isaacs told a British audience that the inclusion of liberal imperialists, including Asquith, Grey, and Haldane, in the government, “was a guarantee that there would be no such measure as a Home Rule Bill introduced into the present Parliament.”²² According to historian H. C. G. Matthew, the liberal imperialists wanted a “clean slate” for their party, in other words to distance themselves from past Liberal policies. The only area in which they achieved this was home rule, effectively dissociating themselves from Gladstone’s idea of establishing an Irish legislature.²³

Campbell-Bannerman’s government did produce the Irish Council Bill in 1907, a measure to devolve limited powers to a Dublin-based body consisting of nominated and elected members. It was not home rule, but accorded with the liberal imperialist doctrine of “step by step” concessions toward Irish self-government.²⁴ Redmond disliked the bill, but voted for it on its first reading and called a nationalist conference in Dublin to consider it. As historian Dermot Meleady notes, home rule was already a compromise of some nationalists’ demands, therefore a measure granting even less was unacceptable to many.²⁵ Elements of the Irish nationalist press and members of the Dublin conference—supposedly loyal IPP supporters—criticized the Party severely for supporting the bill.²⁶ Redmond was forced into an embarrassing climb-down, and the government withdrew the measure.²⁷ The affair inculcated a suspicion in Irish nationalists that the British government would not deliver an adequate form of self-government, and by 1910 the Council Bill had become synonymous with a weak, intolerable version of home rule.²⁸

²⁰ Herbert Samuel [pseud. Viscount Samuel], *Memoirs* (London: Cresset, 1945), 33.

²¹ John Redmond at Swindon, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 10 October 1911; Richard McGhee at Tain, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 6 December 1913; *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 31 July 1914.

²² Rufus Isaacs in London, *The Times* (London), 12 December 1905.

²³ H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Élite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 132, 291-292.

²⁴ Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*, 268-269, 286.

²⁵ Dermot Meleady, *John Redmond: The National Leader* (Sallins: Merrion, 2014), 107.

²⁶ The speeches at the Dublin convention were widely reported in the press. See *Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 May 1907.

²⁷ A. C. Hepburn, “The Irish Council Bill and the Fall of Sir Antony MacDonnell, 1906-7,” *Irish Historical Studies* 17, no. 68 (Sept. 1971): 470-498; Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971), 141-150.

²⁸ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 3 November and 25 November 1910.

It is curious that Redmond believed that Lloyd George and Churchill were more reliable home rulers than Asquith. The former was so strongly against Irish self-government that he almost joined the Liberal Unionists in 1886. By sheer accident, Lloyd George missed a train that would have taken him to the inaugural meeting of Joseph Chamberlain's National Radical Union and out of the Liberal Party.²⁹ In addition to this political aversion, Lloyd George was strongly anti-Catholic. Lucy Masterman wrote of him, "His view of the Roman Catholic religion was that it was excellent for women and children, whom he appeared to regard as an inferior order of beings altogether."³⁰ He once told a friend, "I hate a priest, Daniel, wherever I find him."³¹ This hostility had a political dimension. Masterman recorded, "George is not a very keen Home Ruler...he has a good deal of the protestant in him."³²

Redmond's trust in Lloyd George might be attributed to the latter's personal qualities. He possessed an outstanding propensity for convincing people that he was on their side. Economist John Maynard Keynes described Lloyd George as having "six or seven senses not available to ordinary men, judging character, motive, and subconscious impulse, perceiving what each was thinking and even what each was going to say next, and compounding with telepathic instinct the argument or appeal best suited to the vanity, weakness, or self-interest of his immediate auditor."³³ It is possible that conversing with Lloyd George and listening to his speeches convinced Redmond that he was a firm supporter of Irish self-government.

Even more surprising than Redmond's faith in Lloyd George is that the IPP leader considered Winston Churchill a reliable ally. Churchill began his political career in 1900 as a Unionist. He "crossed the floor" of the Commons and joined the Liberals in May 1904. Twenty years later he would return to the Unionists, but in the interim he was considered one of the most influential Liberals. Churchill made disparaging remarks about the IPP and Irish self-government. Referring to the nationalists' opposition to the Boer War, he said in 1902, "Ireland suffered little asses to bray in the same way...they were not real representatives and did not represent what was good in Ireland—only what was common, and mean, and disloyal."³⁴ The idea that the Irish nationalists were not "real representatives" reflects a belief that IPP members

²⁹ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 26-29.

³⁰ Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman: A Biography* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1939), 180.

³¹ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George Family Letters, 1885-1936* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), 7.

³² Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 242.

³³ John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1933), 15.

³⁴ Winston Churchill in Manchester, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 20 March 1902.

were products of a corrupt political machine, therefore their election did not illustrate popular feeling in Ireland. This is ironic as British political candidates were also selected by their party machines. In addition, the United Kingdom was not a perfect democracy. All women, as well as men who owned less than £10 of property, were denied the right to vote. After switching parties in 1904, Churchill assured his constituents that, on Irish issues, he was still a Unionist, “I do not look forward to the day when there shall be created a separate Parliament in Ireland to be a rival of, and perhaps an enemy of, the central Parliament here at home.”³⁵

Like Lloyd George, Churchill saw the Catholic Church as a pernicious influence. He wrote in 1899, “as a rationalist I deprecate all Romish practices and prefer those of Protestantism, because I believe that the Reformed Church is less deeply sunk in the mire of Dogma than the Original Establishment. We are at any rate a step nearer Reason.”³⁶ This had a political aspect, as he said in 1911, “priestly rule & ascendancy will always I trust encounter staunch resistance from free & enlightened men...the Catholic Church has ruined every country in wh[ich] it has been supreme.”³⁷ Like other contemporaries, Churchill had a tendency to describe negative events in Ireland as a result of innate characteristics. He wrote of the Irish in 1920, “What a diabolical streak they have in their character! I expect it is that treacherous, assassinating, conspiring trait which has done them in in the bygone ages of history and prevented them from being a great responsible nation with stability and prosperity.”³⁸

Churchill’s distinguishing qualities were his imperialistic and militaristic aggression. After the First World War, Churchill befriended a new MP named Oswald Mosley, who would later found the British Union of Fascists. They remained close until Churchill’s aggression drove them apart. Mosley wrote of Churchill, “He seemed to me constantly to risk war without good reason.”³⁹ Churchill’s belief in the Empire meant that he would likely oppose any policy he felt would weaken it. As a Cabinet member Churchill recommended aggressive action against both Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists, though at different times.

³⁵ Winston Churchill in Manchester, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 18 June 1904.

³⁶ Winston Churchill to Ivor Guest, 19 January 1899, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part I, 1901-1907* (London: Heinemann, 1969), xxvi.

³⁷ Winston Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 5 June 1911, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part II, 1907-1911* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1089.

³⁸ Winston Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 31 March 1920, in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume IV Companion Part II, July 1919-March 1921* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1062.

³⁹ Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1968), 106-107.

Asquith, Churchill, and Lloyd George were the three most influential members of the British government, and none of them were enthusiastic about home rule. There were few principled reasons for the Prime Minister to commit himself to Irish self-government in December 1909. However, Asquith knew that he might need the Irish nationalists. The large Irish vote in Britain might sway a number of crucial election contests. Also, if his significant majority in the House of Commons were diminished, he might need IPP votes to stay in power.

Reactions to Asquith's Home Rule Stance

Some Irish nationalists were skeptical as to whether Asquith's commitment to home rule would be translated into action. Dublin's nationalist *Sunday Independent* responded, "You've done well, Mr. Asquith, but you might be a little more explicit. A confession of faith does not mean a promise to perform."⁴⁰ The unionist *Irish Times* did not believe that self-government was an immediate issue. It said in an editorial, "the Liberals have taken up Home Rule with extreme reluctance. They will not face the grave risks of that policy unless the Nationalist vote becomes an essential condition of their return to office."⁴¹

Redmond embraced the Prime Minister's declaration. He told a United Irish League conference on December 15, 1909, that Asquith's Albert Hall speech meant "the coming back of the whole Liberal Party to the standard of Gladstone—to full Gladstonian Home Rule."⁴² Redmond's friend Wilfrid Blunt considered that the IPP leader was taking a risk in trusting Asquith so completely. Blunt called the Prime Minister's commitment to home rule, "not very clear," and wrote of Redmond, "he runs the risk of being made a fool of should the Liberals return in power enough to do without him." In this estimation, the best result for the Irish nationalists would be for the Liberals to win the election, but with a reduced majority.⁴³

In order to pass a home rule bill, Redmond knew that the veto power of the House of Lords would have to be undermined. Therefore, he advised the Irish in Britain to vote for the two parties pledged to diminish the Lords' power: the Liberals and Labour.⁴⁴ Many in Britain saw the situation in the same light. The *Morning Leader*, a London-based Liberal paper, said of

⁴⁰ *Sunday Independent* (Dublin), 12 December 1909.

⁴¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 16 December 1909.

⁴² John Redmond in Dublin, *Ulster Herald* (Omagh), 18 December 1909.

⁴³ Blunt, *My Diaries*, II:285, entry for 20 December 1909.

⁴⁴ John Redmond in Dublin, *Ulster Herald* (Omagh), 18 December 1909.

home rule, “There is no other obstacle to it, as the Irish leader wisely sees, than the House of Lords.”⁴⁵ Redmond spoke out against the Lords in his campaign speeches. He positioned himself as a friend of the English and Irish masses or “democracies,” who were engaged in a struggle against noble privilege. On January 9, 1910, the Irish nationalist leader said, “The Lords have been the enemies all through the last century of the democracy of this country,” and, “he thanked God to see the day when the democracy of Ireland could join hands with the democracy of England in a campaign to destroy this hydra-headed monster.” Redmond deplored that some English people did not trust the Irish with self-government, as they had given similar rights to colonies like Canada and South Africa. He denied that nationalists sought to separate Ireland from the British Empire, and defined their demand by drawing on the South African precedent, “we want a treaty of peace like that which was made by Botha and De Wet.”⁴⁶

Within weeks of Asquith’s public commitment to home rule, British and Irish unionists amplified their anti-home rule rhetoric. The Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) held a public meeting in Belfast on January 4, 1910. Unionist dignitaries enunciated what would become their staple arguments against Irish self-government. James Hamilton, Duke of Abercorn, sent a letter asserting, “if Home Rule were given to Ireland, separation must eventually follow.”⁴⁷ James H. Campbell addressed himself to “the law-abiding and peaceful province of Ulster.” He declared that only within the Union “could the loyal minority in Ireland depend for the retention of their civil and religious liberty and the safety of their lives and property.”⁴⁸ Walter Long told his audience that their duty in the election was to “convince their fellow citizens in all parts of the United Kingdom what their real view of the situation was in regard to Home Rule.” Long invoked Randolph Churchill’s 1886 saying, “Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right,” and made an ominous prediction when he said, “Civil war might be necessary, it might be justified by the circumstances, it might be forced on a people in order to protect the lives of the people and their successors; but it was an awful thing to contemplate.”⁴⁹

The idea of Ulster as the loyal and law-abiding portion of Ireland was one of the enduring themes of unionist propaganda. It was designed to draw a stark contrast between the northern

⁴⁵ *Morning Leader* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 16 December 1909.

⁴⁶ John Redmond at Manchester, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 January 1910.

⁴⁷ Duke of Abercorn in Belfast, *The Times* (London), 5 January 1910.

⁴⁸ James H. Campbell in Belfast, *The Times* (London), 5 January 1910.

⁴⁹ Walter Long in Belfast, *The Times* (London), 5 January 1910.

province and the rest of Ireland, which unionists portrayed as disloyal and lawless. Such statements also conveyed that Ulster was inhabited solely by people who were loyal to the British connection. It is ironic that unionist leaders encouraged their supposedly loyal and law-abiding constituents to engage in civil war against a legally constituted authority. But this idea of unionists was, after all, only an impression that they wished to convey. Moreover, the images they conjured of Irish nationalists as reckless law-breakers incapable of rehabilitation rested on stereotypes derived from the Land War and Fenian dynamiting periods of the 1880s-1890s.

Abercorn and Long told the Belfast meeting that Irish unionists' duty was to try to influence English opinion. This reflects that the "predominant partner" should ultimately decide the fate of the whole of the United Kingdom, and shows the impotence of Irish unionists should they fail to appeal to British allies.

Long's invocation of violent action was one of the most dramatic and complicated features of unionist strategy. The speaker seemed to be advocating violence to his audience when he called the idea of civil war "necessary" and "justified" under certain circumstances. However, Long then spoke of civil war being "forced" on Irish unionists, whom he described as defending their rights. These kinds of statements enabled unionist leaders to claim that they were not inciting their audiences to violence, but that a violent reaction to the introduction of a home rule bill was inevitable. They were simply warning politicians and the public in Britain and Ireland of this fact. Long prudently added that civil war was "an awful thing to contemplate," though he had just compelled his audience to contemplate such a conflict. The idea of a civil war over home rule placed the onus of resisting self-government on Ulster unionists. While there were unionists in every part of Ireland, outside of the northeastern part of Ulster they were a distinct minority, living scattered among an overwhelming majority of nationalists. The only group within unionism capable of carrying out any organized violent campaign were those in Ulster. Despite this emphasis, unionists intended to use that fact to defeat self-government for the whole island.⁵⁰

While the Belfast meeting only laterally referred to this Ulster-centric unionist strategy, it was apparent to some observers. In discussing the meeting, the Unionist *Morning Post* credited

⁵⁰ Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/85, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 12 March 1912; United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/38, "Interview between Capt. Craig, MP, Lord Midleton, and Lord Desart," 9 May 1918.

Irish unionists—particularly those in the north—with foiling the first two home rule bills. It said, “Nothing did so much to ensure the defeat of Mr. Gladstone’s attack on the integrity of the United Kingdom as the fierce and unflinching opposition offered in Ulster. Feeling in the North of Ireland is the same as it was twenty years ago.”⁵¹ Crediting Ulster unionists with defeating previous attempts at instituting home rule artificially inflated their importance. The First Home Rule Bill had been defeated by the House of Commons. The second had been vetoed by the Lords, and followed by an election in which home rulers gained a majority only in Ireland. In 1910 the *Irish Times* said of the Lords, “This one safeguard alone has prevented the passing into law of Home Rule Bills.”⁵² Ulster unionists contributed only a few members to the Commons or the Lords. Westminster and the British public remained their greatest safeguard against home rule. Ominously for Ireland-wide unionism, the focus on Ulster amplified the unionists of this region above their counterparts elsewhere on the island.

Some contemporaries believed that for home rule to be enacted, special provision would have to be made for those parts of the north of Ireland that were majority Protestant and unionist. From the outset of the third home rule crisis, participants in debates about home rule struggled to define a geographic entity known as “Ulster,” and to devise means to placate the people living there. In January 1910, N. C. Philpott proposed in the *Irish Independent* that four counties: Antrim, Armagh, Londonderry, and Down, be excluded from the purview of the future Irish parliament. Fermanagh was to be cut in half and the eastern portion excluded as well. His rationale was that these areas “have Orange traditions, and...are strongly Presbyterian and Protestant.” Philpott added that this was equitable as far as the province was concerned, “There being nine counties in Ulster, we give half to the Orangemen and half to the Nationalists.” Dublin’s Trinity College would also be outside the administration of the home rule legislature.⁵³

A correspondent who signed as “South Tyrone” replied that parliamentary constituencies should be used to determine an area to be excluded from home rule. He considered that the counties of Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan, as well as the constituencies of South Armagh, South Down, and South Fermanagh should be under the jurisdiction of the home rule parliament while the rest of the province was left out. He recognized that there was a nationalist majority in

⁵¹ *Morning Post* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 5 January 1910.

⁵² *Irish Times* (Dublin), 29 November 1910.

⁵³ N. C. Philpott, “Imperial Home Rule Scheme,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 31 January 1910.

Mid-Tyrone and a large unionist minority in South Down, but these would have to be sacrificed to form a more logical, contiguous unit. He wrote that there would have to be decisions made as to which areas were “to be included in Ulster,” meaning excluded from home rule. The parts of the province under nationalist administration would be “out of Ulster.” The writer also objected to Philpott referring to all unionists as “Orangemen,” a term he considered derogatory. He wrote, “We might as well call our Nationalist opponents ‘Fenians.’”⁵⁴

It is interesting to note that Philpott used the geographic definition of Ulster as a nine-county area that may have to be divided. “South Tyrone” considered Ulster a less tangible entity. To him, an “Ulster” identity was not defined by geographic location but by an anti-home rule mindset. Thus he felt justified in calling the new, unionist-majority area he advocated, “Ulster.” Philpott used an exclusively religious rationale; the excluded areas were “Presbyterian and Protestant,” while the traditionally Protestant Trinity College should also be left out. “South Tyrone” used the political characterizations of “nationalist” and “unionist,” and objected to being lumped together with the exclusively Protestant Orange Order. Neither correspondent suggested giving the area excluded from home rule its own administration, implying that the population there would continue to be governed directly from Westminster.

Whether there would be administrative change in any part of Ireland had yet to be determined. The results of the January 1910 election did not return a straightforward verdict for or against Asquith’s policies. The Unionists and Liberal Unionists won the largest portion of the popular vote, with 46.8 percent compared to the Liberals’ 43.5 percent. However, due to the distribution of seats, 273 Unionists would sit in the new House of Commons alongside 275 Liberals. Labour won 7 percent of the vote and 40 seats.⁵⁵ The IPP won 70 seats in Ireland and T. P. O’Connor’s Liverpool constituency. Independent Irish nationalists won three seats, while the loose coalition around William O’Brien and the All-for-Ireland-League (AFIL) won eight for a total of 82 Irish nationalists at Westminster. Twenty-one of the 273 Unionists were from Irish constituencies, as was one of the 275 Liberals.⁵⁶

While the Irish results barely varied from the 1906 polls (only one seat changed hands from nationalist to unionist), throughout the United Kingdom the Unionists gained 106 seats

⁵⁴ South Tyrone [pseud.], “Ulster and Home Rule,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 3 February 1910.

⁵⁵ Craig, ed., *British Parliamentary Election Results*, 577, 581.

⁵⁶ Brian Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 194.

compared with the last election; a result that some interpreted as the public's rejection of government policy.⁵⁷ The unionist *Saturday Review* exulted, "The Liberal Government can now only exist precariously by favour of the Labour and the Irish gangs. Beyond all shade of doubt England has broken the evil power of the Liberals to wreck the Constitution."⁵⁸ Asquith's government could be defeated if the IPP voted with the Unionists on any issue. Many believed that that issue might be the budget, but Asquith's declaration in support of home rule made it seem as though the government and the nationalists had a firm understanding. Lord Monteagle, a unionist from Co. Limerick, foresaw another possibility: the Liberals and Unionists might ally against the nationalists. He wrote to fellow Irish unionist Horace Plunkett, "both the great English parties must see the absurdity of allowing Redmond to hold the balance on the big constitutional questions, and I still hope that some compromise may be devised that would leave Redmond isolated instead of a dictator."⁵⁹ To Monteagle, a deal between the major British parties that would preclude home rule was not only possible, it was necessary.

Liberals, Nationalists, and the Lords

The appearance of IPP-Liberal amity was shattered after the election. Before the final votes had been counted, the press began to speculate that the government would prioritize passing the 1909 budget over attacking the Lords' veto, a procedure that would delay home rule. In addition, Asquith might compromise with the Lords to pass the budget and leave all of their powers intact, including the ability to veto Irish self-government.⁶⁰

Almost immediately, many commentators assumed home rule was dead again, and began to speculate on other ways of solving the Irish question. British conservative J. Ellis Barker suggested that the IPP should cooperate with the Unionist Party to bring self-government "in a much wider sense of the term than is dreamed of by most Home Rulers."⁶¹ He predicted that if a Liberal government attempted to enforce a home rule bill there would be civil war between nationalists and Ulster, which he assumed to be entirely unionist. Barker asserted, "Ulster is

⁵⁷ *Spectator* (London), 29 January 1910; *The Times* (London), 8 February 1910; A. V. Dicey, "The Political Situation," *The Times* (London), 21 February 1910.

⁵⁸ *Saturday Review* (London), 29 January 1910.

⁵⁹ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,414, Monteagle to Horace Plunkett, 25 January 1910.

⁶⁰ Joseph West Ridgeway, "The Government and the Lords," *The Times* (London), 1 February 1910; *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 2 February 1910; *The Times* (London), 9 February 1910.

⁶¹ J. Ellis Barker, "The Parliamentary Position and the Irish Party," *The Nineteenth Century and After* (Feb. 1910): 255.

equally entitled to Home Rule within her own borders” because, “she is Protestant and Anglo-Saxon.”⁶² Barker seems to have assumed that if Irish nationalists cooperated with the British Unionists to achieve home rule they would face no resistance from Irish unionists, indicating that the latter would acquiesce in whatever plan their British allies decided to enact. If one assumes that the British unionist position on home rule was entrenched and unchanging, this idea seems far-fetched. However, there is evidence that British unionists were willing to concede some measure of Irish self-government. John Dillon, one of Redmond’s principal deputies, told Blunt in April 1910 that he did not anticipate that Asquith would keep his promises, but expected “to get Home Rule from the Tories.”⁶³

The press reports reflected real disagreements in Asquith’s administration over whether to prioritize the budget or the Lords’ veto. J. A. Spender, a liberal and editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, later described the January 1910 vote as “the budget election,” and asserted that Asquith did not feel that the electorate had given him a mandate for drastic action against the Lords.⁶⁴ Asquith himself wrote that the efficient running of the country demanded that the budget issue be settled as soon as possible.⁶⁵ This choice of emphases caused rifts within the coalition of parties that kept Asquith’s administration in power. In a speech in Dublin on February 10, 1910, Redmond referred to the press reports and declared that “Ireland,” meaning the IPP, would oppose Asquith if he attempted to prioritize the budget over the veto.⁶⁶

Redmond’s speech prompted a rebuke from London’s *Times*. Referring to the IPP’s reliance on American contributions, *The Times* asserted that the Irish nationalists had no right to impinge on the decisive role usually reserved for English politicians. It stated, “The ‘predominant partner’ does not relish dictation to the Government he has chosen, particularly when that dictation comes from a party which confesses that it is kept in existence by foreign funds.”⁶⁷ This reflects a feeling that, despite their island being an integral part of the United Kingdom, Irish nationalists should not wield influence in the same manner as English politicians.

⁶² Barker, “The Parliamentary Position,” 242. The general outline of this article was reprinted in *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 3 February 1910; *Review of Reviews* (Feb. 1910): 136.

⁶³ Blunt, *My Diaries*, II:300, entry for 27 April 1910.

⁶⁴ J. A. Spender, *Life, Journalism and Politics*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, n.d.), I:234.

⁶⁵ Asquith, *Fifty Years of British Parliament*, II:92.

⁶⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 11 February 1910.

⁶⁷ *The Times* (London), 12 February 1910.

Ironically, opposition to Irish influence placed this unionist paper on the side of a Liberal Prime Minister.

Other influential Britons were equally dismissive of nationalist opinion. J. L. Garvin, editor of the unionist *Observer*, wrote that because the IPP would vote against the Lords to obtain home rule and not out of principle, their votes on the issue should not count. He added, “A coalition dependent for its position in Parliament and the constituencies upon the Irish vote can claim no effective and legitimate majority.”⁶⁸ The *Saturday Review* asserted, “the votes of the Redmondites are objected to not because they are Irish but because they are Home Rulers.” The paper welcomed Irish “loyalist” votes in defense of the Lords.⁶⁹ A. V. Dicey, one of the United Kingdom’s foremost constitutional scholars, wrote that all Irish nationalists were separatists, and, “For the opposition of Separatists, as a Unionist, I care nothing.”⁷⁰ The implication of this doctrine for United Kingdom democracy is interesting as it implies that citizens could be deprived of their rights for the opinions they held.

Whether his position was acknowledged as legitimate or not, Redmond’s opposition could end Asquith’s government. Churchill warned the Prime Minister, “We are becoming involved in a perfectly unreal dispute with our own supporters. The Irish, the Labour party, & I daresay half our own men say, ‘Veto before Budget.’”⁷¹ Nonetheless, Asquith was determined to prioritize the budget even at the risk of his own government. Unionists welcomed the policy and predicted that the IPP and Labour leaders would be put in their places. Austen Chamberlain wrote on the eve of the new legislative session, “Budget first and Veto after. Asquith has beaten his own recalcitrant colleagues and now defies Redmond, Barnes & Co. who, being beaten, will doubtless come to heel.”⁷² Lord Balfour wrote in exactly the same terms, “Redmond will come to heel.”⁷³ Edward Carson, MP for Trinity College and a rising star in the Unionist Party, predicted that “the Irish,” meaning the IPP, “will simply do as they are told.”⁷⁴

⁶⁸ J. L. Garvin, “Imperial and Foreign Affairs: The Elections and their Meaning,” *Fortnightly Review* (Feb. 1910): 191, 193.

⁶⁹ *Saturday Review* (London), 7 May 1910.

⁷⁰ A. V. Dicey, “The Political Situation,” *The Times* (London), 21 February 1910.

⁷¹ Winston Churchill to H. H. Asquith, 18 February 1910, in R. S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part II*, 971.

⁷² Austen Chamberlain to Neville Chamberlain, 20 February 1910, in *Politics from Inside: An Epistolary Chronicle, 1906-1914* (London: Cassell, 1936), 200.

⁷³ Lord Balfour, [pseud. David Lindsay, Earl Crawford], *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay*, ed. John Vincent (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 145, entry for 15 February 1910.

⁷⁴ PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/44, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 24 January 1910.

The Irish nationalist leader defied these expectations during the first sitting of the new Parliament on February 21, 1910. Asquith informed the Commons that not only did he intend to make passing the budget his first priority, he would not ask the King to create new peers to sit in the Lords. The Prime Minister even seemed to shy away from his supposed commitment to home rule, adding that he had not definitely said that he would introduce a bill for Irish self-government, only that without the Lords' veto his government would be free to do so.⁷⁵ In response, Redmond declared that his party was independent of alliances and the only issue they cared about was home rule. He quoted Asquith's statement that he would not take office without a mandate to reduce the Lords' power and said that if the Prime Minister intended to pass the budget before the veto, "Ireland," meaning the IPP, would oppose him.⁷⁶

Newspaper comments on the proceedings did not fall along party lines. The liberal *Daily News* indicated that Asquith had made a mistake, "Mr. Redmond's support is indispensable, his advice is intrinsically sound, and the Government would be wise to accept it."⁷⁷ The unionist *Daily Mail* praised the Prime Minister for having "stood firm and resisted dictation."⁷⁸ All agreed that if the IPP voted against the government, Asquith would be forced to resign. The *Morning Post*, also a unionist organ, dramatically compared Redmond to Macbeth: "the Irish Leader pauses, he hesitates, before he plunges his dagger into the weakened body of Liberalism."⁷⁹

Unlike the assassin in Shakespeare's play, Redmond did not strike. Over the next several weeks, the government negotiated with the IPP while pushing ahead with the budget. The nationalists abstained from voting on the money bill; refraining from opposing the government and causing its downfall. At the same time, the Cabinet developed their "veto resolutions," a series of Parliamentary agreements to limit the Lords' power. Bills passed in the Commons but vetoed in the Lords would have to be passed by the lower house in three consecutive sessions, or for two years, in order to become law. This would make the Commons the ultimate adjudicator of legislation, but over the course of the two-year delay the opposition might force a general election that changed the makeup of the legislature.

⁷⁵ H. H. Asquith, "Debate on the Address," HC Deb 21 February 1910 vol 14 cc35-78, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁷⁶ John Redmond, "Debate on the Address," HC Deb 21 February 1910 vol 14 cc35-78, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁷⁷ *Daily News* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 22 February 1910.

⁷⁸ *Daily Mail* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 22 February 1910.

⁷⁹ *Morning Post* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 22 February 1910.

Throughout this period, members of Asquith's government resented that they appeared to be acting at the behest of Redmond and his colleagues. Lucy Masterman wrote of March and April 1910, "The seams in the Cabinet ran very queerly... The anti-Irish prejudice ran very high."⁸⁰ Churchill's reports to the King denied that the government had made a deal with the Irish nationalists four times between March and April. On March 1 he wrote, "It would not do justice to the Government to attribute to them a weak surrender to [the] Irish faction."⁸¹ The Cabinet negotiated with both the IPP and AFIL leader William O'Brien on the terms of the budget, aiming to make it more acceptable to the Irish public. By April 13, the administration was on the verge of modifying the budget to alleviate Irish taxation when they suddenly changed their minds. Asquith told the King that the Cabinet was "unanimously of opinion that to purchase the Irish vote by such a concession would be a discreditable transaction."⁸²

By this time, however, the Commons had passed all of the veto resolutions, showing that a majority in the lower house supported the Prime Minister in removing the Lords' ability to veto legislation. On April 14, Asquith announced that if the upper house remained intransigent, he would ask the King to create enough Liberal peers to overwhelm the current voting strength. By this time British political rhetoric was becoming extreme. *The Times* decried government policy as "revolution full-blown" and lamented, "Mr. Redmond has had his way in every particular."⁸³ Lord Esher, a confidant of the royal family, wrote under the pseudonym "Historicus" that even if the government won an election on reducing the Lords' power, the opposition "will not accept their defeat at the polls," an ominous warning of strenuous, perhaps even violent, agitation.⁸⁴ Carson, who had been elected leader of the Irish unionist MPs on the first day of the parliamentary session, said he was "boiling with rage" and added, "I hope there will be violence—it is a justifiable occasion if ever there was one."⁸⁵ Such threats of civil disruption became increasingly common over the next two years.

Calls for compromise became more urgent. On May 5, 1910, Lord Curzon gave a speech proposing that the top five members of the two major parties meet with a neutral arbiter to

⁸⁰ Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 159.

⁸¹ Winston Churchill to the King, 1 March 1910, in R. S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part II*, 983.

⁸² Quoted in Jenkins, *Asquith*, 209.

⁸³ *The Times* (London), 15 April 1910.

⁸⁴ Reginald Brett, Viscount Esher [pseud. Historicus], "The House of Lords," *The Times* (London), 23 April 1910.

⁸⁵ PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/47, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 17 April 1910.

discuss constitutional issues. He called the group, “the all-England eleven.”⁸⁶ King Edward VII died unexpectedly on the night of May 6, necessitating a temporary party truce. Aware of the calls for compromise and concerned that they had not received a mandate to destroy the Lords’ veto in January, the government convened a conference to discuss constitutional issues.

The British Parties Attempt to Compromise

The constitutional conference opened on June 16, 1910. While these bipartisan talks were going on behind the doors of Westminster palace, some unionists renewed calls for their party to consider adopting a home rule policy, though a different one from that expected of the Liberals. One week into the conference, Walter Long, who had threatened civil war in opposition to home rule in January, reached out to John Redmond offering to discuss a possible scheme for Irish self-government.⁸⁷ There is no evidence that talks took place.

On October 20, *Observer* editor J. L. Garvin sent letters to Balfour and Chamberlain urging them to change their policy on Ireland. He described “some form of devolution” as “inevitable,” and suggested a compromise between Gladstonian home rule and traditional unionism. This could be embodied by “an Ireland under Federal Home Rule on the Quebec model.” This referred to the relationship between the national and provincial parliaments of Canada, a dominion within the British Empire. Garvin added that a grateful home rule Ireland might send conservative MPs to Westminster to defend “nearly all we care for.”⁸⁸ Chamberlain was open to the concept. He replied to Garvin that the two British parties should collaborate to develop a “safe” measure of home rule for Ireland.⁸⁹ Chamberlain soon received an offer that brought this idea within the realm of practical politics.

Tired of party warfare and fearful that the British Empire’s place among the great powers was not being safeguarded, on August 17, 1910, Lloyd George wrote a memorandum proposing that the Liberals and Unionists form a coalition. This “national government” would deal with the most pressing and controversial issues, including land taxes, housing, insurance, and national defense. Under the heading “Local Government” he wrote, “a good deal of work is cast upon the Imperial Parliament which could be much more efficiently discharged by local bodies on a large

⁸⁶ Lord Curzon at Reading, *The Times* (London), 6 May 1910.

⁸⁷ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,252/1/B, John Redmond, Memorandum, 23 June 1910.

⁸⁸ J. L. Garvin to Arthur Balfour, 20 October 1910, in *Politics from Inside*, 279-281.

⁸⁹ Austen Chamberlain to J. L. Garvin, 21 October 1910, in *Politics from Inside*, 281-283.

scale.” This claim that Westminster was overworked was one of the favorite arguments of devolutionists and federalists, implying that reform was being undertaken to address a practical problem, not necessarily as a concession to any particular sentiment. Under the heading “Imperial Problems” Lloyd George advocated a “non-Party” settlement of the Irish question, one that could be enacted “without being subject to the embarrassing dictation of extreme partisans, whether from Nationalists or Orangemen.”⁹⁰ Lloyd George scouted the memo among the Cabinet, where he met little resistance.⁹¹ Still, he waited until mid-October, when the constitutional conference had reached a critical point, to put the proposal to the Unionists.

By that time Lloyd George had added an explicit statement that federal home rule would be coalition policy.⁹² He sent the memo to Balfour and other Unionist leaders, using Churchill’s friend F. E. Smith as an intermediary. Chamberlain later wrote that the coalition terms were amenable to Unionist policy, even to the point of being detrimental to the Liberals, “when we first heard of them they appeared so favourable that we could not understand how George could face his Party after agreeing to them.”⁹³ On October 21, Chamberlain wrote that if the Unionists and Liberals agreed to settle the Irish question, the nationalists would have no power to overturn it, “Lloyd George told F. E. Smith that the Liberal Party was pledged to Devolution in some form or another and could not abandon the pledge, but if a scheme were agreed on between the two great Parties were rejected by the Irish, the Liberals would then wash their hands of the whole affair and leave the Irish to stew in their own juice.”⁹⁴ The same day, he wrote to Smith that if both of the major British parties agreed on a change in Irish government “it would go through as easily and as swiftly as any great Bill has ever gone through Parliament.”⁹⁵ This indicates that while the Irish nationalists would be unable to expand the powers the British parties were willing to grant them, Irish unionists would be equally unable to resist whatever change they imposed. Several influential Unionists signaled their support for the plan, including Chamberlain, Smith, and Andrew Bonar Law.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Lloyd George’s full memorandum is in Charles Petrie, *The Life and Letters of Austen Chamberlain*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1939), I:381-388.

⁹¹ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 6 vols. (London: Odhams, 1938), I:21-22.

⁹² Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 170.

⁹³ Austen Chamberlain to Lord Lansdowne, 26 August 1912, in *Politics from Inside*, 292.

⁹⁴ Austen Chamberlain to Lord Cawdor, 21 October 1910, in *Politics from Inside*, 287.

⁹⁵ Austen Chamberlain to F. E. Smith, 21 October 1910, in *Politics from Inside*, 285.

⁹⁶ Austen Chamberlain to Lord Lansdowne, 26 August 1912, in *Politics from Inside*, 292.

At the same time that this initiative for federal home rule was taking shape behind closed doors, public pressure for this type of settlement began to mount. On October 22, a letter appeared in *The Times* written by a unionist who signed as “Pacificus.” He suggested that if the Irish question was out of the way, the two major British parties could easily settle other constitutional matters between themselves.⁹⁷ Pacificus admitted that the unionists could not actively advocate home rule. To change their position so radically would cause most of their supporters to desert them, a process he called “Conversion and martyrdom.” He added, “The Unionists cannot champion Home Rule, they might nevertheless submit to it.”⁹⁸ In further letters, Pacificus argued for federalizing the United Kingdom, which entailed granting a local parliament to Ireland, as well as one each to Scotland, Wales, and England, or any other agreed units. Westminster would be a supreme authority over them all. He openly questioned whether Irish unionists really opposed home rule.⁹⁹ The author made distinctions between the interests of “the Irish Unionists,” whom he described as “the Protestants of the south” and “country gentlemen,” compared to the “Ulstermen” inhabiting “Protestant Ulster.”¹⁰⁰ In the midst of his letter-writing campaign, the press revealed that Pacificus was actually F. S. Oliver, a unionist lawyer, writer, and businessman, but he continued the correspondence under his pseudonym.¹⁰¹

Support for the Pacificus plan grew in unionist circles. *The Times* stood behind the idea, as did Garvin’s *Observer*. Other unionist journals including the *Standard*, *Globe*, and *Morning Post* voiced approval for devolution, though sometimes hesitantly.¹⁰² Young unionists involved with the Round Table movement were already positively disposed toward federalist ideas.¹⁰³

Support for home rule in any form would be a major policy shift for the Unionist Party. However, many individual unionists were willing to support giving Ireland a parliament within a federal system for the United Kingdom because they saw this as preferable to “Parnellite” or “Gladstonian” home rule. This was usually defined as an Irish parliament and executive established with the acknowledgement of Ireland’s separate nationality. Lord Milner,

⁹⁷ F. S. Oliver [pseud. Pacificus], “The Constitutional Conference—II,” *The Times* (London), 22 October 1910.

⁹⁸ F. S. Oliver [pseud. Pacificus], “The Constitutional Conference—III,” *The Times* (London), 24 October 1910.

⁹⁹ F. S. Oliver [pseud. Pacificus], “The Constitutional Conference—VI,” *The Times* (London), 31 October 1910.

¹⁰⁰ F. S. Oliver [pseud. Pacificus], “The Constitutional Conference—V,” *The Times* (London), 28 October 1910.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 27 October 1910.

¹⁰² *Morning Post* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 20 October 1910; *Standard* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 October 1910; *Globe* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 27 October 1910.

¹⁰³ John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1921* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 106-107, 109, 112.

intellectual forbear of the Round Table movement, drew the distinction in an April 1910 letter attempting to convince Balfour to support federalism. He described devolution, or what he called “provincial Home Rule,” as “Ireland to the United Kingdom like Quebec to the rest of Canada.” Whereas Parnellite or “National Home Rule” would be “Ireland like Canada, virtually quite independent of the rest of the United Kingdom.”¹⁰⁴

Terminology that was sometimes used interchangeably was often interpreted in very different ways. Historian John Kendle asserts that some unionists viewed “devolution” or “federalism” as potentially positive, and most employed these terms synonymously. However, “federalism” was inaccurate to describe establishing a system of devolved, subordinate parliaments as the Westminster parliament would remain supreme, while federalism denotes equality. Another synonym for devolution was “home rule all round,” but unionists did not like this phrase as, to them, it implied the first step in the British Empire’s disintegration.¹⁰⁵ Further complicating the question of terminology, there was a difference between federalizing the United Kingdom and federalizing the Empire. The former would mean establishing local parliaments for England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, or any parts of those units as could be agreed upon. Each of these units would also send representatives to a supreme parliament at Westminster. Federalizing the Empire would involve setting up assemblies in each colony or dominion that did not currently possess one, and arranging that all of them send representatives to an Imperial Parliament in London. Some unionists supported a federal Empire, but not a federal UK.¹⁰⁶

Federalism would seem to mitigate the Irish unionist argument that they wanted equal treatment with the rest of the United Kingdom. If the whole country was to be federalized, unionists could not claim that their citizenship rights were being diluted. By contrast, *The Times* insisted, “It would pass the wit of man to contrive Parnellite Home Rule under which progressive Ulster and the retrograde South, Orangemen and Catholics, would live in peace.”¹⁰⁷ The *Morning Post* suggested that in a federal system there could be a separate parliament for Ulster.¹⁰⁸ Ian Malcolm wrote in *The Times* that, if Ireland must be given a “local parliament” at all, “the loyal North” must have one as well.¹⁰⁹ Again, British unionists implied that, if they

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution*, 112.

¹⁰⁵ Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution*, 107-108.

¹⁰⁶ L. S. Amery, “Imperial Federation and Home Rule,” *The Times* (London), 1 November 1910.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times* (London), 28 October 1910.

¹⁰⁸ *Morning Post* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 20 October 1910.

¹⁰⁹ Ian Malcolm, “Two Parliaments or None for Ireland,” *The Times* (London), 28 October 1910.

agreed with the liberals that the UK should be federalized, Irish unionists would have to accept either one or two Irish parliaments, whether they wanted them or not. William Redmond, John's brother and an Irish nationalist MP, responded to calls for a separate northern parliament with a reminder that the province was "at the very least half Nationalist," adding, "we do not want new and fresh divisions in Ireland but one law and free Government for all."¹¹⁰

British federalists seemed to gain unexpected allies within the IPP leadership. During a fundraising trip to North America, John Redmond and T. P. O'Connor made several statements that were interpreted as supporting federalism or "imperial home rule," as it was often called in Ireland. Historian Michael Wheatley interprets this as a sincere attempt to broaden nationalist minds to make them amenable to "home rule all round." According to Wheatley, the effort failed because it was at odds with the Irish nationalist rank-and-file's passionate adherence to Parnellite home rule.¹¹¹ However, most of Redmond's and O'Connor's statements employed mixed rhetoric that could be interpreted as supporting a range of positions.

In the October 1910 issue of New York's *McClure's Magazine*, Redmond wrote under the title, "What Ireland Wants," "We do not seek any alteration of the constitution or supremacy of the Imperial Parliament. We ask merely to be permitted to take our place in the ranks of those other portions of the British Empire—some twenty-eight in number—which, in their own purely local affairs, are governed by free representative institutions of their own."¹¹² Redmond was suggesting federalizing the British Empire, not the United Kingdom. Moreover, later in the article the nationalist leader asserted that "Ireland" wanted the same measure of self-government as "Canada, Australia, South Africa, and other portions of the Empire." This was consistent with what was called "colonial" and would later be called "dominion" home rule, a status within the Empire that conveyed more governmental authority than either of Gladstone's two bills. Redmond described the fight for these rights as "practically over," adding, "all that remains is to settle the exact terms on which the Treaty of Peace is to be drawn up."¹¹³

On October 5, Redmond told London's *Daily Express*, "Our demand for Home Rule does not mean that we want to break with the British Empire. We are entirely loyal to the Empire as

¹¹⁰ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 31 October 1910.

¹¹¹ Michael Wheatley, "John Redmond and Federalism in 1910," *Irish Historical Studies* 32, no. 127 (May 2001): 363-364.

¹¹² John Redmond, "What Ireland Wants," *McClure's Magazine* (Oct. 1910): 691.

¹¹³ Redmond, "What Ireland Wants," 696.

such, and we desire to strengthen the Imperial bonds through a Federal system of government... We do not demand such complete local independence as the British self-governing Colonies possess, for we are willing to forego the right to make our own tariff.” He added, “We are strongly in favor of a Federal Empire.”¹¹⁴ Again, the reference to federalism is a federalization of the Empire, not of the United Kingdom, as the *Daily Express* correspondent acknowledged.¹¹⁵ The references to imperial loyalty are consistent with statements Redmond and other IPP members made to assure the British public and politicians that they were not separatists. The line regarding the “self-governing Colonies” is a backtracking from his statements about wanting the same rights as dominions, but this too was designed to allay British fears, especially as tariff reform was a divisive issue in Britain at the time.

T. P. O’Connor’s federalist statements were more explicit. He declared himself in favor of federalizing both the Empire and the United Kingdom. However, when outlining his idea of UK federalism he described the parliaments for England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales as “national and local chambers,” indicating a belief that federal home rule could satisfy nationalist aspirations.¹¹⁶ In Ottawa, O’Connor declared, “his mission was to secure Canada’s approval of a federal scheme of government for the four Kingdoms of the British Isles, such as the provinces in Canada enjoy under a central Government.”¹¹⁷ This is similar to a statement Redmond made in New York when he described home rule as, “something like you have here, where Federal affairs are governed by the Federal Government and State affairs by the State Government.”¹¹⁸ Both quotations tried to explain home rule by making analogies to local systems of government.

The IPP’s home rule rhetoric had always been so all-encompassing as to promise all things to all people.¹¹⁹ Nationalist leaders promised their Irish followers that self-government would mean the overturning of landlordism and the end of English interference in their affairs. They assured British audiences that home rule would not be a disruption to their lives or to the Empire. To Americans and Canadians, they insisted that they were only asking for the type of government already operating in those countries; a useful formula for conveying that home rule

¹¹⁴ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,236/16, J. W. T. Mason to John Redmond, 17 October 1910; *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 October 1910.

¹¹⁵ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,236/16, J. W. T. Mason to John Redmond, 18 October 1910.

¹¹⁶ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 17 October 1910.

¹¹⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 5 October 1910.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Wheatley, “John Redmond and Federalism 1910,” 354.

¹¹⁹ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 9-10; O’Day, *Irish Home Rule*, 309.

would be beneficial to its citizens and innocuous to others. It is also likely that Redmond and O'Connor knew that there was a groundswell of support in Britain for federalizing the United Kingdom. They may have hoped to pose themselves as willing participants in a federal solution in order to maximize concessions to Ireland should the British parties agree to enforce it.

Whatever their intent, Redmond's and O'Connor's statements caused an uproar in Ireland, particularly among the nationalist press opposed to their party.¹²⁰ On October 17, the *Irish Independent* called home rule all round, "an attempt to sidetrack Home Rule for Ireland. It is an effort to save the Liberal Party from being compelled to redeem Mr. Asquith's Albert Hall pledge." The paper added, "Gladstone's Home Rule is the minimum."¹²¹ A letter to the *Independent* called home rule all round, "an insidious, but destructive attack upon the principle of Irish Nationality."¹²² The writer was correct in assuming that some federalists wanted to deny any acknowledgment of Irish nationalism. John Sweetman of Sinn Féin also wrote that accepting a devolved assembly comparable to that of a U.S. state would undermine the idea of Irish nationalism, "it would be as absurd, under this system of Federation, to call Ireland a self-governing nation, as it would be to call Minnesota a self-governing nation."¹²³

Redmond's statements angered nationalists, and gained him little credence with unionists. Arthur Walsh of London wrote in *The Times*, "Unionists will not be deceived by Mr. Redmond's protestations of loyalty to the British Empire; they know very well that 'national independence' is and always has been that gentleman's motto."¹²⁴ The IPP leader repudiated the *Daily Express* interview, claiming that the reporter had put words in his mouth.¹²⁵ In a further statement, Redmond said home rule all round might be achieved, but Ireland must come first. He added, "the Irish Party and I stand on the question of Home Rule precisely where Parnell stood, and have not, and never will, recede one inch from the position he took up."¹²⁶

Irish unionists added their voices to the anti-federalist chorus. On October 22, 1910, the UUC declared, "Any plan of Federation would be fatal to the civil and religious liberties of the loyal minority in Ireland, would overwhelm the prosperous commercial and manufacturing

¹²⁰ Wheatley, "John Redmond and Federalism 1910," 356-360.

¹²¹ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 17 October 1910.

¹²² James Doyle, "Imperial Home Rule," *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 27 October 1910.

¹²³ John Sweetman, "Federal Home Rule," *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 October 1910.

¹²⁴ Arthur Walsh, "Mr. Redmond and Home Rule," *The Times* (London), 20 October 1910.

¹²⁵ *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 October 1910.

¹²⁶ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 19 October 1910. A draft of this statement is in NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,236/16.

portions of that island with ruinous financial burdens, would render further progress in land purchase impossible for want of funds, would imperil Imperial defence, and would prove to be the first step in the disintegration of the Empire.”¹²⁷ This statement encapsulates all of the Irish unionists’ arguments against any form of home rule, indicating that they saw federalism as identical. A member of the Grand Black Chapter, an Orange organization, wrote, “The scheme of Federal Home Rule was simply a kite sent up by the Nationalists to see how the wind was blowing.”¹²⁸ Southern unionist Richard Bagwell wrote that proponents of a separate parliament for Ulster forgot “there are plenty of loyalists outside of Ulster,” who would be worse off if the northern province had its own legislature.¹²⁹ Abercorn tried to discard the idea of separating the north from the rest of Ireland when he wrote, “If anybody thinks that Ulster can be bought off by a separate Legislature for the province, let him abandon the idea. Ulster will never abandon the loyalists of the other provinces, and it will always prove loyal to England.”¹³⁰

British unionists also began to speak out against federalism. The *Spectator* denounced “The breaking up of the United Kingdom under the alias of Federalism,” adding that such a solution “will not come to pass unless the people of this country are bent upon their own destruction.”¹³¹ Despite his previous overture to Redmond, Walter Long declared against federalism on October 29. He wrote, “Home Rule in any form would be a danger to the Empire, would imperil the growing prosperity of Ireland, and would involve the most cowardly betrayal of a vast number of our fellow-subjects.”¹³² Hugh Cecil voiced unalterable opposition to a federated United Kingdom, though he was not against federalizing the Empire.¹³³

Balfour privately made it known that he was as opposed to the federal idea as any other form of Irish self-government. He wrote to F. S. Oliver on October 22 that any scheme satisfactory to the Irish nationalists would confer a parliament, an executive, and control of the police. There would be no way of controlling Ireland, “short of two Army Corps, or a Naval Blockade.” Alluding to the idea of separating Ulster from the rest of the island, he asked, “Is Ireland to form one province or two? If you prefer the latter, will any Nationalist, of any type,

¹²⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 October 1910.

¹²⁸ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 1 November 1910.

¹²⁹ R. Bagwell, “Two Parliaments or None for Ireland,” *The Times* (London), 31 October 1910.

¹³⁰ Abercorn, “Irish Unionists and Home Rule,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 11 November 1910.

¹³¹ *Spectator* (London), 22 October 1910.

¹³² Walter Long, “Unionists and Home Rule,” *The Times* (London), 29 October 1910.

¹³³ Hugh Cecil, “Good Federalism and Bad,” *The Times* (London), 4 November 1910.

accept this administrative solution?”¹³⁴ In short, Balfour pointed out that federalizing the United Kingdom would involve all of the dangers of Irish home rule, with the added complications of setting up local parliaments all over Britain.

As the Unionist Party leader, Balfour’s rejection of federalism meant that Lloyd George’s idea for a coalition government fell by the wayside. The members of the constitutional conference came to tentative agreements that would leave the Lords’ powers largely intact. The conference agreed that legislation would be divided into ordinary and constitutional categories. If the Commons and Lords disagreed on constitutional legislation, it would require a referendum to pass. The Unionists wanted home rule classified as constitutional legislation, but the Liberals refused, likely due to Asquith’s home rule pledge. This marked an impasse, and the conference broke up.¹³⁵ The government prepared to move forward with the veto resolutions, which had been formulated into the Parliament Bill. The next steps were to dissolve Parliament and call a general election. Unionists blamed Redmond for the entire crisis, and for forcing a second poll in less than a year. The *Daily Telegraph* dubbed him the “Dollar Dictator,” and predicted that the government would be “deeply damaged” in the polls by their association with him.¹³⁶ The *Daily Mail* called on “moderate men of all parties” to unite against “the scandal and peril of an Irish dictatorship subsidised by the gold of American Fenians.”¹³⁷

Unbeknownst to most at the time, after the breakdown of the conference, Asquith met with the King on November 16, 1910. The monarch agreed that, if the government won the upcoming election, he would create as many peers as necessary to pass the Parliament Bill.¹³⁸ The IPP leadership were among those in the know; T. P. O’Connor learned of the King’s promise to Asquith from Alec Murray, the Master of Elibank and chief government whip, on December 21. Thus, the Irish nationalists received the election results secure in the knowledge that the government had the power to deprive the Lords of their veto on home rule. O’Connor did not foresee any complications from the northern unionists, as he commented, “Of course we

¹³⁴ Quoted in Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution*, 121-122.

¹³⁵ Copy of Sir R. Finlay’s Notes of the Meeting of the Unionist Leaders to hear Balfour’s Report of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Conference, 18 December 1910 in *Politics from Inside*, 295-296.

¹³⁶ *Daily Telegraph* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 15 November 1910.

¹³⁷ *Daily Mail* (London), reprinted in the *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 December 1910.

¹³⁸ Reginald Brett [pseud. Viscount Esher], *The Captains and the Kings Depart: Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1938) I:33-34, entry for 19 November 1910.

shall have difficulties over the details of the bill—especially with regard to finance; but the Govt I believe, will be as reasonable as well as we.”¹³⁹

Home Rule Resistance, Religion, and Separate Treatment for Ulster

Unionist electoral rhetoric highlighted the government’s alleged deference to the Irish nationalists, whom they portrayed as corrupt and under foreign influence. Edward Carson said on November 17 that the government was “selling this country for American dollars,” adding that Irish unionists depended on the Imperial Parliament to protect their “civil and religious liberties.” Carson also announced that the Irish unionist MPs had agreed that he should publicly reject calls for the northern province to have its own parliament, “Ulster would never be a party to separate treatment.”¹⁴⁰ Later that month, Carson warned a Belfast audience that under home rule unionists would be a “permanent minority,” unable to influence economic policy and without the prospect that elections would change their position.¹⁴¹

While the Irish unionist leader spoke of maintaining the bonds between Britain and Ireland, Balfour appealed more directly to British nationalism. After denouncing the Irish nationalists and home rule he said, “Great Britain shall manage the affairs of Great Britain; and that if and when we alter the fabric of our immortal Constitution it shall be of our own free will and not at the bidding of those who care nothing for our Constitution and nothing for our history.”¹⁴² The assumption was that, though Irish nationalists had the right to sit in Parliament, they were not to exercise the same powers and in the same ways as their British colleagues.

On November 28, the UUC announced that they were opening an arms fund to resist home rule. Their announcement read, “we shall feel ourselves justified in resorting to any means that may be found necessary to enable us to preserve unimpaired our equal citizenship of the United Kingdom.”¹⁴³ Before the week was out reports indicated that the Council was seeking quotes for arms and ammunition.¹⁴⁴ Joseph Devlin, Irish nationalist MP for West Belfast, dismissed these threats of “revolution” as designed to frighten British voters.¹⁴⁵ On Christmas

¹³⁹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,215/2, T. P. O’Connor to John Redmond, 22 December 1910.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Carson at Nottingham, *The Times* (London), 18 November 1910.

¹⁴¹ Edward Carson in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 29 November 1910.

¹⁴² Arthur Balfour at Nottingham, *The Times* (London), 18 November 1910.

¹⁴³ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 30 November 1910.

¹⁴⁴ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 3 December 1910.

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Devlin in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 1 December 1910.

Eve, leading northern unionist James Craig said that “Ulster,” “would not remain loyal if it came to tampering with its ancient rights and breaking up the Constitution.” He added that they would soon form unionist clubs across the province, and suggested that young men learn military drill.¹⁴⁶

Unionist activists forcefully injected religious rhetoric into the home rule debate during the election. In mid-November 1910, the London-based Protestant Alliance issued a manifesto describing the IPP as the “Irish Roman Catholic party,” alleging that they were using Irish-American money “to cripple, and, if possible, bring disaster upon the British Empire.” It concluded, “The predominating question is, Who is to rule Britain, King or Pope?”¹⁴⁷ More than 2,000 British nonconformists signed a declaration describing Irish self-government as “a menace to the rights of Protestant minorities in Ireland.”¹⁴⁸ The Anglican Bishop of Durham said it was “disquieting” that more nonconformists were not speaking out against “the surrender of the Protestant and other loyalists of Ireland to a rule which must be largely Roman and Parnellite.”¹⁴⁹ At a meeting in Scotland, an audience member asked Asquith, “Will you be prepared to permit the soldiers of the Crown to shoot down any of the Protestant minority in Ireland if, and when, the latter take up arms in defence of their present liberties?” Asquith refused to answer. Interestingly, while the questioner referred to the whole island, *The Times* placed this exchange under the heading “Ulster Protestants,” emphasizing the northern province as the locus of anti-home rule sentiment, to the exclusion of unionists elsewhere.¹⁵⁰

In the first week of December, a group of Irish Presbyterians appealed to British nonconformists to vote against home rule candidates as a means of defending of civil and religious liberty.¹⁵¹ On December 15, the Church of Ireland General Synod’s Standing Committee announced, “the great body of clergy, as well as the laity, of the Church are as much opposed as ever to the introduction of any measure of Home Rule.”¹⁵² In the midst of these political pronouncements by Protestant religious officials and organizations, *The Times* asserted that the Catholic Church “effectively guides the government of three-fourths of Ireland.”¹⁵³ The

¹⁴⁶ James Craig at Hillhall, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 December 1910.

¹⁴⁷ *The Times* (London), 18 November 1910.

¹⁴⁸ *The Times* (London), 15 December 1910.

¹⁴⁹ Handley Dunelm, “Home Rule and British Nonconformity,” *The Times* (London), 14 December 1910.

¹⁵⁰ *The Times* (London), 9 December 1910.

¹⁵¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 8 December 1910.

¹⁵² *Irish Times* (Dublin), 16 December 1910.

¹⁵³ *The Times* (London), 9 December 1910.

implication was that, while Protestant clergy and laity involving themselves in politics on religious grounds was natural, the involvement of Catholic clergy or ideas was inherently different, authoritarian, and unwelcome.

There was pushback against the idea of home rule as a religious issue. Protestant home ruler Pierce O'Mahony protested the Church of Ireland's statement against self-government.¹⁵⁴ A correspondent to the *Irish Times* who signed as "An Irish Protestant" identified himself as a unionist but deplored the extreme rhetoric his fellows used against home rule, "this exaggerated way of speaking, to say nothing of threats of armed violence, merely makes Irish Protestants and Unionists look ridiculous in the eyes of the world."¹⁵⁵

Stephen Gwynn, a Protestant nationalist MP, wrote that the Bishop of Durham's letter implied that Catholics were incapable of dealing fairly with Protestants, therefore a majority-Catholic country could not be trusted with self-government. By contrast, Gwynn insisted, "there is no quality upon which the Catholic Irish pride themselves more, or more justly, than upon their tolerance."¹⁵⁶ Robert Anderson, a Presbyterian theologian who had been a London police official during the Fenian outbreaks, responded that it was not "their Catholic fellow-countrymen" that Irish Protestants feared, it was their church. However, he also disparaged individual Catholics when he wrote, "an executive dependent on the votes of the ignorant electorate in Roman Catholic Ireland would be helplessly in the power of the hierarchy and priesthood of that Church."¹⁵⁷ T. W. Russell, a Presbyterian and Unionist-turned-Liberal, argued that Irish Protestants feared the societal and economic consequences of self-government. He said, "many Protestants were seriously alarmed lest the whole system should be reversed—lest having enjoyed everything for centuries, a new *régime* might relegate them to the position in which the Roman Catholics were so long placed." Russell added that such fears were not baseless, but Protestant representation in the home rule parliament and bureaucracy would adequately safeguard them.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Pierce O'Mahony, "The Church of Ireland and Home Rule," *Irish Times* (Dublin), 19 December 1910.

¹⁵⁵ An Irish Protestant [pseud.], "The Finance of Home Rule," *Irish Times* (Dublin), 20 December 1910.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Gwynn, "The Position of Protestants under Home Rule," *The Times* (London), 24 December 1910. This letter was also printed in the *Irish Times* of the same date.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Anderson, "The Position of Protestants under Home Rule," *The Times* (London), 26 December 1910. This letter was also printed in the *Irish Times* of the same date.

¹⁵⁸ T. W. Russell in Dublin, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 8 November 1910.

These exchanges show that, from the beginning of the third home rule crisis, British Protestants were actively involved in defining the conflict over home rule as a religious one. At the same time, Irish Protestant unionists knew that they depended on British sentiment to defeat home rule. They were equally aware that they could draw on chauvinistic British Protestantism and anti-Catholicism to support their defense of the Union. Even Liberals like Russell agreed that legislative safeguards for the Protestant minority were necessary. Irish nationalist leaders consistently agreed to provide them, but the inference that Catholics could not be trusted to treat people of minority faiths fairly was an ever-present feature of anti-home rule discourse.

After the election, Ulster nationalist leader Joseph Devlin quipped that there were more Protestants in the IPP than there were British Catholics in the entire House of Commons, implying that religious minorities in Ireland were better represented than in any other part of the United Kingdom.¹⁵⁹ He was correct. According to John Dillon, after the December 1910 election there were fourteen Protestants among the seventy-four IPP MPs.¹⁶⁰ Combined with the nineteen Irish Unionists—all of whom were Protestant—and one AFIL MP, Protestants held thirty-four of the 103 Irish seats. Catholics sat for just eight of the 567 British constituencies at Westminster.¹⁶¹ By population, Irish Protestants were over-represented in Parliament. They comprised approximately 25 percent of Ireland's population but held 33 percent of Irish seats. British Catholics were under-represented at more than 5 percent of the population and 1.4 percent of legislative representatives.¹⁶²

Polemical religious rhetoric failed to turn the electorate against the government in December 1910. There were few changes in the prospects of any party, but the alterations actually increased Redmond's influence in British politics. The Unionists and Liberal Unionists held fast at 273 seats. The Liberals lost four representatives and ended up with 271 in the new Parliament. Labour gained two seats for a total of forty-two. The IPP seized two constituencies to rise to seventy-four, both of them from the Irish unionists, who now held nineteen seats. William O'Brien's AFIL remained at eight successful candidates. Overall, the poll changed little

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Devlin at Grimsby, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 15 July 1912.

¹⁶⁰ John Dillon at Salford, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 22 November 1911.

¹⁶¹ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 19 December 1910.

¹⁶² For an estimate of the British Catholic population see Clive D. Field, "The Faith Society? Quantifying Religious Belonging in Edwardian Britain, 1901-1914," *Journal of Religious History* 37, no. 1 (March 2013): 53.

from the January election. The only result was that Asquith's Liberals would be slightly more dependent on the IPP and Labour in close votes.

After the December election, Redmond's policy was clear: he simply had to hold firm and support Asquith in steering the Parliament Bill through the Commons, after which the Prime Minister would introduce home rule. Carson hoped to inject some bellicosity into the Unionist Party. He wrote to Lady Londonderry that he wanted "a policy with principle and a fight for everything we believe in."¹⁶³ Carson intended to visit Ulster, "to know whether men are desperately in earnest and prepared to make great sacrifices." Of the government's policy toward the Lords he wrote, "I earnestly hope that all the bitterest hate of the innate savagery of the human being will be brought to play on those who are prepared to adopt the role of vandals—I never felt more savage—I only wish I was younger and stronger for the fight!"¹⁶⁴

Spectator editor John St. Loe Strachey suggested a policy that Carson might adopt. On Christmas Eve he published an article arguing that if the "Home-rule principle" was conceded, what he called "North-East Ulster" should agitate for a separate parliament. He recognized that "Ulstermen" did not want this, and had resisted making it a part of their strategy, but argued that they should change their minds. Strachey justified separating some portion of the northern province from the rest of the island on racial, religious, and political grounds. He wrote, "Ireland never was a single political unit, nor, again, is Ireland a homogeneous country, or even a country in which there is always a local majority of Nationalists and Roman Catholics of the Celtic or Iberian race." By contrast, "In Belfast and the counties of North-East Ulster the local majority, in many cases in overwhelming numbers, are Protestant in religion, Teutonic, or at any rate English-speaking, in origin, and anti-Nationalist in politics." Strachey acknowledged that northern unionists were concerned for the fate of their compatriots elsewhere in Ireland, and argued that agitating for self-government "will almost certainly destroy the chances of a Home-rule Bill being passed," as, "unless the Dublin Parliament has got the rich city of Belfast and the manufacturing districts of the North to tax, it will be bankrupt within six months."¹⁶⁵

Strachey did not identify a geographic area as "North-East Ulster." He included no statistics of census or election results to justify his statements regarding the wishes of the people

¹⁶³ PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/59, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 23 December 1910.

¹⁶⁴ PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/60, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 13 January 1911.

¹⁶⁵ *Spectator* (London), 24 December 1910.

there. His article was not a search for a solution to the “Ulster problem,” it was a purely political appeal. He encouraged northern unionists to advocate separating themselves from the rest of Ireland in order to defeat home rule entirely. Strachey’s article identifies one of the basic problems in grappling with the idea of partition: what unit to use. If one’s starting-point is Ireland, it is obvious from election results that nationalists form a majority there. Strachey, like most unionists, used the United Kingdom as his unit. Nationalists were a mere “local majority” in Ireland, but remained a minority throughout the UK. If nationalists argued that they were entitled to self-government, they could not deny the same treatment to another local majority, this time in Ulster. If one takes this reasoning to its logical conclusion, nationalists in the northern province also deserved self-government, or at least a choice as to which government they wished to join. This is likely why Strachey did not specify a geographical area or quote statistics, as to do so would acknowledge that there were Catholic and nationalist populations in every part of Ulster. He was more sensitive to this issue than most of his contemporaries, as adding the qualifier “North-East” to “Ulster” acknowledges that there were majority-nationalist parts of the province. Most unionist rhetoric concerning Ulster was phrased to portray the entire province as Protestant and unionist.

The *Spectator*’s appeal drew a number of responses. *The Times* and *Irish Times* printed extracts from the article. An anonymous letter supposedly from a UUC secretary stated that he and his colleagues “are in honour bound not to desert their fellow-Unionists of the South and West.” He admitted that Redmond would likely reject a home rule bill excluding Ulster, which he called, “the future milch-cow of the Nationalist Parliament.” The writer added on behalf of Irish unionists, “we claim direct representation in the British House of Commons, and, except in local matters, to be governed by its direct authority.”¹⁶⁶ This claim to direct governance from Westminster precluded a parliament for Ulster, or any part of it.

Samuel M. Miller of Mountstewart, Co. Tyrone, attempted to put a geographic definition to Strachey’s proposals, though his letter made clear that he was really searching for justifications to exclude all of Ulster from home rule. He assumed that “North-East Ulster” meant the four counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry. However, he described Fermanagh and Tyrone as “half Unionist” with majority-unionist county councils, and noted that

¹⁶⁶ One of the Hon. Secretaries, Ulster Unionist Council [pseud.], “An Appeal to Ulster,” *Spectator* (London), 31 December 1910.

there were “strong and extremely militant Protestant minorities” in Cavan and Monaghan. Miller had no justification for keeping Donegal out of home rule, except that if it were included it would be physically cut off from the rest of the area of nationalist governance. Strachey responded that there should be a poll of each Ulster county gauging whether the population wanted to be governed from Dublin or Belfast. The resulting “geographic chaos” would render the home rule project impossible, “You cannot apply the principle of local autonomy fairly and safely in Ireland without a *reductio ad absurdum*. Therefore you had better leave the Union alone.”¹⁶⁷

The most militant response came from Leslie D’Esse of London. He wrote that though he had left the northern province as a boy, he identified as an “Ulsterman.” His family were “Anglo-Normans” involved in the original conquest of Ireland, who had “kept our blood pure from Celtic taint; we loathe mixed marriages.” D’Esse referred to unionists as England’s “garrison” who would be “betrayed” by the passage of home rule. He predicted that if the British Army were sent to Ireland to force home rule on the unionists, the soldiers would quickly join them in a civil war against the nationalists. D’Esse wrote, “At the end will be a new Ireland—a separate State—purged of the Celt, but hating and despising England more bitterly than America did a century ago.”¹⁶⁸ This apocalyptic vision likely confirmed Strachey’s belief that a movement for separating Ulster from a home rule Ireland would expose too many problems for self-government to be enacted.

By February 1911 Strachey was even more insistent that, if home rule passed, “separate treatment” should be accorded to some part of Ulster, whether anyone there wanted it or not. He wrote, “this matter cannot be wholly left to the men in the North.” English and Scottish unionists had a right to advocate separate treatment. If the government framed a home rule measure with ample safeguards for Ulster, the right of unionists there to resist it, and of British unionists to support them in doing so, would be diminished. Strachey defined the area to be afforded separate treatment as, “Belfast and that part of north-east Ulster in which there is a Protestant majority.” He still did not say how that area was to be determined.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Samuel M. Miller, Letter to the editor, *Spectator* (London), 31 December 1910. Strachey’s editorial comments are at the end of this letter and in the magazine’s “News of the Week” section.

¹⁶⁸ Leslie D’Esse, Letter to the editor, *Spectator* (London), 31 December 1910.

¹⁶⁹ *Spectator* (London), 25 February 1911.

Carson did not adopt Strachey's suggested course. His plan for an energetic offensive against home rule consisted of a campaign to win over British opinion. The thin margins between the parties after both 1910 elections may have encouraged him in this strategy. Carson told a UUC meeting in Belfast in January 1911, "He believed in his heart that the English and Scotch people hated Home Rule." He announced, "Now was the time for action. There was not a moment to be lost in setting about educating the English people on this question."¹⁷⁰ The *Irish Times* later asserted that unionist policy should be to, "bring home to the English people the Nationalist Party's unfitness for self-government."¹⁷¹ There were prominent potential sympathizers in Britain. London's *Standard* asserted, "Ulster knows very well that Home Rule means Rome rule, whatever people like Mr. Redmond and T. P. O'Connor may say." The paper was certain that the Catholic Church would be the determining influence in an Irish state, "From the first the priests will 'boss' the elections, and they will dictate the policy of the Government." Home rule would face determined resistance from the northern unionists that British people should support, "against a Dublin Parliament's rule it is certain that Ulster would fight, and who will say that Ulster would be wrong?"¹⁷² Despite such statements, there are no indications that the government or the Irish nationalists were taking threats of unionist resistance to home rule seriously. Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell told Wilfrid Blunt in January 1911, "the only real difficulty now in Home Rule was the financial one."¹⁷³

There were signs that the anti-home rule movement might take on a more serious character than platform rhetoric. In March 1911, the RIC began investigating press reports of Orangemen drilling near Aghadrumsee, Co. Fermanagh. District Inspector James McMahon reported, "there is hardly anything in the case," and the incident was "got up for bluster and bravado in order that it would get into the Press of the United Kingdom to show what determined fellows the Orangemen of Aghadrumsee are in opposition to the anticipated Home Rule Bill." He said the rector of the local Protestant church had assembled young men for shooting matches, but no drilling took place.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the reports continued, and eventually reached Birrell's

¹⁷⁰ Edward Carson in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 31 January 1911.

¹⁷¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 December 1911.

¹⁷² *Standard* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 11 January 1911.

¹⁷³ Blunt, *My Diaries*, II:336, entry for 28 January 1911.

¹⁷⁴ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, Report of DI James McMahon, 6 April 1911.

desk. He ordered the RIC to watch such activity, adding, "I am not disposed to treat the 'armed force' movement as ridiculous."¹⁷⁵

The Parliament Act Passed

As the Parliament Bill wended its way through Westminster, a rift developed in the Unionist Party over the lengths of acceptable resistance to the measure. Their dilemma was that the bill would certainly pass the Commons with Liberal, Labour, and IPP support. When it reached the Unionist-dominated House of Lords, they could accept it and avoid Asquith's threat to advise the King to create peers. Or, the upper house could reject the bill and gamble that the monarch would not consent to create new liberal peers. Those unionists advocating the latter course were called "die-hards" or "ditchers," after George Wyndham swore that they would "die in the last ditch" fighting against the Parliament Bill.¹⁷⁶ This faction included Lords Salisbury, Selborne, and Hugh Cecil, as well as Carson, Chamberlain, and F. E. Smith; all apparently staunch opponents of home rule. The term "die-hards," referring to uncompromising Unionists, survived long after the Parliament Bill controversy, though the size and personnel of the group to which it referred varied. The problem with their position regarding the House of Lords in 1911 was that, under the Parliament Bill, the upper house could delay legislation for two years, during which time the opposition in the Commons might force a general election. If the King created several hundred new liberal peers, the Lords could pass government-sponsored legislation immediately, therefore there was a clear incentive for Unionists to let the bill pass.

Everyone involved in the debate knew that home rule was the main issue at stake. Unionists in the Lords attempted to insert an amendment into the Parliament Bill that would exclude any measure to establish "a National Parliament or Assembly or a National Council" in any part of the United Kingdom. In his speech moving the amendment, Lord Lansdowne said that the electors had twice rejected home rule, referring to the elections that followed the 1886 and 1893 bills that resulted in Liberal defeats. He added that the December 1910 election had not given the government a mandate to introduce a measure for Irish self-government, which would become a standard unionist argument.¹⁷⁷ Writing in *The Times*, Hugh Cecil warned that

¹⁷⁵ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, Minute of Chief Secretary, 25 April 1911.

¹⁷⁶ Lord Balcarras [pseud. David Lindsay, Earl of Crawford], *The Crawford Papers*, 196, entry for 21 July 1911.

¹⁷⁷ Lord Lansdowne, "Parliament Bill," House of Lords Debates (HL Deb) 4 July 1911 vol 9 cc100-92, Hansard 1803-2005.

creating peers would “destroy the Constitution” and release those opposed to the government from any moral obligation to follow any laws passed under such circumstances, paving the way for a revolution.¹⁷⁸

In July 1911, the secret that Asquith already had the King’s promise to create enough peers to pass the Parliament Bill began to slip out. Balfour was willing to consent to the King creating 150 peers to equalize the parties in the Lords, but it would take between 300 and 400 to “swamp” the upper house and enable the government to pass its full slate of legislation without effective resistance. The Unionists did not believe that the King would consent to this.¹⁷⁹ On July 5, Viscount Esher told Balfour that this was the case. Foreshadowing the possibility of extra-parliamentary resistance to such a change to the character of the Lords, the Unionist leader promised to “do his utmost to keep the struggle within the limits of party conflict.”¹⁸⁰ Balfour called the promise to create peers, given before the election, a “shocking scandal.”¹⁸¹ *The Times* again blamed Redmond, writing that the Prime Minister had “played a contemptible part in subservience to an avowedly disloyal faction.”¹⁸² When Asquith stood to speak in the Commons on July 24, some Unionist MPs interjected, calling him a traitor and asking for Redmond or “the Dictator,” indicating that the Irish nationalist leader was the real Prime Minister.¹⁸³

When the House of Lords voted on the Parliament Bill, most Unionist members abstained and left the chamber in protest.¹⁸⁴ The measure passed and became an act without the creation of hundreds of liberal peers. Lucy Masterman called it, “the biggest constitutional Revolution since 1688.”¹⁸⁵ While this is likely true, the Unionist Lords allowing the bill to pass meant that they retained the power to delay controversial legislation for two years. Moreover, partisan feeling was extraordinarily high, and the Liberal government was preparing to introduce more legislation that would provoke emotional and combative responses. Many Unionists held that

¹⁷⁸ Hugh Cecil, “The Lords and the Parliament Bill,” *The Times* (London), 5 July 1911.

¹⁷⁹ Lord Balcarras, *The Crawford Papers*, 195-196, entries for 19 July and 21 July 1911.

¹⁸⁰ Reginald Brett [pseud. Viscount Esher] to the King, 5 July 1911, in *The Captains and the Kings Depart*, I:54.

¹⁸¹ Arthur Balfour to Mary Elcho, 16 July 1911 in Jane Ridley and Clayre Percy, eds., *The Letters of Arthur Balfour and Lady Elcho, 1885-1917* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), 266.

¹⁸² *The Times* (London), 22 July 1911.

¹⁸³ “Parliament Bill,” House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 24 July 1911 vol 28 cc1467-84; L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1953), I:379-380.

¹⁸⁴ John Morley, *Recollections*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1917), II:354-356.

¹⁸⁵ Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 153.

the constitution they had known no longer functioned. Therefore, they did not have to observe the normal course of the law in opposing measures passed under the Parliament Act.¹⁸⁶

Die-hard dissent within the Unionist Party led to Balfour's deposition from the leadership. He was replaced by Andrew Bonar Law, the son of an Ulster-born Presbyterian minister. Bonar Law was born in New Brunswick, now part of Canada, and raised between there and Scotland. He had few qualities that designated him as a natural Unionist Party leader. John Maynard Keynes described him as, "almost devoid of Conservative principles. This Presbyterian from Canada has no imaginative reverence for the traditions and symbols of the past, no special care for vested interests, no attachment whatever to the Upper Classes, the City, the Army, or the Church."¹⁸⁷ Bonar Law's main attraction was that he was not Austen Chamberlain or Walter Long, his two rivals for the post. Their differing policies, characters, and disdain for one another were likely to exacerbate tensions within an already fractured party, while Bonar Law was a comparatively neutral choice.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, his support of Irish unionists gave him added value among what was soon to be the most active section of his party. Bonar Law requested, and received, Carson's blessing before putting his name forward for the leadership.¹⁸⁹ Ronald McNeill wrote that Balfour's resignation had been "regarded in Ulster as a calamity," but the new leader soon proved himself to the northern unionists.¹⁹⁰

Conclusions

Between December 1909 and July 1911, political dynamics in the United Kingdom changed fundamentally. At the beginning of this period, no major British party advocated Irish self-government. Even if a home rule bill passed the Commons, it would be vetoed in the House of Lords. As a constitutional crisis developed over the 1909 budget, Irish nationalist leader John Redmond seized the opportunity to extract a commitment on home rule from Asquith's government. This pledge was hesitant, grudging, and went against the instincts of Asquith and several of his Cabinet ministers. Far from being allies, the IPP and the Liberals were only

¹⁸⁶ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 April 1912; Lord Selborne, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 27 September 1912; United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/1/10, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, July 1913.

¹⁸⁷ Keynes, *Essays in Biography*, 42.

¹⁸⁸ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955), 77-85.

¹⁸⁹ Ian Colvin, *The Life of Lord Carson*, 3 vols. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), II:108.

¹⁹⁰ Ronald McNeill, *Ulster's Stand for Union* (London: John Murray, 1922), 60.

incidental partners with a mutual interest in reducing the Lords' power. Both Liberals and Unionists resented Irish nationalists' influence in United Kingdom politics. If either of the two major attempts at compromise between the British parties—the constitutional conference or Lloyd George's proposal for a coalition government—had been successful, there would have been no Parliament Act and no home rule bill. A compromise might mean federal home rule, but only after a delay while a scheme was worked out for the rest of the United Kingdom, and with fewer legislative powers than the Irish parliaments envisaged in either of Gladstone's bills.

As it happened, Redmond achieved his major goal of the years 1910 and 1911: a reduction of the power of the House of Lords. In addition, the IPP held the balance of power at Westminster. However, there were residual effects. Some Unionists maintained that the constitution they had known was no longer in force, therefore they were not bound to constitutional methods of resistance to measures supported by those who had carried out the destruction. The imminent introduction of home rule legislation mobilized its opponents in Ireland, particularly in Ulster. Threats of civil war were aired in public, and unionists prepared to resist Irish self-government both in and out of Parliament. This prompted suggestions to divide Ireland into separate administrative units. In short, unionists were already searching for radical methods for halting further constitutional changes.

As unionist politics radicalized over the next two years, Redmond's lack of real British allies undermined his position. Irish nationalists were committed to self-government for all of Ireland, an ambition that most Liberals viewed with ambivalence, at best. Conversely, the threat of home rule and the failure of compromise drove British and Irish unionists into a much closer alliance than prior to the passage of the Parliament Act. British unionists who had been prepared to sacrifice their Irish counterparts by advocating a federal scheme were not prepared to do so faced with a full home rule bill brought by Asquith's Liberal government. While it appeared that Redmond was complete master of the situation in July 1911, he faced a united opposition increasingly willing to countenance violence to prevent his goals.

CHAPTER 2
“PREPARED TO MAKE GREAT SACRIFICES:”
REACTIONS TO THE HOME RULE BILL, JULY 1911-DECEMBER 1912

Introduction

The imminent introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill caused Irish unionists and nationalists to react in very different ways. Irish nationalists had high expectations for the new legislation. However, the bill was framed by Asquith’s government to satisfy British party concerns rather than Irish nationalist ones. Unionists insisted that no bill entailing any form of home rule could possibly be acceptable, regardless of the safeguards it might contain. Prior to the measure’s introduction, Ulster unionists, under Edward Carson’s leadership, declared that they would institute a provisional government for the province—or some part of it—rather than submit to home rule. This implied the administrative separation of this undetermined area from the rest of Ireland, though “separate treatment” was not official Unionist Party policy. The announcement that Winston Churchill intended to hold a home rule meeting in Belfast prompted the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) to organize against it. The stoppage of the meeting seemed to show that the northern unionists could control parts of the province, even against United Kingdom Cabinet members.

Historians debate how effectively the Third Home Rule Bill addressed Irish nationalist aspirations. Some assert that Irish nationalists welcomed the measure enthusiastically.¹ Others claim that the actual stipulations of any home rule bill mattered little; far more important were the symbols of nationhood that would accompany the establishment of an Irish parliament.² Michael Wheatley points out that there was some pushback against the bill, but argues that reactions were “significantly” more positive than negative.³ Alvin Jackson asserts that there was “immediate dissatisfaction” with the bill, largely due to its financial provisions.⁴

¹ Thomas Bartlett, “When Histories Collide: The Third Home Rule Bill for Ireland,” in *The Home Rule Crisis, 1912-14*, ed. Gabriel Doherty (Cork: Mercier, 2014), 24; Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 31-32; Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971), 201-202; Dermot Meleady, *John Redmond: The National Leader* (Dublin: Merrion, 2014), 215.

² James McConnel, *The Irish Parliamentary Party and the Third Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013), 223-225, 240; Alan O’Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 240.

³ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 164.

⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111.

I argue that many nationalists were dissatisfied with the stipulations of the Third Home Rule Bill due to a crisis of expectations between Irish nationalists and the British government. Many Irish nationalists expected that self-government would embody the same type of legislative concessions that had been granted to British colonies like Australia and Canada, or to the recently defeated Boers in South Africa. The combination of legislative and financial autonomy that these regions enjoyed was known as “colonial” and later “dominion” home rule. This form of self-government entailed a recognition of the national status of the area in question, an obvious goal of Irish nationalists. Irish nationalists of all shades expected better financial terms, namely fiscal autonomy, the right of the Irish Parliament to collect and distribute all of its own revenue without reference to Westminster. This was a key power in dominion status. The only reason Asquith’s government refused to grant this concession was an imperialistic mindset; a desire to control Ireland to as great an extent as possible, even under home rule. The Third Home Rule Bill’s failure to deliver dominion status caused widespread dissatisfaction that was only overcome by the resigned realization that they could not get better terms at the present time, at least not through constitutional methods.

The unionist anti-home rule campaign was largely unaffected by the bill’s introduction, though it intensified as the implementation of Irish self-government drew nearer. Suggestions to exclude all or part of Ulster from home rule were mainly conceived of as ways to show that Irish self-government was impractical, but when Unionist MPs backed an exclusion amendment in the House of Commons, this increasingly appeared to be official Party policy. Some within the Cabinet were predisposed to leaving at least part of Ulster out of the bill, thus members of both parties seemed to be moving toward this type of settlement. Riots in the Belfast shipyards embarrassed nationalists and unionists alike, but the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was widely interpreted as instilling discipline in the unionist rank-and-file in order to prevent such outbreaks.

Historians often discuss the UVF’s formation in terms of whether or not Carson and the other unionist leaders were “bluffing” in their talk of violent resistance to home rule. To those who consider that they had no intention of actually resorting to violence the organization was merely a propagandistic charade designed to pressure the government into making concessions.⁵

⁵ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1798-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 369; Timothy Bowman, “The Ulster Volunteers, 1913-1914: Force or Farce?,” *History Ireland* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 2002): 43-47;

Observers who interpret the resistance movement as sincere assert that the UVF was the body that would implement the anticipated anti-home rule rebellion.⁶ Patrick Buckland and Alan Parkinson argue that the formation of the UVF was largely an attempt by the leadership to take control of rank-and-file unionist militancy.⁷ I assert that this last interpretation has the most merit, though the militant unionist movement should not be interpreted as an entirely grassroots phenomenon. Unionist leaders had employed radical rhetoric since the January 1910 election, pre-dating the Royal Irish Constabulary's earliest reports of arms training. The unionist rifle and drill clubs formed between 1911 and 1912 are evidence that the rank-and-file took their leaders' assertions of active resistance at face value.

Ulster Unionists and Mr. Churchill

By the end of July 1911, the House of Lords had been denuded of its veto power. This deprived Irish unionists of their greatest assurance that the British Parliament would never pass a home rule bill, but did nothing to dampen their resistance. Irish unionist leader Edward Carson had already publicly announced that they would resist home rule regardless of what happened to the Lords, if there was an attempt to impose it, "without an appeal to the country."⁸ The defeat over the Parliament Act cost Arthur Balfour the leadership of the Conservative and Unionist Party. In the midst of this turmoil, Carson and James Craig began to prepare to hold an anti-home rule meeting in Ulster. Frustrated by his party's inability to advance their agenda in Parliament, Carson was eager to find alternate means of influencing the political situation. He wrote to Craig regarding his visit to the north of Ireland, "What I am very anxious about is to satisfy myself that the people over there really mean to resist. I am not for a mere game of bluff & unless men are prepared to make great sacrifices which they clearly understand the talk of resistance is no use." He warned that they would be hampered by, "many weaklings in our own camp who talk loud & mean nothing & will be the first to criticize us when the moment of action

Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 82-84.

⁶ Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Macmillan, 2006), 249; Jackson, *Home Rule*, 118-120, 132-134; A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 69-70.

⁷ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism Two: Ulster Unionism and the Origins of Northern Ireland, 1886-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 57-58, 63; Alan F. Parkinson, *Friends in High Places: Ulster's Resistance to Irish Home Rule, 1912-1914* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2012), 248.

⁸ Edward Carson, "The Parliament Bill and Home Rule," *The Times* (London), 22 July 1911.

comes.”⁹ Carson expressed similar sentiments to Lady Londonderry, “I will make a big effort— (my last in politics) to stir up some life over this Home Rule fight...everyone is demoralised and weak and still the country is calling out for a strong man.”¹⁰

The Ulster unionists held their demonstration at Craigavon, James Craig’s home in Co. Armagh, on September 23, 1911. The speakers dwelled on a mixture of social and religious grievances against home rule. The most significant outcome of the meeting was that unionist leaders clearly espoused the idea of administratively separating Ulster, or some part of it, from the rest of Ireland. Anthony Traill, provost of Trinity College and a Co. Antrim native, sent a message that if home rule passed, for their own protection and that of their southern counterparts, northern unionists should insist on the establishment of a parliament for Ulster.¹¹ The argument that northern unionists outside a home rule parliament could safeguard their southern comrades within it became increasingly common over the next several years. William Moore, MP for North Armagh, assured his audience that they would never submit to government by, “an intolerant Roman Catholic majority.” He dared the government to try to enforce home rule, declaring, “Against such domination he would always be a rebel, and he believed and trusted that every Ulster Protestant would be a rebel too.”¹²

Carson called on his audience to defeat, “the most nefarious conspiracy that has ever been hatched in Great Britain.” He warned them that under home rule they would lose all influence in the civil service, the police, and education, and hinted at the possible curtailment of religious freedoms. Carson said Ireland was more prosperous than ever, and unionists saw no reason to change the status quo, “We ask for no privileges, but we are determined that no one shall have privileges over us...we claim the same rights from the same Government as every other part of the United Kingdom.” Above all, Carson stressed that granting home rule would be a betrayal of Irish unionists. According to the *Irish Times* report of his speech, the words “betray” and “betrayal” occur four times in an oration covering just two columns of newsprint. In face of such treachery by the British government, Carson asserted that when home rule passed they must be prepared to “carry on for ourselves the government of these districts which we can

⁹ Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), Craigavon Papers, T3775/2, Edward Carson to James Craig, 29 July 1911.

¹⁰ PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/68, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 27 August 1911.

¹¹ Anthony Traill, message read at Craigavon, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 25 September 1911.

¹² William Moore at Craigavon, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 25 September 1911.

control.” He added, “We must be prepared...the morning Home Rule passes ourselves to become responsible for the government of the Protestant province of Ulster.” The area would then be administered, “either by the Imperial Parliament or by ourselves.”¹³

While Traill called unreservedly for the establishment of a parliament for the province of Ulster, Carson’s language was far more ambiguous. His first statement called for unionists to govern the districts they could control, not necessarily the entire province. However, Carson also asserted that they should govern, “the Protestant province of Ulster.” He likely meant the Protestant-majority areas, however one might read this as an assertion that the entire province was Protestant, therefore unionists should govern the whole of it. The Irish unionist leader was also unclear on what would happen next; whether they would establish their own administration or appeal for direct rule from Westminster.

The Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) moved to address these ambiguities. Two days after the Craigavon meeting, the UUC announced that they would form a provisional government for Ulster to come into being on the day home rule passed. That government would, “remain in force until Ulster shall again resume unimpaired her citizenship in the United Kingdom and her high position in the great British Empire.”¹⁴ Carson said, “Ulster would march from Belfast to Cork” to prevent home rule, indicating that they intended to use their resistance to prevent self-government for all of Ireland. John Lonsdale, MP for Mid-Armagh, added that they intended to ignore a home rule parliament; they would refuse to pay taxes to it, and, “were prepared to take even stronger measures.”¹⁵

The *Irish Times* praised the Craigavon meeting, claiming that the resistance of “Ulster,” meaning northern unionists, would make home rule impossible. However, the paper called Traill’s suggestion of a separate parliament, “mischievous and impracticable.” Unionists advocating such a course would turn themselves into, “the most fatal kind of Separatist party,” and the editor predicted, “Two Parliaments in Ireland would perpetuate in their worst forms our unhappy differences.”¹⁶ The nationalist *Freeman’s Journal* dismissed the idea of Ulster standing apart from the rest of Ireland, “no sensible Unionist, indeed, is likely to abandon the position of great influence which Belfast and its hinterland will undoubtedly occupy in the Irish Parliament.”

¹³ Edward Carson at Craigavon, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 25 September 1911.

¹⁴ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 September 1911.

¹⁵ Edward Carson and John Lonsdale in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 September 1911.

¹⁶ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 25 September 1911.

The paper's London correspondent reported that even the unionist press there were "openly poking fun at Sir Edward Carson."¹⁷ The liberal *Daily News* asserted that the Irish unionist leader had, ironically, come out in favor of home rule for Ulster. The paper commented caustically, "Orangemen have always meant by Unionism the right of their little clique to govern Ireland. They have always been Home Rulers in that sense, and they want, at any rate, to be Ulster Home Rulers in the same sense, whatever happens."¹⁸

Some southern unionists were disturbed by the talk of an Ulster provisional government. In October, S. P. Boyd told a meeting of Dublin unionists, "there seemed to be some danger of Ulster seeking Self Government for itself," which for them would be "a calamity."¹⁹ Accordingly, there was no mention of an Ulster provisional government when Carson addressed a meeting at Dublin's Rotunda Rink on October 10. The Irish unionist leader chose his words carefully. He said, "Ulster asked for no separate parliament. She had never in the long controversy taken that selfish course," adding, "They need fear no action of Ulster which would be in the nature of a desertion of any of the Southern provinces. If Ulster succeeded Home Rule was dead." Carson insinuated that the vital contribution of southern unionists would be to back the actions of those in the north.²⁰ While this emphasized all-Ireland unionism, it also highlighted the impotence of southern unionists and implied subservience to their northern counterparts. None of these statements precluded an Ulster provisional government as long as it was not a parliament, a fact the *Freeman's Journal* noted scornfully.²¹ Despite Carson's appeals for unity, some southern unionists clearly wanted to differentiate themselves from their northern and British counterparts. While denying that home rule was a religious question in most of Ireland, Limerick-born Henry Blake said, "there was a strong sectarian feeling in the north of Ireland, and that feeling was found equally in Liverpool and London."²²

Soon after northern unionists declared their right to control certain portions of Ulster in defiance of either a home rule parliament or the imperial government, circumstances gave them an opportunity to demonstrate what authority they really could exercise. In January 1912, the Ulster Liberal Association invited Winston Churchill, John Redmond, and Joseph Devlin to

¹⁷ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 28 September 1911.

¹⁸ *Daily News* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 27 September 1911.

¹⁹ S. P. Boyd in Dublin, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 4 October 1911.

²⁰ Edward Carson in Dublin, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 11 October 1911.

²¹ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 11 October 1911.

²² Henry Blake in Dublin, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 11 October 1911.

speak at a meeting in Belfast on February 8. Churchill wrote to Redmond that the Belfast meeting should include every facet of Ulster society who were not expressly anti-home rule, as it was, “the British electorate who are the real audience.”²³

The meeting was to be held in the Ulster Hall, in Belfast’s city center. This had been the scene of many political meetings, much like London’s Albert Hall, including a famous one held by Churchill’s father, Randolph, during the first home rule crisis. While all parties had used the venue in the past, in the heightened political atmosphere northern unionists decided that they had a special claim to the Ulster Hall. About a week after the meeting was announced, the UUC declared it a “deliberate challenge” to hold a home rule gathering in the “loyal City of Belfast,” and that they would take steps to stop it.²⁴ The *Irish Times* added that the meeting should not be held in the Hall as it was in a Protestant unionist area, close to Sandy Row. If the meeting were held in the majority-nationalist Falls Road district there would likely be no opposition.²⁵ Under the circumstances, James Craig told a reporter that they were determined to prevent, “a rebel crew dishonouring the historic Ulster Hall.”²⁶

The *Freeman’s Journal* denounced the UUC’s action as a sign of intolerance and a suppression of free speech, “Even before the Home Rule Bill is introduced the Orange mob in Belfast is incited to give a taste of its quality to the electors of Great Britain.”²⁷ Surprisingly, *The Times* agreed that trying to prevent the meeting was a denial of free speech, calling the UUC’s course “hard to justify.” However, the paper also blamed the Liberal government for provoking the “content and peaceful” northern province, adding that “The Ulstermen” were determined on “a system of passive resistance” to defeat home rule.²⁸ On January 19, the *Irish Times* asserted that the UUC’s decision “cannot be justified,” but added that the occasion provided an opportunity for “the North” to show that they were serious in their determination to resist home rule.²⁹ However, the unionist press changed its tone as they concluded that the Liberals were trying to goad their Belfast counterparts into violent opposition in order to embarrass them. By January 23, the *Irish Times* argued that if Churchill was such a “tragic fool” as to persist in the

²³ Winston Churchill to John Redmond, 13 January 1912, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II, Companion Part 3, 1911-1914* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1381.

²⁴ PRONI, Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) Papers, D4503/1, UUC Standing Committee Minutes, 16 January 1912.

²⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 17 January 1912.

²⁶ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 18 January 1912.

²⁷ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 17 January 1912.

²⁸ *The Times* (London), 18 January 1912.

²⁹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 19 January 1912.

meeting, the Chief Secretary should proclaim it an unlawful assembly and suppress it.³⁰ This would have created an interesting situation, with one Cabinet member declaring illegal a meeting at which another Cabinet member was the guest of honor and principal speaker.

One of the most interesting reactions to the Churchill meeting came from Frederick Crawford, a close associate of Carson who had been involved in violent intrigues during the previous home rule crises. He suggested that, to show the seriousness of their resistance while preserving the peace, the Unionist Clubs should raise their own “volunteer police force” independent of the RIC.³¹ It was one of the earliest suggestions of an organized paramilitary organization controlled by the UUC.

Richard McGhee, a Protestant nationalist MP representing Mid-Tyrone, reminded *Times* readers that the Ulster Hall had hosted home rule meetings in the past.³² A correspondent to the *Irish Times* noted that Carson had held a unionist demonstration in Dublin’s Rotunda Rink, close to the Ancient Order of Hibernians’ headquarters.³³ In the midst of the tumult, the Ulster Liberal Association issued a statement that their organization was predominantly Protestant, therefore the meeting was likely to be as well.³⁴ A member of the association later argued that the UUC objected to the demonstration because it would show, “that Ulster Protestantism was not solid or even overwhelmingly solid for Ulster Unionism.”³⁵

The UUC brought the confrontation to a head by renting the Hall for February 6 and 7, implying that they would refuse to leave when the Liberals arrived for their meeting the following day.³⁶ After consultations between Churchill, the Ulster Liberals, and Liberal headquarters in London, they decided to move the meeting to the Celtic Park football grounds on Donegall Road, in a predominantly Catholic and nationalist area of west Belfast. Churchill thought that the unionists would be embarrassed when he and his colleagues “ostentatiously” agreed to move the meeting. He wrote to his wife, “The Orange faction will be left to brood morosely over their illegal and uncontested possession of the Ulster Hall. Dirty dogs ‘chained

³⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 23 January 1912.

³¹ F. H. Crawford in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 18 January 1912.

³² Richard McGhee, “Meetings in the Ulster Hall,” *The Times* (London), 20 January 1912.

³³ Playboy [pseud.], “Mr. Churchill and Belfast,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 23 January 1912.

³⁴ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 January 1912.

³⁵ W. H. Davey, “The Minority in Ulster,” *Saturday Review* (London), 14 September 1912.

³⁶ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 January 1912.

like suffragettes to the railings.”³⁷ However, the northern unionist press declared victory in the affair. The *Belfast News-Letter* wrote that Ulster unionists owed Churchill a debt, as he had provided an opportunity to show “the people of Great Britain” their determination to resist home rule.³⁸ There were no incidents during the meeting, and Churchill even admitted that it was right and dignified for Ulster unionists to insist upon their own rights, but warned them against becoming, “the tool or the catspaw of the Tory Party in England.”³⁹

The controversy was indeed a victory for unionists. They proved that by threatening resistance, even to the point of violence, they could alter events they found objectionable. Moreover, while the phrase “no-go areas” became famous during the post-1968 Troubles, this vetoing of a meeting in the city center and its movement to west Belfast highlighted that there were distinct nationalist and unionist districts that might be closed to persons of differing political values, even if they held high office in the United Kingdom. The proximity of these nationalist and unionist areas might have shown the impossibility of neatly separating parts of Ulster from the rest of the island without creating isolated and disgruntled minorities, but this does not seem to have been realized at the time.

Debating the Third Home Rule Bill

As anti-home rule demonstrations mounted, some liberals seriously considered excluding parts of Ireland from the new parliament’s purview. Unfortunately for proponents of all-Ireland self-government, this included members of Asquith’s Cabinet. In August 1911, Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell wrote to Churchill that the northern unionists’ threats should be taken seriously, “Ulster has cried ‘Wolf’ so often and so absurdly that one is inclined to ridicule her rhomontade, but we are cutting very deep this time and her yells are genuine.” Birrell outlined a plan to allow each county in Ulster to vote themselves out of home rule for five years. He predicted that every county except Antrim and Down would support self-government.⁴⁰

Birrell was one of the most vocal supporters of Irish nationalist interests in the Cabinet. The fact that he was willing to negotiate away the principle of all-Ireland home rule was a grave

³⁷ Winston Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 24 January 1912, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part 3*, 1384.

³⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 February 1912.

³⁹ Winston Churchill in Belfast, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 9 February 1912.

⁴⁰ Claydon Estate, Harry Verney Papers, 10/167/195, Augustine Birrell to Winston Churchill, 26 August 1911.

indication that Asquith's government was not committed to this standard. Birrell cited RIC reports of unionist drilling as a cause for concern, adding that the police were divided as to whether "Ulster" really meant to fight.⁴¹ Publicly, and in Cabinet meetings, Birrell continued to oppose any dilution of all-Ireland self-government, but his private admission of misgivings likely influenced other members of the government in their subsequent actions.

On February 6, 1912, Lloyd George formally submitted to the Cabinet a plan for parts of Ireland to contract out of home rule. Charles Hobhouse wrote that the proposal was clearly aimed at Ulster, but the option would be open to every county on the island. He added that the idea was not put forward out of knowledge of the northern province, or a desire to mollify people there. Hobhouse wrote that Lloyd George, "had made no inquiry into the real condition or intentions of Ulster, and roundly declared such to be useless."⁴² Asquith explained the idea to the King as a political tactic, to mitigate possible British popular backlash against home rule on the Ulster unionists' behalf.⁴³ The proposal sparked a heated debate. Churchill supported Lloyd George. Crewe and Loreburn were opposed. Churchill asked Loreburn, "how far are you prepared to go? Are you ready to plant guns in the streets of Belfast and shoot people down?" He replied, "I shall be prepared to do my duty." Churchill later called the response pompous.⁴⁴

Hobhouse characterized Birrell as against Lloyd George's proposal. This was consistent with his support of Redmond's party in the Cabinet, but inconsistent with his letter to Churchill. Historian Patricia Jalland intimates that the Chief Secretary may have deliberately given Lloyd George and Churchill the idea for county option with his August 1911 letter, allowing him to advance the idea while ostensibly remaining the Irish nationalists' strongest ally in the Cabinet. If Redmond and his colleagues learned that the proposal came from Birrell, they would regard it as a betrayal and may have even broken with the Liberals.⁴⁵ Hobhouse states that Asquith was in favor of Lloyd George's proposal, an assertion that contradicts the Prime Minister's account of the meeting. Jalland asserts that Asquith likely vacillated from one side to the other, as he was prone to doing in Cabinet meetings.⁴⁶ Ultimately, the Prime Minister supported an alternative

⁴¹ Claydon Estate, Harry Verney Papers, 10/167/195, Augustine Birrell to Winston Churchill, 26 August 1911.

⁴² Charles Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, ed. Edward David (New York: St. Martin's, 1977), 111, entry for 11 February 1912.

⁴³ Bodleian Library, MS Asq. 6, fos. 95-97, H. H. Asquith to King George V, 7 February 1912.

⁴⁴ United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/1/3, Austen Chamberlain, "Memo. of a Conversation with Winston Churchill," 27 November 1913.

⁴⁵ Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland*, 59-60.

⁴⁶ Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland*, 63-64.

proposal put forward by Crewe that they frame the home rule bill for all of Ireland, but make clear that the government was free to grant separate treatment to Ulster later, if they saw fit or if British opinion pressured them to do so.⁴⁷

Historians debate whether the first incarnation of the bill should have included explicit safeguards for northern unionists. Jackson and Jalland argue that this would have disarmed the Ulster unionist resistance and divided them from many of their British sympathizers.⁴⁸ However, some British unionists were using their Irish counterparts to undermine the Parliament Act and force a general election. These goals would not have been accomplished by an offer of separate treatment in April 1912. In any case, resistance to home rule was only partially based on practical, material concerns. Irish unionists' arguments relied far more on emotional appeals to British Empire patriotism and fear of Catholic government than apprehensions like over-taxation. These sentimental pleas would have resonated with sections of the British public even if extensive safeguards were offered from the outset. As Nicholas Mansergh argues, it is unlikely that the Unionists would have accepted initial concessions as sufficient to end their resistance to home rule.⁴⁹ Finally, by proposing home rule for all Ireland, but making clear that they would entertain suggestions for separate treatment for some portion of the unionist population, Asquith and his Cabinet were following Gladstone's lead, as they were prone to doing on issues related to Irish self-government.⁵⁰

The Cabinet debate concerning exclusion took place in the context of drafting the home rule bill. Asquith had formed a Cabinet committee to frame the measure in January 1911. Its members coquetted with a federal scheme, pushed by Churchill and Lloyd George. They ultimately devised a bill based on Gladstone's 1893 measure. Despite the bill's importance for Ireland and their supposed partnership with the Liberal government, Irish nationalists had little say in its development. As late as December 1911 the Cabinet even refused to allow the IPP to see a copy.⁵¹ Irish nationalist leaders were drawn into the process later that month through correspondence with Birrell and meetings with the Cabinet, which the *Freeman's Journal*

⁴⁷ Bodleian Library, MS Asq. 6, fos. 95-97, H. H. Asquith to King George V, 7 February 1912.

⁴⁸ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 111-113; Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland*, 56-60.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing, 1912-72* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 50-51.

⁵⁰ Gladstone first introduced the bill and then invited suggestions as to separate treatment for Ulster. See W. E. Gladstone, "Motion for Leave [First Night]," HC Deb 8 April 1886 vol 304 cc1036-141, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁵¹ Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith's Cabinet*, 108-109, entry for 9 December 1911.

happily reported in order to inflate the idea that the IPP were influencing the drafting process.⁵² The nationalists also exchanged memoranda arguing points that they wanted included in the measure, but this was the extent of government by Irish ideas.⁵³

While Asquith's government drafted the bill mainly with British political concerns in mind, the IPP had to ensure that the Irish nationalist public would support the legislation. The Party dominated Irish parliamentary politics, but there was competition for nationalist opinion. The IPP's primary domestic opponent was the All-for-Ireland League (AFIL), led by land agitator and former Party member William O'Brien. He broke with the IPP on several occasions, the final one in 1909. The IPP denounced the AFIL as "factionists," reflecting the drive for unity within Irish nationalism.⁵⁴ O'Brien supported home rule, but wanted it to come as a result of "conciliation" and "consent" among Irish unionists, rather than the coercive vote of a parliamentary majority. In other words, self-government should only come if those pledged to oppose it changed their minds. Historians usually portray the AFIL as a loose coalition of anti-IPP nationalists, rather than an ideologically united opposition pursuing a focused program.⁵⁵

Another nationalist political movement at this time was Sinn Féin. Formally, this group was committed to Arthur Griffith's ideas of economic self-sufficiency and a dual monarchy for Britain and Ireland. This would entail the reestablishment of the Kingdom of Ireland governed by a King, Lords, and Commons, reasserting the legislative autonomy that "Grattan's Parliament" had wrung from Britain in 1782. Sinn Féin called on Irish MPs to abstain from Westminster, or refuse to take their seats, and to establish an alternate assembly in Dublin. The movement attracted support from "advanced" nationalists, those who felt that home rule would not satisfy Ireland's national aspirations. This sometimes included separatists and republicans, who wanted to establish an independent Irish state outside of the British Empire. Sinn Féin had some successes in local government elections, and was credited with orchestrating much of the

⁵² *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 23 March, 25 March 1912.

⁵³ National Library of Ireland (NLI), John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,266, "Memorandum on Clauses of the Home Rule Bill," 29 January 1912; Herbert Samuel [pseud. Viscount Samuel], *Memoirs* (London: Cresset, 1945), 72.

⁵⁴ For examples see the speeches of John Redmond and John Dillon in Dublin, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 11 February 1910; also a *Freeman's Journal* editorial on 21 December 1910.

⁵⁵ Joseph V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics, 1881-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 244; John O'Donovan, "The All-for-Ireland League and the Home Rule Debate, 1910-14," in *The Home Rule Crisis*, 141-142, 163.

nationalist agitation that defeated the Council Bill.⁵⁶ However, the group mounted only one parliamentary campaign, a 1906 by-election in North Leitrim that resulted in an IPP victory.⁵⁷

The most successful non-IPP element of Irish nationalism was the *Irish Independent* newspaper, owned by Dublin industrialist William Martin Murphy. Unlike most publications in this period, it was not the organ of any party or political ideology. The *Independent* delighted in criticizing the IPP, causing the Party's own *Freeman's Journal* to brand it a "factionist" paper.⁵⁸ Despite the *Freeman's* official status, its daily circulation stagnated at approximately 30 to 35 thousand copies, while by 1914 the *Independent* routinely sold 90 to 100 thousand papers.⁵⁹ Though electorally dominant within nationalism, the IPP had potential critics on public platforms and in the press, and struggled to ensure that Irish legislation could garner enough support to be portrayed as the demand of "the nation" or "the people."

The Irish press and public speculated as to what they might expect from a new measure for self-government. In 1911, Erskine Childers published *The Framework of Home Rule* advocating colonial status for Ireland.⁶⁰ Childers, a former British Army officer and author of the famous spy novel, *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), had been born in London but raised in Co. Wicklow. In addition to full legislative and fiscal autonomy, the status he advocated implied control of police and armed forces. This status was accorded to Australia, Canada, and South Africa, and was widely regarded as a recognition of separate nationhood and virtual independence, including the right to secede from the British Empire.

In a 1911 examination of Gladstone's 1893 bill, Cork lawyer John J. Horgan assured his readers that that measure would have granted an Irish parliament the same rights as those of Canada and South Africa. He called the bill's provisions against establishing any religion, "somewhat ridiculous, and to some extent offensive...as no Irish Catholic has the slightest ambition to enact such laws." However, "the raving of the Orange bigots has created such a condition of mind even amongst singularly clear-headed and logical Englishmen that we must

⁵⁶ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 May 1907.

⁵⁷ Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 31-33, 43, 49-51; Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17-32.

⁵⁸ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 23 March and 25 March 1914.

⁵⁹ Felix M. Larkin, "'A Great Daily Organ': The Freeman's Journal, 1763-1924," *History Ireland* 14, no. 3 (March/April 2006): 44-49; Patrick Maume, "The Irish Independent and the Ulster Crisis, 1912-21," in *The Ulster Crisis, 1885-1921*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 202-228.

⁶⁰ Erskine Childers, *Framework of Home Rule* (London: Edward Arnold, 1911), 280.

accept these restrictions as a necessary part of any Home Rule Bill.”⁶¹ Meanwhile, the *Spectator* asserted that “Very few Catholics” would support a bill that did not include the right to establish a state religion, despite the absence of this power from previous home rule legislation.⁶²

The *Irish Independent* took up the demands for colonial home rule and fiscal autonomy with gusto.⁶³ This type of settlement seemed attainable. In November 1910, Cabinet member Richard Haldane cited Australia, Canada, and South Africa as precedents for the Irish people’s “proper control over their local affairs.”⁶⁴ Pierce O’Mahony wrote in the *Freeman’s Journal*, “Home Rule must be in the nature of a great Treaty of Peace. It must be acceptable to the British democracy as well as the Irish.” He added that some points might require negotiation, and the only people qualified to carry out such discussions were their elected representatives, the IPP.⁶⁵

Some supporters of Irish self-government tried to temper expectations. Joseph Maguire, a Clontarf barrister, argued that both financial independence and colonial home rule were outside the realm of practical politics. He blamed Childers for raising the idea of fiscal autonomy, calling it, “separatist finance.”⁶⁶ J. M. Robertson, MP for Tyneside and an official with the Board of Trade, rejected the idea of granting financial freedom and colonial home rule to Ireland. He said, “Fiscal autonomy would mean the disintegration of the Kingdom...The English Home Rulers could no longer say that Home Rule did not mean separation.” He considered the Ulster problem secondary to finance, but suggested, “they might make a separate canton out of Ulster.” Robertson then laid out a plan for what was sometimes called, “home rule within home rule,” or the granting of a separate parliament or assembly for the northern province subordinate to the Irish Parliament, rather than to Westminster. He added that it was possible that the Ulster unionists would reject separate treatment due to the presence of Protestants elsewhere. In that case, they could proceed with an all-Ireland home rule bill.⁶⁷ While Robertson, like many of his contemporaries, was sensitive to the point that treating Ulster separately would leave many Protestants under a majority-nationalist authority, he ignored the fact that many northern nationalists would be left under predominantly unionist governance.

⁶¹ John J. Horgan, *Home Rule: A Critical Consideration* (Dublin: Maunsell, 1911), 14.

⁶² *Spectator* (London), 24 December 1910.

⁶³ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 6 October 1911.

⁶⁴ Richard Haldane at Grimsby, *The Times* (London), 29 November 1910.

⁶⁵ Pierce O’Mahony, “The Home Rule Bill,” *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 9 April 1912.

⁶⁶ Joseph Maguire, “Home Rule Finance,” *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 6 February 1912; Joseph Maguire, “The Home Rule Bill Wanted,” *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 2 April 1912.

⁶⁷ J. M. Robertson in London, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 3 February 1912.

As the introduction of the home rule bill approached, Irish nationalists and unionists held mass demonstrations to show their popular strength. On March 31, 1912, an estimated 100 to 150 thousand people thronged Dublin's city center to hear speakers herald the approach of self-government.⁶⁸ Redmond called the forthcoming home rule bill, "a great treaty of peace between Ireland and England and the Empire." Several speakers referred to the Ulster unionists, indulging in plenty of the derision that one might expect political opponents to heap upon one another. John Dillon said that there were "emissaries of Ulster" touring Britain, "going about from house to house whispering these lies into the ears of the English people." However, there were more generous assessments. Dublin MP J. P. Nannetti said, "There were good men amongst the Orangemen of Ireland, and good men amongst the Protestants of Ireland—patriots as ardent as any of them," adding that the IPP wanted them to take their place in the "Councils of the Nation." William Redmond illuminated one of the IPP's assumptions when he said of unionists, "just as their opposition to emancipation and to disestablishment passed away, so their opposition to Home Rule will pass away."⁶⁹ This was the party's initial reaction to anti-home rule agitation, particularly in the north: they had heard similar threats before, and once the bill had been passed and enacted, resistance to it would dissipate.

Not to be outdone, the unionists claimed an attendance of between 200 and 250 thousand at a demonstration at Balmoral, in south Belfast, on April 9. One of the main features of the gathering was that everyone present swore to resist home rule under any circumstances. Prior to the speeches, the Church of Ireland Primate John Crozier prayed, "Deliver us, we pray Thee, from those great and imminent dangers by which we are now encompassed. And continue to protect Thy true religion against the designs of those who seek to overthrow it." The speeches were mainly recapitulations of the horrors unionists could expect under home rule. Viscount Templetown assured his audience, "Home Rule would mean Rome Rule, and their severance from the Empire." James H. Campbell told them that as a result of nationalist land agitation, "that day in many parts of Ireland a reign of terrorism prevailed, paralysing law and order, and men and women were falling victims to the assassin in Clare and Galway, and the victims of the armed moonlighter could be counted by hundreds." Home rule meant, "the surrender of the

⁶⁸ This was the estimate given by the *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 2 April 1912.

⁶⁹ John Redmond, John Dillon, J. P. Nannetti, and William Redmond in Dublin, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 1 April 1912.

loyal minority in that country to the implacable and inveterate enemies of England and her Empire.” Earl Erne dismissed the idea of legislation protections being built into the home rule bill by retorting, “Unionists did not care a fig for their safeguards.”⁷⁰

Unionist Party leader Andrew Bonar Law provided the highlight of the day. He attacked what he considered the basis of the nationalist claim to a separate political structure when he said, “Men do not constitute a nation because they happen to live in the same island. Ireland is not, and never has been, a nation. There are two peoples in Ireland, separated from each other by a gulf of religion, of race, and, above all, of prejudice, far deeper than that which separates Ireland as a whole from the United Kingdom.” It was common for unionists to deny that Ireland was a nation, and to ignore the existence of Protestant nationalists. However, Bonar Law’s reference to “prejudice” as the greatest bar to a common Irish identity indicates a belief in strict, insurmountable cultural determinism. The Unionist leader asserted that most British people were against home rule, but they had to overcome a tyrannical government to express it. He conjured images of the 1688-1689 siege of Derry and the “breaking of the boom” that saved the town. Bonar Law declared, “You must trust to yourselves. Once again you hold the pass for the Empire. You are a besieged city.” He added, “The Government by their Parliament Act have erected a boom against you, a boom to cut you off from the help of the British people. You will burst that boom. The help will come.”⁷¹ Interestingly, Bonar Law told the Ulster unionists both to rely on themselves, and that they could trust to British aid. Whatever his exact meaning, the idea that they must resist the Liberal government was clear.

The *Irish Times* correspondent at the Balmoral demonstration declared it, “no mere political performance. It was the solemn registering of a people’s will.” By contrast, the introduction of the home rule bill, “will appear as a cynical farce with every grain of reality taken from it. The reality is here in the North.”⁷²

Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill in Parliament on April 11, 1912. Officially titled the Government of Ireland Bill, it provided for an Irish Parliament and an executive responsible to it. The legislature would consist of a 164-member elected Commons and a forty-member Senate nominated by the Lord Lieutenant. Forty-two Irish MPs would continue to sit at

⁷⁰ John Crozier, Viscount Templetown, James H. Campbell, and Earl Erne at Balmoral, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 April 1912.

⁷¹ Andrew Bonar Law at Balmoral, *The Times* (London), 10 April 1912.

⁷² *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 April 1912.

Westminster. The Lord Lieutenant would lead the executive; both he and Westminster could veto any bill passed by the Dublin legislature. The Irish Parliament could not pass bills relating to the position of the Crown, raise an army, or make international treaties or trade agreements. There were some “reserved services,” meaning powers that would pass to the Dublin legislature at some point but that were initially remained with Westminster, the most important being control of the police, collecting taxes, and regulating land purchase. The Irish Parliament was debarred from establishing any religion, passing any law that would give legal advantage or disadvantage based on religious belief, or refuse to recognize marriage on religious grounds. The financial aspects of the bill were complex. They were designed to balance Irish domestic and imperial priorities, as well as to gradually turn the Irish budget deficit into a surplus. The bill did not grant fiscal autonomy, nor give any indication that it might follow in the future.⁷³

To see a home rule bill introduced at Westminster, knowing that he had the votes to pass it, was the crowning moment of Redmond’s political career. However, while the vague cry of “home rule” had been Irish nationalists’ constitutional goal for decades, not all among the rank-and-file were prepared to accept any legislation under this title. Reactions among the nationalist populace were mixed, ranging from enthusiasm to resigned disappointment. The *Irish Independent* highlighted the fact that the bill delivered neither legislative nor fiscal autonomy. The paper’s editors pledged to await the verdict of their fellow nationalists before passing judgement, and said resignedly, “we think the Bill is not one to enthuse over, but the people have no alternative but to accept it.”⁷⁴

In an attempt to control public reaction, the *Freeman’s Journal* published every message of support they received or could elicit.⁷⁵ Ironically, these missives sometimes contained criticisms, particularly of the bill’s financial clauses. While a message from Clonmel said the legislation, “meets the National demand,” another from Listowel called it merely, “an honest attempt at conciliation, with necessity for material amendments.” D. J. Riley, a member of the

⁷³ For summaries of the Third Home Rule Bill’s powers and restrictions see Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity*, 34-35; Meleady, *John Redmond: The National Leader*, 212-213. The text of the bill is in John Redmond, *The Home Rule Bill* (London: Cassel, 1912).

⁷⁴ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 13 April 1912.

⁷⁵ The paper published these messages for the next several months, but many examples can be found in *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 13 April, 15 April, 16 April, and 17 April 1912.

Trim Urban Council, called the home rule bill, “a good one, perhaps as good as we could hope to get,” before criticizing the nominated Senate and lack of Customs control.⁷⁶

In light of Ulster unionist allegations that religious discrimination would be endemic under a home rule government, nationalist papers were particularly eager to print Protestant praise of the bill. Most Protestant home rulers hailed the religious safeguards, and argued for an enlargement of the Irish Parliament’s powers. Arthur N. Wrightson wrote that the legislature should control Irish customs duties. Thomas Henry Webb called it simply, “As good a Bill as could have been expected from the present Ministry.” Waterford Quaker T. Harvey Jacob was even less positive when he telegraphed, “Bill absurdly inadequate considered as proposal for final settlement. But might possibly be useful as step towards real Self-Government.”⁷⁷

On April 13, Sinn Féin declared that they rejected both the principle of home rule and the measure itself. Their resolution stated, “as the object of Sinn Fein is the independence of Ireland, we refuse to accept a final settlement of the dispute between Ireland and Great Britain any arrangement which leaves a single vestige of British rule in Ireland. For this reason we decline to regard as liberty the arrangement which has come to be known as Home Rule.” Moreover, Sinn Féin considered that Asquith’s bill, “falls short of being a complete measure of Home Rule.”⁷⁸

The IPP quickly gained control of the discourse surrounding the bill. Resolutions praising the measure came in from local councils and boards of guardians all over Ireland, most of them filled with Party supporters. Redmond received congratulations from every corner of the British Empire and the United States. One came from Edward O’Meagher Condon, one of the Fenians who had inspired nationalists by shouting “God Save Ireland” during their 1867 trial at Manchester.⁷⁹ Galway Urban Councilor H. M. A. Murphy asserted, “What Redmond is prepared to accept is good enough for the people of Ireland.”⁸⁰ Thus, regardless of the measure’s details, some were prepared to support the Third Home Rule Bill based on the idea that, “What’s good enough for Redmond is good enough for me.” The UIL’s Limerick City Branch called the bill, “a generous offer of settlement of our national claim to independence.”⁸¹ This message from an

⁷⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 13 April 1912.

⁷⁷ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 13 April 1912; *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 13 April 1912.

⁷⁸ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 15 April 1912.

⁷⁹ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 15 April 1912.

⁸⁰ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 13 April 1912.

⁸¹ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 16 April 1912.

IPP organization is interesting for its similarity to Sinn Féin's denunciation of the bill. Both the Limerick UIL and Sinn Féin expressed Irish nationalists' demand as one for "independence." While the UIL considered that the bill met this demand, Sinn Féin maintained that no home rule measure, especially not this one, could do so. Therefore, even Irish nationalists who agreed on their ultimate goal could disagree as to what that constituted or how it might be accomplished.

The *Freeman's Journal* pointed out that even the bill's critics recommended its passage.⁸² This ignores the rejection of small nationalist groups like Sinn Féin, but even the dissentient *Irish Independent* admitted, "Viewing the Bill from a broad standpoint, the country is, apparently, disposed to accept it, though there are, it is evident, a great many who had expected a better Bill."⁸³ The *Freeman's Journal* solicited an article from National University professor C. H. Oldham stating that the bill's financial and constitutional aspects were no different from arrangements made under colonial home rule.⁸⁴ Nationalist MP J. J. Clancy noted that even during Grattan's Parliament there had been no Irish executive responsible to that parliament, thus the measure marked an advancement in this regard.⁸⁵ Sinn Féin leader Arthur Griffith also idealized Grattan's Parliament, again showing that even while opposing one another Irish nationalists employed the same vocabulary. Clancy concluded ominously of the bill, "attempts to belittle it, to decry it, to depreciate it, ought not to be made by anyone who is not prepared to enforce a better settlement by force of arms."⁸⁶

This was an acknowledgment of the realpolitik of the situation, and an allusion to the IPP's limitations. Despite holding the balance of power at Westminster, Irish representatives had to accept legislation framed by their British counterparts. While that legislation might take Irish aspirations into account, they would always be limited by British public opinion and party politics. Despite jibes at Redmond as the "dollar dictator," supposedly bending Asquith's government to his will, the IPP's options after the bill's introduction were limited. They could oppose it, and even turn out Asquith's government. This would leave the Unionists to form a government, likely killing home rule or ensuring its envelopment within a federal scheme that might take years to unfold. The IPP were not prepared to turn against a sitting government

⁸² *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 15 April 1912.

⁸³ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 13 April 1912.

⁸⁴ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 15 April 1912.

⁸⁵ J. J. Clancy, "The Home Rule Bill, The Constitutional Aspects," *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 16 April 1912.

⁸⁶ J. J. Clancy, "The Home Rule Bill, An Explanation of the Financial Scheme," *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 13 April 1912.

pledged—however reluctantly—to home rule, and had to accept whatever bill they produced. The *Irish Independent* was correct in asserting that the people had no choice but to accept the bill, and their representatives at Westminster could do little more.

In fact, the nationalists had been unable to use a significant piece of leverage to influence the framing of the bill's most contentious clauses: finance. In 1911, Asquith's government set up a commission to explore the economics of home rule. Chaired by retired Treasury official Henry Primrose, the committee reported that the most beneficial arrangement would be to grant Ireland full fiscal autonomy.⁸⁷ Birrell sent a copy of the commission's report to Redmond in October 1911, with a note that the government did not intend to carry it out due to "political considerations."⁸⁸ Denis Kelly, Catholic Bishop of Ross and the Irish expert on the Primrose committee, believed that the only reason for the government to withhold fiscal autonomy was an imperialist mindset. He wrote, "Like Pharaoh of old they will not let the Hebrews go," and, "Ireland is growing richer. They want to share in our taxes for all their British schemes, which can do us only harm."⁸⁹

On April 20, 1912, the press published the commission's full report.⁹⁰ This confirmation that the government had ignored its own committee's recommendations to restrict the Irish legislature's powers seemed to validate protests against the bill's financial scheme. The same day, the Irish County Councils General Council, a standing committee representing the local governments on the island, publicly criticized the financial clauses in harsh terms, while still recommending acceptance.⁹¹

Redmond called a convention of Irish nationalists to consider the home rule bill for April 23. This was a tense moment for the IPP leadership.⁹² A similar gathering of Party supporters had rejected the 1907 Irish Council Bill, and Asquith's home rule terms were causing significant discontent. However, the 8,700 delegates, primarily from pro-IPP organizations, signaled their approval by acclamation.⁹³ The *Freeman's Journal* called the verdict, "the solemn ratification of

⁸⁷ National Library of Ireland (NLI), John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,199/4, Denis Kelly to John Redmond, 16 September 1911.

⁸⁸ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,169/3, Augustine Birrell, "Private Memorandum," n.d.; Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971), 199.

⁸⁹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,199/4, Denis Kelly, "Home Rule or Devolution," 17 January 1912.

⁹⁰ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 20 April 1912.

⁹¹ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 22 April 1912.

⁹² NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,182/19, John Dillon to John Redmond, 14 January 1912.

⁹³ For the numbers and affiliations of attendees see *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 10 May 1912.

Ireland to the peace offering of the British people.”⁹⁴ Support for the bill was widespread enough that it moved forward, but was largely based on Irish nationalists’ recognition of the fact that it was the best they could expect, not genuine enthusiasm for its terms.

Unionist Arguments against Home Rule

While the IPP reasserted its authority within nationalism, unionist arguments against home rule were not affected by the bill’s introduction. Some of the opinions that the IPP marshalled in favor of the measure were echoed by unionists attacking it. Belfast businessman Thomas Sinclair argued that the existence of an Irish executive would mean that the Imperial Parliament would have no more control over its Irish counterpart than it had of the Canadian legislature. He added that the unionists would only be able to secure thirty to thirty-two votes in the Irish Commons, leaving them helpless in a house of 164. As the province of Ulster was allotted fifty-nine seats, this was an admission that the population there was approximately half-nationalist. Moreover, it gives the impression that unionists might be willing to work home rule if they were guaranteed more votes. Ironically, Sinclair was describing the nationalist quandary at Westminster, as for decades they had held around eighty seats in a house of nearly 700. Godfrey Fetherstonhaugh, MP for North Fermanagh, even suggested that “Ulster,” meaning his fellow northern unionists, might be persuaded to cooperate in self-government, but only for “a real Home Rule Bill such as Canada has” not “a silly Bill like that now before Parliament.”⁹⁵ This statement might have been meant simply to embarrass the nationalists, as most Irish unionists asserted that they would oppose home rule under any circumstances.

The general terms of the arguments against home rule had already been set at Craigavon, Balmoral, and numerous meetings before and between these major demonstrations. British and Irish unionists elaborated their opinions in a book timed to coincide with the introduction of the home rule bill.⁹⁶ *Against Home Rule: The Case for the Union* was a collaborative effort between British, Ulster, and southern unionists.

The task of explaining the mindset and demands of Ulster unionists was delegated to Thomas Sinclair. He began by asserting that the term, “Ulster” should only apply to areas of the

⁹⁴ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 24 April 1912.

⁹⁵ Godfrey Fetherstonhaugh at Irvinestown, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 17 August 1912.

⁹⁶ For the timing of the publication see *The Times* (London), 11 April 1912.

northern province in which unionists were the majority.⁹⁷ Sinclair never mentioned the existence of a nationalist population in Ulster, and the fact that they were an actual demographic majority in some of the areas he claimed as primarily unionist was seemingly of no consequence. He wrote that Ulster unionists considered themselves a colonial remnant in Ireland. The English and Scottish peoples owed them some consideration in constitutional issues as, “We are in Ireland as their trustees, having had committed to us, through their and our forefathers, the development of the material resources of Ulster, the preservation of its loyalty, and the discharge of its share of Imperial obligations.”⁹⁸ He wrote that Ulster unionists wanted to remain united with the rest of the island under the Act of Union. However, if home rule were passed, “contrary to Ulster’s earnest and patriotic pleading,” “she” desired to remain under Westminster’s direct rule. If this demand were refused, a provisional government was the only recourse.⁹⁹

Lawyer and historian Richard Bagwell spelled out the case for the Union from the southern viewpoint. Many of his subjects, often called the unionists of the “South and West,” were landowners who split their time between Ireland and Britain. For some of them, their Irish lands were one of a number of their interests throughout the United Kingdom and they did not spend much time on the island. Though southern unionists were often identified exclusively as landowners, many were merchants. The middle- and working-class population of south Dublin sometimes returned a unionist to Parliament. After 1885, this was the only unionist constituency outside of Ulster or Trinity College. Lord Oranmore and Browne of Co. Mayo estimated that there were 270,000 southern unionists, but they were so scattered that their electoral strength was negligible in most areas.¹⁰⁰ George O’Callaghan-Westropp told a unionist meeting in Ennis, “the votes of all the Protestants in Clare would not return even a single District Councillor.”¹⁰¹ Southern unionists like Carson and Campbell, who identified themselves closely with the northern resistance movement, were sometimes frustrated at what they considered lack of action

⁹⁷ Thomas Sinclair, “The Position of Ulster,” in *Against Home Rule: The Case for the Union*, ed. S. Rosenbaum (London: Frederick Warne, 1912), 170.

⁹⁸ Sinclair, “The Position of Ulster,” in *Against Home Rule*, 171.

⁹⁹ Sinclair, “The Position of Ulster,” in *Against Home Rule*, 180-181.

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey H. Browne [pseud. Lord Oranmore and Browne] in London, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 6 April 1911.

¹⁰¹ George O’Callaghan-Westropp at Ennis, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 23 January 1912.

by their counterparts outside of Ulster.¹⁰² However, the outlook and goals of the two sections of Irish unionism were largely aligned in early 1912.

Bagwell indicated that while religion was an identifiable dividing line, unionists feared political persecution, and they depended on their status within the United Kingdom to prevent this. He wrote, “Protestant ascendancy, though used as a catchword, is a thing long past. Roman Catholic ascendancy would be a very real thing under Home Rule. The supremacy of the Imperial Parliament alone makes both the one and the other impossible.”¹⁰³ A particular fear was exclusion from the bureaucracy and local government offices.¹⁰⁴ Bagwell argued that safeguarding the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament was impossible. He wrote, “A Parliament is by nature supreme within its sphere of action, and its constant effort would be to enlarge that field,” and, “Nothing will conciliate the revolutionary faction in Ireland, and there is every reason to think that it would become the strongest.”¹⁰⁵ Like Sinclair, Bagwell insinuated that Irish unionists were fulfilling a colonial mission in Ireland. He wrote that southern unionists “exercised a great civilizing influence” on those around them.¹⁰⁶ Also like Ulster unionists, the case he presented was for maintaining the status quo; any change would, according to Bagwell, result in Ireland’s separation from the UK and political persecution of minorities.

Many Protestant clergy openly identified with resistance to home rule. On April 16, the Church of Ireland General Synod passed a resolution denouncing, “any measure that could endanger the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland,” and appealing to British unionists to prevent their Irish “brethren” being, “thrust out from their inheritance and common citizenship.”¹⁰⁷ In moving the resolution, Bishop Charles D’Arcy said that being a patriotic Irishman was compatible with loyalty to the Empire. However, there were clear distinctions between the two segments of the island’s population, “In the one section they found a brooding hatred of England, in the other a devoted affection for all the ideals for which England stands. As Irish Nationalists were the most disloyal of all British subjects, so Irish Loyalists were the most loyal, the most loving, the most devoted.” George Chadwick, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe,

¹⁰² James H. Campbell, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 6 April 1911; PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/110, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 26 November 1913; United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/39, Midleton to Edward Carson, 6 December 1918.

¹⁰³ Richard Bagwell, “The Southern Minorities,” in *Against Home Rule*, 184.

¹⁰⁴ Bagwell, “The Southern Minorities,” in *Against Home Rule*, 186.

¹⁰⁵ Bagwell, “The Southern Minorities,” in *Against Home Rule*, 186, 187.

¹⁰⁶ Bagwell, “The Southern Minorities,” in *Against Home Rule*, 183.

¹⁰⁷ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 17 April 1912.

defined his objections to self-government as expressly religious. He declared that he had “studied Romanism and therefore he was certain they would be persecuted...Rome had never failed to persecute when she has the power.”¹⁰⁸

There were a number of protests against the Church of Ireland taking an official stance on a political question like home rule. E. P. Culverwell of Trinity College argued that as Protestants had denounced the “priest in politics” as early as 1893, the synod proceedings made them hypocrites. He asked, “if not the Church of Rome, why the Church of Ireland?”¹⁰⁹ Walter MacMurrough Kavanagh, a former nationalist MP for the Ulster constituency of Carlow, expressed similar sentiments during the synod. The *Irish Times* defended the Church’s stance by arguing that home rule was outside the realm of normal politics. The paper estimated that ninety-nine percent of Protestants were unionists, dismissing home rulers in their ranks as “a minute minority.”¹¹⁰

Clergyman J. O. Hannay, better known as the writer George A. Birmingham, opposed the synod resolution, adding that he was a home ruler, but Asquith’s bill was not a good one. William Hutcheson Poe argued that the resolution might accurately represent the feelings of Ulster unionists, but southern Protestants lived on the best of terms with their Catholic neighbors, and, “having no fears of any possible encroachments on their religious liberties are strongly opposed to their Church being identified with any resolution of an offensive nature against the members of another persuasion.” He added that he believed the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland was diminishing, and would continue to do so under self-government.¹¹¹

Despite this debate, the Irish Protestant churches tended toward a unionist stance, whether formal or informal. The same dynamic worked within the Catholic clergy in favor of nationalism. Sometimes this was directed against the unionists. Thomas Cummins, a parish priest in Roscommon, praised the Home Rule Bill as a “Treaty of Peace.” The only thing standing in its way was, “that Orange crowd in a corner of the North of Ireland moved with unreasoning hate to [sic] their Catholic fellow countrymen.”¹¹² W. Lillis, the parish priest of Ballindangan, Co. Cork, wrote that unionists had no arguments against home rule, simply the,

¹⁰⁸ The synod speeches were printed in the *Freeman’s Journal* and *Irish Times* of 17 April 1912.

¹⁰⁹ E. P. Culverwell, Letter to the editor, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 18 April 1912.

¹¹⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 17 April 1912.

¹¹¹ *Freeman’s Journal* and *Irish Times* of 17 April 1912.

¹¹² Thomas Cummins at Roscommon, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 16 April 1912.

“abuse and insult and threats of hypothetical blackguardism of a few thousand irreconcilable bigots from a remote corner of the black North.”¹¹³ While unionists themselves often reduced their movement to a small part of the island, belittling rather than engaging with their arguments against home rule only furthered misunderstanding.

Movements to accord separate treatment to some portion of Ulster intensified after the Third Home Rule Bill’s introduction. In Parliament on April 11, 1912, Carson raised the same point John St. Loe Strachey had discussed in the *Spectator*. The Irish unionist leader asked, “what argument is there that you can raise for giving Home Rule to Ireland that you do not equally raise for giving Home Rule to that Protestant minority in the north-east province?” Redmond responded, “Is that his proposal? Is that his demand?,” to which Carson interjected, “Will you agree to it?”¹¹⁴ Stephen Gwynn later wrote that Redmond was embarrassed and confused at the reply.¹¹⁵ Carson had said numerous times that northern unionists would not demand separate treatment, primarily out of common cause with their counterparts in other parts of Ireland. Now, he implied that if the nationalist leader consented to separate Ulster from the rest of Ireland, he and his supporters would agree.

The idea of dividing Ireland soon moved out of the realm of conjecture and into Parliament. On May 11, the *Freeman’s Journal* reported that an amendment to the Home Rule Bill had been tabled that would exclude four counties from the new legislature’s control: Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry.¹¹⁶ Unionists had sponsored most of the modifications. However, the exclusion amendment came from Liberal Thomas Agar-Robartes. Introducing the amendment on June 11, he said he was eager to see home rule pass, and his exclusion scheme was designed to remove the major obstacle to it. To justify dividing the island, Agar-Robartes said, “I think everyone will admit that Ireland consists of two nations different in sentiment, character, history, and religion.”¹¹⁷ Though he claimed to be a home ruler, Agar-Robartes was a liberal imperialist and had opposed Irish self-government during the 1906 election campaign.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ W. Lillis, Letter to the editor of the *Cork Examiner*, reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 4 May 1912.

¹¹⁴ Edward Carson, “Settlement of an Old Controversy,” House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 11 April 1912 vol 36 cc1424-514, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond’s Last Years* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1919), 67.

¹¹⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 11 May 1912.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Agar-Robartes, “Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament),” HC Deb 11 June 1912 vol 39 cc744-824, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹¹⁸ H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Élite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 300; Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 80.

The *Fortnightly Review* later asserted that his anti-home rule stance and the exclusion amendment stemmed from an intense Protestantism.¹¹⁹

The *Irish Times* asserted that the amendment was not designed to operate, but to point out the government's faulty logic, as highlighted by the *Spectator* and Carson, "If a small fraction of the United Kingdom is entitled to self-government, then a fourth part of the population of Ireland is entitled to self-government as against the three-fourths." It is interesting to note that the paper referred to population rather than geographical area, as this facilitated grouping the southern and northern unionists together. The *Irish Times* called the idea of excluding certain parts of the north from home rule, "a trap, designed to secure an admission that the Northern Unionists were willing to abandon the Unionists of the rest of Ireland to their fate," and praised "Ulster," meaning northern unionists, for not falling into it.¹²⁰ London's *Times* called the prospect of removing certain counties from home rule, "utterly impractical." The value of raising the proposal was that, "An attempt to exclude Ulster or any portion of Ulster would...be fatal to the Bill and to the whole principle of Home Rule."¹²¹

Legislators agreed. Unionist William Hayes Fisher told Parliament, "if this Amendment is carried it kills the Bill." Carson quoted his own speech in which he asserted, "If Ulster succeeds Home Rule is dead," and added that counties Tyrone and Fermanagh were as entitled to exclusion as the four listed.¹²² Assertions such as these led Irish nationalists to conclude that, despite what Agar-Robartes said, the Unionists were using his idea as a "wrecking amendment" to destroy the home rule bill.¹²³ Redmond pointed out that the four counties contained approximately 315,000 Catholics and 700,000 Protestants, arguing against the unionist portrayal of, "a great body of a million there, homogeneous in race, in religion, and in political conviction." He added that electoral returns showed more home rule votes in the four counties than there were Catholics among the population, indicating that many of the area's Protestants

¹¹⁹ Auditor Tantum [pseud.], "The Spirit of the House," *Fortnightly Review* (Nov. 1915): 854.

¹²⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 June 1912.

¹²¹ *The Times* (London), 12 June 1912.

¹²² William Hayes Fisher and Edward Carson, "Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament)," HC Deb 13 June 1912 vol 39 cc1064-131, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹²³ John Redmond, "Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament)," HC Deb 13 June 1912 vol 39 cc1064-131, Hansard 1803-2005; Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1919), 68-69.

voted for self-government.¹²⁴ Bonar Law insisted that Unionist support of the exclusion amendment was a sincere attempt to avoid an inevitable civil war on the passage of home rule.¹²⁵

During a speech at Carlisle, Dillon echoed Redmond when he said, “the Catholic and Protestant are inextricably mixed up in these counties. It was no homogenous population.” He added, “we want home rule for all Ireland or no home rule.” Dillon ended with a derisive attack on his opponents, “The thing the Protestants of Ulster could not bear to accept was equality with their fellow-countrymen. Their attitude was one of hatred, an intolerable spirit.”¹²⁶ The four-county exclusion amendment failed, with three Liberals voting in favor.¹²⁷

While the Home Rule Bill continued its parliamentary path, the Unionists conducted an increasingly strident campaign against it in Britain. During a meeting in London’s Albert Hall, Carson said the government had shown that they would not leave the northern province out of the bill, and had therefore issued a “declaration of war against Ulster.”¹²⁸ A June 25 message from Bonar Law to a Unionist candidate declared that the government, “by deliberately refusing to give separate treatment to Ulster have made it certain that even if they succeed in carrying Home Rule through Parliament it can never be enforced except as a result of civil war, which would not be confined to Ireland.”¹²⁹ Despite Unionist insistence that separate treatment for Ulster was not their goal, these statements imply that lack of special legislative provisions for the northern province would spark a civil war, rather than the passage of home rule itself.

The resistance rhetoric reached its height during a unionist demonstration at Blenheim Palace on July 27, 1912. Bonar Law called the government, “a revolutionary committee which has seized by fraud upon despotic power.” He asserted that the Parliament Act had subverted the normal course of politics, therefore, “we shall not be restrained by the bonds, which would influence us in an ordinary political struggle,” adding, “I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go in which I shall not be ready to support them and in which they will not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.”¹³⁰ Carson referred to a speech

¹²⁴ John Redmond, “Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament),” HC Deb 13 June 1912 vol 39 cc1064-131, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹²⁵ Andrew Bonar Law, “Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament),” HC Deb 18 June 1912 vol 39 cc1503-618, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹²⁶ John Dillon at Carlisle, *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 15 June 1912.

¹²⁷ *Spectator* (London), 22 June 1912.

¹²⁸ Edward Carson in London, *The Times* (London), 15 June 1912.

¹²⁹ *The Times* (London), 26 June 1912.

¹³⁰ Andrew Bonar Law at Blenheim, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 29 July 1912.

Asquith had given in which the Prime Minister said he did not believe the Ulster unionists were in earnest. The Irish unionist leader called it a challenge, and assured his audience that steps were already being taken to “perfect our arrangements for making Home Rule absolutely impossible.” He added, “They may tell us if they like that that is treason. We are prepared to face the consequences.”¹³¹

Carson’s rhetoric had changed little since the Craigavon demonstration. His private statements suggest that he meant what he said. He wrote to Lady Londonderry after the Blenheim meeting, “I hope we will have the biggest row there ever has been and be done with it one way or the other.”¹³² In July 1913, Carson indicated to British Unionist MP W. A. S. Hewins that they would not have to resort to violence. The Irish unionist leader said, “he had known for a long time that the Government would not force Home Rule on Ulster. So it is all play-acting.”¹³³ Historian Ronan Fanning takes this as proof that Carson knew the government did not intend to pass the Home Rule Bill without modifications, and interprets the Irish unionist leader’s violent rhetoric as posturing to force changes that members of the Cabinet were inclined to make anyway.¹³⁴ However, Carson was conciliatory at times and violent at others. From 1910 he consistently expressed to Lady Londonderry his anger and willingness to fight. On the other hand, according to RIC accounts of UUC meetings, Carson was often the most moderate voice in the room, urging the Ulster unionists to compromise on home rule.¹³⁵ Carson portrayed himself as using his influence to restrain the northern unionist rank-and-file, a stance that earned him praise in the Unionist press, and gained credence among the authorities.¹³⁶

Bonar Law’s language marked a considerable radicalization of British unionist rhetoric. Given his position, many assumed that he was pledging the entire Unionist Party to violent resistance against home rule. Even some of his supporters thought this was too strong. *The Times* called the speech, “more explicit than was altogether desirable or necessary,” especially as home rule could not be enacted for at least two years. Nonetheless, the paper asserted that Bonar

¹³¹ Edward Carson at Blenheim, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 29 July 1912.

¹³² PRONI, Lady Londonderry Papers, D2846/1/1/88, Edward Carson to Lady Londonderry, 13 August 1912.

¹³³ W. A. S. Hewins, *The Apologia of an Imperialist: Forty Years of Empire Policy* (London: Constable, 1929), I:302, entry for 9 July 1913.

¹³⁴ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 54-58.

¹³⁵ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Detective Joseph Edwards, 15 December 1912.

¹³⁶ *The Times* (London), 10 February 1914; *Daily Express* (London), 9 June 1914; H. A. L. Fisher, *The Coalition Diaries and Letters of H. A. L. Fisher, 1916-1922: The Historian in Lloyd George’s Cabinet*, ed. F. Russell Bryant, 4 vols., (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), I:197, entry for 23 January 1918.

Law was merely issuing a warning, and that civil war would be the government's fault.¹³⁷ Bonar Law echoed the Blenheim speech in Parliament on July 31, 1912, and added, "I have seen no sign that there is not a Member of the party who does not endorse every word I say."¹³⁸ Unionist MP Robert Sanders wrote in his journal, "The party as a whole quite agrees with Bonar Law that Ulster would be justified in any steps she might take, but I have not yet been able to find out who she is going to fight or what form resistance can take."¹³⁹ Sanders suggests that he would support a certain type of resistance against a specific opponent. This might indicate support for passive resistance against an Irish parliament, but not actual violence against British troops. Moreover, Sanders highlights a major incongruity in the unionist resistance strategy. While pledging their loyalty to the British Crown and Empire, Carson and his associates openly invoked the idea of fighting the British Army to prevent home rule.

There was a fundamental disconnect between how unionists regarded what they were saying and how their opponents interpreted their words. Unionists claimed they were delivering cogent warnings that civil war was inevitable, as Ulster unionists were determined to resist home rule. Irish nationalists and some Liberals interpreted their speeches as inciting rebellion against a constitutionally elected government.¹⁴⁰ After Bonar Law's message that civil war would not be confined to Ireland, Dillon accused him of threatening to bring civil war to the entire United Kingdom to prevent home rule.¹⁴¹ The *Freeman's Journal* mocked the idea that Bonar Law was issuing such outrageous threats because the government had refused to give separate treatment to the northern province. The paper asserted that Ulster unionists claimed the right to bar any legislation for Ireland, "the 'Ulster' claim is a claim to an ascendancy and a veto, not a claim to self-government."¹⁴² Politicians were already trying to lay blame for theoretical violence, and soon had actual events to focus their attention.

On June 29, 1912, a Presbyterian Sunday school procession met an Ancient Order of Hibernians band on a road outside of Castledawson, Co. Antrim. The groups exchanged insults, and a melee ensued. Protestants from the nearby town became involved, and several people

¹³⁷ *The Times* (London), 29 July 1912.

¹³⁸ Andrew Bonar Law, "Belfast Riots," HC Deb 31 July 1912 vol 41 cc2088-149, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹³⁹ Robert Sanders, *Real Old Tory Politics: The Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, ed. John Ramsden (London: Historians' Press, 1984), 49, entry for 11 August 1912.

¹⁴⁰ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 3 July and 6 July 1912.

¹⁴¹ John Dillon at Ilkeston, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 27 June 1912.

¹⁴² *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 27 June 1912.

were injured, including members of the RIC who had been escorting the two groups.¹⁴³ At a meeting of Belfast Presbyterian clergy the next week, Rev. John McIlveen said he hoped the events, “would open the eyes of their fellow-Protestants in Scotland and England to the position of peril in which the lives and liberties of their co-religionists would be placed were the proposed measure of Home Rule for Ireland adopted by the Imperial Parliament.”¹⁴⁴

Over the next several days, violent outbreaks began in Belfast. The northern metropolis had a long history of rioting, fueled by sectarianism, politics, and the fact that a Catholic nationalist minority comprising 24 percent of the city’s population lived in close contact with their Protestant unionist neighbors.¹⁴⁵ The rejection of the First Home Rule Bill in 1886 sparked one of the worst outbreaks, in which thirty-two people lost their lives.¹⁴⁶ Throughout July 1912, nationalists and unionists attacked one another and wrecked shops associated with the other side. The most far-reaching incidents occurred in the shipyards, where approximately 2,000 Catholic and 500 Protestant workers were forced from their jobs. In late July the Army was called in to restore order. Unionists asserted that the introduction of the Home Rule Bill caused the violence, the Castledawson incident had been a mere spark.¹⁴⁷ Nationalists argued that Unionist Clubs had grown within the city’s workplaces, and they used recent events as a pretext to expel home rulers.¹⁴⁸ Harland and Wolff, the city’s largest employer and builder of the *Titanic*, shut down completely.¹⁴⁹ There were also disturbances in the second-largest shipbuilder, Workman and Clark. UUC member George Clark, a partner in the firm, had been tasked with organizing the Unionist Clubs.¹⁵⁰ The incidents were unfortunate for nationalists, as any violence strengthened the unionist argument that only the British administration could maintain peace in Ireland. Home rulers might have used the worker expulsions to highlight the possible plight of their

¹⁴³ The most reliable evidence for the events are the RIC accounts published in the *Irish Times* on 23, 24, and 26 July. Augustine Birrell also read an RIC report in the Commons. See *The Times* (London), 3 July 1912.

¹⁴⁴ John McIlveen in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 5 July 1912.

¹⁴⁵ For statistics on the religious population of Belfast see NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,266.

¹⁴⁶ Alan Megahey, “‘God Will Defend the Right’: Protestant Churches and Opposition to Home Rule,” in *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day (London: Routledge, 2001), 163.

¹⁴⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 6 July 1912; Charles Craig, “Belfast Riots,” HC Deb 31 July 1912 vol 41 cc2088-149, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph Devlin, “Belfast Riots,” HC Deb 31 July 1912 vol 41 cc2088-149, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁴⁹ *The Times* (London), 29 July 1912.

¹⁵⁰ PRONI, Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) Papers, D4503/1, UUC Standing Committee Minutes, 8 December 1910.

northern comrades under unionist government, but as proposals to divide Ireland were not being taken seriously there was no impetus for doing so.

At the end of August 1912, Churchill urged Redmond to make an offer to mollify the northern unionists, as, “The opposition of three or four Ulster Counties is the only obstacle which now stands in the way of Home Rule.” Churchill added that the stakes were higher than the issue of Irish self-government, “I do not believe there is any real feeling against Home Rule in the Tory Party apart from the Ulster question, but they hate the Government, are bitterly desirous of turning it out, and see in the resistance of Ulster an extra parliamentary force which they will not hesitate to use to the full.” Churchill’s suggested remedy was problematic. He said they should “afford the characteristically Protestant and Orange Counties the option of a moratorium of several years before acceding to the Irish Parliament.”¹⁵¹ These statements reflect a widely held belief among British politicians and the press that there were “characteristically Protestant” counties. Redmond knew that every Ulster county contained a large nationalist population. If he proposed a deal involving the abandonment of those nationalists—even temporarily—he would face recriminations from supporters and opponents alike. The IPP leader encouraged the Liberal government to stick to the Home Rule Bill, knowing that their combined parliamentary strength would inevitably pass it. They could then take steps to mollify northern unionists in the knowledge that the law was on the nationalists’ side.¹⁵²

The Ulster Covenant and Volunteers

The anti-home rule campaign continued to intensify. In the midst of the summer tour of Britain, James Craig announced they would hold a demonstration on “Ulster Day,” September 28, 1912. He said, “every man and woman would have an opportunity of showing to England and to the world at large that there was no bluff about their preparations, and that there was no humbug when Ulster said she meant to fight.”¹⁵³ In mid-August the UUC announced that “special religious services” would be held all over the province on Ulster Day, and all unionists should sign a covenant approved by the Council.¹⁵⁴ There were initially few specifics as to the nature of this document. *The Times* asserted that signatories would pledge themselves not to

¹⁵¹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,175/9, Winston Churchill to John Redmond, 31 August 1912.

¹⁵² NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/3, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 24 November 1913.

¹⁵³ James Craig at Bangor, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 15 July 1912.

¹⁵⁴ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 17 August 1912; *Irish Times* (Dublin), 19 August 1912.

recognize or pay taxes to an Irish parliament. The paper predicted that 750,000 people would sign, and, “by its gravity, its moderation, and its unflinching firmness that it will arrest the attention and command the support of the English and the Scottish peoples.”¹⁵⁵

Thomas Lough, Liberal MP for Islington West and a native of Co. Cavan, in Ulster, told the press that projecting 750,000 covenant signatories was preposterous. He said such exaggerations showed the movement was a bluff, “The whole of this stage business adds but one more to the many historic examples of a difference of opinion between parties in Ireland which is neither serious nor permanent being utilized by leaders of English opinion for the meanest purposes of their own party warfare.”¹⁵⁶ Like many home rulers, Lough underestimated unionist fears of Irish self-government, but it is evident that the resistance movement was being used to influence party politics.

J. B. Armour, a Presbyterian minister and home ruler from Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, asserted that Protestant clergy were being pressured to support the covenant.¹⁵⁷ There was no shortage of active unionist clergymen, but the drive for unanimity among political and religious creeds throughout the United Kingdom likely spurred attempts to influence those who disagreed or wished not to involve their churches in politics. Armour wrote to his son of the Ulster Day plans, “The whole business is a disgrace to Protestantism and will give it a bad kick...If the design of the service was to pray God to send forth a spirit of evil, the prayers have been fully answered, as strife and ill feeling have been introduced into almost all congregations.”¹⁵⁸ After the covenant’s publication, B. R. Balfour, a unionist justice of the peace from Drogheda, expressed concern that its terms were a cover for physical force.¹⁵⁹

Despite such misgivings, there was no sign of dissension in unionist reports of September 28. As advertised, the day began with Protestant church services around the province. The *Irish Times* asserted, “Unhappily there has in the past been less co-operation between the various Protestant denominations than is desirable, but this Home Rule question has removed all barriers.” The proceedings included a special prayer to, “Avert the dreadful sins of civil and religious strife which now threaten.” The main Belfast service in the Ulster Hall incorporated a

¹⁵⁵ *The Times* (London), 22 August 1912.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Lough, Letter to the editor, *The Times* (London), 23 August 1912; *Irish Times* (Dublin), 23 August 1912.

¹⁵⁷ PRONI, J. B. Armour Papers, D1792/A/3/3/32, J. B. Armour to W. S. Armour, 26 September 1912.

¹⁵⁸ PRONI, J. B. Armour Papers, D1792/A/3/3/33, J. B. Armour to W. S. Armour, 3 October 1912.

¹⁵⁹ B. R. Balfour, “The Ulster Covenant,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 23 September 1912.

reading from Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 10 to 18, which includes, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”¹⁶⁰

Given the religious nature of the day, the early speakers were Protestant clergymen. William McKean, former moderator of the Irish Presbyterian General Assembly, told his audience that Ulster unionists were the descendants of planters who had found the land a “morass” and made it ordered and prosperous by their own industry. He had no equivocations as to what political change would mean for his congregation, “The Irish question is at bottom a war against Protestantism; it is an attempt to establish a Roman Catholic ascendancy and to begin the disintegration of the Empire.” The sitting moderator, Henry Montgomery, argued that there were two units in Ireland, discernable, “not so much to geographical boundaries as an inherent and ineradicable endowments of character and aims.” He added, “If the Roman Catholic unit may choose its course in regard to the British Constitution, the same choice, in fairness, belongs to the Protestant section.” Charles D’Arcy, the Church of Ireland’s Bishop of Down and Connor, said, “no power has the right to sell us into slavery,” and home rule would, “ultimately destroy the fair fabric of British civilisation.” Defending the right of Protestant clergy to intervene in politics in some circumstances, he said, “When we believe that the very foundations of our life as a community are in danger we cannot, we dare not, keep silence.”¹⁶¹ The *Irish Times* was uncomfortable with the religious nature of the proceedings, but argued that it showed the seriousness of the resistance movement. The paper quoted Edward Carson as saying, “For Ulster...the Union is not a policy, but a religion.”¹⁶²

The secular portion of the day was marked by highly choreographed and dramatic actions. Following the church services, unionists marched together to sign Ulster’s Solemn League and Covenant. In Belfast, the central location was City Hall. Edward Carson headed the procession from the Ulster Hall surrounded by an honor guard of Orangemen and Unionist Club members. Carson was the first to sign the Covenant, which asserted that self-government, “would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland,

¹⁶⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

¹⁶¹ William McKean, Henry Montgomery, and Charles D’Arcy in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

¹⁶² *Irish Times* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship, and perilous to the unity of the Empire,” and pledged its signers to, “using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland.” There was a separate but similar Covenant for female signatories. After the signing, Carson and his honor guard marched to the docks, where he boarded the Liverpool-bound ship *Patriotic* to supervise signing ceremonies in Britain.¹⁶³ Scenes such as this, though with less ceremony and fewer distinguished persons present, were repeated in unionist areas all over the province. Other signings took place in Dublin, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, and Exeter.¹⁶⁴ The total signatures from Ulster amounted to 218,206 men and 228,991 women, representing approximately 28 percent of the province’s total population.¹⁶⁵

While unionist organs praised the day’s religious significance and its disciplined ceremonials, the *Freeman’s Journal* highlighted other aspects of the events. According to the IPP organ, unionist bands played staid hymns alongside incendiary party tunes like “Boyne Water” and “Kick the Pope.” It described Montgomery’s speech as, “An Anti-Catholic Diatribe.” Violent imagery like wooden rifles and a wooden cannon featured in the Belfast displays, and Carson’s send-off at the *Patriotic* was heralded by random revolver fire. The paper described the events as, “farce,” “posturings,” “rantings,” and “wild theatricality.”¹⁶⁶ London’s *Daily News* also noted the wooden guns, and said the demonstrations showed that Ulster unionists were sincere, but a “small faction” could not resist majority opinion in Ireland, Britain, and the Empire.¹⁶⁷

Despite home rulers’ dismissals of the Covenant signing, there were persistent signs that unionists were willing to do more to resist home rule than sign a piece of paper. RIC accounts of unionist drilling continued. In January 1912 there was a report of young men carrying out military exercises with wooden rifles in the Orange Hall in Clabby, Co. Fermanagh. A sergeant dismissed it as harmless bravado.¹⁶⁸ Birrell intimated that it was a publicity stunt, “The Ulster

¹⁶³ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

¹⁶⁴ *The Times* (London), 30 September 1912.

¹⁶⁵ For the Covenant signatures see PRONI, Edward Carson Papers, D1507/A/37/6, “Return of signatures to Ulster’s Solemn League and Covenant from Ulster only.” For Irish population information see National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Census of Ireland 1901/1911, <http://census.nationalarchives.ie/>.

¹⁶⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

¹⁶⁷ *Daily News* (London), reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 30 September 1912.

¹⁶⁸ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, Report of RIC Sergeant J. W. Carson, 23 February 1912.

politicians want to attract as much police with their budding rebellion as possible.”¹⁶⁹ Other reports filtered in over the ensuing months, most of the notable cases from Fermanagh. By July men in Tubrid were training in companies, with the rector of the local Protestant church acting as commander and instructor.¹⁷⁰ The RIC began cataloging incidents of drilling in November, receiving 219 reports for that month alone.¹⁷¹

In August, the Young Citizen Volunteers (YCV) was formed in Belfast. Ostensibly apolitical and non-sectarian, the YCV was identified with unionism from its outset. The *Belfast Evening Telegraph* asserted that the government would not help to arm and train them due to the involvement of prominent unionists.¹⁷² The *Weekly Irish Times* said they were formed, “to assist the authorities in the suppression of civil disturbances.”¹⁷³ Despite these assertions, the YCV was widely identified as a partisan political organization.

At the end of August, Enniskillen magistrate W. Copeland Trimble formed a mounted escort for Carson when he held a meeting in the town. The unit, which Trimble named the Enniskillen Horse, did not disband after the September 18 meeting, but continued to form part of the local unionist pageantry. By January 1913, Trimble had enrolled 309 troopers and a twenty-four-member band. He wrote to Secretary for War J. E. B. Seely asking the British Army to incorporate the unit into the yeomanry. This would entitle them to equipment and ammunition from the War Office. Trimble described the men as, “loyal to the core, which involves, of course, obedience to the law & co-operation with it.”¹⁷⁴ It is striking that Trimble was confident enough to make the request, but one of his letters indicates that Seely agreed to recognize the unit as part of the territorial system.¹⁷⁵ However, the War Office requested an opinion on the organization’s legal status. A scathing memo by Attorney General for Ireland Ignatius O’Brien said it was, “a mere pretence that this Enniskillen Horse is a troop trained with lawful intentions and loyalty to His Majesty.”¹⁷⁶ The War Office began ignoring Trimble, but the willingness of British military officials to countenance Irish unionist militancy recurred.

¹⁶⁹ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, Augustine Birrell, 1 March 1912.

¹⁷⁰ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, Report of RIC Constable Thomas Lynch, 11 July 1912.

¹⁷¹ Breandán Mac Giolla Choille, ed., *Intelligence Notes, 1913-16* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1966), 20.

¹⁷² Reprinted in *Irish Times* (Dublin), 28 August 1912.

¹⁷³ *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 March 1913.

¹⁷⁴ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, W. Copeland Trimble to J. E. B. Seely, 20 November 1912.

¹⁷⁵ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, W. Copeland Trimble to J. E. B. Seely, 8 January 1913.

¹⁷⁶ UKNA, CO/904/27/1, Ignatius J. O’Brien, “Memorandum of the Attorney General,” 7 February 1913.

While Trimble acted independently, there were authoritative moves to organize unionist militants. On December 13, 1912, the UUC held a private meeting in Belfast's Old Town Hall. They discussed a compromise on home rule which Lord Londonderry had devised, supported by Carson and Craig. The majority were opposed, but they did not make a definite decision.¹⁷⁷ Later that night, Carson and his UUC advisers met at Craigavon, Craig's home. Most of this group, too, were against making a deal with the government. The discussion then moved to arming unionists against home rule. On information from an inside source, an RIC sergeant reported that most were in favor of "pacific means" of resisting home rule, only R. H. Wallace, leader of the Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast, "stoutly declared himself in favour of the arming of unionists generally."¹⁷⁸ Given what followed, it is likely that most of them were for armed resistance, but wanted some measure of control over those who bore arms in their cause.

Just ten days after the meetings in Belfast and Craigavon, the RIC in Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, reported that the UUC were enrolling Covenant signers "with the utmost haste" into a secret organization, the "Ulster Volunteer Movement."¹⁷⁹ On December 28, officers in Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone, submitted a copy of the enrollment form. Called the Ulster Volunteer Force, members were to serve, "throughout the crisis created by the passage into Law of the Home Rule Bill." The object was, "the mutual protection of all Loyalists, and generally to keep the peace."¹⁸⁰ The language implied, as had the discussion at Craigavon, that they would not take action until the home rule bill was law. Of course, enrolling the force was a form of action in itself. The language relating to the preservation of the peace was similar to that regarding the YCV. Throughout the period, unionists successfully portrayed their paramilitary organizations as designed to prevent rather than provoke disturbances, much as their leaders claimed their invocations of civil war were warnings, not incitements. This was despite the UVF's plans to take over as much of the province as possible, in contravention of British law and authority, if home rule passed.¹⁸¹

Further information on the force's objects trickled in. There was a suggestion that it would be armed with rifles and act as a police force on behalf of the Ulster provisional

¹⁷⁷ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Detective Joseph Edwards, 15 December 1912.

¹⁷⁸ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Detective Joseph Edwards, 15 December 1912.

¹⁷⁹ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Sergeant J. English, 23 December 1912.

¹⁸⁰ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Sergeant W. J. Blair, 28 December 1912.

¹⁸¹ PRONI, W. B. Spender Papers, D1295/2/7, "Plans for Ulster Provisional Government."

government.¹⁸² Another report said there would be two organizations; the UVF would be a police body while another force would be established with, “more of a military character,” and enlist, “all those who are prepared to take up arms to prevent a Nationalist Executive from exercising any authority in Ulster.”¹⁸³

The UUC was remarkably successful in maintaining secrecy while establishing the militant organization. Many unionist moves had been calculated to sway public opinion, particularly in Britain. The UVF’s formation was orchestrated quite differently. There were no public pronouncements until March 1913, when Robert Sharman-Crawford announced that they were establishing two armed bodies: one to “defend their homes” and another to patrol the “frontier line.” The *Weekly Irish Times* said the organizations were to “prevent the establishment of Home Rule in Ulster, and to resist any attack made upon the province.”¹⁸⁴ It was unclear who might be planning such an attack, but Charles Craig, MP for South Antrim, said later that month, “He had been asked if he would advocate resistance to British troops, and his answer unhesitatingly was yes.” Craig added that he did not believe the British Army would fire on them, but, “the death of one Ulsterman killed by a British bullet would administer such a shock to public opinion in Great Britain that the Government which ordered the shot to be fired would be hurled from power.”¹⁸⁵ The UVF increasingly became a matter of public record. By late May 1913, UUC spokesmen estimated their numbers at 30,000.¹⁸⁶

The UVF would lend Carson and Bonar Law an impressive bargaining chip in any negotiations with the government, but also gave the Unionist leaders a measure of control over their militant followers. Drilling was already widespread in the province in late 1912. There were militant unionist organizations in the YCV and Enniskillen Horse. However, unionist leaders had no control over these bodies. Enrolling the men in a paramilitary organization might give them a sense of taking action, removing much of the impetus for unilateral exploits.¹⁸⁷

This need to assert control and prevent spontaneous violence does not mean that unionist politicians were irrelevant to increasing militancy among their supporters. Violent unionist

¹⁸² UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Detective Robert Dunlop, 3 January 1913.

¹⁸³ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC County Inspector R. D. Morrison, 22 January 1913.

¹⁸⁴ *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin), 8 March 1913.

¹⁸⁵ Charles Craig at Antrim, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 March 1913.

¹⁸⁶ UKNA, CO/904/27/2, Report of RIC Detective Joseph Edwards, 20 May 1913.

¹⁸⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/23, Edward Carson to Lord Lansdowne, 9 October 1913; Edward Carson at Nottingham, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 6 December 1913.

rhetoric pre-dated the earliest instances of drilling recorded by the RIC. The speeches of Unionist MPs including Long, Bonar Law, Carson, Campbell, and Craig undoubtedly raised the levels of anxiety, fear, and anger toward home rule among their supporters. Forming the UVF was an attempt to forge those emotions and the militancy they provoked into a weapon. Pro-unionist observers emphasized UVF discipline, indicating that they could be relied upon not to engage in random violence.¹⁸⁸ This convinced some British politicians and the military establishment that, though the UVF's existence was not ideal, it was at least disciplined and under control.¹⁸⁹ Some historians continue to write in this vein.¹⁹⁰

Conclusions

In the short term, the introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill was a victory for the IPP. Redmond and his colleagues knew they had the votes to pass it at Westminster, therefore their party's long-elusive goal was within sight. By containing and deflecting nationalist criticism of the bill, the IPP proved their influence and power within Irish nationalism. However, for the long term, dissatisfaction with the Third Home Rule Bill was merely silenced, not assuaged. That many Irish nationalists expected the bill to embody colonial home rule shows that much of public opinion had moved on from the old Gladstonian formula of limited self-government. Irish nationalists accepted the bill because it was the only measure of self-government on offer, but many assumed it was merely a starting point, while British and Irish politicians sometimes referred to it as a final settlement.¹⁹¹ This crisis of expectations both within Irish nationalism and in its relations to British politics was forestalled, but not resolved, in 1912.

Unionist resistance to Irish self-government increased in intensity and organization between 1911 and 1912. The movement drew together Irish unionists north and south, their

¹⁸⁸ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 13 October 1913; *Daily Express* (London), 13 June 1914; Lord Castlereagh, "The Ulster Volunteer Force," *British Review* (July 1914): 1-11; A. V. Dicey, "The Enigma Still Unsolved (II): Facts and Thoughts for Unionists," *The Nineteenth Century and After* (April 1914): 717; F. G. Stone, "The Enigma Still Unsolved (III): Ulster as a Belligerent," *The Nineteenth Century and After* (April 1914): 727.

¹⁸⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C/6, Walter Long, "Ireland," 19 May 1916; C. E. Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1927), I:94, 137; Edward Gleichen, *A Guardsman's Memories* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1932), 382, 385-387; Nevil Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1924), I:190-191.

¹⁹⁰ Timothy Bowman, *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910-22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 206.

¹⁹¹ John Redmond, "Settlement of an Old Controversy," HC Deb 11 April 1912 vol 36 cc1424-514, Hansard 1803-2005.

British counterparts, and the Protestant clergy. Ulster unionists declared their intention to form a provisional government should home rule pass, and forced a Cabinet member to change his plans to hold a home rule meeting in Belfast, validating their claims to control large portions of the province. Bonar Law's increasingly violent language troubled some of his British supporters, but drew attention to the movement and convinced many that the Unionist Party were prepared to go to any lengths to support their Irish counterparts. The Covenant signing was a further propaganda coup for the Ulster unionists, designed to impress contemporaries with its solemnity, religious significance, and unyielding defiance of home rule. All of the unionists' public moves were designed to influence British public opinion. Even their framing of the Belfast riots was designed for British consumption.

The formation of the UVF was neither an entirely "top-down" nor "bottom-up" phenomenon. Carson and his deputies did not conjure militant unionism into existence in 1912. However, Unionist Party leaders had been using violent rhetoric since the January 1910 election campaign. It should have come as no surprise that some of the rank-and-file took them seriously and began to organize militantly against home rule in their local areas. Once the initially secret UVF came into the open, it became another facet of the Irish unionist campaign to influence British public opinion, emphasizing the force's discipline and power.

While unionist resistance to home rule did not force Asquith's government to abandon their course, some were willing to contemplate excluding part of Ireland from the bill's operation. The earliest proponents of exclusion within the Cabinet were Birrell, Lloyd George, and Churchill. Unionist support for the Agar-Robartes amendment to exclude four of the nine counties in Ulster seemed to show that they were willing to consider this type of settlement, despite their assertions to the contrary. Unionist spokesmen even shifted their rhetoric after the failure of this amendment to imply that the lack of separate treatment for Ulster, or some part of it, gave them a pretext to resist home rule.

CHAPTER 3

“A SETTLEMENT NOBODY WANTS:” EXCLUSION GAINS GROUND, 1913-1914

Introduction

The period 1913 to 1914 marks the point at which the home rule debate moved substantially out of the public sphere and into private negotiations. There were still large numbers of political meetings, parliamentary debates, and publications in which both sides espoused their ideals and arguments. Individuals continued to make settlement suggestions, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) came into the open, and some nationalists founded their own militia, the Irish Volunteers; all important developments in the public sphere. But by 1913 the major considerations had been aired and party leaders began to make concerted efforts behind closed doors to find a compromise in the multitude of ideas that had been tabled.

Some historians describe the Unionist Party as wholly backing their Ulster adjuncts in any steps they might take, citing Bonar Law as both the symbol and prime mover of this policy.¹ Other scholars assert that Bonar Law cared primarily about Ulster, but much less about the rest of Ireland.² Still others argue that the support of Bonar Law and the Unionist Party for the northern unionists was strategic as well as sentimental, and more varied than sometimes allowed.³ A number of high-ranking figures within the Party, including Bonar Law, admitted that there were circumstances under which they would withdraw their support for the Ulster unionists. The Unionist Party's primary objectives were to compel the government to call a general election, and to win it. If they did so, they would stop home rule. The need to maintain their electoral appeal meant that they could not support measures that would alienate British public opinion. The Ulster unionists' objective was to stop home rule at all costs, and they

¹ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1955), 125-127; Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism Two: Ulster Unionism and the Origins of Northern Ireland, 1886-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 50-54; Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 51-52, 58-59.

² R. J. Q. Adams, *Bonar Law*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 98; Martin Mansergh, “The Role of the Leaders: Asquith, Churchill, Balfour, Bonar Law, Carson and Redmond,” in *The Home Rule Crisis, 1912-14*, ed. Gabriel Doherty (Cork: Mercier, 2014), 365; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing, 1912-72* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 48, 54.

³ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 116-118; David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), 53-57, 63; Jeremy Smith, “Bluff, Bluster and Brinkmanship: Andrew Bonar Law and the Third Home Rule Bill,” *Historical Journal* 36, no. 1 (March 1993): 161-178; Andrew Taylor, *Bonar Law* (London: Haus, 2006), 59, 63-64.

declared that they would employ any means to do so. This difference in emphases meant that there were circumstances under which the British unionists would not support their constituents in Ulster, primarily if that support would damage their electoral prospects in Britain. Historian Jeremy Smith notes that the Unionists intentionally prolonged the crisis in their attempt to force a general election.⁴ I argue that not only did Unionists keep the crisis going for their ends, but their tactics had an unexpected side-effect that made the administrative division of Ireland more likely. Despite declaring that achieving exclusion for some part of Ulster was not their goal, Unionist leaders justified resistance to home rule on the ground that the government refused to grant special treatment to their constituents in the northern province. When Asquith's Cabinet took them up on the idea of exclusion, Unionist leaders were trapped by their own rhetoric. Once the Liberal government began making offers to exclude certain counties in Ulster from home rule, it seemed that both major British parties were agreed on this policy.

Several Cabinet members felt that the exclusion of Ulster, or some part of it, was the best solution to the third home rule crisis. This begs the question: why did the government make no moves in this direction before the fall of 1913? Alvin Jackson asserts that Asquith's "wait and see" attitude entailed allowing a situation to develop.⁵ Ronan Fanning suggests that the Prime Minister intentionally prolonged the crisis to allow the time limit imposed by the Parliament Act to run out, a strategy that might work in Parliament but raised tensions in Ireland.⁶ Both major British parties pursued strategies designed to strengthen their parliamentary position and appeal to British voters; Irish public opinion was only discussed in terms of either faction's capacity to rebel. Both the government and the Unionists wanted to impress the British electorate by maintaining what they publicly proclaimed were their principles on home rule. After all, compromise indicates not only agreement but a step down from one's position. For Asquith's Cabinet, this would mean retreating from their Home Rule Bill. Few in the government were sentimentally attached to this legislation, but as the bill represented government policy, abandoning it would entail a crippling political defeat. Asquith and his ministers wanted the Unionists to make the first move toward a compromise, as this would acknowledge that the

⁴ Jeremy Smith, *The Tories and Ireland, 1910-1914: Conservative Party Politics and the Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), 6-7.

⁵ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 113-114.

⁶ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 66-67.

government had “won” the parliamentary game.⁷ For Unionists, a deal involving exclusion meant enabling home rule for the rest of Ireland, thereby abandoning a foundational principle of their party. Instead, they hoped that the possibility of civil war would force the government to dissolve Parliament and hold an election. Faced with growing conviction among the press and politicians of all parties that violence would accompany home rule, pressure mounted on Asquith to defuse the situation.

Contemporary political opponents, particularly Sinn Féin and the All-for-Ireland-League (AFIL), accused John Redmond and the IPP leadership of acquiescing in partition. Some historians have followed in this vein.⁸ Asserting that Redmond and his colleagues acquiesced in partition implies that they endorsed the settlement that was eventually enacted: the permanent separation of six counties from the rest of Ireland and the establishment of two Irish parliaments, without gauging the wishes of the population. Prior to the First World War, most compromise ideas involved “exclusion,” referring to leaving certain areas out of the jurisdiction of the home rule parliament and maintaining direct governance from Westminster. In fact, there was no accepted definition of exclusion between 1913 and 1914. Multiple possibilities were discussed in public and in private. Most of these entailed temporary exclusion and some form of plebiscite, particularly county option. Redmond declared that this was the only type of exclusion he would countenance, and he believed that Asquith agreed with him.

Academics have characterized the Irish nationalist leader as politically inept, overly sentimental, overly optimistic, and lacking a forceful personality, traits assumed to have contributed to his lack of success in seeing all-Ireland home rule enacted.⁹ I will show that Asquith and other Cabinet members deliberately misled Redmond as to the nature of their exclusion proposals. They led him to believe that they would consult him at every turn and limit their concessions to the Unionists in specific ways, only to proceed in accordance with their own interests, regardless of what they told the Irish nationalist leader. Redmond watched his ideal of a united home rule Ireland slip away. This contrasted starkly with the forceful role he had played

⁷ United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/63, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 1 October 1913.

⁸ Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 105; M. Mansergh, “The Role of the Leaders,” 369; Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 137, 143, 145.

⁹ Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question*, 24; Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 228-229, 232; N. Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question*, 86.

in reducing the Lords' power between 1909 and 1911. While Redmond had compelled Asquith's government to produce a bill for Irish self-government, their power relationship shifted after its introduction, as the Irish nationalists relied on Liberal votes to pass it. In a thorough biography of Redmond, Dermot Meleady asserts that the Irish nationalist leader underestimated the strength of his unionist countrymen's aversion to home rule, and decries attempts to blame outside forces for his shortcomings.¹⁰ Yet, throughout the crisis, Redmond maintained that he would make any concessions to the Ulster unionists that would preserve all-Ireland self-government, even if temporary exclusion delayed the realization of this ideal by a few years. His primary mistake was believing that he could rely on Asquith's administration to maintain this standard.

The influence of the Curragh mutiny, when several dozen high-ranking British Army officers stationed in Ireland declared their unwillingness to make any moves against Irish unionists, particularly in Ulster, cannot be understated. It brought the issue of whether the Army could be relied upon to enforce home rule to a head. The incident denuded Asquith's government of its power to enforce home rule. It also convinced some observers that, instead of taking a firm line with the Ulster unionists, they should be making further concessions. This exposes a cynical trend, highlighted by historian Ronan Fanning, that British politicians were willing to make concessions to the Irish party capable of the greatest violence.¹¹

Averting Civil War

Early in 1913, observers assumed that a rational compromise on the home rule question would be found. Edmund Vesey Knox, a former nationalist MP for the Ulster constituencies of Cavan and Londonderry City, sent his thoughts to James Craig in February. Knox told Craig that his tactics were failing, "I do not think you have made any impression on the English people, and if there were an election now there is no reason to suppose the division of the parties would be very different." If the unionists did not make terms, the Home Rule Bill would pass and they would have, "no resource but a helpless resistance to the law." Knox's proposals included one of the earliest suggestions for northern self-government. He argued that the councils of five counties: Antrim, Armagh, Londonderry, Down, and Tyrone, should elect a higher council to

¹⁰ Dermot Meleady, *John Redmond: The National Leader* (Dublin: Merrion, 2014), 5-6.

¹¹ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 1-6

administer local affairs. Specifically, they would control the police, local government, education, and public works. This “Ulster Council” would receive its funding from the Irish government. Knox also suggested that greater powers be given to the Irish Senate, an independent commission be set up to periodically redistribute seats in the Irish Commons according to population, and the home rule legislature give up appointment of judges for six years as well as all control of Customs duties.¹² A separate draft of the letter asserted that home rule was, “practically regarded as an accomplished fact by the English electorate,” and “you will get more sympathetic consideration from the Irish Nationalists than you will get from the English Liberals.”¹³ The unionists do not seem to have followed up on the idea.

Carson seemed to have his own plan for separate treatment for Ulster. On New Year’s Day, 1913, he introduced an amendment to exclude the entire nine-county province of Ulster from the Home Rule Bill. Proposing the measure, the Irish Unionist leader used a number of different definitions of “Ulster.” Sometimes he described six counties involved in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century “plantations” of Protestants in the north of Ireland, at others the four majority-Protestant counties. He acknowledged the existence of Catholic and nationalist majorities in parts of the province, including two of the six counties, but nonetheless referred to it as “the Protestant part of Ireland.” Carson said his reason for introducing the measure was that most members of Parliament did not realize the seriousness of northern unionists’ determination to resist home rule. He said, “Ulster,” meaning the unionist population, “is a serious fact, and a stern reality.” However, Carson’s entire speech implied that, both within the geographical bounds of Ulster and in United Kingdom policy, unionist opinion should count in excess proportion to its numbers. By defining “Ulster” in these terms, he denied that northern nationalists, or any other opponents of unionist policy, were a serious fact.¹⁴

In addition to ignoring demographic realities, Carson confused the historical narrative. There were multiple plantations of English and Scottish settlers in Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The official plantation of Ulster between 1603 and 1625 involved six counties, but included Cavan and Donegal, which Carson omitted from what he described as the

¹² Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), E. F. V. Knox Papers, D1222/59, E. F. V. Knox to James Craig, 18 February 1913.

¹³ PRONI, E. F. V. Knox Papers, D1222/60, E. F. V. Knox to T. S. Sinclair (draft), n.d.

¹⁴ Edward Carson, “Clause I.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament.),” House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 1 January 1913 vol 46 cc377-483.

“plantation counties.” He substituted Antrim and Down, which were not included in the official plantation of Ulster. Informal British colonization took place in these two counties, particularly by Presbyterian Scots. Antrim and Down were included in Oliver Cromwell’s ten-county plantation scheme in 1652, as were Armagh and seven counties outside of Ulster. By Carson’s time, scholars acknowledged the uneven execution of the plantations and the persistent Catholic presence in the areas involved.¹⁵

During the debate on January 1, 1913, Bonar Law made two blunders while trying to support Carson. First, he said that the northern unionists would prefer to be governed by a foreign country than by Irish nationalists. Winston Churchill, who as First Lord of the Admiralty frequently expounded on perceived threats to the Empire, accused the Ulster unionists of preferring German to British governance. Northern unionists had made statements to this effect, which Liberals and Irish nationalists publicized in hope of undermining their British support.¹⁶ Secondly, as Churchill pressed his advantage, Bonar Law confessed that his party would not continue to support Ulster unionist resistance to home rule if they lost a general election on the issue.¹⁷ This was a significant pronouncement. The Unionist leader had previously declared that his entire party would support their Ulster constituents in resisting home rule by any means. Now, he admitted that there were circumstances in which the northern unionists would be left to fend for themselves.

There is other evidence that Bonar Law and other British unionist leaders had reservations about the Ulster unionist resistance to home rule. Though James Craig invited Bonar Law to Belfast for “Ulster Day” in September 1912, he declined. Bonar Law wrote to Craig, “I have certainly done my full share of this fight, and it would I think be bad policy to overdo it.”¹⁸ While this conveys that Bonar Law had a public relations motive for distancing himself from the proceedings, it is clear that he felt his previous statements in support of Carson’s and Craig’s movement should be sufficient.

¹⁵ For Carson’s contemporaries see P. W. Joyce, *A Concise History of Ireland: From the Earliest Times to 1837* (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1903), 187-189; Constantia Maxwell, *A Short History of Ireland* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, n.d. [1913]), 46-47, 67, 71. For later assessments see Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 197, 207, 211, 222; Raymond Gillespie, *Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2006), 54, 200.

¹⁶ *Ulster Herald* (Omagh), 5 September 1914; *The Kaiser’s Ulster Friends* (Belfast: Ulster Liberal Association, n.d.).

¹⁷ Andrew Bonar Law and Winston Churchill, “Clause 1.—(Establishment of Irish Parliament.)” House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 1 January 1913 vol 46 cc377-483.

¹⁸ PRONI, Craigavon Papers, T3775/5/1, Andrew Bonar Law to James Craig, 3 September 1912.

The Unionist Party—with its power center in Britain—had slightly different motives in opposing home rule than its constituents in Ireland. Irish unionists' primary object was to defeat home rule. The goal of the Party, and of Bonar Law as its leader, was to force and win a general election. The home rule issue was the most effective leverage for doing so. Even if the Unionists lost at the polls, forcing Parliament to dissolve to hold one would interrupt the period of three consecutive sessions required by the Parliament Act to pass legislation vetoed by the Lords, and the Home Rule Bill would have to start its legislative life over again.¹⁹

This difference in emphases entailed a slight disconnect between the Unionist Party and its supporters in Ulster. The latter were willing to do practically anything to defeat home rule. Some of their British counterparts were willing to support them, but most of the leadership realized that aiding an actual Ulster unionist rebellion, as opposed to a theoretical one, would likely ruin their chances of winning the next election. Bonar Law knew they would need a large majority in the next election to take control of the situation. If they won such a victory, his party would treat Ireland, “as Mr. Balfour dealt with her.”²⁰ This was an allusion to the stringent enforcement of coercive measures that earned the former Unionist leader the nickname, “Bloody Balfour.”²¹ Bonar Law added that they would lower Ireland's representation in the Commons, which, “by reducing the number of the Nationalist Members would finally kill the H.R. agitation.”²² In the meantime, Bonar Law did not want to see the Ulster unionists pacified, as the nullification of their objections to home rule would help the Liberals. He told Asquith in October 1913, “if the question of Ulster were removed one of the strongest points in our favour in an election would be gone and our chance of winning it would, in my opinion, be diminished.”²³ It was in the Unionist Party's interest, and indeed was part of Bonar Law's strategy, to keep the crisis going until they forced an election.

There was little difficulty on that score. Despite the secrecy with which it was initially established, by May 1913 the UVF had gone public, and became a part of the Unionist propaganda machine. Every action on behalf of the organization received extensive press

¹⁹ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 66-67, 74.

²⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/68, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 8 October 1913.

²¹ Carla King, “Defenders of the Union: Sir Horace Plunkett,” in *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 2001), 139.

²² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/68, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 8 October 1913.

²³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/80, Andrew Bonar Law, “Notes of a Conversation with the P.M.,” 15 October 1913.

coverage in Ireland and Britain. Enrollment numbers, maneuvers, and speeches from unionist politicians were all common news fodder.²⁴ In July 1913, Carson declared that the UVF motto should be, “For God and Country.”²⁵ A more commonly used phrase was, “For God and Ulster,” perhaps reflecting some confusion over what country the Irish unionist leader meant.²⁶

Among the biggest UVF news stories of 1913 was the increasing involvement of British military figures in the movement, some retired and some on active duty. Timothy Bowman downplays this element, arguing that British officers had little impact in making the UVF a more efficient fighting force.²⁷ However, as Alan Parkinson points out, the real value of Ulster unionists’ “friends in high places” was in lending their prestige, influence, and credentials as British patriots to the movement.²⁸ In September, the UUC appointed Lieutenant General Sir George Richardson as the force’s overall commander. Richardson had been recommended by Lord Frederick Roberts, a British Army Field Marshal who had been born in Co. Waterford, educated in England, and served in a number of theaters throughout the Empire. Historian A. T. Q. Stewart has characterized Roberts as, “the most distinguished British soldier alive” in 1913.²⁹ The Field Marshal assured Bonar Law that the British Army would never fight the UVF, “Protestant officers and men could not be expected to fire willingly upon Protestant civilians, who would be fighting in the Protestant cause under the Union Jack.”³⁰

Other British Army officers in the UVF included colonels William Hacket Pain, F. P. Crozier, and T. V. P. McCammon. Wilfrid Spender, an English captain in the Royal Artillery and a UVF member, wrote to Carson in June 1913 offering to leave the Army to fight for the Ulster unionists if an outbreak seemed imminent.³¹ These examples show that what might have been a dilemma for the British Army—whether or not to take part in a political quarrel—was not a quandary at all for some soldiers. Many active or retired officers, some of them with few or

²⁴ For examples see *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 April, 12 July, and 19 August 1913; *The Times* (London), 18 July, 29 July, and 24 September 1913.

²⁵ Edward Carson at Holywood, *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 18 July 1913.

²⁶ This motto was eventually put on the UVF badge and was a World War I battle-cry. See Laurence Kirkpatrick, “Irish Presbyterians and the Ulster Covenant,” in *The Home Rule Crisis*, 272; Alan F. Parkinson, *Friends in High Places: Ulster’s Resistance to Irish Home Rule, 1912-1914* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2012), 295.

²⁷ Timothy Bowman, *Carson’s Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 208.

²⁸ Parkinson, *Friends in High Places*, 308-310.

²⁹ A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 73.

³⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/11, Lord Roberts to Andrew Bonar Law, 14 September 1913.

³¹ PRONI, Wilfrid Spender Papers, D1295/1A/40, Wilfrid Spender to Edward Carson, 13 June 1913.

distant Irish connections, saw no contradiction between their duty as soldiers and agreeing to resist the will of the sitting government. Roberts highlighted religion and patriotism as two motives that might compel soldiers to disobedience, to which can be added political conviction.

By late summer, 1913, British unionist leaders were concerned that militancy among their followers was getting out of control. F. E. Smith's speeches caused them particular consternation. He toured Ulster speaking at unionist meetings, sometimes acting as aide-de-camp to General Richardson at UVF rallies, a role that earned him the nickname, "Gallop Smith" among Irish nationalists.³² Lucy Masterman claimed that the IPP did not resent Carson, as his sentiments were genuine. However, they held Smith in contempt as it was common knowledge that he had been "quite prepared to accept Home Rule" in 1910.³³

Unionist leaders could not control what Smith said or did on his own authority, but he increasingly claimed to speak for the party. He said on September 20, 1913, that he did not want to contemplate a day when "this Government, corrupt and guilty as it was, would dare attempt to mobilise an English army to march upon Ulster." He continued:

But if that unhappy moment in the history of the Empire arrived he would say this, on behalf of the Unionist Party in Great Britain, from that moment they held themselves absolved from all allegiance to this Government. From that moment they on their part would say to their followers in England: 'To your tents, O Israel!' From that moment they would stand side by side with Ulster, refusing to recognise any law, and prepared with Ulster to risk the collapse of the whole body politic to prevent this monstrous crime.³⁴

This echoes Bonar Law's statement that civil war would not be confined to Ireland, but Smith said explicitly that the Unionist Party would incite their followers to violence against the government. His religious overtones and pledge to countenance lawbreaking are unmistakable. Unionist leaders often claimed that they were delivering warnings and not issuing threats, but this speech cannot be construed as anything but the latter.

Three days later, Lansdowne asked Bonar Law if he was not "a little horrified" that Smith was pledging their entire party to "violent action in Ulster." It could place them in "a rather

³² J. J. Horgan, ed., *The Complete Grammar of Anarchy: By Members of the War Cabinet and Their Friends* (Dublin: Maunsell, 1918), vii, 13.

³³ Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 243.

³⁴ F. E. Smith at Ballyclare, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 September 1913.

awkward position.”³⁵ The Unionist leader agreed, but claimed that Carson was such a dominating figure no one would notice Smith’s speeches.³⁶ Despite their private disapproval, the Unionist leaders did not denounce such language. Smith’s son later wrote, “Bonar Law adopted the Ulster cause and willingly took responsibility for extreme measures,” while his father, “in all he did for Ulster was carrying out the Unionist leader’s policy, and in no way violating orders or exceeding instructions.”³⁷ Their lack of condemnation shows that the Unionist leadership at least tacitly permitted extreme rhetoric, even to the point of threatening the existence of the state.

Some politicians were growing increasingly comfortable with the idea of resolving the home rule crisis through violence. Viscount Esher, one of King George V’s advisors and confidants, recorded a September 1913 conversation with Lord George Curzon. Curzon said, “The contest must finally be allowed to solve itself in battle on the soil of Ireland.” Esher agreed, adding, “Carson—a brave, resolute man—should be encouraged to provoke the contest at an early date.”³⁸ By this time the UVF numbered 56,551, though it was sometimes claimed that they had 80 to 100 thousand members.³⁹ Whether these statesmen were advocating a confrontation between the UVF and the British Army is unclear, but there was no other force for them to fight. Moreover, Ulster unionists had professed their willingness to shoot British soldiers on a number of occasions.

Similarly, Winston Churchill told Austen Chamberlain in November that before the crisis was resolved, “Public opinion had got to have a shock,” and “A little red blood had got to flow.” He expected the Ulster unionist rank-and-file to begin a precipitant conflict that the government would suppress. When Chamberlain expressed dismay at this “gamble on bloodshed,” Churchill implied that unionist fears of Irish self-government were groundless. Home rule did not mean real autonomy, as the British government could enforce their will on an Irish parliament through economic pressure. He said, “we can always bring them to book by withholding supplies.” This was an early expression of Churchill’s idea to coerce Irish nationalists by blockading the island,

³⁵ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/21, Lord Lansdowne to Andrew Bonar Law, 23 September 1913.

³⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/61, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 27 September 1913.

³⁷ Frederick Smith [pseud. Earl of Birkenhead], *Frederick Edwin, Earl of Birkenhead*, 2 vols. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933), I:283.

³⁸ Reginald Brett [pseud. Viscount Esher], *The Captains and the Kings Depart: Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, ed. Oliver Brett [pseud. Viscount Esher], 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), I:135, entry for 14 September 1913.

³⁹ For UVF numbers as calculated by the RIC see Breandán Mac Giolla Choille, ed., *Intelligence Notes, 1913-16* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1966), 27. For a press estimate see *Irish Times* (Dublin), 15 October 1913.

a notion he would revive later.⁴⁰ These casual assertions that bloodshed could provide simple solutions to political problems are reminiscent of George Dangerfield's assertion in *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) that by 1913 British politics had drifted into a mode in which violence was acceptable. He cites the vitriol surrounding the Parliament Act, as well as the embrace of strenuous agitation by trades unionists, women's suffragists, and anti-home rulers.⁴¹

Just when it seemed as though violence over home rule was becoming a certainty, Cabinet member Lord Loreburn published a letter in *The Times* calling for a conference on the home rule crisis. He denied that Ulster unionist resistance to self-government would amount to civil war, but admitted there would be serious disturbances that exacerbated political and religious differences in Ireland. On the other hand, home rule was so near that nationalists might cause equal or greater violence if it were abandoned. The factor that Loreburn called, "the most powerful of all" was that Britain must have a say in Irish government. Therefore, the British parties were entitled to a voice equal to or greater than that of the Irish in any conference.⁴²

Loreburn was regarded as one of the most ardent home rulers in the Cabinet.⁴³ His public declaration that the Cabinet's position on Irish self-government was negotiable produced an uproar. *The Times's* editors called the letter an admission that the administration's Irish policy was "indefensible." The paper asserted that no unionist would accept a national Irish parliament with an executive responsible to it, therefore any conference must involve a government climb-down.⁴⁴ The *Irish Times* said that the letter showed Ulster unionists, "they are fighting a winning cause."⁴⁵ The *Freeman's Journal* wrote that, though sincere and well-intended, Loreburn's letter would be "treated as a Liberal white flag."⁴⁶ Redmond called it an "unfortunate intervention."⁴⁷

King George V's concern over the home rule crisis had been growing for some time. In the first half of 1913, Unionist leaders considered trying to influence the King to refuse his

⁴⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/1/3, Austen Chamberlain, "Memo. of conversation with Winston Churchill," 27 November 1913.

⁴¹ George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn, 1961).

⁴² Lord Loreburn, "Home Rule," *The Times* (London), 11 September 1913.

⁴³ Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years*, 84; Frederick S. Oliver, *The Alternatives to Civil War* (London: John Murray, 1913), 21.

⁴⁴ *The Times* (London), 11 September 1913.

⁴⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 September 1913.

⁴⁶ *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 12 September 1913.

⁴⁷ National Library of Ireland (NLI), John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/4, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 4 February 1914.

assent to the bill, essentially vetoing it.⁴⁸ The monarch still technically possessed this power, but it had not been used since 1708, and was generally considered archaic in the age of representative government. Alternatively, the King could dismiss Asquith's administration and force an election. Either course would involve the monarchy in political controversy, a messy solution that might diminish the institution's popularity and reverence.⁴⁹ King George felt the pressure of the situation. He told Cabinet member Lewis Harcourt, "he would never go to Dublin to open a Home Rule parliament, and that if he signed the Home Rule Bill he would be hissed in the streets of Belfast." Harcourt replied that if the King "didn't sign the Bill he would be hissed in the streets of London."⁵⁰

King George was aware that the Cabinet was amenable to a compromise on the Home Rule Bill involving Ulster's exclusion. Moreover, he knew that they were willing to force the Irish nationalists to agree to this type of solution. The introduction of the Home Rule Bill had subtly altered the balance of power between the IPP and Asquith's Cabinet. Between the December 1910 election and the measure's debut in April 1912, the government relied on Irish nationalist votes to stay in office. Once the bill was introduced, the nationalists relied on Liberal votes to pass it. Voting against the government would mean not only Asquith's ouster, but the disappearance of their best chance at home rule. Birrell alluded to this power dynamic in July 1913. The Chief Secretary said that if the Unionists approached the Cabinet with a plan for Ulster to "contract out" of home rule temporarily, perhaps for ten years, they would accept it. The King objected, "But Mr Redmond would never agree to this plan." Birrell responded, "He would have to agree!"⁵¹

With this knowledge, King George seized on Loreburn's conference suggestion as a means of resolving the deadlock. He summoned Bonar Law to meet him during a courtly excursion to Balmoral Castle, in Scotland. On September 16, the Unionist leader told the King that there were only two bases for a conference that his party would accept: the government must announce that Irish self-government would be folded into a scheme of general devolution, or, "N.E. Ulster shall remain an integral part of the United Kingdom, and that some form of Local

⁴⁸ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/20, Andrew Bonar Law to A. V. Dicey, 26 March 1913.

⁴⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/1/9, Lord Cromer to John St. Loe Strachey, 22 February 1913.

⁵⁰ Charles Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, ed. Edward David (New York: St. Martin's, 1977), 147, entry for 17 October 1913.

⁵¹ Harold Nicolson, *King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), 220.

Government be given to the rest of Ireland.”⁵² Churchill was also at Balmoral, and was under orders from Asquith to sound out the Unionist leader as to the possibility of a meeting.⁵³ Bonar Law told both the King and Churchill that exclusion was impossible without “a large measure of approval from the Unionists of the South and West of Ireland,” as, “the leaders of the Unionist Party would not give their consent to any scheme which would be regarded as a betrayal by the loyalists of Ireland.”⁵⁴ Churchill said he had “no doubt that the Nationalists could be made to agree to the exclusion of Ulster.”⁵⁵ The Unionist leader added that if the British Army was sent to Ulster to enforce home rule, his party would encourage the soldiers to disobey their orders.⁵⁶

Churchill told King George, “he has always admitted that Ulster has a case.” Despite this sympathy, Churchill resented unionist tactics. It was natural that the opposition would try to force out the government, but “it is not ‘playing the game’ to try & do this by trying to raise a threat of civil war.” Nonetheless, he assured the King that they would find a satisfactory basis for a conference.⁵⁷

Finally, on September 22, 1913, King George wrote to Asquith, recapitulating many of the unionist arguments against home rule. He said that Carson was openly advocating illegal methods and had by now admitted that the Ulster unionists would not acknowledge the verdict of a general election. The monarch was convinced that they would rebel against home rule, therefore their claims should be taken seriously. By contrast, he intimated that most Irish nationalists were less intense in their feelings in favor of self-government. He also told the Prime Minister to consider, “the effect upon the Protestant sentiment in these Islands and the Colonies of the coercion of Ulster.” The monarch suggested that a conference was the only way out of the crisis, and the best result might be the exclusion of “North-East Ulster,” whatever that meant, for five or ten years.⁵⁸

On October 1, Asquith replied that the prospect of Irish nationalist revolt should the home rule bill be rejected was a greater danger than that posed by Ulster unionists should it pass. On the subject of nationalist revolt, Arthur Balfour told Churchill at Balmoral that he did not

⁵² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/57, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 16 September 1913.

⁵³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/56, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 18 September 1913.

⁵⁴ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/57, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 16 September 1913.

⁵⁵ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/58, Andrew Bonar Law to Edward Carson, 24 September 1913.

⁵⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/56, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 18 September 1913.

⁵⁷ Lord Stamfordham’s Diary, Extract, 17 September 1913, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part 3, 1911-1914* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1399-1400.

⁵⁸ King George V to H. H. Asquith, 22 September 1913, in Nicolson, *King George the Fifth*, 225-229.

believe in the capacity of the “Southern Irish” to rebel in favor of home rule, implying that they could safely leave the nationalists out of their calculations.⁵⁹ These avowals by the monarch, the Prime Minister, and a prominent opposition leader—combined with those of Esher, Curzon, and Churchill—highlight a pronounced cynicism in British designs on Ireland; they were inclined to conciliate whatever side had the greatest capacity for violence. Nonetheless, Asquith believed they should make, “some special arrangement in regard to the North East, which is not inconsistent with the fundamental principle and purpose of the Bill.”⁶⁰ Thus, between his meetings and correspondence, King George had received assurances from his Prime Minister, the opposition leader, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and another prominent Cabinet member, that the way to avoid civil disturbance in any part of the United Kingdom lay in excluding an undefined entity known as Ulster from the purview of the Home Rule Bill. It was up to the ministers to work out the details.

Negotiations: Asquith and the Unionists

After the Balmoral meetings, Asquith reiterated that the likeliest solution was to be found in special treatment for the north of Ireland. He wrote to Churchill, “I always thought (and said) that, in the end, we should probably have to make some sort of bargain about Ulster as the price of Home Rule.”⁶¹ While the government was clearly moving toward a solution involving separate treatment or even exclusion, the Unionists continued to consider their position.

Bonar Law solicited Carson’s and F. E. Smith’s views, both of whom were staying with Craig at Craigavon. Carson outlined possible complications to exclusion, including, “a difficulty arrives as to defining Ulster.” This highlights the inconsistency of unionist rhetoric—including his own—on a crucial point. He added, “my view is that the whole of Ulster shd [should] be excluded but the minimum wd [would] be the 6 Plantation Counties & for that a good case cd [could] be made.” However, the southern unionists would pose another difficulty, “I cd not agree to their abandonment tho’ I feel certain it wd be the best settlement if Home Rule is inevitable.” Finally, he was certain that the IPP would never agree to exclusion, “they wd

⁵⁹ Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith’s Cabinet*, 150, entry for 11 November 1913.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Nicolson, *King George the Fifth*, 229.

⁶¹ H. H. Asquith to Winston Churchill, 19 September 1913, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part 3*, 1400.

probably prefer a general election.”⁶² Carson later defended his demand that the whole province be excluded based on the strong feelings of Ulster unionists. He wrote, “The Covenant has been signed all through Ulster and although it is quite true that in Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal we are only a small minority, the fellow-feeling and comradeship of those in the other parts of Ulster towards their isolated friends is very strong and determined.”⁶³ This implies that the sentiments of Ulster unionists should trump any practical difficulties that may arise in excluding the whole province, and does not consider the wishes of the nationalist population in the least.

Smith argued that rank-and-file unionists did not want a conference, as they “are conscious of the strategical strength of Ulster’s present position if left uncompromised by negotiations.” He suggested that if any settlement was made, it should be either to leave Ulster under the Imperial Parliament, or for the area to be “constituted a province with powers analogous to those conceded to the rest of Ireland.” The main questions in his view were whether “Ulster” and the rest of “Unionist Ireland” would agree to such a settlement. Smith does not seem to have considered Irish nationalist wishes worthy of consideration. He wanted to continue the crisis, as, “The existing position is the most favourable to us and the most formidable to the Govt.” In his estimation, there were larger issues at stake than home rule, “We should always remember that we are now for the first time given a chance of resisting the Parliament Act in operation. That Act was revolutionary: perhaps we have our one and only chance of destroying it.”⁶⁴ Walter Long also warned Bonar Law that the unionist rank-and-file were against compromising on home rule, and if he pursued any course that might enable Irish self-government he risked splitting his party.⁶⁵

Lansdowne was less sanguine as to the strength of the Unionist position than Smith. He had conferred with Balfour and Curzon, and the three felt that they were running out of options to defeat home rule entirely, “nothing which could be done, or was likely to be done, would prevent the Bill from going through.” Initially, unionists assumed that a conference would mean the end of the Home Rule Bill as introduced to Parliament.⁶⁶ Prior to publishing his letter, Loreburn consulted George Hamilton, a former Unionist MP who had been in Balfour’s Cabinet,

⁶² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/15, Edward Carson to Andrew Bonar Law, 20 September 1913.

⁶³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/23, Edward Carson to Lord Lansdowne, 9 October 1913.

⁶⁴ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/15, F. E. Smith to Andrew Bonar Law, 20 September 1913.

⁶⁵ British Library (BL), Walter H. Long Papers, Add. Ms. 62404, Walter Long to Andrew Bonar Law, 7 November 1913.

⁶⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/21, Lord Lansdowne to Andrew Bonar Law, 23 September 1913.

on the conference idea. Hamilton was supportive, “provided that the Home Rule Bill was either suspended or dropped.” Loreburn called this, “an unreasonable condition, as it would be a breach of faith with the Irish Nationalist Party who had behaved exceedingly well to the Government.”⁶⁷ This makes him one of just a few politicians to praise the IPP for their conduct during the crisis. Knowing Loreburn’s intentions, Lansdowne feared that the government would propose, “that we should go into a conference upon the assumption that the Government Bill holds the field, and that the only matter open for discussion is the exclusion of Ulster.” He added, “The idea of a conference on these lines fills me with alarm.”⁶⁸ This shows that Unionist leaders still did not consider a settlement by exclusion a positive outcome of the home rule crisis, and hoped to force the government to abandon the bill entirely.

On September 26, 1913, Lansdowne highlighted the importance of keeping the Ulster unionists at arm’s length during any negotiations, as their priorities might differ from the party as a whole. He wrote to Bonar Law, “I have always felt that we have to be extremely careful in our relations with Carson and his friends. They are ‘running their own show’, and there is some advantage in our being able to say, as we can with perfect truth, that this is the case, and that we are in no sense responsible for their proceedings.” At the same time, he recognized that the situation in the north of Ireland was, “from a party point of view, much the most important factor in our calculations.” They would be “shabby fellows” if they abandoned the Ulster unionists after they had done all of the “rough work” in the anti-home rule campaign.⁶⁹ Bonar Law hoped that Carson would rein in his extreme rhetoric, but thought overall that he had shown “wonderful restraint.” The Party leader also indicated that they had not “determined seriously to consider an arrangement leaving Ulster out,” adding that the southern unionists must agree to exclusion.⁷⁰

While the Unionist leaders deliberated, Bonar Law received an unexpected letter from F. Harcourt Kitchin, editor of the liberal *Glasgow Herald*. He had spoken with Lloyd George, who felt, “the Ulster Unionists have every bit as good a claim for autonomy within their own province as the Nationalists have for autonomy in theirs.” This again shows the propensity among British politicians to portray Ireland as neatly divided into two territories: one majority-nationalist and the other wholly unionist. Lloyd George wanted the Unionists to ask for, “the right of Ulster to

⁶⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/27, George Hamilton, Memorandum, 24 September 1913.

⁶⁸ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/21, Lord Lansdowne to Andrew Bonar Law, 23 September 1913.

⁶⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/27, Lord Lansdowne to Andrew Bonar Law, 26 September 1913.

⁷⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/61, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 27 September 1913.

exclude itself by popular vote,” which they could use as a basis for a conference. Kitchin assured Bonar Law that Lloyd George was, “more in sympathy with Ulster than a good many of his associates” in the Cabinet. The editor claimed that he had sent this letter on his own initiative, realizing the import of the conversation as a means of avoiding civil war. However, Kitchin added a postscript in which he disclosed Lloyd George’s plans for land reform.⁷¹ This had nothing to do with avoiding civil war, and Lloyd George probably asked Kitchin to send the letter to apprise Bonar Law of his personal opinions without being accused of subverting the Prime Minister or the Cabinet. He was also likely trying to coax a settlement offer out of the Unionists, which the Liberals could use to portray their opponents as weakening in their opposition to home rule. The statements that Lloyd George sympathized with the Ulster unionists and favored exclusion were consistent with his opinions as privately expressed.

The Kitchin letter was yet another sign that members of the government were moving toward a settlement based on exclusion, but this was not Lansdowne’s or Bonar Law’s preferred solution. On October 4, 1913, Bonar Law said he “looked upon the solution of leaving Ulster out much more favourably” than Lansdowne, adding, “I have had the idea for very many years that that might perhaps in the end be a right method of dealing with the situation.” Even so, the party leader considered, “such a solution is only a last resort, and nothing would seem to be more foolish than to give the enemy the idea that we were not only ready but anxious for a settlement on those lines.” They still hoped to force an election, win it by a large majority, and deal with Ireland on their own terms.⁷² But, given the Unionists’ focus on Ulster during their anti-home rule campaign and their support for exclusion while debating both the Agar-Robartes and Carson amendments, it is understandable that the government thought this was their goal.

The likelihood of a settlement by exclusion grew as the Unionist Party leaders’ esteem for the southern unionists fell. During an October 8 meeting with Bonar Law, Carson described meeting with a delegation of southern unionists who were concerned that Unionist emphases had shifted toward excluding their northern counterparts from home rule. This would leave the southerners within a home rule parliament and denuded of the numerical strength they could command when combined with the Ulster unionists. Carson questioned the southern unionists’ resolve, and asked why they had not staged more displays of resistance to home rule. Bonar Law

⁷¹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/35, F. Harcourt Kitchin to Andrew Bonar Law, 30 September 1913.

⁷² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/67, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 4 October 1913.

commented, “we are not justified in risking civil war for the sake of people who will take no risks even of a financial kind for themselves.” He added of the southern unionists, “they have become more or less reconciled to the idea of Home Rule, and that indeed they realise that owing to the extension of Local Government their position under a Home Rule Parliament would not, apart from sentiment, be different from what it is now.”⁷³ This is ironic given that Lord Salisbury’s Unionist administration had expanded Irish local government in 1898. Carson wrote the next day of the southern unionists, “I do not think they realise that we have no power to stop the Bill and that even if we refuse the separate treatment of Ulster the Bill will probably become law all the same.”⁷⁴ Lansdowne called the southerners, “very helpless and inarticulate...But they are quite powerful enough to provoke a serious outcry against us if we throw them over.”⁷⁵ Thus, Unionist leaders were moving from resisting exclusion because they did not want to “betray” the southern unionists, to considering that the latter were not doing enough to resist home rule. As a result, they increasingly left the southern unionists out of their calculations.

Asquith finally met with Bonar Law on October 15. Given his public rhetoric, the Unionist leader’s most startling revelation was that his party cared more about the government’s bill to disestablish the Church of Wales than Irish self-government. Bonar Law assured the Prime Minister that Carson was open to a negotiated settlement, and the latter’s uncompromising statements were merely designed to influence the British public. The Unionist leader said his promises to support his Ulster counterparts were “contingent,” and if the government won an election on home rule his party would withdraw their support. Bonar Law admitted the impotence of Irish unionists if left on their own, “it was really the certainty of British support which made the strength of the Ulster resistance.” For his part, Asquith emphasized his party’s independence from the IPP, “the Nationalists without the support of the Liberal Party were powerless, and that if he or the Government decided on any course which commanded the support of their own party the Nationalists would have no choice but to accept it.” Before they parted, Asquith secured an assurance from the Unionist leader that if some as-yet-undefined portion of Ulster was excluded, his party would not object to home rule for the rest of Ireland.⁷⁶

⁷³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/5/68, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 8 October 1913.

⁷⁴ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/23, Edward Carson to Lord Lansdowne, 9 October 1913.

⁷⁵ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/23, Lord Lansdowne to Edward Carson, 11 October 1913.

⁷⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/80, Andrew Bonar Law, “Notes of a Conversation with the P.M.,” 15 October 1913.

Lansdowne thought that the position was “becoming extremely difficult.” He feared that Asquith would make what the public regarded as a reasonable offer to resolve the crisis, and the Unionists would be exposed to popular backlash if they rejected it.⁷⁷ Bonar Law wrote to a supporter that their strategy was to appear reasonable, coax an exclusion offer from the Prime Minister, and wait for Redmond to reject it, thereby making the IPP appear unreasonable and willing to selfishly risk civil war over their party’s interests. He worried that Asquith would suggest excluding four counties and holding plebiscites in Fermanagh and Tyrone. Bonar Law said this, “would be so reasonable that we would be in a very bad position if we had to refuse it,” but that Carson would not accept.⁷⁸ *Spectator* editor John St. Loe Strachey wrote to the Unionist leader that they should not quibble over whether an exclusion settlement was labeled “temporary” or “permanent,” “No settlement that we could devise could be permanent if the people of the Plantation came to the conclusion that they did not want it to be permanent. On the other hand no settlement though labelled as ‘temporary’ would ever prove temporary unless the Ulster people wanted it to be so. We must not fight over a word.”⁷⁹ The phrases “the people of the Plantation,” and “the Ulster people” refer to northern unionists, therefore this implies that Irish nationalists would have no say over exclusion. Strachey’s last piece of advice is interesting, as over the next decade conflict between British governments and Irish parties was often perceived, sometimes erroneously, as fighting over words.

Bonar Law met Asquith again on November 7, 1913. The Unionist leader said that what “the Ulster people,” meaning the northern unionists, resented most was being treated differently from “the people in England and Scotland.” He suggested that a “system of Home Rule” involving self-government for England, Scotland, and Wales, would provoke less opposition from the Ulster unionists.⁸⁰ It is unclear whether this suggestion originated with Carson or Bonar Law. The latter had supported Lloyd George’s federalist proposals in 1910, and the Irish unionist leader occasionally suggested that this was the only alternative to exclusion.⁸¹ In any case, Bonar Law did not say that Ulster, or some part of it, should receive its own legislature in a federal or devolutionary system. This indicates that the Unionist leaders’ greatest objection to

⁷⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/31, Lord Lansdowne to Andrew Bonar Law, 16 October 1913.

⁷⁸ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/8, Andrew Bonar Law to J. P. Croal, 18 October 1913.

⁷⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/58, John St. Loe Strachey to Andrew Bonar Law, 27 October 1913.

⁸⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/93, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 7 November 1913.

⁸¹ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/26/42, Edward Carson, Draft Public Letter, 14 February 1918.

home rule was differentiated treatment from Britain, not the potential religious or political tyranny of a Dublin parliament, as they often proclaimed.

Asquith raised the question of how to define an “Ulster” area to exclude from the Home Rule Bill. He and Bonar Law discussed “essentially Nationalist Counties” and “purely Protestant Counties,” indicating their belief that certain areas could be identified exclusively with one political and religious persuasion. Asquith favored excluding a defined region for a specified period, and then holding a plebiscite of “the people of Ulster” as to whether they would join the Irish Parliament. The implication was that this vote would take place among the inhabitants of the excluded area, not the entire province. Bonar Law said of Carson and his followers, “the very minimum which they would accept would be the six Plantation Counties,” and from then on in their conversation, “it was assumed that by Ulster was meant these six Counties.” Bonar Law added, “It is obvious that any settlement of this kind is out of the question if the Nationalists are determined not to have it; for the Unionists do not wish it, and you cannot impose a settlement which nobody wants.” Asquith brushed this aside by asserting that Redmond and his deputies knew this was their last chance at home rule; they must choose between exclusion or nothing.⁸²

Bonar Law left the meeting with the impression that Asquith was going to get approval from his Cabinet and the Irish nationalists for four- or six-county exclusion. He wrote to Walter Long, “if he makes us a definite proposal on these lines I don’t see that we could possibly take the responsibility of refusing it,” adding that if the Irish nationalists agree to exclusion, “our best card for the election will have been lost.”⁸³ Long said of exclusion, “The proposal has no attractions for me: it is a clumsy expedient at best.” He hoped that, “any offer the Government make will be so impossible as to enable us easily to refuse it.” Long declared that the Unionists’ minimum demand should be the exclusion of the entire province of Ulster, “for all time, subject of course to her own wishes.” He did not define how “her” wishes were to be ascertained. There was little practical value in this suggestion, it was merely an idea to try to force the government into making a proposal that the Irish nationalists would reject. Long reiterated that enabling home rule for any part of Ireland would leave them open to accusations of betraying the southern unionists, “the lot of the Protestants and Loyalists in many parts of Ireland will be a bitter one

⁸² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/93, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 7 November 1913.

⁸³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/94, Andrew Bonar Law to Walter Long, 7 November 1913.

indeed if they are placed under the hell of an Irish Parliament. However, it may be necessary to sacrifice them in order to escape from Civil War.”⁸⁴

Bonar Law had one more meeting with Asquith, on December 10. Instead of the four- or six-county exclusion proposal the Unionist leader expected, the Prime Minister came bearing a new set of options. He suggested either temporary exclusion, or home rule within home rule. Bonar Law rejected both. He said that neither proposal would satisfy “Ulster,” meaning the northern unionists, adding, “the essence of their grievance was that they felt they had the right to be treated in the same way as the other citizens of the United Kingdom, and to have the protection of the British Parliament.” Asquith admitted that neither idea would satisfy the Ulster unionists, but the proposals were reasonable and would undercut Unionist support in “England,” referring to Britain. Bonar Law agreed that refusing the terms would hurt his chances of winning an election. He suggested a settlement based on the exclusion of Ulster (he did not define the area), and leaving control of the post office, customs houses, and judiciary—even in the rest of Ireland—with Westminster. The two parted having decided nothing.⁸⁵

Having thoroughly sounded out Bonar Law, Asquith decided to appeal directly to Carson. On December 23, 1913, the Prime Minister sent the Irish unionist leader a letter containing some “suggestions” for modifying the Home Rule Bill. They would provide special treatment for a yet-to-be-defined area he called, “statutory Ulster.” Asquith was careful to say that these were “not put forward as proposals,” and neither the Cabinet nor the Irish nationalists had approved them. They were merely for encouraging discussion and “inviting counter-suggestions,” inveighing that the Prime Minister still wanted the Unionists to make proposals of their own. Asquith’s ideas included removing control of the post office and customs from the Irish Parliament, and having Westminster appoint judges to whom unionists could appeal if they felt Irish legislation was unjust. In statutory Ulster, police control, land tenure, and factory and trade inspection would continue as they were. While Westminster would remain the ultimate authority, there was some element of local control in that “Ulster Boards” would be created to oversee education and local government. The area’s representatives would sit in the Irish Parliament, but if a majority of them felt that any legislation was unjust they could appeal to

⁸⁴ BL, Walter H. Long Papers, Add Ms. 62416, Walter Long, Memorandum, 20 November 1913.

⁸⁵ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/111, Andrew Bonar Law, “Notes of Conversation with the P.M.,” 10 December 1913.

Westminster. All of this would remain in force until the Imperial Parliament decided otherwise.⁸⁶ Asquith's "suggestions" amounted to a form of home rule within home rule, though they would drastically limit the Irish Parliament's powers and were potentially indefinite.

Carson consulted Bonar Law on the "suggestions" but rejected them as, "the basis is the inclusion of Ulster in the Irish Parliament."⁸⁷ The Unionist Party leader said they were "utterly fantastic and have no sense in them at all," but were likely a prelude to the exclusion of Ulster, which he expected to be Asquith's next step.⁸⁸

Though the Unionists rejected the Prime Minister's "suggestions" out of hand, they had no intention of ending the talks. Bonar Law wrote on December 22, "our main object has been, and I think still should be, to act in such a way that we cannot be accused of unreasonableness or unwillingness."⁸⁹ At the same time, they were determined not to make proposals that enabled the passage of home rule. Given that Unionists claimed they wanted a negotiated settlement, and even suggested general devolution of the United Kingdom, not making an offer of their own seems contradictory. However, Unionist leaders held that it would be contrary to their principles to do anything that might ease the passage of any bill for Irish self-government. As Hugh Cecil put it, "It is for Home Rulers to make Home Rule workable not for us."⁹⁰

Asquith continued to try to draw settlement ideas out of the Unionist leaders, but the most he could do was coax a definition of "exclusion" from Carson. The Irish unionist leader wrote on January 10, 1914, "when we spoke of the exclusion of Ulster I meant that Ulster should remain as at present under the Imperial Parliament—and that a Dublin Parliament should have no legislative powers within the excluded area." Carson added that this undefined area should continue to send representatives to Westminster, but not to Dublin.⁹¹

Negotiations: Asquith and the Irish Nationalists

While Asquith's government moved toward a settlement by exclusion, IPP leaders remained unreceptive to the idea. Churchill sounded out the nationalists through T. P. O'Connor. The latter reported on October 7, 1913, that his colleagues would prefer postponing

⁸⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/1/52, H. H. Asquith to Edward Carson, 23 December 1913.

⁸⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/117, Edward Carson to H. H. Asquith, n.d.

⁸⁸ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/119, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 27 December 1913.

⁸⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/33/6/115, Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Lansdowne, 22 December 1913.

⁹⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/1/14, Hugh Cecil to Andrew Bonar Law, 8 December 1913.

⁹¹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/34/1/11, Edward Carson to H. H. Asquith, 10 January 1914.

home rule, “rather than consent to a mutilation of the country.” He added, “This feeling is not due merely to the intense sense of Ireland as a national unit, but also to the fact that we have in Ulster and even in the Four Counties some of the truest Nationalists in Ireland. Besides, as you know, the only minority in Ireland that suffers from religious persecution is the Catholic minority in the North.”⁹² On October 22, O’Connor described the idea of excluding Ulster as extremely unpopular among all Irish parties. He wrote, “There is no proposal which is more resented by the Liberal Protestants and Unionist Home Rulers, and, I am told, even by a considerable section of the Carsonites themselves, than the separation of Ulster from the rest of Ireland.”⁹³

Asquith tried to gradually acclimatize Redmond to the idea of a compromise. On November 17, the Prime Minister suggested that the Irish nationalist leader should, “be careful not to close the door to the possibility of an agreed settlement.”⁹⁴ Four days later, having met with Bonar Law a second time, Asquith told Redmond that the only settlement the Unionists would entertain entailed permanent exclusion, “Ulster to mean an area to be settled by agreement and discussion.” The Prime Minister said he would not countenance this idea, and added that Birrell felt “home rule within home rule” was also impossible. During a Cabinet meeting, Herbert Samuel had suggested giving Ulster a veto over all legislation in the Irish Parliament, but his colleagues rejected this. The only idea that gained credence among the Cabinet came from Lloyd George, who suggested that whatever area was defined as “Ulster” might be excluded from the bill, but would come in automatically after five years. The government did not view this as a satisfactory settlement, but thought that proposing it might prevent violence in the north. Redmond said the Prime Minister had assured him that, “he [Asquith] would not dream of making any proposal to the other side except after the fullest consultation with me,” adding that if they agreed to make a proposal it would not come before June 1914.⁹⁵

Redmond rejected Lloyd George’s idea for temporary exclusion on November 24, 1913. He said, “our people, and especially in Ulster, would be shocked by the prospect of any

⁹² T. P. O’Connor to Winston S. Churchill, 7 October 1913, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part 3*, 1402.

⁹³ T. P. O’Connor to Winston S. Churchill, 22 October 1913, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion Part 3*, 1405.

⁹⁴ NLI, Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/3, H. H. Asquith to John Redmond, 13 November 1913

⁹⁵ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 165/3, John Redmond, Memorandum. This memo is undated, but states that the date of the Asquith-Redmond meeting that it summarized took place on 17 November 1913.

exclusion of Ulster. Such exclusion, apart from its mutilation of Ireland, would expose our people in North-East Ulster to intolerable oppression.” The Irish nationalist leader feared this solution, “would tend to perpetuate the sectarian differences we seek to extirpate. It might even accentuate these differences.” There was no solace in the time limit, as, “During the period of exclusion, the Orange leaders, flushed with this great victory, would devote themselves towards making what is temporary, perpetual.” Moreover, if the Unionists won the next election they could make exclusion permanent. Redmond discountenanced the idea of an Ulster unionist rebellion. He urged Asquith to wait and force the Unionists to make settlement proposals of their own. If these were not forthcoming, they might make an offer just as the Home Rule Bill was to become law.⁹⁶ Asquith told the Cabinet that the Irish nationalist leader was personally in favor of home rule within home rule, but his colleagues would not permit him to suggest it.⁹⁷ Unbeknownst to Redmond, during his December 10 meeting with Bonar Law, the Prime Minister proposed temporary exclusion in spite of the Irish nationalist leader’s objections.

Asquith assured the Irish nationalist leader on November 26, “There is no question at this stage of our making any ‘offer’ or ‘proposal’ to Mr Bonar Law.” He added, “We must, of course, keep our hands free, when the critical stage of the Bill is ultimately reached, to take such a course as may in all the circumstances seem best calculated to safeguard the fortunes of Home Rule.”⁹⁸ This seemed to accord with Redmond’s idea of making a settlement offer just as the measure was about to pass. However, this was the last consultation between the two before Asquith sent his “suggestions” for a settlement to Carson on December 23, 1913. Not only had he told Redmond that they would collaborate on any settlement offer, but none would be offered before June 1914. Asquith tried to skirt these promises by insisting his “suggestions” were not to be considered “proposals,” and by sending them to Carson instead of Bonar Law. Thus, the Prime Minister kept the strict letter of his word to Redmond while violating it in spirit. Moreover, Bonar Law was correct in supposing that this was not Asquith’s last word in conciliating the northern unionists.

⁹⁶ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/3, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 24 November 1913.

⁹⁷ Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith’s Cabinet*, 151, entry for 25 November 1913.

⁹⁸ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/3, H. H. Asquith to John Redmond, 26 November 1913.

The Prime Minister's fears of an Irish nationalist revolt might have grown after November 25, 1913, if he had been paying attention to events in Dublin.⁹⁹ That night, a self-appointed committee met at the Rotunda and instituted the Irish Volunteers, a militant body formed with the vague mission to "secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland." It was unclear what they wanted, but some of the speakers tried to convey that they were not establishing a force to fight the northern unionists. P. H. Pearse said the new movement was not antagonistic "to the Volunteer Companies which had been raised by the Unionists in the North-East of Ulster. He could conceive circumstances in which it would be desirable and feasible for them to fraternise and cooperate with them." Pearse added, "Ireland armed would, at any rate, make a better bargain with the Empire than Ireland unarmed."¹⁰⁰

The establishment of the Irish Volunteers was the culmination of nationalist conviction that, if unionists could organize militantly without government interference, so could they. In October 1913 there had been a movement in Athlone, Co. Westmeath, to found a Midland Volunteer Force to defend home rule.¹⁰¹ This body eventually folded into the Dublin-based one.¹⁰² Shortly before the Irish Volunteers were established, labor leaders organized workers into a force to defend themselves against police during a massive strike known as the Dublin Lockout. The Irish Citizen Army proved lasting, but attracted only a few hundred members.

The Irish Volunteers were avowedly following the northern unionist example. The organization originated with an article in the Gaelic League newspaper, *An Claidreamh Soluis*, entitled, "The North Began." The writer, Eoin MacNeill, was a League founder and history professor at University College Dublin, as well as a home ruler and IPP supporter.¹⁰³ However, other Irish nationalists seized on the suggestion of a public militant organization. Bulmer Hobson, a member of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), followed up on the article by visiting Michael O'Rahilly, editor of *An Claidreamh Soluis*. The IRB was committed to establishing an Irish Republic through physical force, and many members eschewed home rule

⁹⁹ For evidence that neither Asquith nor other parliamentarians acknowledged the formation of the Irish Volunteers see Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years*, 95. Liberal Harold Spender thought that the Irish Volunteers formed after the Curragh mutiny. See "The Last Stand," *Contemporary Review* (July 1914): 2. The first MP to refer to the Irish Volunteers was the Unionist Lord Balcarras in February 1914, "Address in Reply to His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech," House of Lords Debates (HL Deb) 11 February 1914 vol 15 cc56-144, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁰⁰ P. H. Pearse in Dublin, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 26 November 1913.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 18 October 1913.

¹⁰² Oliver Snoddy, "Midland Volunteer Force, 1913," *Journal of the Old Athlone Society* 1, no. 1 (1969): 38-44.

¹⁰³ For MacNeill's political convictions see NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,204, Eoin MacNeill to Stephen Gwynn, 20 May 1914.

politics. Neither MacNeill nor O’Rahilly were in the IRB, and the Gaelic League was officially apolitical, but half of the eight-man committee that organized the Irish Volunteers’ launch were Brotherhood members. Of the thirty-man committee that initially governed the Volunteers, twelve were in the IRB from November 1913. Four more joined within the next three years.¹⁰⁴

The Volunteers initially organized without IPP support, but the movement’s success forced Party leaders to acknowledge it. Redmond threatened to start his own militant organization if the Volunteer committee insisted on retaining their independence, but by June 1914 the two sides agreed to a compromise that added twenty-five handpicked IPP supporters to the thirty-member committee.¹⁰⁵ Combined with his supporters already on the committee, this gave Redmond a majority. By this time, the Irish Volunteers had enrolled approximately 128,500 men.¹⁰⁶ According to RIC estimates, they grew to 182,822 by September 1914.¹⁰⁷

Asquith and his Cabinet were oblivious to the formation of the Irish Volunteers, a significant development for their supposed allies in the IPP. In January 1914, Asquith’s Cabinet decided they would consult the Irish nationalists on the timing of their offers to the Unionists, but not on their content. Hobhouse recorded that during a January 22 meeting they agreed “to settle *times* with the Irish, but to do as *we* wished.” The government believed that the Irish nationalist leaders would accept anything short of permanent exclusion.¹⁰⁸

The Prime Minister persisted in his efforts to accommodate Redmond to the idea of a negotiated settlement. On February 2, the Prime Minister emphasized that the pressure on himself had increased when the King threw his weight behind a negotiated settlement. He suggested that when Parliament reopened next week they should make a public offer they knew the Unionists would reject, to deprive them of “moral force.” Asquith said they could offer to remove the post office and customs from the Home Rule Bill, grant Ulster local control over the RIC and education, and enable their representatives to appeal to Westminster. These were essentially the concessions embodied in the “suggestions” that Asquith sent to Carson on December 23, 1913, without Redmond’s knowledge. The Irish nationalist leader replied that he

¹⁰⁴ Bureau of Military History (BMH) Witness Statement (WS) No. 51, Bulmer Hobson, 3-10.

¹⁰⁵ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,204, John Redmond to Eoin MacNeill, 16 May 1914; Eoin MacNeill to John Redmond, 4 July 1914.

¹⁰⁶ Bulmer Hobson, *A Short History of the Irish Volunteers* (Dublin: Candle, 1918), 93.

¹⁰⁷ Mac Giolla Choille, *Intelligence Notes*, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith’s Cabinet*, 157, entry for 23 January 1914.

and his colleagues would allow any settlement that preserved the integrity of Ireland and established an Irish Parliament with an executive responsible to it.¹⁰⁹

After consulting his IPP colleagues, Redmond backtracked in a letter rejecting Asquith's settlement suggestions on February 4, 1914. He said the ideas themselves were unacceptable, and now was not the time to offer any concessions. Redmond wrote, "I might be forced into closing the door on proposals which, if they came at a later stage in the struggle, and under other circumstances, I might be in a position to consider in a different spirit." He added that any concessions would be seen as weakening on their part, "all offers to the Orange Party have up to the present greatly stimulated their movement." A handwritten note on Redmond's copy of this letter indicates that he met with Birrell on February 5, and the Chief Secretary told the Irish nationalist leader, "his views would be carried out."¹¹⁰

While Asquith prepared to publicly offer concessions to the Unionists, a new suggestion surfaced unexpectedly. Horace Plunkett, a former unionist who had gradually moved to support self-government, published a letter in *The Times* on February 10 that home rule should apply to all of Ireland for a certain number of years. At the end of that unspecified time, each county within an agreed area of Ulster would hold a plebiscite to determine if they would remain under the Irish Parliament or transfer themselves to Westminster's authority.¹¹¹ Plunkett informed Carson that he did not support exclusion as, "The crux of the Irish question is to me the ability of the majority to deal fairly with the minority and, if the minority is almost wholly excluded, that issue cannot be tested."¹¹² *The Times* did not recommend the plan as it would not satisfy northern unionists, "The Ulstermen are convinced—rightly or wrongly, but quite immovably—that they have come to the crisis of their fortunes, the last stage of a struggle which must be settled here and now."¹¹³ Asquith welcomed the plan, but did not think those who represented "the Protestant majority in certain Ulster counties" would accept it.¹¹⁴

February 10, 1914 was a busy day for the Prime Minister; Plunkett's plan was published, a new legislative session opened, and Asquith promised to present his own proposals for modifying the Home Rule Bill. Speaking to Parliament, he referred several times to the

¹⁰⁹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/4, John Redmond, Memorandum, 2 February 1914.

¹¹⁰ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/4, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 4 February 1914.

¹¹¹ Horace Plunkett, "The Irish Crisis," *The Times* (London), 10 February 1914.

¹¹² PRONI, Edward Carson Papers, D1507/A/5/5, Horace Plunkett to Edward Carson, 2 February 1914.

¹¹³ *The Times* (London), 10 February 1914.

¹¹⁴ H. H. Asquith, "Debate on the Address," HC Deb 10 February 1914 vol 58 cc 53-152, Hansard 1803-2005.

exclusion of “Ulster” but warned that the excluded area, “would inevitably become the cockpit of contending factions.”¹¹⁵

Asquith told Redmond and the Cabinet that he would propose a plebiscite of each Ulster county to decide whether they would be included or excluded in home rule. The only discrepancy was the time limit. Lloyd George and Birrell led the nationalist leader to believe that whatever counties voted for exclusion would be left out for three years. Redmond indicated that he and his colleagues were willing to accept this concession as the “price of peace,” and this should be the government’s “last word.” If the Unionists rejected it, the Cabinet “should pass the Bill as it stands, and face any consequences in Ulster that may ensue.”¹¹⁶ On March 6, the Chief Secretary informed Redmond that the government had decided to double the exclusion period to six years. The Irish leader told Asquith that this was disappointing, as, “we thought we had an understanding.” He wanted a time limit of no longer than five years, showing that he was flexible on the issue, just not as flexible as the Prime Minister.¹¹⁷ Asquith argued that if exclusion lasted six years, a general election must take place during that period, a stipulation that would either satisfy the Unionists or disarm their contention that home rule should be submitted to the voters. The Prime Minister assured Redmond that, under his scheme, the Home Rule Bill would become law in June 1914, the Irish Parliament would open the next year, and by June 1921 they would achieve a united, self-governing Ireland.¹¹⁸

If this was to be, it would not be under Asquith’s plan. The Prime Minister presented his proposals to the Commons on March 9, and the Unionist leaders rejected them immediately. Carson famously said, “be exclusion good or bad, Ulster wants this question settled now and forever. We don’t want sentence of death with a stay of execution for six years.”¹¹⁹

The Army in Politics

The Unionists were busy attacking home rule from a different angle: within the Army. Politicians had been gathering evidence of party feeling in the military for months.¹²⁰ Brigadier-

¹¹⁵ H. H. Asquith, “Debate on the Address,” HC Deb 10 February 1914 vol 58 cc 53-152, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹¹⁶ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,266, John Redmond, Memorandum, 2 March 1914; Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 267.

¹¹⁷ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/4, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 6 March 1914.

¹¹⁸ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/4, H. H. Asquith to John Redmond, 7 March 1914.

¹¹⁹ *The Times* (London), 10 March 1914.

¹²⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/2/16, Lord Roberts to Andrew Bonar Law, 4 January 1914.

General J. E. “Johnnie” Gough, an India-born member of a Co. Waterford unionist family, was called upon to give his opinions. Gough thought that the Army would not hesitate to act against “Ulster,” meaning the northern unionists, if the latter were the first to act provocatively, perhaps by rioting or “attacks on convents.” However, if the “Ulster forces” showed discipline and a “correct attitude,” many in the Army would not move against them, and might even join them. Gough inserted his personal belief that a home rule government would be disloyal, dishonest, and priest-ridden.¹²¹

By March 1914 the Army Annual Act—a yearly law that enabled the standing force to exist in peacetime—was due for debate, and the Unionists considered adding an amendment that the military could not be used to suppress anti-home rule agitation in Ulster. R. B. Finlay, a lawyer and Unionist MP, wrote to Bonar Law stressing that the amendment’s language must be very specific. They must ensure the British Army could not be used against unionists, but could be employed against Ulster nationalists should *they* provoke “deliberate rioting.”¹²² The issuing of orders to the Army in the King’s name was one of the royal prerogatives. It is ironic that the Unionists—who had urged King George to utilize a privilege not employed in more than 200 years by vetoing the Home Rule Bill—would try to curtail a monarchical right that was exercised frequently. Bonar Law acknowledged strong feelings in Britain that the military should not be involved in politics, but wrote on March 16, “it seems to me that this is the best, and perhaps the only, chance of saving the Army.” He added that Carson was very keen on the idea.¹²³

On March 21, news broke that a number of Army officers at the Curragh in Co. Kildare, the main British Army base in Ireland, had refused orders to move to Ulster and resigned.¹²⁴ In fact, General Arthur Paget, Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, had orders to move north to reinforce a number of arms depots the Cabinet and military hierarchy thought vulnerable.¹²⁵ Churchill and J. E. B. Seely, Secretary of State for War, further instructed him to occupy positions controlling the approaches to Ulster from the south.¹²⁶ Instead of conveying these orders forthrightly, Paget assembled the officers at the Curragh and told them that “active

¹²¹ Notes by Brigadier-General J. E. Gough on ‘Home Rule,’ in Ian F. W. Beckett, ed., *The Army and the Curragh Incident, 1914* (London: Bodley Head, 1986), 35-39.

¹²² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/3/2, R. B. Finlay to Andrew Bonar Law, 2 February 1914.

¹²³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/34/2/39, Andrew Bonar Law to Henry Craik, 16 March 1914.

¹²⁴ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 21 March 1914; *The Times* (London), 21 March 1914.

¹²⁵ H. H. Asquith to King George V, 18 March 1914; Extracts of the Diary of Lieutenant-General Sir John Spencer Ewart, 17-19 March 1914, in *The Army and the Curragh Incident*, 59-60, 62-63.

¹²⁶ Richard Holmes, *The Little Field Marshal: Sir John French* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 175.

Military operations” were to begin against Ulster. He gave those “domiciled in Ulster” the option to “disappear” during active operations in the province, to be reinstated later. Other officers who did not wish to take part could refuse, but would be dismissed from the service.¹²⁷ Thus, Paget did not deliver strict orders to his subordinates but enunciated a number of choices. The leader among the sixty-one officers to resign was General Hubert Gough, whose brother Johnnie had been advising Unionist politicians since September 1913. In editing Charles Hobhouse’s diaries, historian Edward David found evidence that the first move the Curragh “mutineers” made was to inform Bonar Law’s London office of their actions.¹²⁸

The Cabinet called Gough to London and gave him a written assurance that the affair had been a misunderstanding. However, Seely added two paragraphs pledging that the government would not use the Army to coerce “Ulster” into accepting home rule. The Cabinet repudiated this, and Seely resigned. General Henry Wilson, Director of Military Operations, convinced his boss the Chief of the Imperial General Staff John French to resign as well. Wilson, a Co. Longford native, had been consulting the Unionist Party leaders for months and was heavily involved in the Curragh affair. He had informed the Unionist leadership of every move among the military hierarchy, advised Gough throughout his Cabinet interviews, and sent a copy of the confidential document pledging non-coercion to Unionist MPs.¹²⁹

It is difficult to overstate the effect of the Curragh mutiny on the home rule issue. The British Army, which contemporaries naively praised as apolitical, seemed to have taken sides on a strictly partisan political issue.¹³⁰ The assurances Gough received ensured that the Army—a prime tool for enforcing the will of any government—could not function in a portion of the United Kingdom without political repercussions. In the wake of the incident, Liberals and home rulers tried to focus the public on machinations involving the British Army.¹³¹ Unionists referred to it as “the plot against Ulster,” referring to their belief that the projected moves were a prelude

¹²⁷ Notes by Lieutenant Colonel I. G. Hogg, 25 March 1914, in *The Army and the Curragh Incident*, 114-118.

¹²⁸ Edward David, *Inside Asquith’s Cabinet*, 169. The unsigned, undated telegram that David asserts was sent from the Curragh to Bonar Law on 20 March 1914 is in UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/32/2/54.

¹²⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/32/1/46, L. S. Amery to Andrew Bonar Law, 22 March 1914; UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/32/1/50, “Message from General Wilson,” 23 March 1914; UKPA, BL/32/1/66, Edward Carson to Andrew Bonar Law, 26 March 1914; Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, I:131-132, 138-145.

¹³⁰ For assumptions that politics did not enter into the British Army see the following written by the son of a general involved in the Curragh affair: James Fergusson, *The Curragh Incident* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 27-28.

¹³¹ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 24 March 1914; *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 26 March 1914.

to full-scale suppression of the UVF.¹³² Lord Stamfordham wrote on the King's behalf, "this is a most serious disaster to the Army—worse than a defeat at the hands of an enemy—nothing to compare to it has happened in the history of our Country." He asked Bonar Law to press for the permanent exclusion of six counties from home rule, without referenda among the populace.¹³³ Stamfordham's proposed solution again shows the readiness of British political elites to conciliate Irish unionists due to their ability to rebel, in this case with sympathy from the Army.

The Curragh incident was followed weeks later by news that made the UVF seem to be acting with impunity. On the night of April 24, 1914, unionists landed 20,000 rifles and 2 million rounds of ammunition at Larne, Co. Antrim. The UVF controlled the area around Larne for several hours. They detained harbor officials and RIC who might have interfered. One customs official had a heart attack and died in their custody, but no one else was hurt.¹³⁴ The weapons were a hodgepodge of old firearms, some of which had no ammunition, causing historians to doubt their military efficacy.¹³⁵ Politically, it was quite a coup. The Curragh and Larne episodes seemed to show that the Ulster unionists could take control of portions of the province at will, and the government could not rely on the British Army to act against them.

While momentum swung in the northern unionists' favor, Redmond watched the Home Rule Bill continue to erode before his eyes. An April 6 Cabinet memo proposed to exclude six counties of Ulster from home rule without plebiscite or time limit, namely, "until the Imperial Parliament otherwise provide." This unit, referred to as "Protestant Ulster," would be administered by Westminster and would not receive its own government without the consent of the rest of Ireland. The Irish Parliament would be denuded of its powers over the post office and customs. United Kingdom devolution would be given new life, and an all-party Irish Convention summoned to consider how a united, self-governing Ireland would fit into this wider scheme. The memo was not signed. The United Kingdom's National Archive notes that it originated in the Irish Office, Birrell's fiefdom.¹³⁶ Lloyd George later revived many of the ideas contained within it, which suggests that he might have contributed. This memo likely represents an offer

¹³² *The Times* (London), 27 April 1914; PRONI, J. Milne Barbour Papers, D972/17, *Ulster Unionist Council Year Book 1915*, "Report for 1914."

¹³³ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/32/1/45, Lord Stamfordham to Andrew Bonar Law, 22 March 1914.

¹³⁴ *The Times* (London), 27 and 28 April 1914.

¹³⁵ Timothy Bowman, *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910-22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 8; Joseph E. A. Connell, "Larne gunrunning," *History Ireland* 22, no. 2 (2014): 66.

¹³⁶ United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), Cabinet Papers, CAB/37/119/53, "Suggestions for a Settlement of the Irish Question," 6 April 1914.

that Asquith's government entertained after the failure of the March 9 proposals, only to be drowned in the furor over the Curragh and Larne incidents. Nonetheless, Bonar Law and Redmond received drafts. The Irish nationalist leader's dismay at the suggestions is evident as he wrote on his copy, "What wd. become of the Irish Parliament?"¹³⁷

During an April 28 Parliament debate, Churchill challenged Carson to say, "Give me the Amendments to this Home Rule Bill which I ask for, to safeguard the dignity and the interests of Protestant Ulster."¹³⁸ He was essentially inviting the Irish unionist leader to table any alteration to the bill he wished. Redmond wrote angrily to Asquith the same night that Carson would demand "That a larger area than the four counties should be excluded, and that the exclusion of Ulster should last until the Imperial Parliament otherwise ordered." These were the same stipulations contained in the April 6 Cabinet memo, and Redmond was likely venting his anger over that document as well. He added, "it would be impossible for us to agree to any such demands." The Irish nationalist leader insisted that he and his lieutenants had only agreed to four-county exclusion for six years because the government assured them that this would be their last word.¹³⁹ In a May 5 letter, Redmond protested against the idea of exclusion without plebiscites, as fewer than four counties might vote themselves out of home rule. He argued, "It is obviously absurd and intolerable that while a majority of Unionists can exclude a county from the Irish Parliament, a majority of Nationalists should be refused the right to vote for their inclusion."¹⁴⁰

Redmond's outrage was for naught, as the government was no longer even informing him of their decisions before the opposition. On May 5, the same day the Irish nationalist leader sent his letter, Asquith met with Bonar Law and Carson and told them that he intended to pass home rule and immediately introduce an amending bill to address Unionist concerns.¹⁴¹

The extent of the strain on the Liberal-IPP relationship was not made public. While the press speculated that Churchill's speech probably irritated the Irish nationalists, *The Times* wrote that Redmond, rather than Asquith and his Cabinet, would likely dictate the terms of the

¹³⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/1/E14, "Suggestions for a Settlement of the Irish Question," n.d.; NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,266, "Suggestions for a Settlement of the Irish Question," 6 April 1914.

¹³⁸ Winston Churchill, "Naval and Military Movements (Inquiry)," HC Deb 28 April 1914 vol 61 cc1550-661, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹³⁹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,520, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 28 April 1914.

¹⁴⁰ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,165/4, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 5 May 1914.

¹⁴¹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4/35, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 5 May 1914.

amending bill.¹⁴² In fact the IPP leader was surprised and incensed at the idea. He wrote to the Prime Minister that its mere suggestion would convince the UVF that “they can bully the Government and the Irish Party to grant any terms they demand.” Redmond added that the amending bill should contain no provisions beyond the March 9 proposals.¹⁴³

Bonar Law was almost as upset as Redmond at the idea that exclusion might soon be official government policy, but not for the same reasons. On June 18 he wrote that the Unionist Party had always “represented” separate treatment for Ulster as vital to avoiding civil war, but “The one object at which we aim is to secure a general election.” If the government offered “real exclusion” they might be “compelled to accept it” because they “must avoid the appearance of being unreasonable.” The Unionist Party were trapped by their own rhetoric. While they intended to use the Ulster unionists as leverage to force a general election, focusing on exclusion as a possible solution backfired when the government took them up on the idea. Bonar Law hoped that the Irish nationalists would reject the amendments and break with the government, causing the appeal to the country he had been working toward all along.¹⁴⁴ The Unionist leader seems to have been unaware that Asquith’s government was no longer consulting Redmond or his lieutenants on their moves regarding home rule.

On May 12, 1914, Lloyd George announced that the amending bill would enable temporary exclusion by county votes, unless negotiations resulted in some other agreement.¹⁴⁵ This was likely a ploy to stave off further questions, as the Cabinet had already moved beyond temporary exclusion and plebiscites. Still, the idea of county option made some Unionists uneasy because, despite their confident assertions regarding the predominantly “loyal” character of Ulster, they had no idea what plebiscites might reveal. Lord Londonderry, one of Carson’s principal lieutenants, told the chief party whip Lord Balcarras in March that he was “much less confident about the actual majorities of Loyalists in Ulster counties than the average Unionist.” Balcarras added, “I had always assumed that a joint poll of Ulster counties would give a majority for the Union: even this now seems doubtful.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² *The Times* (London), 30 April and 17 June, 1914.

¹⁴³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,520, John Redmond to Augustine Birrell, 15 May 1914.

¹⁴⁴ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4/38, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 18 June 1914.

¹⁴⁵ H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George, “Business of the House (Procedure Resolution),” HC Deb 12 May 1914 vol 62 cc948-1082.

¹⁴⁶ David Lindsay [pseud. Lord Balcarras, Lord Crawford], *Crawford Papers*, 328, entry for 11 March 1914.

Bonar Law and his party refused to negotiate on the amending bill. His strategy was to keep the crisis going until he forced an election, therefore he had no incentive to enable home rule by helping to frame the amending bill. Moreover, he had trouble on his flank from the southern unionists. As early as October 1913, Irish Unionist Alliance (IUA) leader Lord Midleton informed Bonar Law, “Some of my friends in Ireland—outside Ulster—are a good deal concerned at the turn matters are taking and the concentration of men’s minds upon the Exclusion of the 4 Ulster Counties.”¹⁴⁷

In April 1914, Midleton took his case to the press. In a letter to *The Times* he claimed that, if home rule and exclusion passed, the southern unionists “will be literally thrown to the wolves in a hostile Parliament in which, without Ulster, they will have no representatives.”¹⁴⁸ Lord Stamfordham told Bonar Law that the King was “somewhat concerned” by the letter. The monarch believed that the opposition were united in pursuing one of two goals: either forcing a general election or excluding a yet-to-be-defined area of Ulster until Westminster decided otherwise. Midleton’s letter undermined that belief.¹⁴⁹ This helps to explain why the King never bowed to Unionist pressure to dissolve Parliament and call a general election; he did not trust that the opposition had a workable strategy for addressing the demand for Irish home rule or the issues raised by their campaign against it. Even Balfour, whom the Ulster unionists considered a staunch champion, felt that the focus on this group was causing problems within the Party. He wrote in June 1914, “As regards Unionist opinion, the chief peril to be feared is the notion that the Leaders of the Party have compromised their Unionist principles for the sake of Ulster.” Even if they settled the Ulster question by exclusion, the party would have to find some way to “keep Home Rule as a living issue when the election does eventually come.”¹⁵⁰ Unionist Party leaders still had no incentive to end the crisis, as they were relying on anti-home rule sentiment to win British votes. With the southern unionists raising a rebellion over exclusion, they certainly did not want this type of settlement.

Bonar Law’s situation became more complex when the monarch decided to intervene again. For months King George had been urging Asquith to call a conference on home rule to be held under royal auspices. By mid-July the Prime Minister was on the verge of doing so, but

¹⁴⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/3/20, Lord Midleton to Andrew Bonar Law, 11 October 1913.

¹⁴⁸ Lord Midleton, “The Duty of Unionists,” *The Times* (London), 15 April 1914.

¹⁴⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/32/2/34, Lord Stamfordham to Andrew Bonar Law, 15 April 1914.

¹⁵⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/32/4/17, Arthur Balfour, Memorandum, 12 June 1914.

decided to make one final approach to the Unionist leaders. He used Cabinet member Alec Murray, the Master of Elibank, as his emissary. On July 15, Elibank assured Bonar Law that his words reflected “the view of the Prime Minister without consultation with the Nationalists.” The proposal was to divide Ireland on explicitly religious lines, “a Protestant area should be created in Ulster, which would be excluded from the Home Rule Bill as a unit.” The proposed region included the four counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry, except for mostly Catholic areas of South Armagh and South Down. Majority-Protestant parts of Donegal, Monaghan, and possibly Cavan would be added to the excluded area. Elibank said that Tyrone was difficult, but the government was willing to “partition” it into two parts. This was the first official proposal to exclude areas not based on county boundaries. Carson insisted that all of Tyrone must be excluded from home rule.¹⁵¹

Asquith tried again in person the next day, pitching the same settlement but adding that he would pressure Redmond into accepting it. Bonar Law pounced at this, reminding the Prime Minister that Carson and his colleagues were full members of the Unionist Party, indicating that he did not have to obtain consent for a settlement from an outside body. He added that there was no question of intimidating northern unionists, as “the people of Ulster knew that they had a force which would enable them to hold the Province.” Again, violence was to be the main arbiter of the Irish question. Asquith reverted to the idea of county option by plebiscite, stating that he would publicly disclaim temporary exclusion—which he had privately abandoned already—and whatever counties voted out of home rule would only be included later if they voted in as a unit. It was a desperate plea, and the Unionists recognized it as such. Bonar Law and Carson left the meeting without so much as a reply. Two hours later, Elibank informed them that the King was calling a conference to discuss home rule.¹⁵²

The Buckingham Palace Conference sat each day between July 21 and 24, 1914. Asquith and Lloyd George represented the government, Redmond and Dillon the IPP, and Bonar Law, Lansdowne, Carson, and James Craig the Unionists. James Lowther, a Unionist and the Speaker of the House of Commons, acted as chairman. The group discussed a number of possible settlements, most of them differing on the area and time limit of exclusion. The conference members had large maps showing the province of Ulster broken into parliamentary

¹⁵¹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4/43, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 17 July 1914.

¹⁵² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4/43, Andrew Bonar Law, Memorandum, 17 July 1914.

constituencies, complete with statistics on their religious populations and voting behavior.¹⁵³ During the discussions, Lowther became the latest Unionist to be disabused of his preconceptions regarding Ulster. He later wrote, “The difficulty of separating the Protestant and Roman Catholic populations...appeared insuperable. We found large pockets of Catholics in the midst of a Protestant community, and *vice versa*.”¹⁵⁴ There was no “Ulster” that could easily be defined as wholly Protestant or Catholic, unionist or nationalist, nor were there counties that fell neatly into these categories.

From the outset, Carson, Redmond, and Dillon all agreed that the scheme that would lead most swiftly to an all-Ireland parliament would be to exclude the entire province of Ulster. The almost equal populations of unionists and nationalists across the nine counties ensured that the province would eventually vote for unity. However, the IPP could not be seen as abandoning such a large Ulster nationalist population. Asquith suggested exclusion based on poor law union areas, which pleased neither Carson nor Redmond. The Prime Minister suggested the scheme that Elibank had discussed with the Unionist leaders, beginning with the four-county area but adding and subtracting to it by parliamentary constituencies. Redmond wanted to discuss county option, but the Unionists refused. Carson declared that, if all-Ulster exclusion was not on the table, he demanded that he called the six “Plantation Counties” be left out of home rule. According to Redmond’s account of the conference, Carson coupled this demand with an appeal for “a complete system of Administrative Autonomy as would leave the management of all local affairs practically in the hands of the majority.”¹⁵⁵ Bonar Law recorded that Carson assured the Irish nationalist leader that the Ulster unionists “would not in any way control the Catholics within the excluded area,” as they would remain under the Westminster Parliament.¹⁵⁶ This was the first time that the Irish unionist leader demanded a form a local government for the excluded area.

Both the Irish nationalists and unionists insisted that they must have all of Tyrone, the former because the population was majority-nationalist and the latter on the grounds that unionists were the principal employers and paid most of the taxes. Bonar Law even implied that,

¹⁵³ Both Redmond and Carson kept their copies of the maps. See NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,266; PRONI, Edward Carson Papers, D1507/A/37/11.

¹⁵⁴ James Lowther [pseud. Viscount Ullswater], *A Speaker’s Commentaries*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1925), II:163.

¹⁵⁵ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,257/3, John Redmond, Memorandum, 23 July 1914.

¹⁵⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4/44, Andrew Bonar Law, “Conference at Buckingham Palace,” 21 July 1914.

if the county was only excluded temporarily, unionist proprietors would fire their nationalist employees to force them to leave the county.¹⁵⁷ Asquith suggested that Tyrone be left out for two years and a plebiscite held to decide whether it would join the Irish Parliament. Carson objected, “But they will vote themselves in,” prompting Lowther to ask, “Are you proposing that the people themselves should never be consulted?” Hobhouse, after hearing Asquith’s report of the exchange, said that the Speaker was “at last awake to their intentional obstruction.”¹⁵⁸

As the participants prepared to leave the Buckingham Palace Conference on July 24 without an agreement, Asquith was shocked to see Craig shaking hands with Dillon, and Carson tearfully bidding farewell to Redmond.¹⁵⁹ Disappointing as the lack of agreement was, larger events were overtaking the Irish quarrel. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, had been assassinated in Belgrade less than a month earlier. London’s *Daily Express*, an avid unionist paper, expected life and politics to go on as usual, asserting, “Such a murder as this changes nothing.”¹⁶⁰ The Prime Minister disagreed. Asquith wrote the day the Buckingham Palace Conference ended, “we are within measurable, or imaginable, distance of a real Armageddon, which would dwarf the Ulster & Nationalist Volunteers to their true proportion.”¹⁶¹ On August 4, Germany declared war on and invaded Belgium, prompting the United Kingdom to declare war against Germany. The United Kingdom’s political parties agreed to a domestic truce to concentrate on the war effort.

Despite this, Asquith decided, under pressure from Redmond, to put the Home Rule Bill on the statute book. Irish self-government became law in the United Kingdom on September 18, 1914, though a deal with the Unionists stipulated that it would not be implemented without the simultaneous enactment of the amending bill.¹⁶² Carson was incensed at this maneuver, and threatened to withhold Ulster unionist support for the war effort.¹⁶³ Only his British counterparts’ pleas that an unpatriotic attitude now would damage the Ulster unionists’ case against home rule

¹⁵⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4/44, Andrew Bonar Law, “Conference at Buckingham Palace,” 22 July 1914.

¹⁵⁸ Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith’s Cabinet*, 177, entry for 27 July 1914.

¹⁵⁹ H. H. Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 24 July 1914, in *H. H. Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley*, Michael and Eleanor Brock, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 122.

¹⁶⁰ *Daily Express* (London), 29 June 1914.

¹⁶¹ H. H. Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 24 July 1914 in *H. H. Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 122.

¹⁶² H. H. Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 30 July 1914 in *H. H. Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 136.

¹⁶³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,520, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 5 August 1914; H. H. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1928), II:9, entry for 30 July 1914; H. H. Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 30 July 1914 in *H. H. Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 136.

after the war convinced him to relent.¹⁶⁴ By passing home rule, Asquith cemented the IPP's support for British Army recruiting. Some Irish nationalists, particularly Sinn Féin, opposed the war effort, but by mollifying the IPP the Prime Minister seemingly gained the cooperation of the vast majority of the Irish populace. Asquith may also have thought that placing home rule on the statute book absolved him of his home rule pledge, given grudgingly back in December 1909.¹⁶⁵ The fact that Irish self-government had still not been enacted was a significant caveat, but Asquith had shown a willingness to technically keep faith with Redmond, while violating his promises in spirit.

Conclusions

The year 1913 opened with the first Unionist exclusion suggestion in the form of Carson's amendment to leave the entire province of Ulster out of home rule. This was rejected in Parliament, and the United Kingdom appeared to many to be on an inexorable path to civil war. The Loreburn letter and King George's intervention finally forced Asquith to negotiate with the Unionists. Bonar Law and his lieutenants wanted the Prime Minister to dissolve Parliament and call an election. Instead, Asquith took the Unionists' statements that their Ulster supporters required special treatment at face value, and framed his settlement suggestions accordingly. The Prime Minister was instrumental in defining the area to be excluded in religious terms. He moved from proposing to exclude "statutory Ulster" to offering a definition of "Protestant Ulster," despite his own admissions that any administrative division of the island would exacerbate political and religious strife in Ireland.

Exclusion suggestions of any kind caused problems for Bonar Law. Settling the home rule crisis would preclude a general election, and if he rejected a reasonable compromise he risked ruining his party's chances of winning a vote. The idea of exclusion also caused discontent among Ireland's southern unionists, whom the leadership was increasingly willing to jettison from their calculations.

¹⁶⁴ Austen Chamberlain to Lord Lansdowne, 2 August 1914 in Charles Petrie, *Life and Letters of the Right Hon. Austen Chamberlain*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1939), I:375.

¹⁶⁵ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,520, H. H. Asquith to John Redmond, 6 August 1914; UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/31/4/8, Charles Beresford to Andrew Bonar Law, 6 March 1914; UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/34/5/2, A. V. Dicey to Andrew Bonar Law, 1 September 1914.

Unionist Party leaders hoped that the Irish nationalists would reject all exclusion proposals, ruining any potential deal and making the government appear unable to deliver a compromise. Instead, Asquith and the Cabinet simply charted their own course, only belatedly and sometimes misleadingly informing Redmond of their offers. Despite their displeasure, the IPP were unwilling to turn against a government that had introduced a home rule bill, and had little choice but to acquiesce as the Cabinet's exclusion proposals gradually encompassed more territory for a longer period of time. While the area and time limit of exclusion were the most controversial issues, Redmond also tried to insist that there be a democratic element. However, the government and the Unionists gradually moved away from proposals that would enable the inhabitants of Ulster—unionist or nationalist—to vote on whether they wanted home rule or not.

The third home rule crisis did not reach a resolution. The First World War intervened just when it appeared that all attempts at compromise had failed, and there must either be home rule and violence or an election and an uncertain future for Irish self-government. The party truce was designed to hold all controversial domestic issues in stasis, but this also meant that the resentment and discontent among all parties at the ways in which the debate had developed were also left in place. Some Irish nationalists had never believed that the British government was sincere in offering home rule, or in the IPP's ability to compel such a concession. The delay in implementing self-government caused further disillusionment with the Party.

CHAPTER 4
HOME RULE DURING A WORLD WAR:
THE LLOYD GEORGE PROPOSALS AND THE IRISH CONVENTION, 1916-1918

Introduction

Before the shock of the Easter Rising had worn off, politicians began discussing how they would reform the government of Ireland. The failed rebellion seemed to show the necessity for sweeping changes. Following a visit to Ireland, Prime Minister H. H. Asquith appointed his Cabinet's top negotiator, David Lloyd George, to find a settlement that would be acceptable both to Irish nationalists and unionists. The formula he proposed involved the immediate introduction of the 1914 Home Rule Act, the seminal achievement of constitutional nationalism, but the exclusion from its powers of six northeastern counties in which there was a large Protestant and unionist population. The negotiations failed amid a welter of competing interpretations and accusations of underhandedness, particularly relating to whether exclusion would be temporary or permanent. Some commentators downplay allegations of "treachery" against Lloyd George and join him in blaming the southern unionists for wrecking the settlement.¹

Historians often note the short-term effects of the negotiations' failure. It was a further blow to constitutional nationalism in the face of surging Sinn Féin sympathy.² Irish unionists' continuing aloofness from home rule showed that the IPP policy of unity through the war effort was failing.³ Alvin Jackson argues that Edward Carson's support of the proposals damaged his backing among northern unionists due to the seeming abandonment of their comrades in three of Ulster's nine counties.⁴ It should be noted that Carson remained the Ulster unionist leader and reverence for him among many in this political tradition continued, while the IPP and its leaders faded from prominence in part due to their perceived acceptance of partition.⁵ Ronan Fanning highlights the episode as the first instance of the Unionist Party's "stranglehold" on the

¹ David G. Boyce, "British Opinion, Ireland, and the War, 1916-1918," *The Historical Journal* 17, no. 3 (Sept. 1974): 581; Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 146-147; Thomas Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland: World War I and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 152; Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 162-172.

² Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, 152-153; Dermot Meleady, *John Redmond: The National Leader* (Dublin: Merrion, 2014), 379.

³ Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 205.

⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Sir Edward Carson* (Dublin: Historical Association of Ireland, 1993), 54.

⁵ Each year until 1921 the Ulster Unionist Council's annual reports included a section entitled "Our Leader" in which they praised Carson. See Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), J. Milne Barbour Papers, D972/17.

government's Irish policy. He attributes Lloyd George's promotion of unionist-inspired policies to ambition.⁶ While Lloyd George certainly acted to further his own career, both his personal and political proclivities inclined him more toward unionist stances on Irish issues than British Liberal or Irish nationalist positions.

The Lloyd George proposals had a significance beyond the short term, and influenced the character of the two Irish political entities that exist today. Fanning asserts that the proposals "blazed the trail towards partition," but variations of this idea had been mooted at least as early as the January 1910 election.⁷ I argue that, over the course of the 1916 negotiations, partition assumed the form that would eventually be enacted, and Lloyd George was its primary author. Though only four of the counties to be excluded were majority Protestant and unionist, Lloyd George proposed to meet Carson's demand, enunciated in 1913, by excluding two more.⁸ The British government would not hold plebiscites to determine the wishes of people within that region, and the temporal length of this division would depend, not on public sentiment within the six counties, but on parliamentary politics at Westminster. This form of partition proved the most lasting aspect of Lloyd George's failed attempt at settlement in 1916.

Following the miscarriage of private negotiations, the government, which changed hands from Asquith's leadership to that of Lloyd George in December 1916, decided on a new departure. Historian John D. Fair asserts that conferences were one of the "safety-valves" for the British democracy, providing a space in which, "the participants could rise above the petty demands of party and personal ambition for the sake of the entire nation and posterity."⁹ Despite such lofty ideals, most historians describe the Irish Convention as a non-event. There is only one book devoted solely to its proceedings, R. B. McDowell's *The Irish Convention* (1970). A reviewer dismissed it by asserting that the Convention was undeserving of a book-length study.¹⁰ In 1968, F. S. L. Lyons called the Convention a "gigantic irrelevancy," citing the refusal of Sinn Féin and some sections of Irish labor to participate, as well as the intransigence of Ulster

⁶ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 144-145, 147.

⁷ For the quotation see Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 149.

⁸ United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/15, Edward Carson to Andrew Bonar Law, 20 September 1913.

⁹ John D. Fair, *British Interparty Conferences: A Study of the Procedure of Conciliation in British Politics, 1867-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 275.

¹⁰ Joseph M. Woods, Review of *The Irish Convention* by R. B. McDowell, *American Historical Review* 75, no. 7 (Dec. 1970): 2063-2064.

unionists on home rule.¹¹ Most historians agree with these assertions, and add that the conference was a device Lloyd George used to postpone the contentious Irish question, not a legitimate attempt to find a solution.¹² Patrick Maume considers the Convention at some length, but frames it as a part of the IPP's eclipse by Sinn Féin, assuming that any agreement come to would have been rejected by most nationalists and northern unionists.¹³

There is evidence to support the idea that Lloyd George wanted to keep Ireland quiescent during the war. But, whether he intended for the Convention to reach an agreement or not, it came close to doing so. The Prime Minister admitted that, if the conference succeeded, he would have to implement its findings. The assumption that Sinn Féin's non-participation doomed the Convention marks an ahistorical focus on this organization, which was one of a number of political groupings vying for popularity in 1917. Similarly, the assertion that Ulster unionists would block any settlement is based on an assumption, and ignores the events of the conference.¹⁴

Most historians disregard the fact that the Convention had very tangible results for Irish unionism. During the talks, southern unionist leader Lord Midleton led some of his supporters to agree to a tentative home rule deal to avoid partition. This fractured southern unionists into several different factions, forcing them to reconsider their positions on Irish self-government and unity. Jackson notes that disagreements between southern and Ulster unionists further alienated these groups from one another, but barely touches upon the fact that the conference provoked a lasting split within the former group.¹⁵ Patrick Buckland notes the Convention's profound effects on southern unionism, but sees it as part of an almost inevitable process of decline, rather than an evolution in the political thought of many individuals within this group.¹⁶

¹¹ F. S. L. Lyons, *John Dillon: A Biography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 421.

¹² Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 383; Fair, *British Interparty Conferences*, 222-223; Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 162-163; R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 486; Alvin Jackson, "Irish Unionism, 1870-1922," in *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 2001), 132; Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland, 1911-25* (Dundalk: Dundalgan, 1983), 56; Joseph V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics, 1881-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 232.

¹³ Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 196-203.

¹⁴ In the collection *Defenders of the Union* (2001), cited above, Alvin Jackson endorses the traditional view of the Convention as irrelevant and doomed by Sinn Féin's absence as well as Ulster unionist intransigence. He questions all of this and calls the Convention "more than an elitist talking-shop" in *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 178-181.

¹⁵ Jackson, "Irish Unionism 1870-1922," 132-133; Jackson, *Home Rule*, 183.

¹⁶ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism: One, The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), 128-129.

Lloyd George's Proposals

Political changes followed swiftly after the Easter Rising. The United Kingdom's primary administrator in Ireland, Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell, resigned on May 3. John Dillon, a top lieutenant to IPP leader John Redmond, felt that this was an opportunity for sweeping out the rest of the administration from Dublin Castle and establishing a "Home Rule Executive."¹⁷ Redmond disagreed that such extensive changes were feasible, but knew that he had to alter his own policies. He wrote to Dillon on May 4 recounting a meeting with a member of the administration, "I clearly indicated that our unquestioning support of the Government was at an end."¹⁸ The statement is significant as the IPP leader indicates that he supported the government when he should have defied them, and that he would not make that mistake again.

Prime Minister H. H. Asquith visited Ireland between May 11 and 19. On his return, he tried to convince Lloyd George to become the new Chief Secretary for Ireland. The Prime Minister asked him on May 22 to "take up Ireland: at least for a short time."¹⁹ Lloyd George declined the post, but agreed to act as an intermediary between the Irish parties.²⁰

Lloyd George was ostensibly a neutral arbitrator, and portrayed himself as a home ruler.²¹ However, as a consistent supporter of exclusion his position was closer to the Unionists than to Irish nationalists. During the 1916 talks, Lloyd George assured a northern unionist, "I have always been sympathetic to the claims of Ulster, and as a Protestant Nonconformist I have a thorough appreciation of the Ulster anxieties about Home Rule."²² His anti-Catholicism has been noted, and while this was not widely known, those who were aware of it knew that it gave unionists the upper hand in negotiations under his auspices. Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) member James Stronge wrote in 1917, "Carson says that Lloyd George is decidedly anti-papist and that his feelings on this point are a help to us."²³

¹⁷ National Library of Ireland (NLI), John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,182/22, John Dillon to John Redmond, 3 May 1916.

¹⁸ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,182/22, John Redmond to John Dillon, 4 May 1916.

¹⁹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/1/5, H. H. Asquith to David Lloyd George, 22 May 1916.

²⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/34, Austen Chamberlain to H. H. Asquith, 22 June 1916.

²¹ David Lloyd George, "Motion for Adjournment," HC Deb 24 July 1916 vol 84 cc1427-70, Hansard 1803-2005; David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 6 vols. (London: Odhams, 1938), I:418.

²² UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/2/13, David Lloyd George to R. J. Lynn, 5 June 1916.

²³ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/430/60, James Stronge to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 27 June 1917.

During the war, Lloyd George developed a friendship with Carson. The two were colleagues in Asquith's war Cabinet between May and October 1915. By October he was considering asking Carson to join him in forming a new party, so that the two might remove Asquith as Prime Minister. In July 1916, Lloyd George suggested to his close associates that Carson should become Premier.²⁴ He was toying with these ideas while negotiating a deal between the Irish unionist leader and his nationalist opponents. Had Lloyd George's thoughts been widely known, little would have irritated Irish nationalists more than to suggest that Carson should be put in the United Kingdom's top political post.

Even before the announcement of his role as "Head Pacificator," as some of his correspondents called him, Lloyd George began to outline his ideas to Carson and Redmond.²⁵ On May 25 he wrote to Redmond that the Cabinet did not want any public statement made relating to "the basis of the settlement." He added that Carson and Craig had informed him that "if at this stage anything of that kind were said it would raise hell in Ulster and destroy every chance of success."²⁶ This implies that the party leaders already had an idea of Lloyd George's general terms, and that they were favorable to the Irish nationalists. Throughout the negotiations Lloyd George inculcated a feeling among the participants that they were united in attempting to achieve a common goal, and they may have to overcome great obstacles thrown up by those outside their circle in order to do so. Lloyd George encouraged this feeling in Carson with a June 3 letter telling him that the southern unionists and their supporters in the Cabinet—erstwhile allies of the Irish unionist leader—were "working hard to prevent a settlement."²⁷

Little information on the content of the talks leaked to the press. Several London papers stated that Carson was demanding a "clean cut" of six counties in Ulster, meaning their complete exclusion from the operation of home rule. *The Times* speculated that Carson would likely get what he demanded.²⁸ Reacting to such rumors, the *Irish Independent* declared that nationalists

²⁴ George Riddell, *Lord Riddell's War Diary* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933), 131, entry for 29 October 1915; 205-206, entry for 21 July 1916.

²⁵ For this nickname see UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/1/32, D. J. Sweeney to David Lloyd George, 28 May 1916.

²⁶ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,189, David Lloyd George to John Redmond, 25 May 1916; Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971), 503.

²⁷ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/17/7, David Lloyd George to Edward Carson, 3 June 1916.

²⁸ *The Times* (London), 5 June 1916.

should resist any deal that would divide the island. The paper warned that such “dismemberment” might be presented as temporary, but was likely to prove permanent.²⁹

In the first week of June, Carson and Redmond suddenly left London for Ireland. Carson outlined Lloyd George’s proposals at a June 6 UUC meeting in Belfast. Reports of the consultation confirmed press speculation as to the terms being offered. The most widely discussed aspect was that six counties: Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone, would be excluded from home rule.³⁰ The *Irish Independent* retorted, “This plan is more objectionable than any arrangement previously suggested.”³¹ On June 9, a number of Catholic clergy in northern dioceses published letters protesting exclusion.³² Joseph Devlin, MP for majority-nationalist West Belfast and Redmond’s principal lieutenant in Ulster, had sounded out several of the bishops on the proposals days before. They were all hostile. Patrick O’Donnell, Bishop of Raphoe, warned Devlin, “the Party could not survive the offer of such proposals to the country,” adding, “the country...was rational, democratic, & responsible, but the present proposals were not so.” On June 3, Devlin predicted that the Belfast nationalists, many of them his own constituents, would approve the proposals, but no one else would.³³

With nationalist sentiment swinging against the settlement, Redmond explained the terms in greater detail at an IPP meeting on June 10. The 1914 Home Rule Act was to come into operation immediately, except in the six excluded counties. This arrangement would last until one year after the end of the war, when an Imperial Conference involving representatives of the self-governing dominions would review the entire situation, including partition.³⁴ The press recognized that the Irish leaders were giving different versions of the proposals; in Carson’s the exclusion of the six counties was to be “definite” or permanent, while under Redmond’s it would be “provisional” or temporary.³⁵

This question of whether exclusion was to be temporary or permanent became the most controversial aspect of the Lloyd George proposals. Both Carson and Redmond had received the

²⁹ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 5 June 1916.

³⁰ *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 7 June 1916.

³¹ *Irish Independent*, 7 June 1916.

³² *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 June 1916.

³³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,181/3, Joseph Devlin to John Redmond, 3 June 1916.

³⁴ *Irish Independent*, 12 June 1916.

³⁵ *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 12 June 1916; *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 June 1916.

proposals in written form before leaving London.³⁶ The text did not explicitly address the issue of exclusion's permanence, though it did say that the bill—referring to new legislation to implement the agreement—would remain in force until a year after the end of the war. After that time the settlement could continue in its existing form, or it could be altered by an act of Parliament. All of this accorded with Redmond's statements. Before Redmond left London, he obtained an assurance from Lloyd George that he and Asquith would uphold the written proposals. The IPP leader wrote, "we could rely upon him and the Prime Minister not to tolerate any further concessions being sprung upon us." Lloyd George would "stand or fall by the agreement come to."³⁷ He likely requested this assurance to avoid a recurrence of the constant pressure that Asquith had placed on him in 1914 for further concessions. Devlin also made a note of the terms that Lloyd George had authorized them to convey to his constituents. They included, "The arrangement was to be *temporary*," "During the interval the Irish representation at Westminster would be retained in full strength," and "There would be no separate Parliament for the six counties."³⁸

Carson recognized that the proposals did not state whether exclusion would be permanent or temporary, and sought clarification. When Lloyd George sent the Irish unionist leader the document on May 29 he included the oft-quoted note, "We must make it clear that at the end of the provisional period Ulster does not, whether she wills it or not, merge in the rest of Ireland."³⁹ Most subsequent observers interpret this as a commitment to permanent partition.⁴⁰ David George Boyce and Alvin Jackson have pointed out that this is only a statement that the excluded area would not be added to the home rule area except by an act passed at Westminster. Boyce observes that this is a rejection of Redmond's interpretation that the six counties would join the Irish Parliament automatically at the end of the provisional period.⁴¹ Jackson notes that it would

³⁶ It was titled, "Headings of a Settlement as to the Government of Ireland." See NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,181/3; PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/17/3.

³⁷ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,189, John Redmond, Memorandum, n.d..

³⁸ D. Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, 508; Denis Gwynn, *The History of Partition* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1950), 154-155.

³⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C9, David Lloyd George to Edward Carson, 29 May 1916.

⁴⁰ Ian Colvin, *The Life of Lord Carson*, 3 vols. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936) III:166; Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: The Man Who Made Ireland* (Boulder: Roberts Rhinehart, 1996), 60-61; D. Gwynn, *History of Partition*, 149; Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, 146; Geoffrey Lewis, *Edward Carson: The Man Who Divided Ireland* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), 188; Lyons, *John Dillon*, 388; Meleady, *John Redmond*, 380; Eamon Phoenix, *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland, 1890-1940* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Society, 1994), 22.

⁴¹ Boyce, "British Opinion," 580.

make the permanence of partition contingent on “the sympathies of the party in power.”⁴² Both assert that Carson and Redmond were likely aware of the proposals’ ambiguity on this crucial issue, and accepted it in their eagerness for an immediate settlement.⁴³ This does not seem likely, as the leaders of both Irish parties pushed Lloyd George to clarify the terms of exclusion. While technically correct that the May 29 note was a confirmation that ending partition required a new act of Parliament, unionists interpreted this as a pledge to permanent exclusion. Carson wrote a letter to the press to this effect in 1924.⁴⁴

UUC member Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery wrote after their June 12 meeting, “Carson holds a letter from Lloyd George stating that the proposed Amendment of the Government of Ireland Act is to be a definitive one and not an Emergency Measure for the duration of the war.” Regardless of the technicality that partition could only be ended by an act of Parliament, Montgomery interpreted this as permanent partition. He wrote, “The Ulster Unionist will be more or less on velvet when the matter comes to be finally settled.”⁴⁵

One aspect of the May 29 note that few contemporaries or historians remark upon was that it denied the right of people in the six counties—nationalist or unionist—to decide their future status for themselves. Only Bishop O’Donnell’s statement that the proposals were not “democratic” hints at this. Many contemporaries—including Irish nationalists—often said that “Ulster,” referring to the excluded area, should not come into a home rule parliament until the population wished to do so.⁴⁶ This maxim ignored the significant minority in the six counties in favor of immediate home rule, and in any case the Lloyd George proposals did not embody this pronouncement. In Lloyd George’s private assurance, the phrase “whether she wills it or not” denies any element of choice or, to use a phrase coming into vogue during the First World War, of self-determination. The fact that the proposals contained no provision for gauging the wishes of the six-county population, as discussed during the 1914 Buckingham Palace Conference, confirms that the inhabitants would not be consulted on the region’s future.⁴⁷

⁴² Jackson, *Home Rule*, 159.

⁴³ Boyce, “British Opinion,” 581; Jackson, *Home Rule*, 158-159.

⁴⁴ *The Times* (London), 3 October 1924.

⁴⁵ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/429/44, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 22 June 1916.

⁴⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 13 June 1916; *The Times* (London), 26 June 1916; also see the Parliament speeches of Edward Carson, David Lloyd George, and John Redmond, “Motion for Adjournment,” HC Deb 24 July 1916 vol 84 cc1427-70, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁴⁷ For John Redmond’s notes of the Buckingham Palace Conference see NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,257/3; for Andrew Bonar Law’s see UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/39/4. Also see Kieran J. Rankin, “The Search for ‘Statutory Ulster,’” *History Ireland* 17, no. 3 (May/June 2009): 28-32.

Carson responded to Lloyd George's written proposals with a memorandum outlining what he understood them to mean. This included, "The 6 counties mentioned in paragraph 2 are to be excluded from the Government of Ireland Act and are not to be included unless at some future time the Imperial Parliament pass an Act for that purpose." This is in accordance with Boyce and Jackson, but combining this with his later statements it is evident that Carson interpreted this as permanent exclusion. The proposals suggest that the excluded area would require some alternate form of administration, and Carson seized upon this as an offer of self-government, at least in administering local government, education, the post office, customs, and land purchase.⁴⁸ These interpretations ran counter to both of the major principles in Devlin's understanding of the proposals: that the settlement would be temporary and the six counties would not have its own government. The text of the proposals and Carson's interpretation skirt the second point by not suggesting that the six counties should have a "parliament."

On the thorny issues of the geographic area and time limit involved in exclusion, Lloyd George's proposals gave the Ulster unionists everything their leaders had demanded during the Buckingham Palace Conference. Carson stated publicly that he had asked Lloyd George to exclude all of Ulster.⁴⁹ He had to do this in order to mollify his supporters, both in the nine counties and in Britain. Privately, Carson admitted that the proposals met his demands on behalf of the Ulster unionists, as did British unionist leaders Andrew Bonar Law, Hugh Cecil, Austen Chamberlain, and Lord Lansdowne.⁵⁰ James Craig later admitted that during the negotiations he and Carson asked Lloyd George to exclude six counties, not nine.⁵¹

Party Approval and Cabinet Disapproval

Despite the public disagreement over the length of exclusion, both parties moved forward with their votes on the proposals. Unbeknownst as yet to Redmond, Dillon, or the public, Carson was armed with Lloyd George's private assurance of May 29, and could confidently assure his followers that his interpretation of the proposals was the correct one. On June 12, the UUC passed resolutions protesting the introduction of home rule, but because the Cabinet thought it

⁴⁸ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/17/1, Edward Carson, Memorandum, n.d.

⁴⁹ Edward Carson, "Motion for Adjournment," HC Deb 24 July 1916 vol 84 cc1427-70, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁵⁰ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/17/8, Edward Carson to Horace Plunkett, 5 June 1916; UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C64, "The Irish Settlement: Meeting of the Unionist Party," 7 July 1916.

⁵¹ PRONI, CAB/9/Z/3/1, James Craig to Austen Chamberlain, 2 January 1922. This letter is marked, "Withheld."

necessary to introduce self-government, “as loyal citizens...in this crisis of the Empire’s history it is our duty to make sacrifices.”⁵² The proceedings were never published, but Ronald McNeill emphasized the sacrifice that six-county unionists were making by agreeing to part with their colleagues in the three Ulster counties that would be included in home rule. He wrote of the June 12 meeting, “It was the saddest hour the Ulster Unionist Council ever spent. Men not prone to emotion shed tears. It was the most poignant ordeal the Ulster leader ever passed through.”⁵³ Publicly, northern unionists and their supporters upheld this moment as a sacrifice they made in the interests of peace with the Irish nationalists and the strengthening of the Empire.⁵⁴

Privately, many unionists admitted that six-county exclusion was better politics than pushing for its extension to the entire province. This had been Carson’s policy since 1913, though most of his Ulster unionist colleagues were unaware of it.⁵⁵ One of the arguments the Irish unionist leader used in his June 6 speech to the UUC was purely utilitarian. According to Carson’s official biographer, he said that the nine counties would contain approximately 869,000 Protestants and 700,000 Catholics, leading him to project a unionist parliamentary majority of one. The six-county population would comprise 825,000 Protestants and 432,000 Catholics, with a unionist majority of seven representatives.⁵⁶ Montgomery recognized that the nine counties currently elected seventeen nationalists and sixteen unionists to Westminster, therefore unionists could not consider their position secure if that area were excluded.⁵⁷ R. I. McConnell of Belfast wrote in congratulations to Carson, “as regards practical politics, the exclusion of six counties is a better proposition than nine.”⁵⁸ A note in Unionist Party leader Andrew Bonar Law’s papers on the situation in Ulster describes “her sacrifice” as “more psychological than real.”⁵⁹

While Carson assuaged the northern unionists, IPP leaders remained nervous that they could not convince their supporters in Ulster to back the proposals without a declaration that the agreement would be temporary. W. H. Owen, who was in Ireland as Lloyd George’s eyes and

⁵² *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 13 June 1916; PRONI, J. Milne Barbour Papers, D972/17, *UUC Year Book 1917*, “Report for 1916.”

⁵³ Ronald McNeill, *Ulster’s Stand for Union* (London: John Murray, 1922), 249.

⁵⁴ *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 13 June 1916; *Irish Times* (Dublin), 13 June 1916; *Spectator* (London), 16 June 1916.

⁵⁵ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/30/2/15, Edward Carson to Andrew Bonar Law, 20 September 1913.

⁵⁶ Colvin, *Life of Lord Carson*, III:168.

⁵⁷ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/429/30, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 11 June 1916

⁵⁸ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/18/28, R. I. McConnell to Edward Carson, 21 July 1916.

⁵⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C65, “Mr. Lloyd George’s Proposals: Summary of Views of Provincial Papers,” n.d.

ears, reported that Devlin and Dillon wanted a pronouncement to this effect.⁶⁰ The Prime Minister seemed to rise to the occasion. During a speech at Ladybank on June 14, Asquith said regarding Ireland, “what is desired now is a provisional settlement. When the war comes to an end, when the reign of peace is reestablished, we shall have to take stock, as an Empire, of our internal relations.”⁶¹ On June 16, Dillon wrote to Lloyd George that Asquith’s remarks were fortunate, as if the unionist interpretation of exclusion as “definite” had been confirmed, “all the nationalists in Ireland would have been unanimous in rejecting the proposals with contempt.”⁶²

Jeremiah MacVeagh, nationalist MP for South Down, continued to urge Lloyd George to declare the deal temporary, and to add that the proposals’ implementation would be followed by plebiscites. MacVeagh suggested that he might say, “the Irish Settlement proposed is merely provisional and does not in any way prejudice the undoubted right of the people in every County to decide for themselves the question of inclusion or exclusion.”⁶³ No such announcement was forthcoming. Dublin Castle official Frederick Wrench assured Carson, “Asquith as usual is confusing the issue.” He added, “when I saw him the word ‘provisional’ was not in Lloyd George’s mind, and he said more than once that there was to be no time limit whatever to the exclusion of the Ulster counties.”⁶⁴

The Prime Minister’s speech reassured the IPP leadership that their interpretation of exclusion in Lloyd George’s proposals was the correct one. They convened a conference of six-county nationalists to consider the proposals on June 23 in Belfast’s St. Mary’s Hall. In urging their acceptance, Redmond stressed that the six counties would only be excluded from home rule until the end of the war, when the Imperial Conference would review the situation. He added that if they rejected the deal, their sole remaining option was to resume a long and potentially fruitless parliamentary battle. Speaking against the proposals, solicitor F. J. O’Connor of Omagh, Co. Tyrone, said that if they accepted them and a parliamentary majority decided exclusion should be permanent, the IPP would be powerless to reverse this.⁶⁵ Both Devlin and

⁶⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/40, W. H. Owen to David Lloyd George, 14 June 1916.

⁶¹ H. H. Asquith at Ladybank, *The Times* (London), 15 June 1916.

⁶² UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/1, John Dillon to David Lloyd George, 16 June 1916.

⁶³ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/3, Jeremiah MacVeagh to David Lloyd George, 16 June 1916.

⁶⁴ PRONI, Edward Carson Papers, D1507/A/17/16, Frederick Wrench to Edward Carson, 15 June 1916.

⁶⁵ John Redmond and F. J. O’Connor in Belfast, *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 24 June 1916.

Redmond threatened to resign if the six-county nationalists failed to pass the proposals. The *Irish Independent* compared this to holding a pistol to the delegates' heads.⁶⁶

The final vote was 475 for the proposals and 275 against. The voting shows a clear geographical divide. Representatives from the majority-nationalist areas: Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Londonderry City—which might have been included in home rule if plebiscites were held—voted against the proposals. Delegates from counties Antrim (including Belfast), Armagh, Down, and the Londonderry countryside, majority-unionist areas that likely would have been excluded in any case, voted overwhelmingly for the agreement.⁶⁷ The convention gave Redmond the indication of support he needed among six-county nationalists. The IPP met in Dublin on June 26 to approve the proposals. This was, by that time, largely a formality.⁶⁸

Bodies representing Irish unionists and nationalists had now agreed to Lloyd George's proposals, which might have been assumed to end the ordeal. However, since Carson and Redmond left London, Unionists in the Cabinet had grown alarmed at the lengths to which Lloyd George's offer committed them. Most protested that he had exceeded his authority by representing his proposals as government policy, approved by the Cabinet. That the proposals entailed immediate home rule angered them further. Austen Chamberlain, Walter Long, and Lord Lansdowne had thought that Lloyd George might get consent from the Irish parties for a temporary administration to replace the Castle system, but not self-government.⁶⁹ Long said that prior to May 30 he had had only a general idea of what Lloyd George intended to propose, and when the two met that day he discovered that the proposals had already been sent to the Irish leaders. At that time, Lloyd George told Long that exclusion would be subject to revision after the war.⁷⁰

Both British and Irish unionists were concerned that nationalists would see a grant of immediate home rule as validating the recent rebellion. Southern unionist George F. Stewart expressed this to Lloyd George immediately after receiving the proposals.⁷¹ Long expanded on

⁶⁶ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 24 June 1916.

⁶⁷ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/15/1/15, Owen, "Convention of Ulster Nationalists," *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 24 June 1916; A. C. Hepburn, *Catholic Belfast and Nationalist Ireland in the Era of Joe Devlin, 1871-1934* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 179-180.

⁶⁸ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/39, Joseph Devlin to David Lloyd George, 26 June 1916.

⁶⁹ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C56, Walter Long, "The Irish Situation," 15 June 1916; UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/34, Austen Chamberlain to H. H. Asquith, 22 June 1916.

⁷⁰ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63C19, Walter Long, "The Irish Difficulty," 23 June 1916.

⁷¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/1/45, George F. Stewart to David Lloyd George, 31 May 1916.

the point by asserting that self-government combined with exclusion would show adherents of both Irish parties that force works. He wrote on June 11, “Ulster is to be excluded and therefore it is said in Ireland that she succeeded because her wealth and her population enabled her to take up arms and threaten violent resistance to Home Rule. It is said that the Nationalists have succeeded to a considerable extent owing to the fact that the Sinn Feiners took up arms and actually did resort to rebellion.”⁷² Long’s concern is ironic given that he had encouraged Ulster unionists to resist home rule by force as early as the January 1910 election campaign.⁷³

It is important to note that not all unionists, and not even all of those within the Cabinet, opposed Lloyd George’s proposals.⁷⁴ Its challengers also did not have a coherent alternative. This lack of unanimity was particularly acute on the issue of partition. Southern unionist and Attorney-General for Ireland James H. Campbell delivered a prescient warning that any scheme involving “a divided Ireland” would “inevitably result in constant agitation, friction, and disorder.”⁷⁵ Lansdowne was also against exclusion. He opposed the grant of immediate self-government but wrote, “if Home Rule is to come I should prefer a measure embracing the whole of Ireland, with safeguards for the minority.”⁷⁶

Arthur Balfour supported the proposals. He expressed the logic of partition when he wrote, “If we must have Home Rule, let us at least exclude from its operation as much of Unionist Ireland as is possible.” This ignores the existence of northern nationalists by assuming that it is possible to identify a geographic location of “Unionist Ireland.” Balfour added that Lloyd George’s proposals offered a chance for “settling peaceably and permanently the problem of Ulster.”⁷⁷ The benefit of hindsight highlights the irony in the idea that six-county partition would settle the issue either peacefully or permanently, but contemporaries like Campbell also warned that this would not provide a lasting solution.

Still other unionists were for partition but against the six-county area. The Church of Ireland’s Archbishop of Dublin John Bernard warned Lloyd George against dividing the island by religious identity. He wrote, “it is important that the line of division should not precisely

⁷² UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C11, Walter Long to Andrew Bonar Law, 11 June 1916. This letter was also sent to Asquith and Lloyd George.

⁷³ Walter Long in Belfast, *The Times* (London), 5 January 1910.

⁷⁴ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C64, “The Irish Settlement: Meeting of the Unionist Party,” 7 July 1916.

⁷⁵ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/14/3/18, James H. Campbell to H. H. Asquith, 19 June 1916.

⁷⁶ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/15/1/10, Lord Lansdowne, Memorandum, 2 June 1916.

⁷⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/63/C20, Arthur Balfour, “Ulster and the Irish Crisis,” 24 June 1916.

correspond with ecclesiastical or religious differences.” The demarcation should be made “on geographical, rather than on theological, lines.” For this reason, Bernard favored excluding the entire nine-county province of Ulster from home rule.⁷⁸

Cabinet opposition to the proposals disturbed Ulster unionists, who had based their support of the scheme largely on the idea that the government considered immediate home rule a war necessity. Somerset Saunderson learned from Long that Lloyd George never put the proposals before the Cabinet, “as he had led us to understand.”⁷⁹ Travers Blackley, secretary of the Cavan UUC delegates, wrote that his group wanted to hold another conference, as when they voted to accept the proposals, “they were under the impression that the Unionist party in England had thrown them over and would no longer stand by them.”⁸⁰

This is a noteworthy moment in the history of Ulster unionism. Since 1910, they had expressed their demands uncompromisingly and warned—or threatened, depending on one’s interpretation—that violence would ensue if they were not met. Their confidence was largely based on the support they believed they commanded among the Unionist Party, as well as the British government and public. When that support showed signs of wavering, the Ulster unionists made what they considered significant concessions.

Cabinet opposition to the proposals enabled Lloyd George to continue his strategy of making the Irish party leaders feel as though they were united in struggling toward a great goal. He wrote to Dillon on June 10 blaming Cabinet opposition on southern unionist pressure. Lloyd George promised that if Dillon and Carson convinced their followers to support the proposals, he and Asquith would fight for them within the government. He ended with a scarcely veiled threat that if both British parties were united they could govern Ireland by coercion, but not if he and the Prime Minister remained on the Irish nationalists’ side.⁸¹ A week later, Lloyd George assured Dillon that Asquith had approved the proposals, adding, “I feel certain he also will stand or fall by them.”⁸² He reiterated this to Redmond.⁸³ Lloyd George revealed his lack of concern for the opposition when he wrote to Asquith that if Carson and the IPP support the settlement,

⁷⁸ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/2/7, John Bernard to David Lloyd George, 3 June 1916.

⁷⁹ PRONI, Edward Carson Papers, D1507/A/17/17, Somerset Saunderson to Edward Carson, 15 June 1916.

⁸⁰ PRONI, Edward Carson Papers, D1507/A/18/15, Travers R. Blackley to Edward Carson, 13 July 1916.

⁸¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/2/24, David Lloyd George to John Dillon, 10 June 1916.

⁸² UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/11, David Lloyd George to John Dillon, 17 June 1916.

⁸³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,189, David Lloyd George to John Redmond, 21 June 1916.

the Cabinet Unionists “will rail in vain.”⁸⁴ He told other government members that he would resign if they did not support the deal. Long called his bluff by writing to Lloyd George, “I cannot believe that you seriously intend to base your resignation upon this excuse.”⁸⁵

Events in Ireland showed that Lloyd George’s tactics were working, but Cabinet dissension continued. T. P. O’Connor warned Redmond on June 28 that there might be changes to the settlement. He was entirely convinced of Lloyd George’s sincerity. O’Connor wrote, “L.G. has complained several times of being left alone to make this fight,” and implored, “I hope you will not regard any suggestion made by L.G. to meet the situation as anything like surrender or betrayal, or indeed serious modification.”⁸⁶

The issue of the permanence of exclusion had not been resolved, and came back to the forefront in Parliament. Responding to questions as to whether exclusion would be temporary, Lansdowne told the House of Lords on June 29 that the proposals had not been approved by the Cabinet and were therefore only “consultations.”⁸⁷ On July 7, Redmond urged Lloyd George that when Asquith spoke the next Monday he must declare the agreement provisional. In addition, he should say that the six counties would not have its own executive and there would be no new conditions added since the nationalist convention approved the proposals.⁸⁸

Instead, responding to a July 10 question from Carson, Asquith said that the excluded counties could not be brought into home rule without a new bill at Westminster.⁸⁹ This confirmed Lloyd George’s private assurance of May 29 and contradicted Redmond’s assumption of automatic inclusion, but the IPP MPs seem not to have realized this.⁹⁰ The next day, Lansdowne said that the proposals entailed “permanent and enduring” amendments to the 1914 Home Rule Act.⁹¹ Dillon called this speech, “absolutely fatal to all further chance of the likelihood of a settlement.”⁹² On July 18, Redmond wrote to the Prime Minister that the text of

⁸⁴ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/2/30, David Lloyd George to H. H. Asquith, 12 June 1916.

⁸⁵ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/2/33, Walter Long to David Lloyd George, 12 June 1916.

⁸⁶ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,215/2/A, T. P. O’Connor to John Redmond, 28 June 1916.

⁸⁷ See the speeches of Lords Salisbury, Midleton, and Lansdowne in “The Irish Negotiations,” House of Lords Debates (HL Deb) 29 June 1916 vol 22 cc492-508, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁸⁸ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/14/3/49, John Redmond to David Lloyd George, 7 July 1916.

⁸⁹ Edward Carson and H. H. Asquith, “Prime Minister’s Statement,” House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 10 July 1916 vol 84 cc57-64, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁹⁰ Dillon claimed that the IPP MPs did not hear the July 10 question and answer. See John Dillon, “Motion for Adjournment,” HC Deb 24 July 1916 vol 84 cc1427-70.

⁹¹ Lord Lansdowne, “Government of Ireland,” HL Deb 11 July 1916 vol 22 cc609-52, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁹² John Dillon, “Chief Secretary Appointed,” HC Deb 31 July 1916 vol 84 cc2116-231, Hansard 1803-2005.

the new home rule bill should be published immediately, and there should be no deviation from the “strictly temporary and provisional character of ALL sections of the bill.”⁹³

A draft of the new measure circulated to the Cabinet on July 14 contained language that would exclude the six counties “only for the period of the war and twelve months later,” which accorded with Redmond’s interpretation of the proposals.⁹⁴ Despite Lloyd George’s promise to Dillon to fight for the proposals within the Cabinet, they decided—with his acquiescence—to compromise between Carson’s and Redmond’s interpretations. On July 19 they agreed to keep the overall settlement temporary, but to insert language into the new bill stating that the excluded counties would not join the home rule parliament automatically. This would render home rule temporary, but partition perpetual. They also planned to reduce the number of Irish MPs at Westminster.⁹⁵ Redmond called keeping the IPP in Parliament at their full strength, “an indispensable safeguard of the temporary character of the whole arrangement.”⁹⁶ The Irish nationalist MPs could counter attempts to make exclusion permanent, but this was less likely if their numbers were reduced.

Home Secretary Herbert Samuel informed Carson of the Cabinet’s decisions on July 21. The Irish unionist leader wanted to call the excluded area “North Ireland.” Samuel objected that that would be “taken in the rest of the country as hoisting the flag of a permanent separation and as the definite constitution of a new state within the Empire, which is not, I believe, what you have in view.” He suggested that they call the area simply, “the Six Counties.”⁹⁷ Despite Samuel’s assertion that Carson wanted only temporary partition, the groundwork for what would become Northern Ireland had been firmly laid. The idea that the six-county area should have its own parliament was not fully developed, but Carson and Lloyd George were already devising a form of self-government, even down to the detail of an acceptable name.

Samuel and Lloyd George conveyed the terms to Redmond on July 22. The next day the IPP leader warned Asquith, “any bill framed upon these lines will meet with the vehement opposition at all its stages of the Irish Party.”⁹⁸ Redmond and Dillon publicly broke off the

⁹³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ns. 15,165/6, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 18 July 1916.

⁹⁴ David Lindsay [pseud. Lord Balcarres, Lord Crawford], *The Crawford Papers: The journals of David Lindsay, twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and tenth Earl of Balcarres (1871-1940), during the years 1892-1940*, ed. John Vincent (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 356, entry for 15 July 1916.

⁹⁵ Lindsay, *Crawford Papers*, 356-357, entry for 19 July 1916.

⁹⁶ John Redmond, “Motion for Adjournment,” HC Deb 24 July 1916 vol 84 cc1427-70.

⁹⁷ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/18/27, Herbert Samuel to Edward Carson, 21 July 1916.

⁹⁸ NLI, John Redmond Papers, 15,165/6, John Redmond to H. H. Asquith, 23 July 1916.

negotiations on July 24. Dillon declared, “I rest on the written document,” placing his faith in the proposals as sent to them by Lloyd George.⁹⁹

The affair permanently damaged the relationship between Redmond and Lloyd George. Frances Stevenson, Lloyd George’s private secretary and mistress, wrote in her diary on July 26, “The Irish are angry with him: they think he should have upheld the original terms of the agreement, & I think they have reason to be angry.”¹⁰⁰ The reference to “original terms” is significant, as it indicates that the draft bill embodying Redmond’s interpretation of the proposals was initially the correct one.

New Government and New Ideas

The IPP’s anxieties only intensified as 1916 wore on. Asquith’s Cabinet slowly fractured due to his perceived indolence in prosecuting the war. In December, Lloyd George brought matters to a head by using his favorite tactic of threatening to resign. Asquith preemptively stepped down, assuming that the other parties would fail to form a Cabinet and the King would call him back into office immediately.¹⁰¹ Instead, the King offered the Premiership to Bonar Law, who refused. Finally, Lloyd George formed a new coalition. Historian David Powell describes the new government as “dominated by the Conservatives,” pointing out that thirteen out of the twenty-three Cabinet members were Unionists.¹⁰² In his first statement to Parliament as Prime Minister, Lloyd George told the Commons that he did not have time to devote to Ireland. Redmond replied that the speech “showed an utter and complete absence of that quick decision which, we were told, was to be the characteristic of this Government.”¹⁰³ IPP member Stephen Gwynn, who was serving as a captain in the Army, later wrote that he was happy to get back to the Western Front after the hostile atmosphere of Parliament toward the Irish nationalists.¹⁰⁴

Though Lloyd George professed that he had no time to devote to the Irish question, it remained on the minds of many. Opinion gradually shifted toward holding an all-party

⁹⁹ John Dillon, “Motion for Adjournment,” HC Deb 24 July 1916 vol 84 cc1427-70, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁰⁰ Frances Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 109, entry for July 26, 1916.

¹⁰¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69.

¹⁰² David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-1935: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), 73.

¹⁰³ David Lloyd George and John Redmond, “Prime Minister’s Statement,” HC Deb 19 December 1916 vol 88 cc1333-94, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁰⁴ Gwynn, *John Redmond’s Last Years*, 248.

conference on the issue. All-for-Ireland-League (AFIL) founder William O'Brien suggested the idea as early as September 1916.¹⁰⁵ His experience arbitrating land disputes between Irish nationalist politicians and unionist landlords in 1902 had instilled a belief in "settlement by consent," and a determination that this was the way to reach self-government. Lord Lieutenant Wimborne also suggested all-party talks as a means of breaking the deadlock.¹⁰⁶

The most ardent advocate within the government of a conference was L. S. Amery. A Unionist and signatory of the Ulster Covenant, in his memoirs he claimed to believe that partition would provide "no real solution" to the Irish question.¹⁰⁷ Amery's assessment of the situation in February 1917 included cutting criticism of the 1914 Home Rule Act, calling it, "unattractive to all sections of Irishmen," and "framed by Englishmen to suit Parliamentary exigencies at Westminster, and not by Irishmen to suit Irish ideas or to meet Irish needs." He asserted, "No British Government can solve the Irish problem by legislation, and no British statesman can solve it by negotiation." He added that no solution was possible "until Irishmen themselves shoulder the responsibility of discovering a form of government on which they can agree. The surprising thing is that anyone should ever have thought that any other method could succeed."¹⁰⁸ This last observation is not surprising when one takes into account that British politicians of both major parties worked on the assumption that they must play a major role in determining Ireland's form of government.

The Prime Minister did not immediately act on the convention suggestion. There were still other possible avenues of agreement. In October 1916, Liberal MP William Chapple suggested that the government set up a boundary commission after the war to "define Protestant Ulster." The population of the designated area should then decide by plebiscite whether to be included in home rule.¹⁰⁹ The new Chief Secretary, Unionist MP Henry Duke, favored referring the area of exclusion to a "Statutory Commission." T. P. O'Connor liked the idea, if the IPP controlled the body's composition. The only other option was to convince Lloyd George to "bully" Carson into accepting an all-Ireland parliament, which he did not think the Prime Minister would do. In February 1917, O'Connor asserted that the basis of partition proposed by

¹⁰⁵ W. O'Brien, "Is There a Way Out of the Chaos in Ireland?," *The Nineteenth Century and After* (Sept. 1916): 503.

¹⁰⁶ J. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics*, 228.

¹⁰⁷ L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1953), II:112-113.

¹⁰⁸ United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), CAB/24/6, L. S. Amery, "The Irish Situation," 18 February 1917.

¹⁰⁹ William Chapple, "Government of Ireland Act," HC Deb 25 October 1916 vol 86 c1118, Hansard 1803-2005.

Lloyd George in 1916 was “out of date,” adding, “I could be no party to the exclusion of Tyrone and Fermanagh or indeed to any county of Ulster, without a plebiscite.”¹¹⁰

The Prime Minister tried to restart negotiations with Redmond. The IPP leader was mistrustful after Lloyd George’s conduct during the 1916 negotiations, and the Prime Minister had to approach him through intermediaries. In March 1917, Liberal MP Harold Spender wrote that Lloyd George was prepared to offer a boundary commission to delimit the areas to be included in and excluded from home rule.¹¹¹ Spender hinted at the commission’s powers when he said, “We often cut up counties in England without engaging in a Civil War.”¹¹² The IPP leader was unmoved.¹¹³

Rebuffed by Redmond, on April 16, 1917, Lloyd George appointed a Cabinet committee to draft a new home rule bill. It was composed of Unionists Lord Curzon and Chief Secretary Henry Duke, as well as Liberal Christopher Addison. The last, who described himself as “a sincere Home Ruler,” later wrote, “the first stage of our efforts gave me a much poorer opinion of the 1914 Act than I had ever had before.” Addison added, “As an effective instrument of self-government it was a very crippled affair, for the Irish Government was so hedged about by restrictions and limitations and was financially so impotent that the first year of its administration would certainly have brought about an unanswerable demand for drastic amendment.”¹¹⁴

On the crucial issue of exclusion, the new bill would provide county option for each of the six counties. Exclusion was to be temporary with the option of renewal, as each county would hold a new poll every seven to ten years. The committee were “directed” that inclusion should require a 55 percent vote of the electors in each county. Carson wanted the figure to be 75 percent.¹¹⁵ The drafting committee rejected these ideas, asserting that anything other than a bare majority would “invite the criticism that an apparently trifling departure from ordinary constitutional procedure was proposed for the transparent purpose of enabling a minority in Tyrone and Fermanagh to decide the issue in those counties.” The counties that voted for

¹¹⁰ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,215/2/B, T. P. O’Connor to John Redmond, 15 February 1917.

¹¹¹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,263/1, Harold Spender to John Redmond, 27 March 1917.

¹¹² NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,263/1, Harold Spender to John Redmond, 29 March 1917.

¹¹³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,263/1, Letter on behalf of John Redmond to Harold Spender, 27 March 1917.

¹¹⁴ Christopher Addison, *Politics From Within, 1911-1918: Including Some Records of a Great National Effort*, 2 vols. (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1924), II:180-181.

¹¹⁵ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/23/9, Alexander McDowell to Edward Carson, 2 April 1917.

exclusion would be linked to the rest of the island via a “Council of Ireland,” which would negotiate legislation of common concern and eventual reunification.¹¹⁶

Addison learned “to his infinite disgust” that the Cabinet decided on May 16 not to present the new proposals to Redmond, but to call a convention of Irish parties instead. He said that the sudden change of tact showed Lloyd George’s “secretiveness combined with an autocratic temper.” The Cabinet decided to send the new proposals to Redmond, and offer the convention as a secondary option.¹¹⁷ However, when Lloyd George wrote to the IPP leader, he said that the six counties were to be excluded as a block. There was no mention of plebiscites, and Parliament would reconsider their position after five years. This removed the principle of choice and confirmed the idea, embodied in Lloyd George’s 1916 proposals, that Westminster should decide the area and duration of exclusion. If Redmond rejected this, the Prime Minister offered what Amery had suggested, namely, “that Irishmen of all creeds and parties might meet together in a Convention for the purpose of drafting a Constitution for their Country.”¹¹⁸ Redmond and his IPP colleagues accepted the conference option.¹¹⁹

Once the government determined to convene an all-party conference, its composition became an important and contentious issue. When he announced the Convention in Parliament on May 21, Lloyd George said that each delegate would be pledged “to do his best” to reach a settlement. He promised that if the Convention came to “substantial agreement” as to the “character and scope” of a constitution for Ireland within the Empire, his administration would frame legislation based on that agreement.¹²⁰ These phrases were characteristically vague, and might enable Lloyd George to argue that any agreement short of unanimity did not meet these requirements. Given the diversity of interests that would be represented, arriving at “substantial agreement” was a significant challenge. Moreover, two days later Bonar Law said on behalf of the government that if every party in the conference decided on a plan for an Irish parliament except the Ulster unionists, this would not constitute “substantial agreement.”¹²¹ Thus, the “Ulster veto” seemed to be very much intact.

¹¹⁶ UKNA, CAB/24/12, Lord Curzon, Henry Duke, and Christopher Addison, “Ireland: Policy of the Government,” 8 May 1917. This memo was published in condensed form in Addison, *Politics From Within*, II:182-184.

¹¹⁷ Addison, *Politics From Within*, II:184-186.

¹¹⁸ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,189, David Lloyd George to John Redmond, 16 May 1918.

¹¹⁹ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,189, John Redmond to David Lloyd George, 17 May 1918.

¹²⁰ *The Times* (London), 22 May 1917.

¹²¹ *The Times* (London), 25 May 1917.

Lloyd George announced the Convention's composition in Parliament on June 11, 1917. The IPP, Sinn Féin, the Ulster unionists, and the southern unionists each received five seats. The AFIL and Irish nobles were offered two representatives each. Organized labor was given five representatives. Chambers of commerce were allotted three seats. Local government representatives totaled forty-seven, most of them home rulers. Clerical representatives included four Catholic bishops and three Protestant officials. Finally, the government intended to nominate fifteen representatives of "leading Irishmen" for a total of 101.¹²²

Irish Parties and the Convention

Lloyd George reserved no seats specifically for northern nationalists, a fact that Sinn Féin sympathizer Laurence Ginnell pointed out in Parliament.¹²³ The IPP ensured that several of their representatives came from Ulster, but the government scheme provides further evidence of their refusal to recognize the existence and concerns of northern nationalists.¹²⁴ AFIL leader William O'Brien announced on June 21 that his party would not participate. He derided the Convention's composition, citing the Ulster nationalists' exclusion as well as alleged overrepresentation of the IPP and northern unionists.¹²⁵ Thus, ironically, he refused to take part in a conference he had helped to inspire, and which most resembled the 1902 Land Conference he wanted to recreate.

Representatives of Sinn Féin declined to participate in the Convention almost immediately after its announcement. A May 21 statement signed by several prominent members of the movement asserted that, as the British government was backing the Ulster unionists on partition, the conference's failure was "assured beforehand." They argued that the Convention's collapse "would give the English Government the opportunity of declaring to its Allies, to the U.S. and to neutral Powers, that England had left the solution of the Irish question to the Irish themselves; that the Irish were unable to solve it; and that therefore, England's continued occupation of Ireland was justified."¹²⁶ Labor leader William O'Brien—not to be confused with the AFIL founder—signed this statement, indicating that his Irish Transport and General

¹²² David Lloyd George, "Death of Major Redmond, M.P.," HC Deb 11 June 1917 vol 94 cc612-21, Hansard 1803-2005; *The Times* (London), 12 June 1917.

¹²³ Laurence Ginnell, "Government of Ireland," HC Deb 21 June 1917 vol 94 c1959, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹²⁴ For IPP concern to include northern nationalists in their delegation see NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,182/24, John Dillon to John Redmond, 21 June 1917; NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,181/3, Joseph Devlin to John Redmond, 25 June 1916.

¹²⁵ William O'Brien's correspondence with Lloyd George was published in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 21 June 1917.

¹²⁶ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 21 May 1917.

Workers' Union (ITGWU) would also hold aloof from the Convention. Sinn Féin founder Arthur Griffith and the organization's National Council met on May 23 and demanded that the British government agree to submit a Convention agreement to international arbitration. Barring this, they intended to continue preparing Ireland's case for representation at the peace conference that would end the First World War.¹²⁷ There was virtually no chance of this demand being met, therefore it was tantamount to a refusal.

Some historians claim that Sinn Féin's absence from the Convention is one of the factors that doomed it from the outset, the assumption being that it was more important to assuage this school of thought than any other within Irish nationalism. The IPP's nationalist opponents were clearly on the rise. Prisoners interned after the Easter Rising were released in December 1916. Between February 1917 and the Convention's opening in July, figures associated with the Rising and campaigning under the banner of Sinn Féin defeated IPP candidates in four successive by-elections. Another Sinn Féin victory followed in August. Some contemporary observers claimed that these elections killed the Convention before it began.¹²⁸ However, it was unclear whether this was an expression of dissatisfaction with the IPP or approval of another policy. London's *Daily Telegraph* asked in July 1917, "what is *Sinn Fein* for? The difficulty is that nobody is in a position to answer that question."¹²⁹ At this time, Sinn Féin was less an organized party than a collective term for nationalists opposed to the IPP. After his election in February 1917, Count Plunkett started his own nationalist organization, the Liberty Clubs. Yet another association, the Irish Nation League, claimed to be working toward similar goals as Sinn Féin. It was not until a party conference at the end of October 1917, three months into the Convention's deliberations, that Sinn Féin was reorganized and propounded its objectives.

Historian Michael Laffan attributes Sinn Féin's 1917 electoral successes in part to IPP weakness. Sinn Féin was composed of a number of factions, the two most prominent being anti-IPP nationalists and physical-force republicans who flocked to its banner after the Rising.¹³⁰ Given the chaotic state of Sinn Féin, it is not certain that its adherents were capable of nominating credible representatives to the Convention that were also acceptable to the

¹²⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 May 1917.

¹²⁸ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 July and 16 July 1917.

¹²⁹ *Daily Telegraph* (London), reprinted in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 July 1917.

¹³⁰ Laffan describes the confusion within nationalism in this period in *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77-121.

government. Confusion as to who was qualified to speak for Sinn Féin is evident in Lloyd George's announcement of the Convention's composition on June 11. He referred to "spokesmen of associations which profess Separatist doctrines," rather than any coherent party.¹³¹ A week later, Bonar Law said, "The Sinn Fein movement" was not "organised in such a way that any person or persons could authoritatively speak for those engaged in it."¹³²

Moreover, between February and April 1918, the IPP defeated Sinn Féin candidates in three consecutive by-elections, showing that the latter were not invincible. Both the government and the IPP admitted that Sinn Féin deserved to be represented at the Convention.¹³³ The government went so far as to release the convicted Rising prisoners in June 1917 in an attempt to "create a good atmosphere" for the talks.¹³⁴ The absence of accredited representatives from Sinn Féin did not signal the end of the Convention enterprise, and is comprehensible as the organization struggled to define itself in 1917. The government nominated two members who were known to have Sinn Féin sympathies: Edward Lysaght and George Russell, the latter a writer who published as "A.E." or "Æ."¹³⁵

The southern unionists agreed to participate in the Convention at an Irish Unionist Alliance (IUA) meeting on June 1. With sympathizers from other delegations, the southern unionists eventually mustered ten representatives. IUA leader Lord Midleton said at the time that they only accepted the Convention invitation reluctantly, but later wrote, "As our numbers were less than one-tenth of the population, we could not complain."¹³⁶ After the Convention, Midleton claimed that participating necessitated a change of mindset among unionists. He said that Lloyd George's terms implied "some form of Home Rule" and "The fact of entering the Convention was a sacrifice to every Unionist." Therefore, Midleton entered the talks with a

¹³¹ David Lloyd George, "Death of Major Redmond, M.P.," HC Deb 11 June 1917 vol 94 cc612-21, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹³² Andrew Bonar Law, "Release of Political Prisoners," HC Deb 18 June 1917 vol 94 cc1430-1, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹³³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,199/4, Denis Kelly to John Redmond, 25 May 1917; NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,215/2/B, T. P. O'Connor to John Redmond, 29 May 1917.

¹³⁴ UKNA, CAB/23/2/61, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 22 May 1917.

¹³⁵ S. Gwynn, *Last Days of John Redmond*, 273-274.

¹³⁶ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/38/1/4, Midleton to David Lloyd George, 28 June 1917; William St. John Brodrick [pseud. Earl of Midleton], *Records and Reactions, 1856-1939* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1939), 235.

belief that home rule was inevitable, and that it was his duty to obtain the best settlement he could.¹³⁷

The Ulster unionists took the most cautious approach of any party to the Convention. Carson seemed open to the idea of the Convention reaching an accord based on home rule. In a May 28 letter, he reminded UUC standing committee member Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery that the 1914 Home Rule Act, which included Ulster, was on the statute book, and “has now become the law of the land.” It was therefore necessary for Ulster unionists to obtain every safeguard possible by means of the Convention.¹³⁸

Carson told the standing committee that their attitude should be to establish that they were content under the Union and listen to all that was said, but not necessarily aid in arriving at an agreement. An anonymous standing committee member summarized the policy as, “We sit tight, and practically say nothing, until the others have told us what they want, and have come to some agreement among themselves. We will then discuss it with them.” Carson emphasized that the various nationalist parties were divided and there was little chance of the Convention reaching “substantial agreement.” The standing committee member added that Carson, “emphatically assured us we can go in, and come out of the Convention without prejudice to our position, and no settlement will be forced upon Ulster against our will.”¹³⁹

The policy of “considering” and “discussing” forms of home rule was still too open-minded for some UUC members. Montgomery indicated that the Ulster unionists were not participating in order to aid in an agreement. Instead, “The main object of the U.U.C. agreeing to send representatives to the Convention is to produce a good effect on English Public opinion.”¹⁴⁰ According to this rationale, refusing to join the Convention might weaken their support in Britain, but the Ulster unionists could appoint a delegation with a mandate to do as little as possible to contribute to the conference.

To this end, the UUC set up a system of checks and balances designed to ensure that their Convention delegates took no decisions without reference to Belfast. They appointed five representatives, but also formed an advisory council to which the delegates should refer all of

¹³⁷ Middleton, “An Untold Tale,” *The Times* (London), 6 November 1919. There are copies of this letter in UKNA, Middleton Papers, PRO/30/67/40.

¹³⁸ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/430/22, Edward Carson to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 28 May 1917.

¹³⁹ PRONI, UUC Papers, D1327/18/30, Memorandum, 10 June 1917.

¹⁴⁰ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/430/24, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to Edward Selater, 1 June 1917.

their decisions.¹⁴¹ Some unionists outside the six counties were anxious to prevent a repeat of the 1916 negotiations. During the UUC meeting that appointed the Convention delegates, representatives from Monaghan proposed the resolution, “as Sir Edward Carson said ‘Ulster means Ulster’ and that there should be no partition of the Province, and that the three counties of Monaghan, Cavan, and Donegal should not again be expected to sacrifice themselves.”¹⁴² The Ulster unionists’ fallback position to the maintenance of the Union was to be to safeguard the nine-county province rather than the six counties discussed in 1916. The Ulster unionist delegation offended their southern counterparts before the Convention even began by not consulting them on policy decisions.¹⁴³ Midleton described the attitude toward his group as, “we should hew wood and draw water for Ulster.”¹⁴⁴

The Convention elected its own chairman, Horace Plunkett. A former Unionist MP for South Dublin between 1893 and 1900, by 1911 he quietly adopted a pro-home rule stance, without attaching himself to any party.¹⁴⁵ He came to view the Ulster unionist delegation as the biggest obstacle to an agreed solution. In his diary for October 1917, he referred to “the arrogant Ulstermen,” and wrote, “They seem to assume that they alone count.”¹⁴⁶ Lord MacDonnell, a unionist and former Chief Secretary from Co. Mayo, called the northerners’ unhelpful stance, “an impeachment of their honesty,” a reference to Lloyd George’s statement that the delegates were pledged to do their best to work for a settlement.¹⁴⁷

Between the abstaining parties and the difficult attitude of some of its delegates, the Convention was not entered upon with much optimism. Frances Stevenson wrote that the Prime Minister was “hopeful that peace may reign for a few months at least in that quarter, though I do not know whether he has any hopes of the Convention ultimately solving the Irish puzzle.”¹⁴⁸ Ronan Fanning cites this as evidence that Lloyd George never intended for the conference to succeed, merely to defer contentious issues until after the war.¹⁴⁹ Horace Plunkett reported that

¹⁴¹ PRONI, UUC Papers, D4503/2, UUC Standing Committee Minutes, 15 June 1917.

¹⁴² PRONI, UUC Papers, D4503/2, UUC Standing Committee Minutes, 8 June 1917.

¹⁴³ Geoffrey Henry Browne [pseud. Lord Oranmore and Browne], “Lord Oranmore’s Journal, 1913-27,” ed. John Butler, *Irish Historical Studies* 29, no. 116 (Nov., 1995): 570, 21 July 1917.

¹⁴⁴ Midleton, *Records and Reactions*, 236-237

¹⁴⁵ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/31, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, entry for 19 August 1911.

¹⁴⁶ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/38, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, entry for 17 October 1917.

¹⁴⁷ New York Public Library (NYPL), Horace Plunkett, *The Irish Convention: Confidential Report to His Majesty the King by the Chairman* (1918), para. 60.

¹⁴⁸ Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, 158, entry for 19 May 1917.

¹⁴⁹ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 161.

Sinn Féiners were spreading this rumor.¹⁵⁰ Ronald McNeill wrote that the Ulster unionist delegation were doing their patriotic duty in helping to maintain a peaceful atmosphere during the war. He called the Convention, “a bone thrown to a snarling dog, and the longer there was anything to gnaw the longer would the dog keep quiet.”¹⁵¹

Lloyd George’s purposes in calling the conference were likely more nuanced than this allows. It was evident to many that the Convention had little chance of success, and it is likely that the Prime Minister saw the value in deferring the Irish question. However, Lloyd George told Stevenson of the Irish question in April 1917, “I want to get it settled now.”¹⁵² The Prime Minister had formed multiple committees to draft home rule bills, and before the Convention ended he interjected in its deliberations. Therefore, Lloyd George was willing to commit his own and his government’s time and energy to Ireland despite the war. In addition, his government was running out of ideas for solving the problem on their own. By establishing the conference, the Prime Minister could gauge what terms were considered acceptable to the Irish public and political classes. Moreover, the Convention did not keep Ireland quiet, as political agitation continued outside of its deliberations.

Even Horace Plunkett, the most optimistic proponent of the Convention, was not sanguine as to its success. He told the King that the conference was being asked to succeed where three British administrations: Asquith’s Liberal government, his war Cabinet, and Lloyd George’s coalition, had all failed. Plunkett wrote, “It is little wonder that even friendly public opinion should regard the Convention as an imperfect instrument for the accomplishment of a hopeless task.”¹⁵³ Ulster unionist James Craig typified the almost forlorn hope that the conference would succeed. He said on July 12, “Everyone now felt that a solution free from the sacrifice of any principle for which they had struggled so nobly, a solution come to by agreement, if such were possible, would be a great relief.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, Craig wanted the Convention to reach an accord and believed that his constituents did as well, but they were not willing to minimize their demands to ensure this achievement. A similar attitude prevailed

¹⁵⁰ NYPL, Plunkett, *Confidential Report*, para. 20.

¹⁵¹ McNeill, *Ulster’s Stand for Union*, 259.

¹⁵² Frances Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 155, entry for 25 April 1917.

¹⁵³ NYPL, Plunkett, *Confidential Report*, para. 17.

¹⁵⁴ James Craig at Finnebrogue, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 13 July 1917.

among all of the parties involved. If there was any room for maneuver between these two stances, it was the delegates' task to find it.

The Irish Convention

The Convention met for the first time on July 25, 1917, in the Regent House at Trinity College. Due to abstentions and government nominations, it numbered ninety-five members. After his election as chair, Plunkett became nearly obsessed with procedural issues. He wanted the delegates to discuss topics at prescribed times.¹⁵⁵ It was Plunkett, not Lloyd George, who was primarily responsible for the Convention's extended length, as he deliberately prolonged the proceedings. Plunkett wrote, "the longer the Convention takes, the better the chances of a settlement in the end."¹⁵⁶ He told the King, "the Irish question has never been argued in Parliament (or, for that matter, out of it) on its merits. Reason has been overborne by passion." Plunkett was determined that the Convention should provide this discussion. The delegates' speeches were not published, and the only public indications of what they were doing were short official statements to the press. Though Plunkett said secrecy was necessary, this increased the public perception that the Convention was not accomplishing anything.¹⁵⁷

Seven different schemes of self-government were submitted for discussion at the Convention. Five of them were based on precedents in operation in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, called "colonial" or "dominion" home rule. The remaining two were based on the federal idea. Six out of the seven settlement ideas would give Ireland fiscal autonomy, or complete control over collecting and spending taxes. The dominion schemes each had distinctive features. Some of them contemplated providing provincial legislatures subordinate to an Irish parliament. Other suggestions would create provincial committees with local powers within the Irish legislature; all ideas for conciliating the Ulster unionists while maintaining political unity.¹⁵⁸

Lord MacDonnell submitted a scheme based on Erskine Childers's *The Framework of Home Rule* (1911), which argued for both dominion status and fiscal autonomy. Childers served

¹⁵⁵ Horace Plunkett, *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1918), 10.

¹⁵⁶ NLI, Shane Leslie Papers, Ms. 22,834, Horace Plunkett to Shane Leslie, 5 January 1918.

¹⁵⁷ NYPL, Plunkett, *Confidential Report*, para. 21.

¹⁵⁸ Plunkett, *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention*, 10.

on the Convention's secretariat.¹⁵⁹ Prior to the Convention's opening, George "Æ" Russell published *Thoughts for a Convention* (1917) in which he argued for dominion status with safeguards for Ulster unionists.¹⁶⁰ He predicted that partition would cause lasting strife, as, "Ireland would regard the six Ulster counties as the French have regarded Alsace-Lorraine, whose hopes of re-conquest turned Europe into an armed camp."¹⁶¹ The unionist *Irish Times* called the pamphlet, "the most high-minded and persuasive pleading that has ever been addressed to Irish people of all parties."¹⁶² The *Irish Independent*, whose publisher William Martin Murphy sat in the Convention as a government nominee, had advocated dominion status in 1911, and now renewed the call.¹⁶³ Plunkett felt that the apparent popularity of Sinn Féin's calls for complete independence was driving IPP supporters to advocate dominion home rule.¹⁶⁴ Edward Lysaght, who had been nominated to the Convention due to his Sinn Féin sympathies, told the conference on August 28 that the organization "demanded a republic...But at present Sinn Fein was not intransigent." He believed that the organization could be won over, "if it can be persuaded that national freedom is possible within the Empire." Plunkett told the King that he believed Sinn Féin would welcome an offer of dominion status.¹⁶⁵

The Ulster unionists assumed that the 1914 Home Rule Act would provide a basis for the conference, and were surprised that ideas such as dominion home rule were being mooted. Ronald McNeill later wrote, "The Act of 1914 was brushed aside as beneath contempt."¹⁶⁶ In their report following the conference, the Ulster unionist delegates said, "Had we thought that the majority of the Convention intended to demand...what is tantamount to full national independence, we could not have agreed to enter the Convention."¹⁶⁷ They need not have worried. Lloyd George had no intention of implementing an agreement based on dominion home rule. He told *Manchester Guardian* editor C. P. Scott that it could not be conceded as, "the

¹⁵⁹ R. B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention, 1917-18* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 108-109.

¹⁶⁰ George Russell [pseud. A.E., Æ], *Thoughts for a Convention: Memorandum on the State of Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsell, 1917), 12, 21, 24-25.

¹⁶¹ Russell, *Thoughts for a Convention*, 20.

¹⁶² *Irish Times* (Dublin), 1 June 1917.

¹⁶³ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 17 May, 7 August, 8 August, and 15 August 1917.

¹⁶⁴ NLI, Shane Leslie Papers, Ms. 22,834, Horace Plunkett to Shane Leslie, 5 January 1918.

¹⁶⁵ Plunkett, *Confidential Report*, paras. 30, 41.

¹⁶⁶ McNeill, *Ulster's Stand for Union*, 259.

¹⁶⁷ "Report of Ulster Unionist Delegates to Irish Convention," in *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention*, 33.

Dominions were virtually independent States and could secede at any time if they chose.”¹⁶⁸ Therefore, while the Convention was allegedly empowered to frame a constitution for Ireland, the British government intended to veto any settlement it considered unsatisfactory.

The Convention delegated its decision-making powers to a “Sub-Committee of Nine.” It contained five nationalists, three Ulster unionists, and one southern unionist. Surprisingly, the group reached compromises on constitutional issues. The unionists agreed that there should be an all-Ireland parliament. The nationalists conceded that 40 percent of the lower house be occupied by unionists for ten years. In their report following the Convention, the Ulster unionists tried to portray themselves as having rejected this stipulation as “undemocratic.”¹⁶⁹ In fact, Ulster unionist delegation leader Hugh Barrie suggested the 40 percent figure. The UUC advisory council objected to the idea of nominating some of the Ulster members to the lower house as undemocratic, but agreed to this in the case of the southern unionists.¹⁷⁰ William Martin Murphy noted the irony that the Ulster unionist delegation leader suggested they should be represented in excess of their proportion of the population, while “At the same time Barrie pronounced himself to be a democrat...and that he was opposed to nominated members.”¹⁷¹ These varying definitions of democratic practice notwithstanding, there was an agreement in place regarding parliamentary representation.

The deadlock within the Sub-Committee of Nine took the predictable course of dividing the nationalist and unionist members, but it occurred on the issue of fiscal autonomy. The nationalists wanted the Irish Parliament to collect and distribute all of its own taxes, including customs and excise. The unionists wished to maintain full fiscal union with Britain. The nationalists suggested that, if the Irish Parliament had fiscal autonomy, they would make a free trade treaty with Britain. The unionists rejected the idea.¹⁷²

Faced with the possibility of a breakdown, Redmond wrote to Lloyd George urging him to intervene and compel the Ulster unionists to give way. He suggested that the government

¹⁶⁸ C. P. Scott, *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott*, ed. Trevor Wilson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 343, entry for 19-21 April 1918.

¹⁶⁹ “Report of Ulster Unionist Delegates to Irish Convention,” in *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention*, 33.

¹⁷⁰ “Interim Report of the Sub-Committee to the Grand Committee of the Irish Convention,” 15 November 1917, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention*, 59-60; Middleton, *Ireland: Dupe or Heroine* (London: William Heinemann, 1932), 117.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in McDowell, *The Irish Convention*, 121.

¹⁷² S. Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years*, 307.

might simply declare their intention to enforce the suggestions of the Primrose committee as a way out of the deadlock.¹⁷³ Lloyd George replied that he was busy with war work but had already urged Carson to advocate a compromise. He inveighed that the only alternative to an agreement at the Convention was government by coercion, which he assured Redmond he had always opposed and “would regard with perfect horror.”¹⁷⁴ It was the same combination of assurance and threat that Lloyd George had used during the 1916 negotiations.

Suddenly, the unionists moved toward a compromise. During a November 26 debate, Redmond declared himself willing to entertain any suggestions to break the deadlock. Barrie moved off of his extreme position and admitted that the Irish Parliament should have some taxation powers, but that customs and excise must remain with the Imperial Exchequer. That day, Midleton composed a memo suggesting that customs be retained by the Imperial Exchequer as a form of contribution, but that excise duties might be reserved for “special treatment,” presumably by an Irish parliament. He argued that Ireland’s prosperity was growing “by leaps and bounds,” and if this continued a home rule government would return a financial surplus and be capable of contributing to Imperial services.¹⁷⁵

Midleton’s compromise suggestion steadily gained ground. His southern unionist group backed it, and at a meeting on New Year’s Day, 1918, the IUA passed a resolution supporting their Convention delegates by a 41 to 4 vote.¹⁷⁶ Redmond did not pledge his support, but it was widely believed that he would uphold the compromise. Bishop O’Donnell of Raphoe opposed the idea. He told Plunkett that his strategy was “to put the Nationalists in a strong position in the country by getting them to come out for fiscal autonomy. He [O’Donnell] then thinks that the Government will step in and sweep away all Unionist resistance.”¹⁷⁷ The idea seems to have been to beat the Ulster unionists at their own game; to appear so intransigent that the British government would acquiesce. Nonetheless, Midleton learned that Dillon, whom he described by

¹⁷³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15, 189, John Redmond to David Lloyd George, 13 November and 19 November 1917.

¹⁷⁴ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15, 189, David Lloyd George to John Redmond, 15 November 1917.

¹⁷⁵ Lord Midleton, “Memorandum by Southern Unionists on Fiscal Autonomy,” 26 November 1917, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention*, 83-84.

¹⁷⁶ UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/38, IUA Circular signed by Midleton, George F. Stewart, Andrew Jameson, and J. B. Powell, 15 April 1918.

¹⁷⁷ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15, 221, Horace Plunkett to John Redmond, 18 December 1917.

that time as “probably the most powerful member of the Nationalist Party,” intervened and convinced the bishops to support the deal.¹⁷⁸

Plunkett despaired of getting the Ulster unionists’ consent to any settlement. He wrote in October 1917, “At the proper time I may have to tell them that the Convention will report without asking their leave.”¹⁷⁹ Plunkett shifted his strategy to getting an agreement between the southern unionists, the IPP, and the independent nationalists. He wrote to Lord Bryce in January 1918, “I, personally, think that the Government would put pressure upon the Ulster Unionists and, if necessary, legislate over their heads once it could be shown that they alone blocked the ending of the Irish Question.”¹⁸⁰ He told Shane Leslie that for his strategy to work, “I rely on the Government backing me up with all the pressure they can bring to bear.”¹⁸¹

This was the fundamental problem of all of the Convention members working for an agreement: if, against all odds, they were able to pass a settlement within the conference, they relied on Lloyd George’s government to give it practical effect. Plunkett expressed this several times, as did Redmond and O’Donnell. While Plunkett maintained his faith in the British government, the IPP leader did not. On December 4, 1917, Redmond told Plunkett that he had come to the conclusion that the Convention was only called to pacify Ireland during the war. Plunkett denied this. However, the next day he felt compelled to tell Lloyd George that he would not keep the Convention going merely “for the sake of keeping the country quiet,” indicating that he was getting uneasy on this point.¹⁸²

Despite Plunkett and Redmond having given up on the Ulster unionists, Midleton received indications that they might be willing to accept his compromise. John Crozier, the Church of Ireland’s Primate and a member of the Convention, wrote that Carson was counseling acceptance and had said they must “risk all their popularity in Ulster” to pass the compromise.¹⁸³ Crozier later faced unionist criticism for supporting the compromise.¹⁸⁴

On December 18, the Ulster unionist delegation met privately and developed amendments to Midleton’s compromise, indicating that they were willing to see it go forward.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁸ Midleton, *Records and Reactions*, 241.

¹⁷⁹ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/38, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 17 October 1917.

¹⁸⁰ NLI, Bryce Papers, Ms. 11,016(9), Horace Plunkett to Lord Bryce, 10 January 1918.

¹⁸¹ NLI, Shane Leslie Papers, Ms. 22,834, Horace Plunkett to Shane Leslie, 5 January 1918.

¹⁸² NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/37, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 4 December and 5 December 1917.

¹⁸³ Midleton, *Records and Reactions*, 241-242.

¹⁸⁴ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/11, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to Hugh Barrie, 21 January 1918.

¹⁸⁵ PRONI, UUC Papers, Minute Book of Ulster Unionist Delegation to Irish Convention, 18 December 1917.

A meeting with the advisory council in Belfast on New Year's Day, 1918, confirmed their decision to approve the settlement.¹⁸⁶ However, the meeting also sanctioned an exclusion scheme to be submitted to the Convention at a time the delegation leader deemed appropriate.¹⁸⁷

Montgomery said the exclusion plan was, like so many of the Ulster unionists' moves throughout the home rule saga, designed to influence the British public. He told Barrie that it must be framed in such a way as to make them appear "not as people who put special provincial interests before those of the Empire, but as people who by the stand they made against Home Rule saved the Realm from a very dangerous position."¹⁸⁸ Barrie now had several options. His delegation could endorse Midleton's compromise and refrain from submitting the exclusion scheme, which would result in a unanimous settlement. If the Ulster unionists intended to wreck the deal, Barrie could submit the exclusion scheme as soon as agreement between the other parties seemed likely. Finally, they could abstain and let the other parties pass a majority agreement.

Some members of the advisory council considered Midleton's movement toward a settlement a betrayal. One of its members, Adam Duffin, wrote of the southern unionists, "They want to capitulate and make terms with the enemy lest a worse thing befall them. They are a cowardly crew and stupid to boot."¹⁸⁹ Barrie later wrote in similar terms, as he called the compromise "surrender" and claimed that Midleton and his associates "tried to betray Ulster."¹⁹⁰ However, after the Convention reassembled in January 1918 he told the southern unionist leader, "I think you may count on us. We shall certainly not be against you." This indicates that the Ulster unionists would abstain from voting or support the compromise.¹⁹¹ It is likely that the plan agreed between the UUC and their delegation was either to abstain from voting on the compromise or to support its passage with their amendments, just as Barrie had told Midleton, but then to try to ensure that the resulting arrangement would not apply to the northern province by announcing their exclusion scheme.¹⁹² This would have failed on a Convention vote, but its introduction might have ruptured the fragile coalition supporting the Midleton compromise and

¹⁸⁶ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/3, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to Hugh T. Barrie, 5 January 1918.

¹⁸⁷ PRONI, UUC Papers, Minute Book of Ulster Unionist Delegation to Irish Convention, 1 January 1918.

¹⁸⁸ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/3, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to Hugh Barrie, 5 January 1918.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in McDowell, *The Irish Convention*, 130.

¹⁹⁰ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/434/67, Hugh Barrie to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 28 September 1918; PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/434/75, Hugh Barrie to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 5 October 1918.

¹⁹¹ Midleton, *Records and Reactions*, 242.

¹⁹² PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/93, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to A. V. Dicey, 24 March 1918.

would have placed the Ulster unionists' appeal for separate treatment on record. It is also possible that Amery's hope that the conference atmosphere would incline its members to work constructively was playing out with Barrie and other members of his group, inclining them toward aiding a settlement.

Redmond did not believe that the Ulster unionists intended to endorse the compromise, and spent the Christmas break trying to compel a promise from Lloyd George that the government would enforce an agreement between the nationalists and southern unionists. On December 26, 1917, he wrote that the Prime Minister had assured Devlin and himself that if the other Convention parties compromised on the Midleton proposal, he would "fight the Ulstermen" to ensure it succeeded. However, Lloyd George refused to put this promise in writing.¹⁹³ Finally, on New Year's Eve the Prime Minister promised that if the Midleton plan passed "with the opposition of Ulster alone," he would "use his personal influence with his colleagues...to accept the proposal and to give it legislative effect."¹⁹⁴ The language was characteristically vague, but it was the most that Redmond could extract from Lloyd George. On January 12, 1918, the Prime Minister wrote to Bonar Law, "If the southern unionists and the nationalists agree, as they are likely to, the position of *any* government that refuses to carry out that compact will be an impossible one."¹⁹⁵ It is unclear whether Lloyd George was happy at this prospect or not, but he was warning the Unionist leader that he may have to renege on his promise not to force a settlement on the Ulster unionists, which would nullify Bonar Law's assurance that "substantial agreement" could not be reached without them.

The Convention reassembled on January 2, 1918, and two days later Redmond announced his support for Midleton's compromise. He even declared that, given the large unionist representation in the Irish Parliament within the agreed scheme, he was prepared to serve under the first Unionist Prime Minister of Ireland.¹⁹⁶ However, the compromise on fiscal autonomy was not immediately put up for a vote. The Convention was scheduled to hear debates on land purchase and, despite the urgency of the issue, Plunkett did not alter the program. Writing years later, Midleton blamed this delay for wrecking the settlement.¹⁹⁷ Historian Alvin

¹⁹³ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,217/4, John Redmond to Patrick O'Donnell, 26 December 1917.

¹⁹⁴ NLI, John Redmond Papers, Ms. 15,189, Memorandum, 31 December 1917.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism: One, The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), 121.

¹⁹⁶ NYPL, Plunkett, *Confidential Report*, para. 119; S. Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years*, 307.

¹⁹⁷ Midleton, *Records and Reactions*, 242.

Jackson supports him in this.¹⁹⁸ However, at the time Midleton did not place such a high value on speed. Instead of staying in Dublin that week and pressing for a vote on his solution, he went to London and took part in a parliamentary debate.¹⁹⁹ Plunkett had always felt that the more time spent talking the better. Moreover, he wanted to delay a vote on a contentious resolution for fiscal autonomy, and allow time for Midleton and others to attend Parliament.²⁰⁰ As it happened, the delay provided an opportunity for nationalist supporters of fiscal autonomy to rally against Redmond. On January 15, the IPP leader met with Plunkett and told him that three of the four bishops and Devlin intended to defy him on the Midleton compromise, therefore he must withdraw his support. Plunkett called it “the worst shock of my public life.”²⁰¹

This ended the Convention’s best chance at arriving at an agreement with such overwhelming support that Lloyd George would be forced to enact it, with or without the Ulster unionists’ support. The conference continued sitting until April 5, but had reached its climax. Plunkett and Redmond continued to implore Lloyd George to act as an intermediary. Instead, in a letter to the Convention on February 25, 1918, the Prime Minister listed what his government would and would not accept in a settlement.²⁰² Even in this supposedly free conference between Irish parties to frame a constitution for Ireland, the British government intended to play a deciding role.

On March 6, Redmond died. His lack of initiative during the Convention reflected his declining health and self-confidence.²⁰³ The IPP chairman’s passing provided a sad analogy for the home rule movement, coinciding almost precisely with the historical moment at which this idea ceased to captivate the majority of Irish nationalists.

The Convention eventually submitted three reports and five “notes.” The majority report, supported by sixty-six delegates including the southern unionists and those nationalists who supported the Midleton compromise, embodied the agreements of the Sub-Committee of Nine, modified slightly by Lloyd George’s letter. In the final irony of the Convention, the Ulster unionists voted with the “extreme” nationalists headed by O’Donnell and Devlin against the

¹⁹⁸ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 183-185.

¹⁹⁹ Lord Midleton, “Representation of the People Bill,” HL Deb 08 January 1918 vol 27 cc341-400, Hansard 1803-2005; McDowell, *The Irish Convention*, 147.

²⁰⁰ NYPL, Plunkett, *Confidential Report*, paras. 118-119.

²⁰¹ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/38, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 15 January 1918.

²⁰² David Lloyd George to Horace Plunkett, 25 February 1918, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Irish Convention*, 20-22.

²⁰³ Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity*, 223.

majority report. Just days after receiving the report, Lloyd George declared in Parliament that it did not represent “substantial agreement,” and no one argued with him.²⁰⁴

Whatever goodwill the Convention fostered between the Irish parties was ruined when the Prime Minister announced on April 9 that the government intended to extend conscription to Ireland.²⁰⁵ After the Military Service Bill became law on April 18, the IPP—many of whom declared that they would support conscription if passed by an Irish parliament—left the House of Commons. The Catholic Church had been struggling to chart a neutral course between the British government and the various Irish nationalist factions, but now the clergy and the IPP allied with Sinn Féin in protesting the extension of conscription to Ireland.²⁰⁶ The Irish unionists remained at Westminster. In future, when Lloyd George wanted to justify his government’s right to impose legislation on Ireland, he used the Convention as evidence that Irish people could not agree on their own administration.²⁰⁷ This confirmed the worst fears of every opponent of the conference idea, and seemed to vindicate the criticism of skeptics like Sinn Féin.

Southern Unionists Split

The Convention fallout had a direct impact on the coherence and goals of southern unionism. At their meeting on January 1, 1918, the IUA overwhelmingly approved the course the southern unionist delegates were pursuing at the Convention. Therefore, the southern unionist leaders had every reason to believe that their base was secure. However, a Church of Ireland Synod meeting on January 16 revealed deep fissures among their supporters. Richard Bagwell, the only IUA member to speak against the Convention delegates on New Year’s Day, vehemently attacked them. He called Midleton’s initiative, “not a compromise but a surrender.” UUC member Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery was present and said the “only weak point” in Bagwell’s speech was that he declared himself against partition.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ David Lloyd George, “Home Rule Bill,” HC Deb 09 April 1918 vol 104 cc1362-4, Hansard 1803-2005.

²⁰⁵ David Lloyd George, “Conscription in Ireland,” HC Deb 09 April 1918 vol 104 cc1357-62, Hansard 1803-2005.

²⁰⁶ Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 12-15.

²⁰⁷ David Lloyd George, “Government of Ireland Bill,” HC Deb 31 March 1920 vol 127 cc1287-339, Hansard 1803-2005.

²⁰⁸ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/11, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to Hugh Barrie, 21 January 1918.

Over the next several weeks, Montgomery and other Ulster unionists contacted a number of discontented southern unionists.²⁰⁹ On March 4 a document titled, “The Crisis in Ireland: Call to Unionists,” appeared in the unionist press. It appealed to “all true Irish Unionists, especially those outside Ulster” to “reiterate, with no uncertain voice, their conviction in the maintenance of the legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland...lies the only hope for the future of our country.”²¹⁰ It was signed by a number of prominent unionists, north and south. The “Callers,” as they were dubbed, formed the Southern Unionist Committee, but denied wanting to start a new organization to compete with the IUA. They claimed that the IUA was not representative, implying that any apparent support for Midleton’s Convention policy was illegitimate.²¹¹ “Caller” John E. Walsh asserted that more than 10,000 people signed the document by April 27.²¹²

Carson signaled his approval of the movement on May 2. In a public letter he wrote that self-government now “will place Ireland under the joint rule of *Sinn Fein*, Nationalists, and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy.”²¹³ Despite this personal sanction, Ulster unionist organizations did not officially take sides.²¹⁴ However, the IUA was an Ireland-wide association. As such, it contained many northerners who were also UUC members. Montgomery, chief among this group, said they were determined “to purge the I.U.A. of traitors and get the machine into sound Unionist hands.”²¹⁵

An IUA meeting on January 24, 1919, rejected an anti-partition resolution that Midleton proposed. He and his supporters resigned and formed a new organization, the Unionist Anti-Partition League. In appealing for support for his new group, Midleton called the restructured IUA, “for all practical purposes an offshoot of the Ulster Council.”²¹⁶ Despite the Callers gaining

²⁰⁹ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/29, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to J. R. Fisher, 4 February 1918; PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/432/11, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to W. M. Jellett, 19 February 1918; PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/433/56, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to John E. Walsh, 20 February 1918.

²¹⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 4 March 1918.

²¹¹ John E. Walsh, “The ‘Call to Unionists,’” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 14 March 1918.

²¹² UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/38, John E. Walsh, “Reply to Letter of the Alliance Delegates,” 27 April 1918.

²¹³ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 2 May 1918.

²¹⁴ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/432/175, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to James Stronge, 16 August 1918.

²¹⁵ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/434/20, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to Hugh Barrie, 21 May 1918.

²¹⁶ UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/40, UAPL circular, 31 January 1919.

control of the IUA, Midleton remained the trusted representative of the southern unionists in the eyes of both Irish nationalists and the British government.

One of the ironies within Irish unionism between 1916 and 1917 is that, while some accused Midleton and his colleagues of treachery for their willingness to cooperate with home rulers, Ulster unionists had declared their readiness to abandon their counterparts in other parts of the island while the six counties were excluded. Historian J. J. Lee asserts that, if one takes unionist rhetoric at face value, “If the Pope was indeed anti-Christ, if unionist fears of the persecution awaiting Protestants in a Home Rule, much less a Sinn Féin, state were valid,” then the six-county unionists’ abandonment of their fellows in the other three Ulster counties was “the basest of all ‘betrayals’ in the period.”²¹⁷ This would also apply to six-county unionists’ treatment of their southern counterparts.

Another irony is that, while Midleton was losing the confidence of a significant part of his Irish following, Lloyd George tried to make him the most powerful person in Ireland. On April 27, 1918, the Prime Minister offered the struggling southern unionist leader the post of Lord Lieutenant, “with a free hand” in the governance of the island.²¹⁸ The new viceroy’s primary duty would be to carry out conscription, which Lloyd George viewed as necessary to asserting the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, and “also of giving the Catholic hierarchy a lesson that they could not control the State.” Midleton warned that 90 percent of the Irish population were against conscription. Further interviews convinced him that the Cabinet had no real, determined strategy regarding Ireland, “the Government have in this case as in so many others been so busy with other troubles that they have not had time to think out their scheme...they think that a slap-dash policy can suddenly be adopted with success.”²¹⁹ Midleton declined the post.

Several organizations rose and fell between 1918 and 1919. In November, Horace Plunkett formed the Irish Reconstruction Association, a non-party group to oppose partition. In his diaries he called it the “I.R.A.” and wrote on December 7, 1918, “I hope these initials will get known.”²²⁰ The association did not last long, but the initials were already becoming famous.

²¹⁷ J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

²¹⁸ UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/38/2292, Midleton to Stamfordham, 4 May 1918.

²¹⁹ UKNA, PRO/30/67/38/2282-2288, Midleton, “Memorandum with Regard to the Viceroyalty of Ireland.”

²²⁰ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/38, Horace Plunkett Diary, 7 December 1918.

Conclusions

The 1916 Easter Rising brought simmering discontent among non-IPP Irish nationalists into the open, and highlighted the importance of dealing with it immediately. Lloyd George's attempt entailed the immediate grant of home rule and the exclusion of six of Ulster's nine counties from its operation. However, Redmond believed that this partitioning of Ireland would be temporary, while Carson understood it to be permanent by requiring new legislation at Westminster to end the arrangement. Lloyd George was likely correct in asserting that if Carson and Redmond embraced the settlement, opposition within the government could be overcome. The fact that the government drew up a bill embodying temporary exclusion in almost exactly the terms the IPP leader described shows that this was, at one time, the correct interpretation of the proposals. When the Cabinet forced Lloyd George to clarify his intentions he made little effort to uphold his promises to Redmond or Dillon, but did stand by his assurances to Carson.

As historians have noted, the short-term impact of the Lloyd George proposals' failure was to further undermine the IPP by again delaying Irish self-government. Despite the breakdown of the 1916 negotiations, six-county partition without plebiscites, while instituting a form of local government for the new area, became a basis upon which Lloyd George dealt with Ireland in the future. His government explored other possible settlements and forms of partition, but ultimately returned to the formula enunciated in 1916.

Lloyd George tried several alternative means of reaching an Irish settlement after he became Prime Minister in December 1916. He suggested that a boundary commission might delimit the areas included or excluded from home rule. He established two committees to draft new home rule bills, but when they suggested temporary exclusion combined with plebiscites he disregarded their suggestions and changed tack. Lloyd George then offered to establish an all-party convention to debate and, if possible, agree to a new constitution for Ireland. Despite the Prime Minister's assertions, the Convention was not free to determine Ireland's future. Convention members did not know it but dominion home rule was definitely off the table, and Lloyd George tried to shape the gathering's conclusions to suit his government's priorities.

While contemporaries acknowledged that the Irish Convention faced long odds, success was possible. Whether Lloyd George intended for the conference to succeed or not, and evidence suggests that he wanted an Irish settlement by any means, he admitted that the participants could nullify his intentions by reaching an agreement among themselves. The

Convention came close to a deal in January 1918. The southern unionists and all of the nationalist factions initially signaled their consent. The Ulster unionist attitude is difficult to gauge, but there is evidence that they would either abstain from voting or support the compromise. Lloyd George warned Bonar Law that the government would have to implement an accord between the southern unionists and the nationalists. The deal fell through as some nationalists decided to push for fiscal autonomy, though one of their leaders, Bishop O'Donnell of Raphoe, believed that by doing so he could compel the British government to force a settlement on the Ulster unionists.

Consistent delays in self-government damaged the IPP in the eyes of their Irish nationalist constituents. Home rule had always had its nationalist critics. Moreover, Sinn Féin's ideal of complete independence was more attractive to many than this comparatively meager concession. Some southern unionists were more accommodating than ever to the idea of self-government, but their traditional organization was fracturing as a result of the concessions their leaders recommended during the Convention. With both of the old parties embattled, the way was clear for major changes in Irish politics.

CHAPTER 5
“RICKETY PARLIAMENTS:”
DOMINION HOME RULE AND THE GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND ACT,
1919-JULY 1921

Introduction

The December 1918 elections produced clear majorities in Britain and Ireland. In Britain, the coalition headed by David Lloyd George and supported by Unionist leader Andrew Bonar Law won a stunning 526 out of 707 seats. The second-largest party was Labour with 57 MPs. Coalition Unionists were the largest single grouping, as they won 383 seats compared to 133 “Lloyd George Liberals.”¹ The coalition majority was so overwhelming that the government would have a practically free hand in formulating policy. On hearing the results, Frances Stevenson exclaimed, “George is practically dictator!”² The other clear result of the election was Sinn Féin’s victory in Ireland. The party swept seventy-three out of 105 seats. The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) was nearly destroyed, winning just six seats, five of them in Ulster. Twenty-two Irish Unionists were elected, all but two of them in the northern province. Sinn Féin’s intention not to sit at Westminster was well known, but after the election they announced that they would form an alternative assembly in Dublin, Dáil Éireann. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) engaged in a constantly escalating guerrilla war to destroy British institutions on the island, which could be replaced by services administered by the Dáil. Over the next two years, the Irish policy of Lloyd George and his Cabinet largely involved dealing with this challenge to British authority.

In tandem with confronting the republican threat, the government had to replace the 1914 Home Rule Act. The result was the Government of Ireland Act (1920). This measure codified the form of partition that Edward Carson proposed in 1913 and Lloyd George adopted in 1916: the permanent separation of six counties without plebiscites of any kind. Alvin Jackson argues that Ulster unionists are often charged with rigidity due to their dogmatic resistance to self-government, but acceptance of the Act shows the movement’s flexibility. By 1919 they had shed their alliance with the southern unionists, and the adoption of six-county partition precipitated a

¹ David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), 92-93.

² Frances Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 131, entry for 2 December 1918.

break with unionists in the other three counties of Ulster.³ Actually this was the realization of Carson's long-held policy which, with a small number of lieutenants including James Craig, he pursued unswervingly through 1920. In framing the Government of Ireland Bill, Lloyd George's Cabinet was compelled to question whether their long-term goal was to facilitate Irish unity. They knowingly chose the form of partition least likely to produce this result.

Commentators who argue that the establishment of Northern Ireland merely acknowledged Protestant unionists' right to separate treatment do so by ignoring the significant Catholic nationalist minority in the six counties. This group only exists as a voting bloc in Patrick Buckland's 1973 exposition of partition, and is barely mentioned in Ronan Fanning's analysis published forty years later.⁴ The Cabinet noted the existence of the large Catholic nationalist population in the new Northern Ireland, but I assert that they did not provide them with any of the safeguards considered necessary for Protestant unionists under home rule because they assumed that a majority Protestant and unionist administration could be trusted to govern fairly.

The most widely mooted alternative to government policy was dominion home rule. Supporters of this type of settlement do not fit neatly into the categories of "nationalism" or "unionism," therefore they have not found a place in the histories of either tradition. The few historians who discuss the main organization advocating this solution, the Irish Dominion League, portray it as politically impotent and largely an attempt to compromise with the Ulster unionists.⁵ In fact there was considerable support for dominion home rule, but not from either Lloyd George's government or Sinn Féin. Dominionists were divided on how to deal with northern unionists, but promulgated a number of possible solutions.

Though their main object failed, the Dominion League and its sympathizers succeeded in marshaling significant non-republican opposition to government policy, both in Britain and in Ireland. They were one of many groups that denounced the Government of Ireland Bill and partition. The most explosive issue they helped to highlight was the disastrous effect of Crown

³ Alvin Jackson, "Irish unionism, 1870-1922," in *Defenders of the Union: A survey of British and Irish unionism since 1801*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 2001), 134.

⁴ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism Two: Ulster Unionism and the Origins of Northern Ireland, 1886-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 113-131; Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 188-189, 206-214.

⁵ John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1921* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 231; Colin Reid, "Stephen Gwynn and the Failure of Constitutional Nationalism in Ireland, 1919-1921," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (Sept. 2010): 723-745.

forces reprisals against Irish civilians. Initially unofficial and extralegal, this campaign of material destruction and killings of republicans was legitimated in January 1921, when the Cabinet sanctioned “official reprisals.” Indignation at the government’s initial toleration and later adoption of such methods divorced significant sections of public opinion from Lloyd George’s administration, and agitation against reprisals hastened the end of the conflict.

Some historians assert that Sinn Féin could have achieved a settlement along the lines of the eventual Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) far earlier than they did, blaming the Irish republicans for prolonging the conflict.⁶ However, I argue that Lloyd George and his government did not want to make any concessions that might have enabled a settlement. While the Government of Ireland Bill wended its way through Parliament, the Cabinet tried to deal with the republican threat with a simultaneously policy of coercion and conciliation; coercing the “gunmen” supposedly to encourage moderates to negotiate. This resulted in a number of communications between the government and Sinn Féin, even as the guerrilla war in Ireland escalated. Some historians argue that the opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament was a prerequisite to the government opening negotiations.⁷ There is evidence that some members of the government believed this simplified their problems, but given that they had almost reached a truce agreement in December 1920, and considered postponing the operation of the Government of Ireland Act, it is unlikely that this was the decisive factor. As late as May 1921 Lloyd George refused to consider making any concessions to Sinn Féin. Only as political pressure mounted on the Prime Minister did he seize an opportunity to make an about-face.

Ulster Unionists and the Government of Ireland Bill

Prior to the issuing of the Irish Convention report, Lloyd George had already appointed yet another committee to draft a home rule bill, this time chaired by Walter Long. A lifelong Unionist and vociferous proponent of northern unionists’ right to resist home rule by force, Long

⁶ Paul Bew, “Moderate Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923,” *The Historical Journal* 42, no. 3 (Sept. 1999): 729-749; Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 177; Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41.

⁷ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 246; R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 503-504; Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (New York: Viking, 2005), 275; J. J. Lee, “The Background: Anglo-Irish Relations, 1898-1921,” in *No Surrender Here!: The Civil War Papers of Ernie O’Malley, 1922-1924*, ed. Cormac K. H. O’Malley and Anne Dolan (Dublin: Lilliput, 2007), xxiv; Robert Lynch, *Revolutionary Ireland, 1912-1925* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 78; Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 217.

noted the “strange irony” that he should be charged with devising a scheme of Irish self-government.⁸ However, he had been a federalist since at least 1910. Long asserted that a federal system for the entire United Kingdom would sate Ulster unionists’ opposition. Simply eliminating the words “Home Rule for Ireland” from the nomenclature would go a long way, as “the words ‘No Home Rule’ have become a sort of sacred creed in Ulster.”⁹ The committee prepared two bills. A June 1918 draft was expressly federalist, envisioning “local national parliaments” for England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. There was no special provision for Ulster or any part of it.¹⁰ A bill produced in August would amend the 1914 Home Rule Act by excluding six counties immediately, but provided for each county to opt in by plebiscite after seven years.¹¹ With the Addison-Curzon-Duke effort of 1917, Lloyd George’s government had now drafted three home rule bills. None of them were introduced in Parliament, and the Prime Minister again changed tack.

In November 1918, with the general election approaching, Lloyd George told Bonar Law that they must exclude six Ulster counties and set up a council to extend legislation of the Irish Parliament to this area. There was no mention of a separate legislature.¹² Before redrawing the map of Ireland, Lloyd George and his government spent much of 1919 realigning Europe at the Paris Peace Conference. Some lawmakers thought it unnecessary to introduce new Irish legislation, until reminded that the Third Home Rule Act was on the statute book and would come into operation automatically after the First World War peace treaties were concluded.¹³

On November 4, 1919, the Cabinet committee on Ireland recommended establishing two parliaments: one for the nine-county province of Ulster, the other for the rest of the country. They decided against plebiscites on the grounds that they would “inflamm religious and political passion” and “divide Ireland on purely religious lines.” The decision to give Ulster a parliament was taken to remove British government from the entire island, thereby eliminating the grievance that motivated the home rule movement. The committee predicted that a nine-county Ulster parliament would contain nationalists and unionists in practically even proportions. They

⁸ Walter Long, *Memories* (London: Hutchinson, 1923), 249.

⁹ UKNA, CAB/24/49/10, Walter Long to David Lloyd George, 18 April 1918.

¹⁰ UKNA, CAB/24/89/39, “Draft of a Bill to amend the provision for the Government of the United Kingdom.”

¹¹ UKNA, CAB/24/89/40, “Draft of a Bill to make provision for amending and bringing into operation the Government of Ireland Act, 1914.”

¹² UKNA, CAB/24/86/43, David Lloyd George to Andrew Bonar Law, 2 November 1918. This letter was meant to be read to a Unionist Party meeting but was leaked to the press. *The Times* (London), 18 November 1918.

¹³ Lord Curzon in the House of Lords, *The Times* (London), 11 February 1920.

acknowledged that either a six- or nine-county area would contain “large nationalist majorities” in parts of Ulster, and argued that they should not be left under British rule as this would “clearly infringe the principle of self-determination.” This indicates the Cabinet’s assumption that a large nationalist population would have no cause for complaint if they lived under an Irish government, even one with a unionist majority that might prove perennial. At the same time, the committee resolved to “do everything which an outside authority can do to bring about Irish unity.” This entailed establishing a Council of Ireland comprised of an equal number of MPs from the two parliaments. There was a strong implication that a future united Ireland would be given the same status as a dominion, but not while the two parliaments sat separately.¹⁴

On November 11, Arthur Balfour suggested a simpler plan: they should hold a plebiscite throughout Ireland on whether to continue the Union. If a majority voted no, Ireland would be “cut off from the United Kingdom after a certain date.”¹⁵ Cabinet member H. A. L. Fisher called this Balfour’s “thesis that the only alternative to Unionism is an Irish Republic in S. [South] & S. W. [Southwest].” Fisher quoted Balfour as saying, “let them go to the devil in their own way.”¹⁶ Most Cabinet members objected that they could not afford an independent Ireland, as it might declare neutrality in wartime.

Balfour did not give up. In a November 25 memo, he argued that they should cut the “South and West” out of the Union, create an “autonomous” state there, and sign a treaty guaranteeing payment of a portion of the Imperial debt and British naval access to the Irish coast. Balfour’s willingness to grant “autonomy” to an Irish state was based on his belief that that state would fail. He had expressed this on November 11, and in his memo argued for leaving the six counties out of any scheme of self-government because “only Home Rule areas should be compelled to endure Home Rule.” He argued that Ireland was never a unitary state, and “if she were not surrounded by water, no human being would ever think of forcing the loyal and Protestant North into the same political mould as the disloyal and Roman Catholic South.”¹⁷ The

¹⁴ UKNA, CAB/24/92/57, “First Report of Cabinet Committee on the Irish Question,” 4 November 1919. By December 22 the Cabinet decided not to grant control of Customs and Excise, a key element in dominion status, except to an all-Ireland parliament. UKNA, CAB/23/18/18, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 22 December 1919.

¹⁵ UKNA, CAB/23/18/6, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 11 November 1919.

¹⁶ H. A. L. Fisher, *The Coalition Diaries and Letters of H. A. L. Fisher, 1916-1922: The Historian in Lloyd George’s Cabinet*, ed. F. Russell Bryant, 4 vols. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), II:489, entry for 11 November 1919.

¹⁷ UKNA, CAB/24/93/97, Arthur Balfour, “The Irish Question,” 25 November 1919.

memo embodies the assumption that Ireland's population could be neatly divided between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists.

James Craig was brought into the process in November 1919, and he suggested that he might also confer with UUC Secretary R. Dawson Bates.¹⁸ On December 15 the Cabinet was informed that "the Ulster leaders," presumably Carson and Craig, perhaps with Bates, were "doubtful whether the Northern Parliament of Ireland would be able to govern the three Ulster Counties where there was a Nationalist majority, and greatly preferred that the scheme should be applied only to the six Protestant Counties." This ignores the Catholic nationalist majorities in two of the six counties, Fermanagh and Tyrone, as well as significant minorities in each of the other four. Craig suggested that the government should establish a boundary commission to "examine the distribution of population along the borders of the whole of the six Counties," and then hold votes in local communities immediately adjoining the border as to which parliamentary area they preferred.¹⁹ On December 19 the Cabinet considered the idea of a commission "to draw the exact line of demarcation with a view to the inclusion of Protestant and Roman Catholic communities living near the border," but did not reach a decision.²⁰

Lloyd George briefly outlined the bill in Parliament in December, but the debate over a six- or nine-county northern parliament continued until it was formally introduced.²¹ The discussions turned on the long-term purpose of the government's Irish policy. Cabinet papers argued that if the "ultimate aim of the Government's policy was a united Ireland," then the northern parliamentary area should include all of Ulster.²² The nearly equal voting power of nationalists and unionists in the nine counties virtually ensured eventual reunification. However, the December 10 meeting had been "reminded that one of the principal aims of the Government's policy was to produce a good effect in the Self-Governing Dominions, as well as in the United States of America and other foreign countries."²³ If this was the primary goal, it was more important to produce a justifiable bill than one that could be enacted with success.

¹⁸ UKNA, CAB/23/37/3, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 12 November 1919.

¹⁹ UKNA, CAB/23/18/15, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 15 December 1919.

²⁰ UKNA, CAB/23/18/17, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 19 December 1919.

²¹ David Lloyd George, "Prime Minister's Statement," House of Commons Debates (HC Deb) 22 December 1919 vol 123 cc1168-233, Hansard 1803-2005, <http://www.hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

²² UKNA, CAB/23/18/17, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 19 December 1919.

²³ UKNA, CAB/23/18/13, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 10 December 1919.

The Ireland committee appeared to be on the verge of deciding in favor of the nine-county area when Balfour interceded on February 10, 1920. He asserted, “our Home Rule policy has been largely influenced by our desire to show the world that the principles we apply to other peoples are those we accept for ourselves.” Balfour predicted, “if you carry out logically the principle of self-determination, you need fear no effective agitation either outside Great Britain or in Ireland for re-uniting the two fragments of the Island which your Home Rule Bill divides.” To Balfour, this meant establishing a six-county northern parliamentary area, or what he called “small Ulster” rather than “big Ulster.”²⁴ He did not explain how doing this without plebiscites of any kind accorded with the principle of self-determination, and assumed that the large nationalist minority in “small Ulster” would not agitate against their inclusion in a unionist-dominated political unit. Nonetheless, Balfour’s intervention was decisive. A February 24 Cabinet meeting decided on a six-county northern area without further debate.²⁵

Lloyd George introduced the Government of Ireland Bill in Parliament the next day.²⁶ It was roundly condemned in Ireland. The Irish Unionist Alliance denounced the proposals after Lloyd George’s December 1919 outline. The IUA argued that the unsettled state of Ireland made self-government unsafe. It also declared, “The solution of ‘partition’ is hateful to us, as well as to our Nationalist fellow-countrymen.” Lord Midleton’s Unionist Anti-Partition League condemned the proposals the next day, asserting that the envisioned twenty-six-county legislature would be dominated by republicans, and its machinery made a tool in the secession of “the Southern provinces” from the United Kingdom. The League also declared, “no measure which involves a partition of Ireland will provide a solution of the Irish problem.”²⁷

Joseph Devlin, the Ulster nationalist chief and sole IPP leader to retain his seat after December 1918, called the scheme, “one of the most insulting proposals ever submitted” as it “divides Ireland permanently.” He added, “This bill is purely a measure to please Sir Edward Carson...and will be rejected with contempt by all Ireland except, perhaps, by the ascendant party in Ulster, whose bill I believe it is.”²⁸ Lloyd George’s private statements support Devlin’s assumption. The Prime Minister said of the measure, “Nothing could be done to amend it to

²⁴ UKNA, CAB/24/98/83, Arthur Balfour, “Ireland: Home Rule,” 19 February 1920 and Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, 10 February 1920.

²⁵ UKNA, CAB/23/20/13, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 24 February 1919.

²⁶ “Government of Ireland Bill,” HC Deb 25 February 1920 vol 125 c1694, Hansard 1803-2005.

²⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 9 January 1920.

²⁸ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 27 February 1920.

which Carson objected,” and, “Carson had made it a condition of his support that the Bill should be put through.”²⁹

Sinn Féin largely ignored the proposed statute. Arthur Griffith was the acting President of the Irish Republic while Eamon de Valera toured the United States to raise money and drum up support. He called the Government of Ireland Bill, “England’s present scheme, with her agent Carson, to dismember Ireland.” However, he was nonplussed, as “It will never come into operation.”³⁰ Griffith was not alone in this assumption. The unionist but anti-partition *Irish Times* asserted, “there is a widespread suspicion that the Bill is designed merely as a manoeuvre to get the existing Home Rule Act out of the way.”³¹ Bates, the UUC Secretary, also indicated that the bill might never be enforced.³² Cabinet member F. E. Smith, who had been made Lord Birkenhead in 1919, told Midleton bluntly, “he had not the slightest belief that the Bill would pass,” and, “he would never have assented to it if he had thought that it was possible that it should pass.” Birkenhead added that two of his Cabinet colleagues felt the same way.³³ London’s unionist *Saturday Review* said of the measure, “nobody believes the Bill will ever become an operative Act.” The paper called it, “a moral demonstration rather than a practical policy,” which was “meant to put England right with the world, especially with the United States.”³⁴ The *Irish Times* placed its hopes for the bill’s rejection in the Ulster unionists, as establishing a six-county legislature would force them to violate their 1912 Covenant against home rule. If they rejected the bill it would have no Irish support whatsoever, and “the last excuse for the Government’s proposals will have vanished.”³⁵

The UUC considered the bill during a series of meetings in March 1920. The northern unionists had accepted six-county exclusion from home rule during the Lloyd George proposals of 1916, but reverted to representing unionists in the entire province during the Irish Convention of 1917-1918. The form of partition codified by the bill also stipulated that the six counties would have their own parliament, not governance from Westminster as envisioned in the pre-First World War idea of exclusion. Six-county unionists realized that this would cut them off

²⁹ C. P. Scott, *Political Diaries of C. P. Scott, 1911-1928*, ed. Trevor Wilson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 382, entry for 16-17 March 1920; 384, entry for 10 April 1920.

³⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 1 March 1920.

³¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 February 1920.

³² PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/73, R. Dawson Bates to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 5 May 1920.

³³ UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/42/2417, Midleton, “Memo. of Interview with Lord B.,” 17 March 1920.

³⁴ *Saturday Review* (London), 22 May 1920.

³⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 February 1920.

from the rest of Ireland, and from unionists in the three Ulster counties outside the northern parliamentary area. Ironically, these were sometimes called the “excluded counties,” as they were to be left out of Northern Ireland.³⁶

The UUC met on March 10. Craig presented the case for accepting the Government of Ireland Bill, and it was purely pragmatic. The Council’s standing committee calculated that a six-county parliament would likely contain thirty-one to thirty-two unionists and twenty to twenty-one nationalists; a unionist majority of eleven or twelve. A nine-county parliament might produce a unionist majority of two, or equally divided parties.³⁷ The meeting passed a resolution protesting home rule, but supporting the Government of Ireland Bill on the grounds that it repealed the 1914 measure and embodied “separate treatment” for the six counties.³⁸

Instead of settling the issue, the decision prompted considerable soul-searching among Ulster unionists. UUC members in the three counties, and their supporters in the six, argued that accepting the “partition of Ulster” was a breach of the Covenant.³⁹ The decision’s supporters denied this, but the Covenant was not the deciding factor in any case. Six-county unionists wanted a unit they could control. UUC standing committee member John B. Gunning Moore said that six or nine counties “is not a question of ethics and honour, but a question of arithmetic.”⁴⁰ He wrote, “including the whole 9 will be such a rickety parliament that it must almost at once be absorbed into the Dublin one,” adding, “We believe we can hold 6, possibly we could hold 7 or even 8—but there seems to be authority for saying we can’t hold 9.”⁴¹ Bates concurred, “if the Home Rule Bill was passed for nine Counties Ulster would be absorbed in the rest of Ireland within a comparatively short space of time.”⁴²

Nine-county supporters claimed that Carson had told them that if they demanded all of Ulster the government would accede to their wishes.⁴³ This is confirmed by the Cabinet debates, which show how close the government came to establishing a nine-county parliamentary area. Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery did not believe that the bill would ever operate, or if it did it

³⁶ PRONI, UUC Papers, D1327/18/29, *Ulster and Home Rule: Six Counties or Nine?*.

³⁷ PRONI, UUC Papers, D1327/18/27, Minutes of Adjourned Annual Meeting, 10 March 1920.

³⁸ The resolution was published but Craig’s presentation was not. *The Times* (London), 11 March 1920.

³⁹ PRONI, UUC Papers, D1327/18/29, Letter signed by the principal nine-county supporters.

⁴⁰ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/72, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to James Stronge, 5 May 1920.

⁴¹ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/57B, J. B. G. Moore to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, April 1920.

⁴² PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/73, R. Dawson Bates to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 5 May 1920.

⁴³ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/62, A. Ricardo to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 27 April 1920.

would not last.⁴⁴ He argued that the division between six- and nine-county unionists was not “a permanent severance, but only as a move in the battle.”⁴⁵ The appeal to the Covenant had considerable pull. Montgomery—whose thought process is easy to analyze due to his extensive correspondence—almost switched his support to the nine-county position, until its supporters made the split public by taking their grievances to the press. In a political tradition that valued unanimity, this was a cardinal sin.⁴⁶ The debate became more heated. Montgomery and the six-county supporters began referring to the nine-county advocates as the “cave-dwellers.”⁴⁷

Matters came to a head at a standing committee meeting on May 27, 1920. Ambrose Ricardo, a representative from Co. Tyrone who nonetheless supported all-Ulster partition, moved a resolution in favor of a nine-county parliamentary area that would require a 75 percent vote to join an all-Ireland legislature.⁴⁸ The UUC did not publish voting statistics as this would damage its image of unanimity, but according to Montgomery the resolution failed on a 301-80 vote.⁴⁹ Ricardo assumed that the UUC’s acceptance of the Lloyd George proposals four years earlier was the root of the current situation. He wrote, “The damage was really done in 1916.”⁵⁰ Despite Ricardo’s position as a member of the standing committee, he was apparently unaware that Carson and Craig had been advocating six-county partition since 1913, and had reaffirmed this as recently as the Cabinet debates on the Government of Ireland Bill. Six-county supporter Barry Melaughlin of Co. Tyrone was less sympathetic when he wrote of the three-county unionists’ 1916 stance, “the Delegates from these Counties showed the stuff they were made of by agreeing, under the then circumstances, to waive their rights under the Covenant.” Bates ensured that Melaughlin obtained a seat on the standing committee in time for the March 10 vote.⁵¹

The Government of Ireland Bill became law on December 23, 1920. This ensured separate political treatment for the six counties. Nonetheless, the region remained subject to the same forces at work in the rest of the island. IRA activity in the northeast was initially less

⁴⁴ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/22, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to John Scott, 7 April 1920.

⁴⁵ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/91, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to R. Dawson Bates, 26 May 1920.

⁴⁶ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/58, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to J. B. G. Moore, 26 April 1920.

⁴⁷ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/59, James Stronge to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 26 April 1920; PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/61, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to James Stronge, 27 April 1920.

⁴⁸ For the resolution see PRONI, UUC Papers, D1327/18/29.

⁴⁹ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/92, Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery to James Stronge, 28 May 1920.

⁵⁰ PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/435/28, A. Ricardo to Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, 11 April 1920.

⁵¹ PRONI, UUC Papers, D1327/18/27, R. Dawson Bates to Barry Melaughlin, 2 March 1920 and Barry Melaughlin to James Craig, 8 March 1920.

frequent than elsewhere, but arms raids, ambushes, and assassinations occurred. The terms of the government's bill guaranteed northern unionists' political predominance over the six counties, and the idea that they were entitled to military control soon surfaced. In May 1920, the press reported that the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) were patrolling districts from which the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) had been withdrawn.⁵² Frederick Crawford, who had run guns for the UVF in 1914, urged Craig to "mobilize" the force on behalf of the government. He wrote of the Cabinet, "If they do not accept the help the people (Protestant) of Ulster are willing now to give them they will be sorry, and the Protestants of Ulster will take the matter of protecting themselves into their own hand in a 'rough' and 'ready' way."⁵³

Sometime between May and July 1920, Carson and Craig asked Wilfrid Spender, a former British Army colonel, to go to Belfast and reorganize the UVF.⁵⁴ Spender was an ardent militant unionist. Just a week before Britain joined the First World War he had urged the northern unionist leaders to allow the UVF to take over all of Ireland. Spender had guaranteed that the force could "maintain order" everywhere "except in the wilder parts that do not matter."⁵⁵ He had no compunction about using the UVF in whatever way the northern unionist leaders would sanction.

Spender later wrote that Lloyd George and Chief Secretary Hamar Greenwood tacitly approved of the UVF revival.⁵⁶ There was sympathy in the Cabinet for creating a partisan force. Winston Churchill said on July 23 that he would "raise 30,000 men in Ulster by whom the authority of the Crown could be vindicated."⁵⁷ The prewar narrative of the UVF as a well-organized, disciplined force undoubtedly played into this willingness to utilize them in an official capacity. This narrative continued as, following riots in Derry and Belfast in July 1920 that left dozens dead, the press and local officials credited the UVF with helping to restore order. It is noteworthy that most reports gave equal credit to the Irish Volunteers, who by this time were

⁵² *Irish Times* (Dublin), 25 May 1920.

⁵³ PRONI, F. H. Crawford Papers, D640/7/7, Frederick Crawford to James Craig, 14 May 1920.

⁵⁴ PRONI, CAB/5/1, W. B. Spender to William Coates, 30 August 1920.

⁵⁵ PRONI, Carson Papers, D1507/A/7/1, W. B. Spender to Edward Carson, 1 August 1914.

⁵⁶ PRONI, W. B. Spender Papers, D1295/2/16, W. B. Spender, "History of the UVF," 1959.

⁵⁷ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, ed. Keith Middlemas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) III:28, entry for 23 July 1920.

synonymous with the IRA.⁵⁸ After these fatal clashes, Walter Long suggested that the government enroll UVF members on a “special constabulary basis.”⁵⁹

General C. F. N. Macready, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in Ireland, opposed the reformation of the Ulster unionist militia. He saw little difference between Irish nationalist and unionist militants, as he wrote of the latter, “I always looked upon the leaders of that movement as rebels.” Macready noted the irony that northern unionists expected to be empowered to do as they wished, as long as they declared that they did so in the government’s interest, “If everybody took up arms under the Flag of so-called ‘loyalty’ as they did, I cannot see how any Government can be carried on.”⁶⁰ However, a number of Army commanders supported the Ulster unionists. General William Hackett Pain, Constabulary commissioner for the six counties, had been the UVF’s chief of staff before the war. Spender counted Generals H. H. Tudor, commander of all Irish police, and George Carter-Campbell, head of the Army in the six counties, as personal friends.⁶¹ The IRA intercepted a letter between Admiralty officials in Cork and London stating, “the Officers of the Ulster Volunteer Force are at our disposal.”⁶²

Spender was certain of his official support. In August 1920 he asked General E. G. T. Bainbridge, recently appointed Army commander in Belfast, to arm the UVF. Bainbridge refused, as “arming small bodies of civilians in the manner suggested will only lead to more trouble and excitement.” However, he suggested that UVF members should enroll in a “Special Reserve” which the government could recognize as part of the Crown forces.⁶³ Spender had already formulated a scheme for three different categories of UVF membership. The “A” category would be called up for fulltime service “to meet a general rising,” “B” would be part-time and operate within their own neighborhoods, and “C” would strictly “defend their homes.”⁶⁴ He presented this to John Anderson, a joint Under-Secretary in Dublin Castle, who was instrumental in getting it approved. On November 1, 1920, the government began enrolling the

⁵⁸ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 July 1920; “Derry (Restoration of Order),” HC Deb 15 July 1920 vol 131 c2623W, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁵⁹ UKNA, CAB/24/110/3, Walter Long, “Irish Situation Committee,” 29 July 1920.

⁶⁰ United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/36/2/14, C. F. N. Macready to Frances Stevenson, 25 May 1920.

⁶¹ PRONI, W. B. Spender Papers, D1295/2/16, W. B. Spender, “History of UVF.,” 1959.

⁶² National Library of Ireland (NLI), Florence O’Donoghue Papers, Ms. 31,223(1), R. Hall to Charles Cooke, n.d.

⁶³ PRONI, CAB/5/1, E. G. T. Bainbridge to W. B. Spender, 30 August 1920.

⁶⁴ PRONI, CAB/5/1, UVF handbill.

Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) on exactly the lines Spender had suggested.⁶⁵ Unionist politicians especially encouraged Ulster Volunteers to join.⁶⁶

The enrollment of Special Constables ensured that Northern Ireland's unionist government, once given control of the police, would have a considerable means of enforcing its authority. The new force also impacted the way in which the administration related to the minority population. The UVF's political and religious character was well known, as was the fact that the force was providing the backbone for the new Special Constabulary.⁶⁷ J. F. Gelston, commissioner of the Belfast RIC, asked some of the city's Catholic clergy to encourage their followers to enroll in the USC, but the response was not positive.⁶⁸

The Cabinet knew when they decided on the six-county area that it would have a Protestant and unionist government. A police force of the same complexion would only enhance this group's control. Extensive safeguards for Protestant unionists had been suggested for the Third Home Rule Act. Extra representatives or special committees within the Irish home rule parliament and petitions to the King or to Westminster had all been considered as possible benefits for the Irish minority under home rule. None of these solutions were proposed for six-county Catholics and nationalists under the Government of Ireland Act. Devlin appealed for minority safeguards to be inserted into the measure, but to no avail.⁶⁹

The debate concerning legislative safeguards for minority populations in any part of Ireland rested on two assumptions. The first was that Catholics could not be trusted to treat Protestants fairly, therefore any home rule arrangement must include safeguards for the latter group. The second presumption was that Protestants could always be trusted to govern Catholics fairly, rendering explicit safeguards for the Northern Ireland minority unnecessary. This assumption of Protestant good governance is evident in Balfour's Cabinet memos, as he indicated that northern nationalists would be content under a unionist administration. Walter Long favored establishing an upper house within the Dublin parliament as a safeguard for the southern minority, but decried the idea of a second chamber for the six-county legislature as an

⁶⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 2 November 1920; PRONI, W. B. Spender Papers, D1295/2/16, W. B. Spender, "History of UVF," 1959. During a Cabinet meeting Anderson argued that enrolling Protestants as police was risky but might be necessary. See UKNA, CAB/24/109/96, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 23 July 1920.

⁶⁶ PRONI, CAB/5/1, William Coates to W. B. Spender, 1 September 1920.

⁶⁷ James Kiley, "Special Constables," HC Deb 11 November 1920 vol 134 cc1343-4, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁶⁸ PRONI, CAB/5/1, W. B. Spender to James Craig, 21 September 1920.

⁶⁹ Joseph Devlin, "Government of Ireland Bill," HC Deb 11 November 1920 vol 134 cc1413-65, Hansard 1803-2005.

impingement on democracy.⁷⁰ Lord Stuart assumed impartial Protestant unionist governance when he said, “in the South you will have the strongest motive in an orderly community for showing that a minority will be treated in the South as it probably will be in the North.”⁷¹ This presumption applied to police as well; nonpartisan police were considered unnecessary as most assumed that a Protestant unionist force would deal fairly with the Catholic nationalist minority. Stuart’s proposal that the majority in one part of Ireland should treat the minority well merely so their compatriots in another part of the island would receive the same only highlights the potential for endless abuse. Montgomery foresaw this dynamic when he envisioned partition in 1918, but expressed it far more ominously, “the predominant party in Ulster would hold important hostages in the shape of the R.C. [Roman Catholic] minority living among them.”⁷²

The government did amend the bill to provide Northern Ireland with a Senate, but most of its members would be elected by the House of Commons. Majority rule would prevail throughout the legislature. The first Northern Ireland election took place in May 1921, resulting in a Commons of forty unionists, six Sinn Féiners, and six Nationalists. Ulster Unionist MP William Coote later declared that the result validated total unionist governance, “With a representation of 40 as against 12 we are entitled to say that we control the six counties area, and that no party has any right to take exception to our administering the six counties area.” Coote added that the area had been “given to us by the British people.”⁷³

Dominion Status: Ideas, Organizations, and Limitations

While the Government of Ireland Bill represented the Cabinet’s vision of Ireland’s future, civilian groups were developing their own plans for their administration. Many of these ideas centered on dominion home rule. Horace Plunkett declared himself in favor of this solution in a letter to *The Times* on April 15, 1919. He advocated an all-Ireland parliament with fiscal autonomy. Plunkett admitted that some parts of Ulster might require special treatment due to “the difference of its economic life from the rest of Ireland,” but this should be accomplished by county option. He did not suggest any separate administration for the partitioned area. Topics of

⁷⁰ PRONI, CAB/9/Z/3/1, Walter Long to F. H. Burgis, 30 October 1920.

⁷¹ Lord Stuart, “Government of Ireland Bill,” HL Deb 23 November 1920 vol 42 cc421-511, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁷² PRONI, Montgomery Papers, D627/436/25A, Hugh Montgomery to Mary Ffolliott, 23 August 1918.

⁷³ William Coote, “Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill,” HC Deb 17 February 1922 vol 150 cc1389-473, Hansard 1803-2005.

special concern, especially defense, could be negotiated between Britain and Ireland within the purview of international organizations like the Paris peace conference and the League of Nations.⁷⁴ This last point closely mirrors the international appeals Sinn Féin was making at this time. Plunkett had other ideas for dealing with the northern unionists. His diaries mention “moral coercion,” implying non-violent but compulsive means of bringing the northern unionists into all-Ireland political institutions.⁷⁵ He wrote to Lord Bryce that “Ulster” would likely have to be given a “provincial legislature of the Canadian type” subordinate to the Irish Parliament.⁷⁶

Plunkett gathered a number of politically engaged people who did not conform to republican or unionist political ideals into a new association. The Irish Dominion League published its manifesto on June 28, 1919, in Plunkett’s new journal, the *Irish Statesman*. The League primarily attracted moderate nationalists and southern unionists. Landowners were well represented, including at least four nobles. A number of the League’s adherents were also local officials like resident magistrates, justices of the peace, or deputy lieutenants. Former nationalist MP Stephen Gwynn had formed the federalist Irish Centre Party in January, and merged it with the League. Its members included Crown solicitor W. E. Wylie.⁷⁷ Those who did not join Plunkett’s organization but signaled their support included Ulster unionist civil servant Frederick Wrench, Unionist MP Aubrey Herbert, and Ulster nationalist leader Joseph Devlin.⁷⁸

Many of the Dominion League’s supporters were accustomed to wielding influence at the local or national level, but the group never captured widespread popular support. Plunkett lamented that the League sent out thousands of circulars but had received only forty replies by July 9. This did not deter him, as the League was designed to influence British politicians. Plunkett described its job as “to show that an Irish Parl’t would not be dominated by Sinn Fein,” and “the most important fish” to catch were in London and Paris.⁷⁹

The League’s aims were based on Plunkett’s letter to *The Times*, though they called their proposed state the “Kingdom of Ireland.”⁸⁰ Responding to the Government of Ireland Bill, the League declared its “irreducible minimum” demands on February 7, 1920. The government

⁷⁴ Horace Plunkett, “Ireland’s Ultimate Opportunity,” *The Times* (London), 15 April 1919.

⁷⁵ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/39, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 5 April 1919.

⁷⁶ NLI, Bryce Papers, Ms. 11,016(10), Horace Plunkett to Lord Bryce, 20 April 1919.

⁷⁷ For the Irish Centre Party see *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 January 1919.

⁷⁸ For a list of the Dominion League’s founders see *Irish Times* (Dublin), 28 June 1919. For pledges of support see NLI, Horace Papers, Ms. 42,222/39, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 5 May, 8 June, 24 June, 30 June, and 8 July 1919.

⁷⁹ NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/39, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 15 April, 23 June, and 9 July 1919.

⁸⁰ Horace Plunkett, “Irish Dominion League,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 November 1919.

should declare Ireland a dominion. Irish representation at Westminster would then cease, and the population would elect a “constituent assembly” to draft a constitution, including safeguards for Ulster, over which United Kingdom legislators would have no say. The resulting Irish parliament would have fiscal autonomy but defense would be left to Westminster.⁸¹

Though there were nationalists and unionists in the Dominion League, the organization was criticized by politicians on both poles. John Dillon called the program “unworkable” and “dangerous,” asserting that “Ulster,” meaning the northern unionists, would refuse to cooperate while the condition that Ireland remain within the Empire would alienate Sinn Féin.⁸² Edward Carson called dominion home rule, “an Irish Republic camouflaged by another name.”⁸³ The IUA argued that the assembly envisioned by the League would be dominated by Sinn Féiners, who would declare a republic. In that case, the government might not have the right to interfere, as dominions could leave the British Empire, or “cut the painter,” any time they chose. Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Balfour, Carson, and de Valera all agreed that dominion status included a right to “secede” or leave the Empire.⁸⁴ The IUA added disapprovingly that Dominion League publications implied they would coerce “Ulster,” meaning the unionist population there, into accepting their ideas.⁸⁵

To counteract arguments that his policy was impractical, Horace Plunkett insisted that Sinn Féin would accept dominion status.⁸⁶ He provided little evidence for this, but members of the League were in touch with Sinn Féiners. Lord Monteaule regularly corresponded with James Douglas, a Quaker who adopted dominionism after the Rising, and eventually republicanism. In May 1919 Douglas wrote, “Sinn Fein I think believes that the only way to get even Dominion self-govt is to present a united demand for Independence.” This might be construed as asserting that Sinn Féin’s real goal was dominion status. However, in the same letter he wrote that dominion home rule should only be demanded “If & when all hope of Independence & of

⁸¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 7 February 1920.

⁸² John Dillon, “An Irish Settlement,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 March 1920.

⁸³ Edward Carson at Holywood, *The Times* (London), 14 July 1919.

⁸⁴ Scott, *Political Diaries*, 342-343, entry for 19-21 April 1918; UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/42/2420, Lord Oranmore, “Résumé of interview,” 18 March 1920; Andrew Bonar Law, “Government of Ireland Bill,” HC Deb 30 March 1920 vol 127 cc1107-218, Hansard 1803-2005; NLI, Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/32, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 23 July 1912; Edward Carson, “Chief Secretary for Ireland,” HC Deb 03 April 1919 vol 114 cc1438-552, Hansard 1803-2005; *Derry People*, 5 February 1921.

⁸⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 5 July 1919.

⁸⁶ Plunkett, “Dominion Home Rule,” *The Times* (London), 5 July 1919; *Irish Times* (Dublin), 16 February 1920; Horace Plunkett, “The Home Rule Bill,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 June 1920.

international pressure is gone,” indicating that separation was the party’s primary objective.⁸⁷ Douglas did not want to narrow Sinn Féin’s options. He cautioned Monteagle against starting the new association, warning, “the Dominion League will only force S. F. to reject the Dominion Settlement which I think would be a disaster.”⁸⁸ Douglas was not a heavyweight within Sinn Féin, and wrote primarily on his own authority. Even when he inserted the opinions of leaders like Arthur Griffith, he had obtained these through an intermediary. Nonetheless, the Dominion League’s leaders accepted his hesitant predilections toward their ideas as indicative of the *real* attitude of many professed republicans.⁸⁹ The dominionists took Douglas’s letters so seriously that they forwarded at least one of them to Lloyd George’s secretary.⁹⁰

Most supporters of dominion home rule hoped that their solution would appeal to Ulster unionists, as it would establish self-government while keeping Ireland within the Empire. Douglas had justified dominion status in 1917 by telling South African Premier Jan Smuts, “we did not think it would be as objectionable to Ulster as an Irish Republic.”⁹¹ Plunkett called the idea, “the only possible lasting compromise” with the Ulster Unionists.⁹² However, some dominionists were willing to envision a partitioned Ireland. Lord Shaftesbury counseled Monteagle in July 1920 that establishing two governments was “the only way of making a beginning.” He added, “Ulster must, at any rate temporarily, be treated as a separate unit. I think Sinn Fein has practically swallowed that view.”⁹³ Charles Brett argued that the envisioned constituent assembly should adopt a constitution on a three-quarters vote, as majority voting would render “the North perfectly powerless.” He added, “is not the rule of Government by a bare majority a superstition and unsuitable in many cases?”⁹⁴ Monteagle replied that it was “better to give N.E. Ulster power to contract out but no power to veto the decision of the majority.”⁹⁵

⁸⁷ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, James G. Douglas to Lord Monteagle, 31 May 1919.

⁸⁸ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, James G. Douglas to Lord Monteagle, 28 July 1919.

⁸⁹ Monteagle discussed his contacts with “Sinn Fein leaders” in Parliament. In fact, he was in touch with Douglas, who was in touch with Sinn Féin leaders. Lord Monteagle, “Dominion of Ireland Bill,” HL Deb 01 July 1920 vol 40 cc1113-62, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁹⁰ Compare NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,417/1, James G. Douglas to Lord Monteagle, 26 June 1920 with Karl Walter to Thomas Jones, 29 June 1920 in *Whitehall Diary*, III:23.

⁹¹ James G. Douglas, *Memoirs of Senator James G. Douglas (1887-1954): Concerned Citizen*, ed. J. Anthony Gaughan (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 55.

⁹² NLI, G. F. Berkeley Papers, Ms. 10,925, Irish Dominion League circular by Horace Plunkett, 17 March 1921.

⁹³ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, Lord Shaftesbury to Lord Monteagle, 20 July 1920.

⁹⁴ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,417/1, Charles Brett to Lord Monteagle, 20 September 1920.

⁹⁵ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,417/1, Lord Monteagle to Charles Brett, 24 September 1920.

Republicans, dominionists, and some southern unionists recognized the extent to which Lloyd George and the Cabinet were pledged to support the Ulster unionists. Plunkett wrote to *The Times*, “‘Ulster’ will make no answer to us as long as the Government encourages that minority of the Irish people to refuse to come into any Parliament for the whole of Ireland.”⁹⁶ This implied that Irish unity could be achieved if Lloyd George and his colleagues relaxed their support for partition. This is similar to Sinn Féin’s insistence that, if the British government stood aside, the republicans would grant any necessary safeguards to ensure a united Ireland. The Government of Ireland Bill confirmed impressions that Lloyd George’s administration was expressly partitionist. The *Irish Times* said that it “fulfills...the Government’s pledges to North-East Ulster at the cost of a permanent destruction of Irish peace and unity.”⁹⁷

While primarily a lobbying group, Dominion League members made an effort to give legislative effect to their ideas. Thomas Spring Rice, second baron Monteagle of Brandon, was among the group’s most active members. He was a unionist for most of his life. After the Third Home Rule Bill’s introduction in 1912 he wrote, “I am as much opposed to Home Rule as ever, because I still believe it would be bad for Ireland.” Yet, he added that if self-government arrived it should come with fiscal autonomy, a key stipulation of what was then called colonial home rule.⁹⁸ In 1914, Monteagle still described himself as a southern unionist.⁹⁹ However, after the Easter Rising he admitted that self-government was inevitable; the two necessities were to achieve fiscal autonomy and to win over the Ulster unionists.¹⁰⁰ In April 1917 Monteagle declared in favor of a “semi-Dominion status” for Ireland, incorporating full fiscal autonomy as well as restrictions on defense not considered necessary in other self-governing territories.¹⁰¹ His political evolution serves as an example of similar processes at work among other southern unionists.

Monteagle, in consultation with Horace Plunkett and Henry Harrison, drafted the Dominion of Ireland Bill in 1920. It would establish self-government largely on the League’s lines. This included fiscal autonomy, the right to make commercial treaties, as well as control of the police and a territorial force or “National Guard;” provisions forbidden under every home

⁹⁶ Horace Plunkett, “Dominion Home Rule,” *The Times* (London), 5 July 1919.

⁹⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 31 March 1920.

⁹⁸ Lord Monteagle, “Colonial Home Rule,” *The Times* (London), 11 April 1912.

⁹⁹ Lord Monteagle, “Home Rule and the War,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 8 September 1914.

¹⁰⁰ Lord Monteagle, “The Irish Situation,” *The Times* (London), 22 July 1916.

¹⁰¹ Lord Monteagle, “The Irish Problem,” *Quarterly Review* (April 1917): 558-569.

rule bill. The British military was to be withdrawn from Ireland. The new dominion would not be represented at Westminster, and could apply for membership to the League of Nations. The Irish legislature could establish subordinate “parliaments or councils for any provinces, part of provinces, or group of provinces,” a stipulation clearly aimed at the northern unionists. Under Monteagle’s bill, the Irish populace would elect a constituent assembly to draft a constitution. After this, the representatives of the six counties could appeal to the King for a plebiscite as to whether the constitution would operate there. The six-county representatives could also ask for a poll on establishing a provincial parliament, as provided by the bill.¹⁰²

Monteagle sent a draft to Douglas for republican comments. After consulting with “a leading Sinn Féin acquaintance who is in touch with Griffith,” Douglas predicted that the party would work those aspects of dominion status “consistent with a free Ireland,” particularly power over finance, courts, and police. Sinn Féin would accept under protest elements that were “inconsistent with a free Ireland,” namely any British military presence and a Lord Lieutenant. Partition they would ignore altogether. Despite the advantages he saw in accepting dominion status, Douglas believed, “if only England could see it she would be acting wisely from her own point of view in granting at once a Republic.”¹⁰³

Monteagle introduced the Dominion of Ireland Bill in the House of Lords on June 22, 1920. Arguing for it on July 1 he said, “The dearest wish of my heart is to keep Ireland as a willing member within what General Smuts called ‘the British Commonwealth of Free Nations.’ I believe that this is possible on a Dominion basis, but on nothing short of it.”¹⁰⁴ Much of the Lords’ criticism focused, not on whether dominion self-government was positive or appropriate, but on the assumption that Sinn Féin and the Ulster unionists would refuse to participate. Irish federalist Lord Dunraven opposed the bill in part because it purported to make Ireland a dominion, but qualified that status.¹⁰⁵ This was essentially a protest against constitutional experimentation. Birkenhead denounced the bill on behalf of the government. He objected to the idea that an Irish parliament would have the power to make commercial treaties, participate in Imperial councils, and join the League of Nations. He added that the bill would not appease

¹⁰² Several annotated drafts of the Dominion of Ireland Bill are in NLI, Monteagle Papers, 13,417/1.

¹⁰³ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,417/1, James G. Douglas to Lord Monteagle, 26 June 1920.

¹⁰⁴ Lord Monteagle, “Dominion of Ireland Bill,” HL Deb 01 July 1920 vol 40 cc1113-62, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁰⁵ See the speeches of Lords Dunraven, Crewe, and Killanin in “Dominion of Ireland Bill,” HL Deb 01 July 1920 vol 40 cc1113-62, Hansard 1803-2005.

Ulster unionists, and the legislature would be dominated by republicans. Far from interpreting the measure as offering a truncated dominion status, Birkenhead asserted, “This Bill gives enormous powers and takes enormous risks.”¹⁰⁶ It failed on a 41-28 vote.¹⁰⁷

Instead of the Dominion of Ireland Bill’s failure ending efforts toward this type of settlement, they only gained momentum. In June the Trinity College Historical Society approved a pro-dominion resolution by a slim 8-7 margin. Speaking against dominion status, W. F. Patton warned that it was “the stepping-stone to higher things.”¹⁰⁸ In early August, Cork businessmen began circulating a petition in favor of dominion status, and the Dublin Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution in its favor.¹⁰⁹ The Cork initiative resulted in a deputation that met with Lloyd George and the Cabinet on August 4. Three days later the deputy lieutenants and magistrates of Queen’s County declared for dominion home rule in a body.¹¹⁰ On August 9 two Liberal MPs and one Unionist published a letter in *The Times* in favor of fiscal autonomy, which they declared, “the real substance of Dominion Home Rule.”¹¹¹ On August 13 the Unionist Anti-Partition League passed a resolution in favor of “self-government with an adequate control of all local affairs, including taxation.”¹¹² League leader Lord Midleton told Cabinet members that he was under pressure to declare for dominion home rule.¹¹³ By September he warned that “even loyalists” were pushing for this type of settlement, and in November called for “generous concessions by the Government.”¹¹⁴

The Dominion League seized on the Prime Minister’s suggestion to the Cork deputation that they should organize “all that was best in moderate Irish opinion in the interests of a satisfactory settlement within the Empire.”¹¹⁵ To this end, they planned the Irish Peace Conference, which met in Dublin on August 24. George Berkeley estimated that 600 people

¹⁰⁶ Lord Birkenhead, “Dominion of Ireland Bill,” HL Deb 01 July 1920 vol 40 cc1113-62, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 23 June and 3 July 1920.

¹⁰⁸ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 June 1920.

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 2 August and 4 August 1920.

¹¹⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 9 August 1920.

¹¹¹ Hilton Young [U], John Murray [L], and John Wallace [L], “The Irish Bill,” *The Times* (London), 9 August 1920.

¹¹² *The Times* (London), 14 August 1920.

¹¹³ UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/43/2471, Lord Midleton, “Memorandum of Meetings with the Irish Committee of the Cabinet,” 5 August 1920.

¹¹⁴ UKNA, Midleton Papers, PRO/30/67/43/2492, Lord Midleton to Austen Chamberlain, 28 September 1920; Lord Midleton, “Irish Policy,” HL Deb 02 November 1920 vol 42 cc134-77, Hansard 1803-2005.

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 6 August 1920.

attended. They included dominionists, unionists, and moderate nationalists. In one of the ironies of the Conference, IRA members served as doorkeepers for this gathering of non-republicans.¹¹⁶

The Peace Conference met regularly until late September 1920. They approved the Dominion League program for an Irish settlement; a predictable outcome given that the organization had arranged the gathering.¹¹⁷ They suggested that the northern unionists be granted a provincial parliament subordinate to the Irish legislature, the area of which would be decided by county option.¹¹⁸ It seems that the group intended to be continuously active, as they appointed a standing committee and a deputation to present their proposals to Lloyd George.¹¹⁹

The Peace Conference communicated its initial decisions to the Prime Minister, but received no response.¹²⁰ On November 4 the Conference secretaries wrote to Lloyd George asking “whether you still wish to confer with the representatives of Moderate Irishmen.” They reminded him that they assembled “in response to an invitation from you.” The Peace Conference members had become unsettled after Lloyd George’s speech at Carnarvon on October 9. The Prime Minister derided the idea of offering dominion status to Ireland, and argued that it would be a danger to the Empire. He added a flourish that emphasized the symbolic importance of defeating the IRA to British nationalists when he said, “This is a great country...it has done more for human freedom than any other country...We are not going to quail before a combination of a handful of assassins in any part of the British Empire.”¹²¹

The Conference representatives wrote that such an attitude, coupled with the Cabinet’s determination to pass the Government of Ireland Bill, would “render it useless for Moderate men to discuss the Government’s policy.”¹²² Lloyd George responded nearly two weeks later, indicating that he did not intend to take any steps toward a settlement until he dealt a blow to the insurgents, “the Government must take the sternest counter-measures in defence of the law and its guardians, and real progress toward a settlement is wellnigh [sic] impossible.” He also implied that it was up to “the people of Ireland” to “insist on the termination of the campaign of

¹¹⁶ NLI, G. F. Berkeley Papers, Ms. 10,924, George F. Berkeley, “My Experiences with the Peace with Ireland Movement,” November 1921. For a list of attendees at the first meeting see *Irish Times* (Dublin), 25 August 1920.

¹¹⁷ Amicus [pseud.], “Dominion Home Rule,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 20 August 1920.

¹¹⁸ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, Irish Peace Conference: Resolution Adopted by Standing Committee, 27 September 1920

¹¹⁹ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, Irish Peace Conference Standing Committee Minutes, 7 September 1920.

¹²⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/2/27, Henry Harrison to David Lloyd George, 31 August 1920.

¹²¹ David Lloyd George at Carnarvon, *The Times* (London), 11 October 1920.

¹²² UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/2/47, Henry Harrison and Edmund A. Swayne to David Lloyd George, 4 November 1920.

murder and assassination, which can never succeed.”¹²³ This last suggestion is ironic given that the Prime Minister was addressing a primarily Irish body appealing for an end to violence through negotiation, and Lloyd George was refusing to engage.

Without meaning to, the Irish Peace Conference had called Lloyd George’s bluff. His suggestion to the Cork deputation that they organize moderate opinion was consistent with Cabinet complaints that extremists had taken hold of Irish politics; that if only moderate constitutionalists would assert themselves a generous settlement could be secured. The Prime Minister likely meant his statement to the Cork deputation as a sop to his immediate audience and a further justification of harsh methods against republicans, not as a call to action. However, the Dominion League, who had been attempting to organize moderate opinion for more than a year in the hope of influencing government policy, took it as an earnest invitation to amplify their work. Some members resented that their sincere attempt was rebuffed. Henry Harrison, one of the Conference secretaries and the Dominion League’s most vociferous propagandist, published *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and Its Betrayal* in January 1921. He accused the government of militarism, and “an attempted reconquest by executive terrorism.” Harrison asserted, “It is quite clear that the Prime Minister and those who control his policy have not seriously considered anything but a ‘knock-out blow’ peace.”¹²⁴

Just as the Irish dominionists were becoming discouraged, British politicians took up the cause. On September 29, 1920, Lord Edward Grey published a letter in the *Westminster Gazette* proposing dominion home rule, but without allowing Ireland an army, navy, or the right of secession from the Empire.¹²⁵ A week later, Lord Morley issued a protest against reprisals.¹²⁶ While he did not actually make any administrative proposals, his criticism of government policy was widely interpreted as support for dominion status.¹²⁷

Former Prime Minister H. H. Asquith took the opportunity to state his own position. During an election campaign in February 1920 he had announced that he would grant an Irish parliament fiscal autonomy, and claimed that this would put them on par with the dominions. In a moment of sublime irony given the course of the 1913-1914 negotiations, he quoted Redmond

¹²³ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/2/48, David Lloyd George to Irish Peace Conference, 17 November 1921.

¹²⁴ Henry Harrison, *The Irish Peace Conference 1920 and Its Betrayal: Does the Government Want a Genuine Peace?* (Dublin: Irish Dominion League, 1921) in NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,417/1.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 30 September 1920.

¹²⁶ Lord Morley, “Reprisals,” *The Times* (London), 4 October 1920.

¹²⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 6 October 1920; *The Times* (London), 6 October 1920.

on the necessity of maintaining Ireland's "essential unity."¹²⁸ Asquith maintained his attitude throughout 1920, particularly while criticizing the Government of Ireland Bill.¹²⁹ On October 5 he wrote a letter to *The Times* reiterating his new policy. He claimed not to fear an Irish Republic, as "Men do not in the long run fight for phrases, but for realities."¹³⁰ The political evolution of Asquith, Grey, and Morley is ironic given that, when they formulated their own home rule bill, they denied Ireland any powers approaching dominion status. Asquith later wrote that his newfound conviction was a result of Sinn Féin's electoral success, and provided an opportunity for criticizing government policies.¹³¹

Whatever their motives, parliamentary criticism of government policy continued to mount. On October 29, Unionist Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck gathered a group of British MPs and supporters into the Peace with Ireland Council. They mainly engaged in publicizing and condemning reprisals by government forces. The growth of "reprisals," or destruction carried out by the military, RIC, or the new Auxiliary RIC, caused public indignation in Ireland and Britain.¹³² The term stems from attacks on German civilians by Allied forces during the First World War, operations that caused controversy in that context as well.¹³³ The word itself implies that these actions were undertaken after provocation, but wanton destruction by Crown forces, including wrecking, looting, or shooting at shops or houses, burning buildings, and assaulting civilians frequently occurred where no IRA operations had taken place. Shootings of republicans sometimes accompanied material destruction.¹³⁴

In Bentinck's words, the aim of the Council in denouncing reprisals was to "appeal to public opinion to vindicate the fundamental British principals [sic] of Law and Liberty."¹³⁵ The organization did not advocate governmental reform, but Bentinck had already declared himself in favor of giving Ireland a similar status as Canada.¹³⁶ The group established links with the

¹²⁸ H. H. Asquith at Paisley, *The Times* (London), 3 February 1920.

¹²⁹ H. H. Asquith, "Government of Ireland Bill," HC Deb 30 March 1920 vol 127 cc1107-218, Hansard 1803-2005; *The Times* (London), 6 August 1920

¹³⁰ H. H. Asquith, "Mr. Asquith on Ireland," *The Times* (London), 5 October 1920.

¹³¹ H. H. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1928), II:225-226.

¹³² See the speeches of Lords Loreburn, MacDonnell, and Curzon, and the Archbishop of Canterbury in "Irish Policy," HL Deb 02 November 1920 vol 42 cc134-77, Hansard 1803-2005; *The Times* (London), 21 October 1920.

¹³³ For examples of protests against First World War reprisals see letters to *The Times* (London) by F. H. Ely and Edward Clarke published on 23 April and 1 May 1917, respectively.

¹³⁴ UKNA, CAB/23/23/2, Winston Churchill, "The Irish Situation," 10 November 1920.

¹³⁵ NLI, Bryce Papers, Ms. 11,016(10), Henry Bentinck to Lord Bryce, 29 October 1920.

¹³⁶ Henry Bentinck, "The Irish Bill," *The Times* (London), 12 June 1920.

Dominion League and attracted support from all of the major parties: Unionists, Liberals, and Labour. A striking feature of its membership lists is the number of Church of England clergy involved, including at least five bishops.¹³⁷ Discussing clerical opposition to government policy, *The Times* commented, “Religious forces such as these are still potent in England.”¹³⁸ Another notable member was General Hubert Gough, who had led the Curragh mutiny. In February 1921, Gough declared in favor of dominion status for Ireland.¹³⁹

Irish dominionists possessed many of the advantages necessary to successful political action. They had an organized party. Its members were influential and represented a wide range of opinion. The League had its own newspaper, and received positive press comment from other organs. The group was well funded, could introduce measures into Parliament, and—crucially for Irish constitutional movements—had powerful supporters in Britain. Given all of these advantages, why did it come no nearer to passing a measure to establish an Irish dominion?

The most cogent criticism of the League was its failure to win support either with an overwhelming segment of the public, or with key individuals or groups. Those who argued against its aims on the grounds that neither Ulster unionists nor Sinn Féin would accept dominion status were largely correct. Many southern unionists and a few of their northern counterparts saw the benefits of a large measure of self-government. However, Ulster unionist leaders like Carson argued that dominionism was really republicanism in disguise, implying a greater degree of separation from Britain than they would consider.

To Sinn Féin supporters, dominion status sounded like a republic with greater restrictions. Republicanism demonstrated its appeal to Irish voters in national elections in December 1918, and continued to do so in local elections. After the League’s foundation, Arthur Griffith condemned it as the “latest attempt to sidetrack Irish national demand.”¹⁴⁰ In July 1919, the Abbey Theatre hosted a debate on the merits of a dominion versus a republic. Plunkett said that he believed in a dominion settlement because “the more freedom Ireland had the more she would be friendly to England.” Sinn Féin spokesman Aodh de Blácam called that “the best argument for a Republic he had heard.”¹⁴¹ Moreover, Sinn Féin leaders were convinced that their

¹³⁷ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, Peace with Ireland Council circular; NLI, G. F. Berkeley Papers, Ms. 10,924, “My Experiences with the Peace with Ireland Movement,” November 1921.

¹³⁸ *The Times* (London), 5 October 1920.

¹³⁹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 11 February 1921.

¹⁴⁰ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 3 July 1919.

¹⁴¹ NLI, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,415, James G. Douglas to Lord Monteagle, 28 July 1919.

electoral victories guaranteed their control of public opinion. Reacting to an invitation to the Irish Peace Conference, Michael Collins remarked scathingly, “these people do not really matter.”¹⁴²

There is evidence that high-ranking members of Sinn Féin considered entering a “constituent assembly,” presumably that proposed by the Dominion League. However, they would only do so if it was empowered to make a settlement outside the British Empire, and if Westminster pledged to implement its decisions without interference.¹⁴³ Sinn Féin had issued similar conditions for entering the Irish Convention in 1917, and the British government would almost certainly reject them.

The Dominion League continued its work until November 1921. By that time, the Cabinet was negotiating terms with Sinn Féin. The League’s *raison d’être* had, therefore, expired. In winding up the organization its leaders complained that it “had not received the support which it was entitled to expect.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, Lloyd George’s criticism that supporters of dominion status could not “speak for Ireland” was largely correct.¹⁴⁵ The Prime Minister’s position at the head of a large parliamentary majority meant that his policy would prevail, despite significant criticism. It would take an overwhelming display of popular support—possibly from both islands—to divert him from his course. Even if the dominionists convinced Lloyd George or a large portion of his supporters to back a measure on their lines, they could not guarantee that Sinn Féin or the Irish public would agree to it. As long as this was the case, no settlement based on dominion status was possible.

Seeking Peace with Sinn Féin

The first meeting of Dáil Éireann on January 21, 1919, confirmed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic signed by the Easter Rising leaders in 1916. They issued a Declaration of Independence which referred to “the existing state of war between Ireland and England.” In the ensuing months, this government of the Irish Republic established ministries, departments, and a civil service as alternatives to the British administration of the island. Violent clashes between the IRA and Crown forces, encompassing the RIC and Army, grew more frequent, particularly

¹⁴² NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8430/9, Michael Collins to Art Ó Briain, 7 September 1920.

¹⁴³ UKNA, CO/904/23, Documents seized from Eamon de Valera on 22 June 1921.

¹⁴⁴ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 4 November 1921.

¹⁴⁵ *The Times* (London), 6 August 1920.

after the outlawing of the Dáil in September 1919. However, the government in London did not immediately counter the republican campaign with any major policy shift.

One of the factors that prolonged the conflict was British politicians' and military figures' abhorrence of the idea of negotiating with Sinn Féin. It was May 1920 before Lloyd George began to seriously consider stronger measures in Ireland, and when he did so it was to save face. He wrote to Churchill, "We cannot leave things as they are. De Valera has practically challenged the British Empire, and unless he is put down the Empire will look silly."¹⁴⁶ On August 4 Bonar Law said that making concessions to Sinn Féin would be "showing that we are on the run."¹⁴⁷ Even on the eve of negotiations more than a year later, a Dublin Castle official said that a colleague working to end the violence "has apparently no idea whatever of the dignity of the Empire."¹⁴⁸ This sentiment made it potentially politically damaging for anyone to negotiate with Sinn Féin directly.

Nonetheless, the Cabinet was aware that something had to be done. On June 2, 1920, they decided that the time had almost arrived to reach a "comprehensive settlement" with Sinn Féin. The precedent they invoked was the 1882 "Kilmainham Treaty," in which then-Prime Minister William Gladstone agreed to release Irish nationalist leader Charles Parnell from prison, remove a Chief Secretary identified with coercion, and introduce land legislation. In return, Parnell promised to use his influence to curtail agrarian violence. However, the Cabinet decided, "it was necessary for the Government first to secure the upper hand in their policy of establishing law and order in Ireland" before seeking an agreement.¹⁴⁹ They also developed a plan to suspend representative government if the southern parliament envisioned by the Government of Ireland Bill refused to meet or was unable to do so. Instead, they would nominate an assembly and require only a one-third quorum for it to convene.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, as early as June 1920 the administration was open to negotiating with Sinn Féin, but only after the vague requirement of reestablishing "law and order" had been fulfilled. This meant that a policy of conciliation would only be followed by one of coercion. Lord

¹⁴⁶ David Lloyd George to Winston S. Churchill, 10 May 1920 in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill Volume IV Companion Part 2* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1085.

¹⁴⁷ UKNA, CO/904/232, "Report of Proceedings at a Deputation to the Prime Minister on the Irish Question," 4 August 1920.

¹⁴⁸ UKNA, CO/904/232, Francis Greer to John Anderson, 11 July 1921.

¹⁴⁹ UKNA, CAB/23/21/14, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 2 June 1920.

¹⁵⁰ UKNA, CAB/23/37/40, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 14 June 1920.

Curzon described the idea as, “ardent coercion, trusting to force the Sinn Feiners into a frame of mind favourable to settlement.”¹⁵¹ Throughout the conflict, government officials did not believe that Sinn Féin could control the IRA. They portrayed republican “gunmen” as terrorizing moderates, even within Sinn Féin, and maintained that if they cracked down on the former the latter would come out in favor of a settlement. As Walter Long expressed it, “if the Sinn Féin leaders try to negotiate they’ll be shot by the extremists.”¹⁵² As late as April 1921 Lloyd George said, “De Valera cannot come here and say he is willing to give up Irish independence, for if he did, he might be shot.”¹⁵³ Historian Keith Middlemas remarks on how often the government relied on rumor and hearsay in making decisions on Ireland.¹⁵⁴ Such statements reflect genuine ignorance of the relationship between the Dáil, Sinn Féin, and the IRA, but also provided cover for the government assertion that they were acting on behalf of the Irish population, who they claimed were being terrorized by a few extremists.¹⁵⁵ It also drew upon stereotypes of the Irish as uncontrollably violent and incapable of coordinated action.¹⁵⁶

While the Cabinet set plans in motion to reestablish law and order, some of its members made back-channel attempts to ascertain whether Sinn Féin would accept a solution that fell short of an independent republic. One of the first people approached with settlement ideas was Art Ó Briain, the Dáil’s representative in London. On July 15, Ó Briain met with lawyer and baronet Charles Russell, who had been sent by Charles Riddell, one of Lloyd George’s close associates. Russell passed on Riddell’s message that they were anxious to get in touch with Sinn Féin. Ó Briain said they should speak with Arthur Griffith, but before any negotiations took place the Cabinet should recognize the Irish Republic.¹⁵⁷

On July 22, Alfred Davies, Unionist MP for Lincoln, approached Ó Briain and told him that the government would grant Ireland “any measure of Dominion Home Rule, in fact absolute

¹⁵¹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:28, entry for 23 July 1920.

¹⁵² Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:29, entry for 23 July 1920.

¹⁵³ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:60, entry for 27 April 1921.

¹⁵⁴ Middlemas, *Whitehall Diary*, III:70-71.

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Bonar Law, “Irish Administration,” HC Deb 13 April 1920 vol 127 cc1538-91, Hansard 1803-2005; Winston Churchill at Dundee, *The Times* (London), 18 October 1920; David Lloyd George in London, *The Times* (London), 10 November 1920; Hamar Greenwood, “Ulster Volunteers,” HC Deb 29 November 1920 vol 135 cc914-5, Hansard 1803-2005; Hamar Greenwood in Dublin, *The Times* (London), 24 January 1921.

¹⁵⁶ A number of British officials in this period, including Bonar Law and Churchill, expressed a belief that the Irish were racially inferior and prone to violence. Winston S. Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 31 March 1920 in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill Volume IV Companion Part 2* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1062; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:50, entry for 30 January 1921.

¹⁵⁷ NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8429/12, Art Ó Briain to Michael Collins, 15 July 1920.

freedom,” if the British connection was maintained. Ó Briain told Davies that if Lloyd George “wanted to go down to history as the greatest statesman that England ever had, he should come out with a campaign, telling the English people that, in the interests of England, the Irish Republic must be recognised.” After this, the two countries could make a peace treaty.¹⁵⁸ Davies returned a week later and suggested that members of the Irish republican government meet with the British Cabinet. Deflected on this idea, Davies proposed that Griffith should meet privately with Lloyd George. Ó Briain reiterated that the British government should first recognize the Republic. One of Lloyd George’s secretaries, E. R. Davies, was present at the second meeting and said that this was impossible.¹⁵⁹

Government officials were divided over what they would offer Sinn Féin if they did restore law and order. At a July 23 Cabinet meeting, Crown solicitor W. E. Wylie argued passionately that “No amount of coercion could settle the Irish question,” and the government should offer “any terms short of an Irish Republic,” combined with county option for Ulster.¹⁶⁰ General Macready supported him. Weeks after arriving in Ireland, he had written to Frances Stevenson that force “will not heal the root of the disease.”¹⁶¹ Churchill interjected that he was not “afraid of full Dominion Home Rule, except as part of a defeat.”¹⁶² In other words, he would consider dominion status but wanted to save face by restoring imperial authority before negotiating. Cabinet members Lord Curzon and H. A. L. Fisher suggested that they might amend the Government of Ireland Bill to expand the southern parliament’s powers. The latter specifically mentioned granting control of customs and excise taxes, a key dominion power.¹⁶³ Fisher predicted that the government would be “driven” to grant dominion status eventually.¹⁶⁴ Balfour opposed concessions that entailed abandoning the bill. The next day, he submitted a paper outlining his main argument, “A parliament has been promised to Ulster. Whether the promise was originally wise or unwise is immaterial; it cannot now be withdrawn.”¹⁶⁵ Instead of

¹⁵⁸ NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8426/3, Art Ó Briain to Michael Collins, 23 July 1920.

¹⁵⁹ NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8426/3, Art Ó Briain to Michael Collins, 30 July 1920.

¹⁶⁰ For the first quote see Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:25, entry for 23 July 1920. For the second see UKNA, CAB/24/109/96, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 23 July 1920.

¹⁶¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/36/2/14, C. F. N. Macready to Frances Stevenson, 25 May 1920.

¹⁶² Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:29, entry for 23 July 1920.

¹⁶³ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:30, entry for 23 July 1920.

¹⁶⁴ Fisher, *Coalition Diaries and Letters*, II:588, entry for 23 July 1920.

¹⁶⁵ UKNA, CAB/24/109/86, Arthur Balfour, “The Future of the Home Rule Bill,” 24 July 1920.

formulating concessions, Lloyd George asked for “the definite and final proposals of the Irish Government for the enforcement of the law.”¹⁶⁶

Despite the fact that a number of influential individuals favored making concessions to Sinn Féin, Lloyd George ultimately decided government policy. The Prime Minister was vague and contradictory as to how far he would go to conciliate Irish nationalists. MP J. H. Thomas noted that Lloyd George told a Labour Party deputation in June 1920 that the administration would negotiate on any basis except a republic, but days later Lord Birkenhead denounced Monteaule’s Dominion of Ireland Bill on behalf of the government.¹⁶⁷ In *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity* (2007), historian Paul Bew puts great store in the idea that Lloyd George “dropped vague hints” that he was prepared to grant dominion status in the first week of August 1920.¹⁶⁸ He met with the Cork deputation on August 4. Press reports of the meeting were positive, and the Prime Minister later spoke as though he had offered dominion home rule “with important reservations.” However, a transcript of the conversation shows that the Prime Minister emphatically rejected this idea. He said, “As a matter of fact you cannot offer Dominion Home Rule. You cannot do it,” adding, “Dominion Home Rule means control over harbours, control over the Army, control over the Navy, and control over money. That is exactly what we cannot confer upon them.”¹⁶⁹ Publicly and privately, the Prime Minister argued against amending the Government of Ireland Bill in the direction of dominion status. He portrayed an Irish dominion as a threat to British security, and was adamant that the administration could not grant fiscal autonomy.¹⁷⁰

Another element of Lloyd George’s personal Irish policy was his eagerness to punish Sinn Féin. The Prime Minister told C. P. Scott during the 1918 conscription crisis, “He knew there would be trouble—rioting, bloodshed, but it was better to face all that and get it over...There were to be no judicial trials and punishments. If men were to be shot they were to be put up against a wall and shot on the spot.”¹⁷¹ Sinn Féin officials were assassinated

¹⁶⁶ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:31, entry for 23 July 1920.

¹⁶⁷ J. H. Thomas in Parliament, *The Times* (London), 23 July 1920. For an account of the Labour Party deputation to Lloyd George see *The Times* (London), 21 June 1920.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 403.

¹⁶⁹ UKNA, CO/904/232, “Report of Proceedings at a Deputation to the Prime Minister on the Irish Question,” 4 August 1920. For press accounts see *Irish Times* (Dublin), 6 August 1920; *The Times* (London), 5 August 1920.

¹⁷⁰ UKNA, CAB/23/38/2, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 1920; David Lloyd George, “Government of Ireland Bill,” HC Deb 11 November 1920 vol 134 cc1413-65, Hansard 1803-2005..

¹⁷¹ Scott, *Political Diaries*, 342, entry for 19-21 April 1918.

throughout 1920; police or soldiers were suspected in each case.¹⁷² Chief of the Imperial General Staff Henry Wilson wrote after a meeting with Lloyd George in September 1920, “He reverted to his amazing theory that someone was murdering 2 Sinn Feiners to every loyalist the Sinn Feiners murdered. I told him that, of course, this was absolutely not so, but he seemed to be satisfied that a counter-murder association was the best answer to Sinn Fein murders.”¹⁷³ The Prime Minister told the Cork deputation, “there are a few men we want to get at” before ending the coercion policy.¹⁷⁴ This tacit support for government forces’ extralegal methods contributed to the growth of reprisals.¹⁷⁵

Public denunciation of government policy and continually escalating IRA violence prompted Lloyd George to make a serious effort at achieving a cessation. There had already been signs of movement in this direction. On October 8, 1920, Unionist MP George Cockerill, who later supported the Peace with Ireland Council, published a letter in *The Times* calling for a truce, an amnesty, and a conference to negotiate a “Convention between nations at peace.”¹⁷⁶ Arthur Griffith replied to Lloyd George’s aggressive Carnarvon speech that, if the government recognized Irish independence, they were prepared to negotiate treaties to protect mutual military and financial interests.¹⁷⁷

At the same time, Patrick Moylett of Galway was in London to complain that his home and business had been wrecked by Crown forces. Griffith sent him to see John Steele, a *Chicago Tribune* correspondent who had traveled to Ireland over the previous two years. Steele introduced Moylett to Cabinet member H. A. L. Fisher.¹⁷⁸ Moylett went to Dublin, and Griffith gave him a letter reiterating that Sinn Féin would accept a conference with government representatives if there were no prior conditions. From the time of his return to London, Moylett acted as an unofficial emissary for Griffith.¹⁷⁹ Other republicans knew nothing of Moylett’s

¹⁷² The *Irish Bulletin* kept lists of coroners’ inquest verdicts against the Crown forces, until these were suppressed in September 1920. *Irish Bulletin* (Dublin), 13 February, 16 April, 6 September, and 11 November 1920.

¹⁷³ Henry Wilson, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries*, 2 vols., ed. C. E. Callwell (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1927), II:251.

¹⁷⁴ UKNA, CO/904/232, “Report of Proceedings at a Deputation to the Prime Minister on the Irish Question,” 4 August 1920.

¹⁷⁵ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:53, entry for 15 February 1921.

¹⁷⁶ George Cockerill, “The Way to Peace,” *The Times* (London), 8 October 1920.

¹⁷⁷ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 12 October 1920.

¹⁷⁸ Fisher, *Coalition Diaries and Letters*, II:628, entry for 25 October 1920.

¹⁷⁹ Moylett greatly exaggerated his own importance while relating his experiences later, but the bare facts are discernible. See Bureau of Military History (BMH) Witness Statement (WS) No. 767, Patrick Moylett, 49-72.

actions.¹⁸⁰ The talks continued for weeks but produced no results. Griffith became worried that the affair might make it seem as though they were willing to accept something less than a republic.¹⁸¹ Michael Collins called it a “fiasco” and blamed Steele as being out for a story.¹⁸²

Nonetheless, from this period forward there were concerted attempts by Cabinet members and Dublin Castle officials to maintain contact with Irish republicans. As the Moylett discussions were ending, Lloyd George tried to get George “Æ” Russell to act as an intermediary. The Prime Minister offered to amend the Government of Ireland Bill, but Russell cut off communication after Griffith was arrested on November 26.¹⁸³

On December 1 and 2 Patrick Clune, a Co. Clare native and Catholic Archbishop of Perth, Australia, met with Lloyd George to protest reprisals. The Prime Minister expressed his horror, and asked Clune to act as an intermediary in arranging a truce with Sinn Féin.¹⁸⁴ Reporting these meetings to Griffith, Art Ó Briain said that it was clear the government was desperate for peace.¹⁸⁵ Clune delivered Lloyd George’s terms to Griffith in Dublin’s Mountjoy Gaol. They were simple and strikingly similar to Cockerill’s suggestions: both the IRA and government forces would cease their activities and the Dáil would be allowed to meet. Griffith remarked that this entailed “no surrender of principle on our part.”¹⁸⁶ On December 4 the Archbishop met with Collins, who agreed.¹⁸⁷ There was every reason to believe that a cessation of violence was very close when Clune returned to London.

While the Archbishop was in Dublin, the Prime Minister received indications that the coercion policy was at last bearing fruit. On December 3, 1920, the Galway County Council passed a resolution calling on the Dáil and the British government to appoint three delegates each to negotiate a truce and a lasting peace.¹⁸⁸ Three days later, the Galway Urban District Council passed a similar motion, which noted that the Archbishop of Tuam and Dáil member

¹⁸⁰ NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8426/11, Art Ó Briain to Michael Collins, 20 October 1920; NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8426/7, Michael Collins to Art Ó Briain, 1 November 1920.

¹⁸¹ University College Dublin Archives (UCDA), Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Arthur Griffith to Michael Collins, n.d.

¹⁸² NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8426/7, Michael Collins to Art Ó Briain, 15 December 1920; NLI, Art Ó Briain, Ms. 8430/12, Michael Collins to Art Ó Briain, 4 January 1921.

¹⁸³ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1412, James Haverly to Eamon de Valera, 3 April 1952.

¹⁸⁴ BMH WS No. 362, J. T. McMahon.

¹⁸⁵ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Art Ó Briain to Arthur Griffith, 2 December 1920.

¹⁸⁶ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Arthur Griffith to Diarmuid Ó hÉigartaigh, n.d.

¹⁸⁷ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Note by Michael Collins.

¹⁸⁸ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/2/58, W. G. Seymour to David Lloyd George, 4 December 1920.

Roger Sweetman had also declared for peace.¹⁸⁹ John Harley Scott, a unionist and sheriff of Cork City, submitted a peace resolution to a meeting of the Cork Corporation. In conveying this to Lloyd George, he suggested that the first clause in any truce agreement should be an insistence that Irish arms be surrendered.¹⁹⁰ On December 5, Michael O’Flanagan, a Catholic priest and Sinn Féin vice president, sent Lloyd George a telegram acknowledging that the Prime Minister had recently declared in favor of peace, and inquiring what his first step would be.¹⁹¹

These messages convinced some within the British government and military that they were defeating the republicans, and could impose any terms they wished. During Clune’s subsequent interviews with Lloyd George on December 8 and 11, the Prime Minister’s proposals were less lenient. He suggested that during the truce no arrests would be made, but the government should have a free hand in hunting down the perpetrators of an ambush at Kilmichael, Co. Cork, in which seventeen Auxiliary RIC were killed. Lloyd George suggested that representatives of Irish labor and the Catholic Church should sit with the Dáil, in order to “constitute the national sentiment of Ireland outside Ulster.” Clune quoted the Prime Minister as saying that the peace resolutions and Father O’Flanagan’s telegram proved the republicans were “showing the white feather,” a First World War reference to an implication of cowardice, and were “anxious for peace at any price.” Lloyd George added that Collins and IRA Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy could not meet with the Dáil when it assembled. Finally, Greenwood suggested that arms should be surrendered as a prelude to a truce.¹⁹² The Cabinet confirmed these two conditions.¹⁹³

Above all else, the Sinn Féin leaders objected to the idea of giving up arms. Griffith commented, “this is not a truce but a surrender,” while Collins warned, “Let Ll. George make no mistake, the I.R.A. is not broken...Neither is the spirit of the people subdued.”¹⁹⁴ Under-Secretary John Anderson convinced Clune that they could enact an “unofficial truce” without an arms surrender by simply calling off actions by both sides.¹⁹⁵ The Sinn Féin representatives

¹⁸⁹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/2/58, John Redington to David Lloyd George, 6 December 1920.

¹⁹⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/2/58, John Harley Scott to David Lloyd George, 7 December 1920.

¹⁹¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/95/3/59, Michael O’Flanagan to David Lloyd George, 5 December 1920.

¹⁹² NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8430/11, Art Ó Briain to Michael Collins, 12 December 1920.

¹⁹³ UKNA, CAB/23/23/15, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 13 December 1920; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:44-46, entry for 13 December 1920.

¹⁹⁴ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Arthur Griffith to Michael Collins, 13 December 1920 and Michael Collins to Arthur Griffith, 14 December 1920.

¹⁹⁵ Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, 91, entry for 14 December 1920.

interpreted this suggestion as the arms condition being “waived.” On this and an understanding that the entire Dáil could meet, the republican Cabinet consented to the truce.¹⁹⁶

However, on December 17 the British Cabinet insisted that weapons must be given up as part of any truce deal.¹⁹⁷ Griffith informed Clune that this was impossible, ending the most serious attempt at a ceasefire to date.¹⁹⁸ On December 24 the Cabinet was informed, without evidence, that arms were already being handed in to the authorities. They determined not to change course, as “the forces of the Crown had at last definitely established the upper hand.”¹⁹⁹ General Tudor assured a December 29 meeting that in four months “the terror would be broken if there was no truce.”²⁰⁰

Despite the Government of Ireland Act’s passage, the Cabinet had taken no steps to implement it. Believing that the republicans were eager for a ceasefire, they considered holding quick elections to the northern and southern parliaments, while refusing to negotiate with Sinn Féin in the meantime. They also pondered further delays in the hope that their coercion policy would enable the measure to operate smoothly.²⁰¹ Craig was already preparing for the six-county elections and protested, “the sincerity in the British Government in pressing forward the Act has always been in doubt, and a long pause now might be construed as an attempt to go a step further towards conciliating the rebel element.”²⁰² The Cabinet set the opening of the two parliaments in motion in January 1921.²⁰³ Greenwood said that this decision would furnish “indisputable proof that the Government of Ireland Act is a reality and the independence of Northern Ireland an accomplished fact.”²⁰⁴ Thus, the decision to implement the Act was not taken as a necessary prelude to the ultimate truce of July 1921, but after the failure of a previous attempt. How the plans for an as-yet-unestablished six-county parliament might have been affected by negotiations in December 1920 can only be guessed.

¹⁹⁶ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Arthur Griffith to Michael Collins, 15 December 1920 and Michael Collins to Arthur Griffith, 16 December 1920.

¹⁹⁷ Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, 93-94, entry for 17 December 1920.

¹⁹⁸ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1413, Arthur Griffith to Michael Collins, 17 December 1920.

¹⁹⁹ UKNA, CAB/23/23/22, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 24 December 1920; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:47, entry for 24 December 1920.

²⁰⁰ UKNA, CAB/23/23/25, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 29 December 1920.

²⁰¹ UKNA, CAB/23/23/22, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 24 December 1920.

²⁰² PRONI, CAB/5/4, James Craig to H. A. L. Fisher, 28 December 1920.

²⁰³ UKNA, CAB/23/24/3, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 14 January 1921.

²⁰⁴ UKNA, CAB/24/120/41, Hamar Greenwood, “Government of Ireland Act,” 27 February 1921.

Eamon de Valera returned to Ireland on December 23, 1920, and discouraged secret peace initiatives. In January 1921 he told O’Flanagan that Lloyd George’s “pretences” toward peace were insincere.²⁰⁵ Collins replied to another overture, “All these things are simply designed to get us arguing about things that the English have no intention of conceding.”²⁰⁶

Despite the republicans’ reluctance to engage, secret parleys continued. In mid-March Arthur Vincent, a former government lawyer and Co. Kerry landowner, approached Lloyd George to ask him to stop a series of scheduled executions. Instead, the Prime Minister used him to suggest a meeting with de Valera, which did not come off.²⁰⁷ Lord Derby made a supposedly secret visit to Ireland in April, which was in fact remarkably well publicized.²⁰⁸ He met de Valera on April 21 and tried to get him to drop the demand for complete independence as a prerequisite for meeting Lloyd George. The Sinn Féin leader refused.²⁰⁹

One of the sincerest approaches came from the Irish Business Men’s Conciliation Committee between March and May 1921. Comprised of nationalist and unionist industrialists, this group offered to mediate negotiations between the Dáil and the government.²¹⁰ Lloyd George met them and claimed that he had “offered every facility” for the Dáil to assemble, except for four members whom he did not name.²¹¹ The committee thought that the Dáil had also accepted their meditation, but were overly optimistic in their interpretation of the republican reply. On May 2, Dáil secretary Diarmuid Ó hÉigeartaigh wrote to the committee’s chairman, Andrew Jameson, that as long as the government required them to give up their demand for independence negotiation was impossible. He said renouncing that object would be a “surrender” and further talks would merely be “notification to us of the amount of freedom which England will be good enough to concede.” Ó hÉigeartaigh added, “England is the aggressor. Her troops occupy our country. That alone is the cause of this war. If England had the will for peace, she could have it instantly by withdrawing these troops.”²¹²

²⁰⁵ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1414, Michael O’Flanagan to Eamon de Valera, 26 January 1921 and Eamon de Valera to Michael O’Flanagan, 27 January 1921.

²⁰⁶ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1421, Michael Collins to James O’Connor, 17 February 1921.

²⁰⁷ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1431, James Burke, “Memorandum re Interview with Mr. Vincent.”

²⁰⁸ For examples see *The Times* (London) and *Irish Times* (Dublin) of 25-26 April 1921.

²⁰⁹ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1439, “Note on Visit of Earl Derby to Dublin, April 1921,” 20 January 1954.

²¹⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/3/13, Irish Business Men’s Conciliation Committee to David Lloyd George, 31 March 1921.

²¹¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/3/16, David Lloyd George to Andrew Jameson, 19 April 1921.

²¹² UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1437, Diarmuid Ó hÉigeartaigh to Andrew Jameson, 2 May 1921.

Despite these rebuffs, republican priorities were being made increasingly clear. They wanted negotiations without any preconditions and an acknowledgement of the Dáil's right to assemble in its entirety. This is a significant point, as allowing the British government to ban certain republicans from the deliberations would concede to them the right of continuing to pursue those individuals as criminals, even after IRA actions ceased. This one-sided ceasefire would show that the Irish republicans were not of equal status with the British negotiators. Ó hÉigeartaigh's reply—which undoubtedly expressed de Valera's opinions—shows the high priority republicans placed on the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. On May 29, de Valera told O'Flanagan that he would not meet with any emissaries except an official, accredited envoy from the British Prime Minister, bearing a written statement of terms.²¹³

Solicitor-General James O'Connor was convinced that, if de Valera reached a settlement with the Ulster unionist leaders, the government would be forced to implement it.²¹⁴ To this end, O'Connor met with Edward Carson several times to gauge the unionist leader's reaction to various settlement ideas. During one interview, Carson suggested that Sinn Féin might have to accept a settlement that fell short of their ideal as “a step nearer to liberty.”²¹⁵

Government officials including Under-Secretary Alfred “Andy” Cope and Greenwood advocated arranging negotiations between Sinn Féin and the Ulster unionists in the belief that this would solve the Irish question.²¹⁶ This attitude incorporated a denial of the Sinn Féin view that Ireland and the United Kingdom were nations at war, and that unionists were a minority within the former nation. It also obviated any British responsibility for division or violence in Ireland by assuming that the Irish question was purely one between Irish people. Craig and de Valera did meet on May 5, 1921. According to Greenwood they merely exchanged views, the unionist leader urging the republican President to accept the Government of Ireland Act.²¹⁷ De Valera suggested the Ulster unionists should work with Sinn Féin to strengthen the Irish Republic. Craig ruled this out, but offered to formulate joint demands and take them to Lloyd George.²¹⁸ Cope, O'Flanagan, and Craig, with the Cabinet's support, tried to arrange further

²¹³ National Archives of Ireland (NAI), DE/2/1, Eamon de Valera to Diarmuid Ó hÉigeartaigh, 29 May 1921.

²¹⁴ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1414, James O'Connor to Eamon de Valera, 2 June 1921.

²¹⁵ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1414, James O'Connor, Memo of Second Interview, 30 January 1921.

²¹⁶ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/4/10, Hamar Greenwood to David Lloyd George, 11 May 1921; H. A. L. Fisher to Mary Murray, 5 June 1921 in *Coalition Diaries and Letters*, III:753.

²¹⁷ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/4/5, Hamar Greenwood to David Lloyd George, 5 May 1921.

²¹⁸ Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, 171, entry for 5 May 1921.

meetings but de Valera held aloof.²¹⁹ On June 4 the republican President wrote to O'Connor, "If the sky fell we should catch larks, and such is the hope of securing the end of the struggle with England through a prior agreement with the Unionist minority."²²⁰

Meanwhile, the British government was coming to grips with the fact that their coercion policy was not achieving the desired results, certainly not within the anticipated timeframe. The Cabinet relied to a great extent on the Chief Secretary and the generals for information on the state of Ireland. In September 1920, Greenwood confidently assured Lloyd George, "the tide has definitely turned against the Sinn Feiners."²²¹ Four months later he said the same thing in almost identical terms.²²² Privately, Greenwood admitted that the situation was deteriorating. In April 1921 Lloyd George's aide Thomas Jones wrote that the Chief Secretary "now talks of pacification in years rather than months."²²³ However, Greenwood's official prognostications continued to be fatuously bullish. In May he assured the Prime Minister that the "Sinn Fein Army" were "losing heavily, and certain to be defeated."²²⁴ Dublin Castle's own statistics show that IRA actions increased steadily throughout the conflict.²²⁵ Greenwood's attitude was symptomatic of a mindset within the government that delayed any cessation of violence; they expected victory at any moment, and therefore did not want to stop the conflict.

In December 1920, Tudor told the Cabinet that the rebellion would be crushed in four months. April 1921 arrived with no sign of pacification. On April 27 the Cabinet again considered postponing the elections mandated by the Government of Ireland Act, or granting a truce during the polling period. Greenwood told them frankly that he could not guarantee that conditions would improve in the next six months. Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu supported a ceasefire, saying they had demonstrated that "the Irish are never going to achieve a Republic." Churchill was against altering their course. If the republicans dominated the southern legislature "We can break up this Irish Parliament and revert to coercion." Sinn Féin was contesting the elections but had not altered their abstentionist policy. The party was simply using the polls to elect a new Dáil. Lloyd George argued against making concessions, as the

²¹⁹ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1414, Michael O'Flanagan to Eamon de Valera, 14 May 1921; UKNA, CAB/23/25/26, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 25 May 1921.

²²⁰ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1414, Eamon de Valera to James O'Connor, 4 June 1921.

²²¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/2/21, Hamar Greenwood to David Lloyd George, 29 September 1920.

²²² UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/3/2, Hamar Greenwood to David Lloyd George, 26 January 1921.

²²³ Thomas Jones to Andrew Bonar Law, 24 April 1921 in *Whitehall Diary*, III:55.

²²⁴ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/19/4/10, Hamar Greenwood to David Lloyd George, 11 May 1921.

²²⁵ C. J. C. Street [pseud. I.O.], *Ireland in 1921* (London: Philip Allan, 1921), 7.

republicans would use them to leverage further demands.²²⁶ On May 12, Montagu and Fisher suggested that a truce might enable the Sinn Féin candidates to abandon the republican position. Fisher said, “I doubt if there is any real substance in the Republican agitation now.” Balfour described a ceasefire as a sign of weakness. The often-belligerent Churchill now asserted that a truce was necessary, and might get British public opinion back on their side. Lloyd George again argued against a ceasefire, or further concessions, “We’ve been generous in the Home Rule Act. Anything beyond that would contain germs of trouble.” The truce proposal failed on a 9-5 vote.²²⁷

While Lloyd George’s uncompromising stance remained supreme in the Cabinet, pressure to make a definite peace offer mounted. On May 24, Secretary for War Laming Worthington-Evans described the military situation in Ireland as “virtual stalemate,” and predicted that any change would be to the rebels’ advantage.²²⁸ That day the polls for the Northern and Southern Ireland parliaments opened. The twenty-six counties returned 124 Sinn Féin representatives and four Unionists—the latter for Trinity College—all without opposition. The southern parliament was to open on June 28. On June 2 the Cabinet agreed to institute martial law throughout the twenty-six counties if the legislature did not function.²²⁹

The Northern Ireland Parliament opened on June 22, 1921. Some Cabinet members expressed benign satisfaction. Churchill wrote, “it is something gained to have Ulster Parliament [sic] firmly established in Belfast with an overwhelming loyalist majority.”²³⁰ King George V opened the legislature with an appeal “to all Irishmen to pause, to stretch out the hand of forbearance and conciliation, to forgive and to forget.” He even held out the prospect of a future political reunion.²³¹ This conciliatory tone gave Lloyd George the cover he needed for a change of policy toward Sinn Féin.

Meanwhile, Cope had sent de Valera a list of specific negotiating points around June 14. These were likely the same terms that the Sinn Féin leader communicated to Art Ó Briain. They included fiscal autonomy, free trade between Ireland and Britain, a reduced contribution to the

²²⁶ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:55-60, entry for 27 April 1921.

²²⁷ For the quotes and vote totals see Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:63-70, entry for 12 May 1921. Fisher confirms that Lloyd George was against a truce at this point. *Coalition Diaries and Letters*, III:745, entry for 12 May 1921.

²²⁸ UKNA, CAB/24/123/71, L. Worthington-Evans, “Ireland and the General Military Situation,” 24 May 1921.

²²⁹ UKNA, CAB/23/26/2, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 2 June 1921.

²³⁰ Winston Churchill to Francis Newdegate, 15 June 1921 in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill Volume IV Companion Part 3* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1507-1508.

²³¹ The speech was published in full in *The Times* (London), 23 June 1921. Also Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:78-79.

UK debt, and Northern Ireland to retain its present powers, i.e. no guarantee of north-south reciprocity. De Valera's reaction was, "they are on the wrong track" and "the right way is to propose a treaty with Ireland regarded as a separate state."²³² He told Cope that he would reply to a direct, written offer of negotiations.²³³ On June 15 another Castle contact informed Collins that the authorities were preparing to institute a "most rigorous" form of martial law if the southern parliament failed.²³⁴ On the night of June 22 de Valera was arrested but released the next morning. The authorities seized his papers, including the letter to Ó Briain that likely contained Cope's peace terms.²³⁵

At a Cabinet meeting on June 24, Lloyd George announced his intention to capitalize on the conciliatory tone of the King's speech by inviting de Valera and Craig to London to discuss a settlement. Justifying his abrupt about-face, he said that there was "some evidence that Mr de Valera was inclined to discuss a settlement on lines short of insistence on an Irish Republic."²³⁶ This likely refers to the terms in de Valera's letter to Ó Briain, though the Sinn Féin leader had not committed to negotiating on those points. Cope also met with members of the government, and he had de Valera's assurance that a direct communication would draw a response.²³⁷ Cope gave the republican President the invitation surreptitiously, and it was published in the press on June 27. De Valera hesitated. He tried to compel Lloyd George to recognize Ireland's "essential unity" and right to self-determination, but eventually agreed to a conference without preconditions. The republican leaders arranged a ceasefire with Macready and Tudor. From noon on July 11 IRA actions and government countermeasures largely ceased.

Conclusions

Between 1919 and 1921, Sinn Féin, the British Cabinet, and numerous civilian groups all took steps to implement their vision of Ireland's future government. The terms of the Government of Ireland Act were arrived at circuitously and even reluctantly. There is ample

²³² UKNA, CO/904/23, Eamon de Valera to Art Ó Briain, 14 June 1921.

²³³ NAI, DE/2/244, Eamon de Valera to Michael Collins, 14 June 1921. For confirmation that the intermediary on this occasion was Cope see BMH WS No. 907, Laurence Nugent, 223-224.

²³⁴ NAI, DE/2/244, Michael Collins to Eamon de Valera, 16 June 1921. Collins was in contact with several people working in Dublin Castle. It is unclear who his informant was on this occasion. See BMH WS No. 615, Frank Thornton, 5-6, 44; BMH WS No. 281, Bernard Golden.

²³⁵ Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, 190, entry for 23 June 1921; Frank Pakenham [pseud. Earl of Longford] and Thomas P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 124-128.

²³⁶ UKNA, CAB/23/26/8, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 24 June 1921.

²³⁷ Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, 192, entry for 25 June 1921.

evidence that it was designed merely to remove the 1914 Home Rule Act, not to operate as a governing instrument. Nonetheless, Cabinet members clung to the measure tenaciously, if only as a symbol of their own determination. The fact that the British government stubbornly pushed legislation that few Irish people saw as positive might be considered remarkable. However, British legislators had shown little regard for Irish nationalist opinion since the beginning of the home rule crisis in December 1909. By 1919 the Cabinet was only concerned with delivering the form of partition most palatable to the Ulster unionist leaders. This meant a geographical region they could control, namely the six counties Carson had identified in 1913.

Lloyd George often declared that he would negotiate with Sinn Féin on any terms other than an Irish Republic. However, his refusal to consider the demands of the Irish Dominion League and other advocates of a more generous settlement than that embodied in the Government of Ireland Act exposed the fact that the Prime Minister did not want to make any concessions, particularly not before he restored “law and order.” Nonetheless, the dominionists generated considerable anti-government criticism, particularly on the issue of reprisals. This divorced a significant body of opinion among all parties from support for the government’s Irish policy.

The Cabinet knew from June 1920 that they would eventually have to negotiate with Sinn Féin. Their mistaken but persistent belief that military victory was imminent scuttled the Clune peace initiative. Several other efforts—including the Davies, O’Flanagan, Derby, and Craig overtures—were merely attempts by government members to extract a commitment from an authoritative figure within Sinn Féin that they would negotiate on less than the republic. Each of these was initiated or encouraged by Lloyd George, or by people close to him. Only the Moylett affair of October 1920 originated with a high-ranking member of Sinn Féin, Arthur Griffith.

The opening of Northern Ireland’s parliament in June 1921 is sometimes interpreted as the government’s prerequisite to negotiations with the Irish republicans. The many Cabinet efforts toward a truce prior to this, and their vacillation as to when to implement the Government of Ireland Act, suggest that this was not the case. By July 1921 the IRA and Sinn Féin had been unable to compel a recognition of Irish independence. However, they did force negotiations without an arms surrender or preconditions, which Lloyd George’s government was loath to grant.

Individuals on both sides thought that the ceasefire would work to their advantage. Dublin Castle Under-Secretary James MacMahon said of Sinn Féin's representatives, "If once they get to London...they have *ispo facto* given up 'the Republic.'"²³⁸ Conversely, Dáil member Liam de Roiste called the truce, "a recognition of our national status as coequal with England."²³⁹ Republicans also rejected the idea that the opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament settled that question. Art Ó Briain thought that the operation of the northern government would show the British people that "political Ulster had no relation whatever to geographical Ulster," and "what they have always known as Ulster is nothing more than a handful of people in one corner of the country, whose material interests depend on the maintenance of their foreign ascendancy, and who are bent on securing their material interests at all costs."²⁴⁰

Irish republicans expected the upcoming conference to deliver a settlement that recognized their equal national status with Britain, and altered the status of the six counties. As a coalition government, the British Cabinet had to deliver a settlement that legislators of both major parties could support. Already damaged by the reprisal policy, the truce diminished their prestige among hardliners who wanted to crush the rebellion. Therefore, the republicans entered the negotiations with high expectations, and the government with diminishing political capital.

²³⁸ Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, 199, entry for 5 July 1921.

²³⁹ Liam de Roiste, "Debate on Treaty," Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. T, No. 9, 22 December 1921.

²⁴⁰ NLI, Art Ó Briain Papers, Ms. 8430/18, Art Ó Briain to Michael Collins, 1 July 1921.

CHAPTER 6

“TERRIBLE FINALITY:”

THE TREATY, THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

Introduction

Between July and December 1921, representatives of Sinn Féin engaged in negotiations for an Irish settlement with members of the British Cabinet. The resulting Anglo-Irish Treaty embodied dominion status with reservations. The roots of these terms lay in proposals that British Prime Minister David Lloyd George presented to Sinn Féin President Eamon de Valera on July 20, 1921. The eventual agreement, negotiated between October and December 1921, was essentially the July 20 proposals with a few modifications. Analyzing reactions to the July 20 scheme provides an opportunity for considering how Irish people received a proposition representing dominion status with reservations while it was still an offer, not the *fait accompli* of the signed Treaty.

De Valera’s counter-offer to dominion status became known as “external association.” Historians frequently describe this as a brilliant idea, but an impractical one.¹ This assumption of impracticability rests on the assertion that the British government would never have accepted external association in lieu of their own proposals. R. F. Foster calls the concept, “prophetic and ingenious” but also “completely unacceptable to *all* the British negotiators.”² Jason Knirck asserts that the Sinn Féin delegation proposed external association several times, and their British counterparts rejected it consistently.³

Combining this lack of options on the constitutional question with the idea that the opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament in June 1921 made partition irreversible, much of the

¹ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1798-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 422; Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (New York: Viking, 2005), 282; Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 347, 425; J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 51; Robert Lynch, *Revolutionary Ireland, 1912-1925* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 86; Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-22* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), 319, 327, 340; Frank Pakenham [pseud. Earl of Longford], *Peace by Ordeal: An Account, From First-Hand Sources, of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), 250; John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921-1936* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), 5-6.

² R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), 508.

³ Jason K. Knirck, *Imagining Ireland’s Independence: The Debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 8, 91-92.

existing scholarship implies that Sinn Féin had no practical alternatives to dominion status for the twenty-six counties. I argue that the British government was willing to alter both of these facets of the eventual treaty. The British negotiators seriously considered external association, and in fact never formally rejected the idea during the conference. Lloyd George rejected the scheme, but did so verbally and without attempting to formulate arguments justifying his refusal. De Valera made a mistake in not publishing a plan based on external association prior to the negotiations, and the Sinn Féin delegation compounded this error by not pressing for a formal debate on the idea during the conference. The delegates tacitly accepted the July 20 proposals as the basis for negotiations and gradually accommodated themselves to the British plan.

Lloyd George showed his greatest flexibility on the issue of Northern Ireland. Some observers assert that the vast majority of Sinn Féin were unconcerned about the six counties, with the result that their delegates focused on negotiating a constitutional status they found acceptable for the rest of the island.⁴ On the contrary, much of the conference turned on the issue of partition, and the issue of the governance of the twenty-six counties was intimately connected with the fate of the six. On the issue of partition, the Irish republicans did not demand the simple closure of the northern parliament. De Valera and his Cabinet proposed that there be three Irish parliaments: one for a northern area, one for the rest of the country, and an overarching legislature for the whole island. The Sinn Féin delegation also pushed for plebiscites to determine the northern area. Lloyd George seemed willing to implement this plan, until he met resistance from Craig.

Some historians argue that British Unionists, particularly Andrew Bonar Law, limited Lloyd George's negotiating options by opposing changes regarding Northern Ireland.⁵ This idea of a strong opposition implies that a better deal than the Treaty was politically impossible. The die-hard Unionists—those who often opposed coalition policy, particularly on Ireland—were never a threat to Lloyd George's parliamentary supremacy on their own, but he feared stiffer resistance if Bonar Law joined them. In the end the Prime Minister chose to placate the Unionists in the hope of improving his political position.

⁴ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 106, 114, 124; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 506; Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 339-340.

⁵ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 286-290; Hart, *Mick*, 302.

Treaty supporters within Sinn Féin accepted the agreement not for what it was, but how they expected it would operate. Pro-Treaty Irish republicans assumed they could govern Ireland without reference to London. Many interpreted the twenty-six county state as a sovereign entity.⁶ However, when the Free State's Provisional Government drafted a constitution asserting this, the British Cabinet insisted that it be altered. This shattered the illusion of Free State sovereignty.⁷ The final disappointment with the Treaty's implementation came in 1925. Treaty supporters declared that the boundary commission promised by its terms would transfer large majority-nationalist parts of Northern Ireland to the Free State. The commission's decision to make only small modifications to the border prompted the Free State government to make a deal that maintained the status quo.

Few observers discuss reactions to the Treaty in Northern Ireland. Those that do portray Prime Minister James Craig and his government as immediately and unalterably opposed to the agreement, largely due to the boundary commission clause.⁸ In fact, Craig's response was more nuanced. After initially indicating his willingness to cooperate with the commission, he reverted to his old tactic of threatening unionist resistance to any reduction of their territory or status.

External Association and the July 20 Proposals

De Valera developed the concept that would become known as "external association" in the summer of 1921. He outlined the idea to Dáil propagandist Robert Brennan in June. De Valera drew a large circle, representing the British Empire. He then drew smaller circles within the large one, symbolizing the dominions. Finally, he drew another circle representing Ireland, which was outside of the Empire circle but touching it.⁹ In its full form, external association involved setting up an Irish state that was outside the Empire but associated with it in matters of "common concern." Those matters would be delineated by treaty. Griffith described it as more

⁶ National Archives of Ireland (NAI), TSCH/3/S553, J. L. Fawsitt, "Notes on the Constitutional Aspect of the Treaty."

⁷ Bill Kissane, *New Beginnings: Constitutionalism and Democracy in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011), 36-38.

⁸ Patrick Buckland, *James Craig: Lord Craigavon* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 69-70; St. John Ervine, *Craigavon: Ulsterman* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949), 438-439; Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland, 1911-1925* (Dundalk: Dundalgan, 1983), 89-92.

⁹ Bureau of Military History (BMH) Witness Statement (WS) No. 779 (Section 3), Robert Brennan, 660-662; Robert Brennan, *Allegiance* (Brown and Nolan, 1950), 311-312.

than an alliance but less than full membership.¹⁰ Brennan later wrote that there were two schools of thought within Sinn Féin: one wanted to hold out for the independent republic at all costs, while the other believed the British would never concede this. He called external association a “painstaking, sincere and well thought out plan” to reconcile the two.¹¹

Therefore, De Valera went into his private talks with Lloyd George with a plan for establishing Irish self-government while maintaining a British connection. The two met privately on July 14, 15, 18, and 21.¹² At the second meeting, de Valera discussed his idea for “an independent but ‘associated’ republic.” The Prime Minister called this “an impossible demand.”¹³ Another point on which de Valera and Lloyd George differed was the role of force in their negotiations. For Irish republicans, a free choice to enter or leave the Empire was a key symbol of their right to independence.¹⁴ After the July 15 meeting, the Prime Minister complained to the King that de Valera “harps constantly on the Irish feeling that Ireland cannot be expected to come into the Empire ‘by force.’” He added, “I have explained again and again that we are inviting her to a status which many other free nations enjoy under Your Majesty’s Throne.”¹⁵ Coupling his offers with threats of force should they be rejected was a standard negotiating tactic for Lloyd George. In 1916 he had assured John Dillon that government by coercion was the only alternative to his proposals, and had reiterated this to Redmond during the Irish Convention.

On July 20, Lloyd George sent de Valera detailed proposals for a settlement. They offered dominion status with reservations. The proposals forbade an Irish navy and demanded facilities in Ireland for the British Navy and Royal Air Force. The scheme offered fiscal autonomy on the understanding that the British and Irish governments would enact a free trade agreement. Ireland could have a limited army in the form of a territorial force. The twenty-six-county government must recognize Northern Ireland and all its “powers and privileges.” The

¹⁰ Irish Military Archive (IMA), Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Irish Peace Conference: Seventh Session, 24 October 1921.

¹¹ BMH WS No. 779 (Section 3), Robert Brennan, 662.

¹² Thomas Pakenham [pseud. Earl of Longford] and Thomas P. O’Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 132-140; Frances Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 227-231.

¹³ United Kingdom Parliamentary Archive (UKPA), Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/29/4/58, David Lloyd George to King George V, 15 July 1921.

¹⁴ Gavin Foster, “Res Publica na hÉireann?: Republican Liberty and the Irish Civil War,” *New Hibernia Review* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 26-27.

¹⁵ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/29/4/58, David Lloyd George to King George V, 15 July 1921.

British government would “undertake to give effect” to any agreement reached between the two governments of the island.¹⁶ Northern Ireland was to have a territorial force as well, indicating that the Cabinet intended to follow the principle of equal, reciprocal powers for the two governments.¹⁷

At his July 21 meeting with Lloyd George, de Valera rejected the terms out of hand. The Prime Minister indicated that “Ulster,” as he called Northern Ireland, was the major objection. He said that de Valera would accept “Dominion status sans phrase,” meaning without the restrictions outlined in the proposals, and would negotiate a treaty for mutual defense, but this dominion must embrace the entire island. If the British government refused to negotiate on Northern Ireland, he wanted “complete independence for Southern Ireland.” Lloyd George rejected these ideas, and said that the only thing left for them to discuss was the date on which the truce would terminate. De Valera offered to consult his Cabinet, adding that he would deliver counter-proposals. The Prime Minister told the King that there was little chance of these being satisfactory.¹⁸ Lloyd George was “very depressed” after the meeting, and told Frances Stevenson that if Sinn Féin rejected the offer the only option was “to re-conquer Ireland.”¹⁹

The Dáil Cabinet considered the proposals on July 24. According to de Valera’s notes, Eoin MacNeill and IRA Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy emphasized the importance of “sovereignty” and “freedom” in Ireland’s future relations with the Empire. MacNeill added that they might publicly accept dominion status, while continuing to function as a republic “in the background.” Arthur Griffith said that they should indicate a willingness to cooperate with the British now, and later the people might be in a better condition to resist. Defence Minister Cathal Brugha asserted that they were not empowered to abandon the Republic. Collins called a “Free Dominion” a “step” toward their ultimate goal, alluding to an argument he would develop later in the negotiations.²⁰

Home Affairs Minister Austin Stack later said that he and Brugha declared that they would accept nothing short of independence, and a number of Cabinet members supported them

¹⁶ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/14/6/13, David Lloyd George, “Proposals of the British Government for an Irish Settlement,” 20 July 1921.

¹⁷ United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), CAB/23/26/15, United Kingdom (UK) Cabinet Conclusions, 20 July 1921.

¹⁸ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/29/4/60, David Lloyd George to King George V, 21 July 1921.

¹⁹ Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, 231, entry for 22 July 1921.

²⁰ University College Dublin Archives (UCDA), Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1473, Dáil Cabinet Meeting Notes, 24 July 1921.

at the meeting. He described Mulcahy and Collins as viewing the proposals favorably. Griffith objected to the Ulster clauses but was otherwise in favor.²¹ The Cabinet decided to leave the reply to de Valera, stipulating only, “The basis of reply was ‘external association,’” indicating that the republican government accepted this formula.²² De Valera informed Lloyd George of his Cabinet’s decision in an August 10 letter. A Dáil meeting five days later confirmed this decision unanimously.

To the republicans’ surprise, the proposals, de Valera’s response, and an August 4 letter from South African Premier Jan Smuts to the Sinn Féin leader touting the proposed settlement were published on August 15. Though Lloyd George and de Valera had agreed not to publish anything unilaterally, the British government was likely the source of the leak. The Prime Minister and his colleagues believed that, if the terms were widely known, the Irish public would demand that the Dáil accept.²³ The British Cabinet thought publication would “rally Irish moderate opinion to our side.”²⁴

An *Irish Times* correspondent wrote that ninety-nine percent of Englishmen would consider the July 20 proposals “generous to the point of extravagance.”²⁵ The Irish nationalist press did not rush to accept this generosity. The *Freeman’s Journal* urged the public to display a united front, indicating that they should accept the Dáil’s answer to the proposals.²⁶ Above all, the paper hoped that Lloyd George would endorse Smuts’s interpretation of the July 20 scheme as involving full dominion status.²⁷ He never did so. The *Irish Independent* was also cautious toward the proposals, but praised de Valera’s rejection.²⁸ By August 27 the *Irish Independent*’s editors concluded that the July 20 proposals did not embody real dominion status, and added that partition “would be a blot on the best settlement.”²⁹ The *Ulster Herald*, a nationalist paper in

²¹ BMH WS No. 418, Una Stack, 37-38. This statement includes Austin Stack’s memoir of the peace negotiations, submitted by his wife.

²² NAI, DE/1/3, Dáil Cabinet Minutes, 27 July 1921.

²³ UKPA, LG/F/29/4/61, Lord Stamfordham to David Lloyd George, 21 July 1921; UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1474, Robert Barton, Report of Meeting with Lloyd George, 13 August 1921; Jan Smuts to King George V, 4 August 1921 in Jean Van Der Poel, ed., *The Jan Smuts Papers*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 100.

²⁴ Thomas Jones to David Lloyd George, 11 August 1921 in Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, 3 vols., ed. Keith Middlemas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), III:96.

²⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 15 August 1921.

²⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 22 August 1921.

²⁷ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 18 August and 19 August 1921.

²⁸ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 15 August, 18 August, and 22 August 1921.

²⁹ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 27 August 1921.

Northern Ireland, vehemently condemned the plan as not offering real dominion status or safeguards for six-county Catholics.³⁰ The paper declared, “The Lloyd George scheme contemplates not freedom, but perpetual vassalage for Ireland.”³¹

The Irish Dominion League had consistently advocated granting Ireland dominion status, but qualifying it to meet British security fears. This was what the July 20 proposals, combined with Smuts’s letter, purported to do. The organization represented many of the moderates the government hoped to rally. One might assume that they would welcome the scheme. However, League spokesmen sided with the Dáil in rejecting it. Henry Harrison urged Sinn Féin to uphold its demand for independence, and claimed that in the proposals, “Ireland has been invited to make the maximum of concessions.”³² Horace Plunkett warned that any settlement involving partition would not bring peace.³³

The rejection of the July 20 proposals was significant, as it might have ended the truce between the IRA and Crown forces. Lloyd George had assured de Valera that this would be the consequence if his scheme was rejected. Public discourse concerning the proposed settlement shows that, while Irish nationalists did not leap to its support, most did not want to return to pre-truce conditions. This was equally true of the British government. Thomas Jones described “a feeling of mild panic” at an August 11 Cabinet meeting to consider de Valera’s refusal, adding that the atmosphere was “as though Michael Collins was about to break the truce in ten minutes.”³⁴ On August 15 the administration formally concluded, “it was not desirable that the British Government should denounce the truce in Ireland.”³⁵ Three days later, the Cabinet intimated that they would not abandon the ceasefire unless the republicans did so first.³⁶ Sinn Féin’s rejection of the July 20 proposals caused a stalemate but not a breakdown in the negotiations, and not the public outcry for settlement that the government had hoped.

De Valera made a major mistake in not sending counter-proposals to Lloyd George, as he had said he would. He likely feared that any proposal based on external association would be seen as a retreat from the republican position. However, Lloyd George had interpreted the idea

³⁰ *Ulster Herald* (Omagh), 27 August 1921.

³¹ *Ulster Herald* (Omagh), 20 August 1921.

³² *New York Times*, 16 August 1921.

³³ *Globe* (Toronto), 20 August 1921.

³⁴ Thomas Jones to David Lloyd George, 11 August 1921 in *Whitehall Diary*, III:96.

³⁵ UKNA, CAB/23/26/22, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 15 August 1921.

³⁶ UKNA, CAB/23/26/25, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 18 August 1921.

as a means of maintaining the republic, or at least a form of independence. It is likely, particularly given the Dáil's effective propaganda instruments, that they could have garnered widespread public support for external association in Ireland. This would have given the Irish republicans a strong bargaining chip in future negotiations, and would have undermined the idea that they were unreasonable or unwilling to compromise.

Instead, de Valera and Lloyd George engaged in a long correspondence in which the former tried to compel a recognition of the Republic while the latter attempted to force a public renunciation of this claim. The two eventually agreed to a conference without preconditions. The republican Cabinet selected its negotiators on September 10.³⁷ De Valera proposed Griffith and Collins. Stack objected that they had both favored the July 20 proposals. De Valera and Minister for Defence Cathal Brugha defended Collins's nomination, arguing that Stack must have misunderstood his stance on the proposals.³⁸ The other selections were Minister for Economic Affairs Robert Barton, as well as lawyers George Gavan Duffy and Eamonn Duggan. Erskine Childers, widely considered "the godfather of the Dominion policy," was the delegation's secretary.³⁹ Like many contemporaries, his opinions had radicalized since the home rule crisis. Childers became an ardent republican, and his tirades against the British government led his dominionist friends to dub him, "The encyclopaedia anti-Britannica."⁴⁰

From intelligence reports and conversations with de Valera, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet knew they could extract constitutional concessions from Sinn Féin by promising Irish unity. De Valera told one of Smuts's emissaries in July, "For unity I could persuade my Dail to accept much that is otherwise unacceptable." He suggested a form of "home rule within home rule" involving three parliaments: one for each part of Ireland and an over-arching legislature for the whole island. De Valera also offered extra seats to the unionist minority.⁴¹

The Sinn Féin delegation planned to base their proposals on external association, but like de Valera were prepared to make concessions in the direction of dominion status if they could obtain a guarantee of Irish unity. However, placing Ireland firmly within the Empire and taking an oath of allegiance to the British monarch—a common feature of dominion constitutions—was

³⁷ NAI, DE/1/3/118, Dáil Cabinet Minutes, 10 September 1921.

³⁸ BMH WS No. 418, Una Stack, 42.

³⁹ NLI, G. F. Berkeley Papers, Ms. 10,925, Horace Plunkett, *The Irish Peace Conference and After* (Dublin: Irish Dominion League, 1920).

⁴⁰ NLI, Horace Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/39, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 30 June 1919.

⁴¹ UKNA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/181/2/5, E. F. Cave, "Visit to Ireland," 1 August 1921.

anathema to many republicans.⁴² One of the biggest obstacles to a settlement was British insistence that Westminster, and the dominion legislatures, derived their authority from the Crown. Sinn Féin insisted that legitimate power in Ireland should stem from the Irish people.

Treaty Negotiations I: Establishing Positions

The republicans' failure to offer counter-proposals to the July 20 scheme impacted the conference from its first meeting on October 11.⁴³ Though the republicans had rejected the government's terms, Sinn Féin had not made any alternative suggestions, therefore the July 20 proposals held the field by default.⁴⁴

The first sharp exchanges of the conference came over Northern Ireland. On October 14, Griffith criticized the British government for institutionalizing partition by establishing Northern Ireland. Collins protested the injustice of two majority Catholic and nationalist counties being forced into the northern state. Lloyd George responded that his administration supported the northern government "to prevent civil war."⁴⁵ He hinted that it might be possible to adjust the area of Northern Ireland through a boundary commission. Collins indicated this could rectify the situation.⁴⁶ At the next meeting on October 17, Griffith launched into a detailed statistical breakdown of the population of the nine counties and the six. He proposed that plebiscites be held throughout the six counties to determine which parliamentary area the people wished to inhabit, using poor law union areas or parliamentary constituencies as their basis.⁴⁷

Gavan Duffy ended the October 17 meeting by pressing Lloyd George to admit that the six-county area could not be maintained, and that if Northern Ireland refused to consider unity, its powers would not be expanded without the rest of the island's consent. The Prime Minister concluded the proceedings without promising anything.⁴⁸ The Irish negotiators had scored on the northern question. During the meeting, Lord Birkenhead admitted that the six county area was unreasonable. Lloyd George passed a note to Thomas Jones that read, "This is going to wreck

⁴² NAI, DE/2/304/1/5, Eamon de Valera to Arthur Griffith, 25 October 1921, Treaty Exhibition.

⁴³ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD/45/11/5, Irish Peace Conference Minutes: First Meeting, 11 October 1921.

⁴⁴ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/181/4/1, Lionel Curtis to David Lloyd George, 8 November 1921.

⁴⁵ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD/45/11/5, Irish Peace Conference Minutes: Fourth Session, 14 October 1921.

⁴⁶ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:127-132, entry for 14 October 1921.

⁴⁷ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Irish Peace Conference Minutes: Fifth Session, 17 October 1921; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:132-137, entry for 17 October 1921.

⁴⁸ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Irish Peace Conference Minutes: Fifth Session, 17 October 1921.

settlement,” indicating that he had no intention of forcing the type of agreement the Sinn Féin delegates wanted, and he did not expect them to compromise.⁴⁹

On October 18, the British delegation privately discussed the constitutional arrangements the Sinn Féin delegates were likely to propose. The Irish republicans still had not promulgated detailed proposals on the constitutional question, but the British ministers were familiar with the basic outline of external association. Churchill summarized the Sinn Féin delegation’s position as, “their independence should be admitted in the morning and that they should vote themselves into the Empire in the afternoon.”⁵⁰ Though flippantly expressed, this ably encapsulates their opponents’ aims. De Valera and his colleagues wanted an acknowledgement of Irish independence and a free choice on their future relations with the British Empire.

The British ministers discussed “very tentative,” “conceivable methods” by which they might meet the Sinn Féin demand. They might sign two simultaneous treaties, one “admitting the position taken up by the Irish representatives,” the other “defining their entry into the British Empire.”⁵¹ This was precisely the type of settlement the Sinn Féin delegates hoped would emerge from the talks.⁵² The British delegation decided against this as the Dáil might ratify the first treaty but reject the second. They considered acceding to the Irish delegates’ demand in a preamble to a treaty outlining their future relations with the Empire. However, the Dáil might acknowledge the British admission of their independence but repudiate the agreement itself. The British delegates did not reach a definite conclusion, but the “general view of the Conference was that Ireland must approach the question from inside the Constitution.” This vague phrase does little to elucidate British reactions to Sinn Féin’s anticipated constitutional demands, but they evidently wanted to avoid constitutional experimentation via a new form of association.⁵³

The Sinn Féin delegates continued to develop external association. John Chartres, a delegation secretary, recognized the monarchy’s importance to the British ministers. On October 14 he suggested that, if the British government acknowledged Irish independence and the new state negotiated its association with the Empire, they might recognize the King as head of the

⁴⁹ David Lloyd George to Thomas Jones, 17 October 1921 in *Whitehall Diary*, III:137.

⁵⁰ UKNA, CAB/43/1/17, Meeting of the British Representatives to a Conference with Sinn Fein, 18 October 1921; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:138, entry for 18 October 1921.

⁵¹ UKNA, CAB/43/1/17, Meeting of the British Representatives to a Conference with Sinn Fein, 18 October 1921.

⁵² UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1498, Eamon de Valera to Arthur Griffith, 14 October 1921.

⁵³ UKNA, CAB/43/1/17, Meeting of the British Representatives to a Conference with Sinn Fein, 18 October 1921.

association of states, but not as King of Ireland.⁵⁴ De Valera accepted the idea. Historians sometimes characterize individuals close to the Sinn Féin President as “intransigent” or “irreconcilable” republicans who would not have countenanced external association.⁵⁵ However, de Valera convinced many of these Dáil members to accept his formula, including Cathal Brugha, Childers, Mary MacSwiney, and Austin Stack.⁵⁶

The Sinn Féin delegation sent the first statement of their claims to the British on October 24. The republicans called on the British government to recognize Ireland’s independence, territorial integrity, and right to international recognition. After this, they proposed to make a series of treaties outlining trade relations and defense. The Sinn Féin delegates outlined possible matters of “common interest,” including “reciprocity of civil rights,” income tax, postal services, immigration, and shipping. They blamed the British for partition and declared, “a free choice must be given to electorates within the area.” They also criticized the July 20 scheme, “The claim of Ireland is not Dominion Status but, if it were, your proposals would not confer that status.”⁵⁷ Griffith expanded on their ideas during an October 24 conference meeting. He outlined a form of dual citizenship between Britain and Ireland, and asserted that they would not automatically go to war if their neighbor or one of the dominions did so, but would allow the British Navy to use Irish ports during a period of common hostilities.⁵⁸

Lloyd George was delighted with the memo. During a meeting of the British delegates he pointed out that the Sinn Féiners had conceded common citizenship, access to naval bases, and coming into “the mechanism of the Empire.” They had not accepted allegiance to the monarchy. Chamberlain called the proposals “a republic within the Empire.” Lloyd George and Chamberlain asked Griffith and Collins to meet them alone. The British ministers asked what it

⁵⁴ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1555, John Chartres to Arthur Griffith, 14 October 1921.

⁵⁵ R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 278; Hart, *Mick*, 282-283; Lee, *Ireland*, 51; Townshend, *The Republic*, 335-336

⁵⁶ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1560, Eamon de Valera to Joseph McGarrity, 27 December 1921; UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1556, “Memo given to the President by Cathal Brugha between October 20th and 25th, 1921;” Cathal Brugha, “Debate on Treaty,” Dáil Éireann (DÉ) Debates, Vol. T, No. 15, 7 January 1922; Erskine Childers, “Prelude,” DÉ Debate, Vol. T, No. 3, 15 December 1921; Mary MacSwiney, “Peace Negotiations—Ratification of Plenipotentiaries,” DÉ Debates, Vol. S, No. 10, 14 September 1921; Mary MacSwiney, “Prelude,” DÉ Debates, Vol. T, No. 5, 17 December 1921; BMH WS No. 418, Una Stack, 53; Longford and O’Neill, *Eamon de Valera*, 155.

⁵⁷ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, “Memorandum of the Proposals of the Irish Delegates to the British Representatives,” 24 October 1921.

⁵⁸ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Irish Peace Conference: Seventh Session, 24 October 1921; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:141-144, entry for 24 October 1921.

would take to get them to accept an oath of loyalty to the Crown. Griffith and Collins replied that their primary condition was Irish unity. They implied that Northern Ireland could retain a subordinate legislature, but not one with equal powers to the Irish parliament.⁵⁹

This private meeting marked a turning-point in the format of the talks. From October 24, the British delegation made a concerted effort to limit contact with their Irish counterparts to Griffith and Collins. Robert Barton said later that he and his colleagues were unperturbed by the change in procedure. Griffith had “fought magnificent actions” during the full conference sittings, and neither the delegation nor the Dáil Cabinet had reason to doubt him.⁶⁰ However, Childers was immediately disturbed by Griffith’s and Collins’s private meetings with the British negotiators.⁶¹ The effect of these smaller conferences was to sideline those Sinn Féin delegates who had not viewed the July 20 proposals as an acceptable basis for a settlement.

Instead of replying directly to the Sinn Féin delegation’s October 24 outline of external association, the British ministers sent a memorandum by Lionel Curtis demanding their concrete positions on the Crown, common citizenship, defense, trade, and finance. It included, “The Crown is the symbol of all that keeps the nations of the Empire together.”⁶² Childers seized on this to argue against swearing allegiance to the Crown. He wrote, “Allegiance implies submission to authority. A symbol has no authority.”⁶³ In the context of the conference, the statement seemed to prove Chartres’s theory that adhering to the Crown as a symbol would be acceptable to the British negotiators. Birkenhead, the Lord Chancellor and a former Attorney-General, emphasized the Crown as a symbol during a November 24 meeting.⁶⁴

On October 27, the British delegates gave Griffith and Collins an overt assurance that they could barter allegiance to the Crown for a united Ireland. Describing that day’s meeting, Griffith told de Valera, “The gist of it was that if we would accept the Crown they would send for Craig, i.e.—force ‘Ulster’ in, as I understood.” He concluded, “above all Ireland unified.”⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:144-145, entry for 24 October 1921.

⁶⁰ BMH WS No. 979, Robert Barton, 37-38.

⁶¹ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1489, Erskine Childers, *Diary of the Peace Negotiations*, 25 October 1921.

⁶² IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, “Memorandum by His Majesty’s Government,” 27 October 1921; UKNA, CAB/43/4/332-336.

⁶³ Documents on Irish Foreign Policy (DIFP), No. 183, Erskine Childers, “Notes on the British Memo,” 27 October 1921.

⁶⁴ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Meeting of Sub-Conference at the House of Lords, 24 November 1921.

⁶⁵ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 27 October 1921.

On October 29, the Sinn Féin delegates sent a memo that adhered to external association but stated explicitly that, if the British agreed to recognize a free and united Ireland, they would “recognise the Crown as symbol and accepted head of the combination of signatory States.”⁶⁶ The memo pleased the British delegates. Minister for War Laming Worthington-Evans said, “They are coming along. They will presently say—O King.”⁶⁷

Treaty Negotiations II: Northern Ireland and the British Unionists

The conference was now turning on partition, and there is evidence that Lloyd George was considering significant alterations to his Northern Ireland policy. He told Griffith and Collins on October 30, “he could carry a six-county Parliament subordinate to a national Parliament.” If this failed, Lloyd George would redraw the border or arrange a vote of the nine counties as a whole.⁶⁸ The Prime Minister mentioned similar ideas to his friend George Riddell, specifically an “over-riding” or “central” Irish parliament in addition to the “Northern and Southern” legislatures. He was also considering plebiscites of the northern parliamentary area that he predicted would place counties Fermanagh and Tyrone under the southern legislature.⁶⁹ Lloyd George even reached out to the anti-coalition Liberals led by H. H. Asquith, exploring possibilities of an alternative administration should he decide to grant greater concessions to the Irish republicans than his Unionist partners would countenance.⁷⁰ However, he was more circumspect with his colleagues within the conference. Lloyd George told Jones on November 2 that Sinn Féin “must be satisfied at present with the *nominal* unity of the whole of Ireland and that it would take time to make it real.”⁷¹

Lloyd George continued to give a very different impression to Griffith. The time for inviting Northern Ireland Prime Minister James Craig was approaching, and on November 1 the Prime Minister asked the Sinn Féin delegation leader for a letter outlining the constitutional

⁶⁶ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, “Further Memorandum by the Irish Delegates,” 29 October 1921; UKNA, CAB/43/4/337.

⁶⁷ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:152, entry for 31 October 1921.

⁶⁸ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Memo of a Meeting at Mr. Churchill’s House, 30 October 1921.

⁶⁹ George Riddell, *Lord Riddell’s Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934), 330-331, entry for 30 October 1921 and 331-332, entry for 3 November 1921.

⁷⁰ Kevin Matthews, *Fatal Influence: The Impact of Ireland on British Politics, 1920-1925* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004), 44.

⁷¹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:153, entry for 2 November 1921.

concessions he was willing to make. Griffith wrote to de Valera that the Prime Minister wanted the document “to produce against Craig on the question of Irish unity.”⁷²

Griffith drafted the letter against the protests of Barton, Childers, and Gavan Duffy, but with input from them as well as the British ministers. Significantly, after meeting with the British delegates, Griffith removed the phrase, “on no account could I recommend any association with the Crown or the Commonwealth if the unity of Ireland were denied in form or in fact” from a draft of his letter.⁷³ Griffith insisted that Ireland would associate “with” and not “within” the Commonwealth, in accordance with external association. The British ministers’ agreed to this, implying that they were open to this formula. The final version also accorded with external association, but the condition that Ireland must be united “in fact” was significantly watered down.⁷⁴ At the end of their November 2 meeting, Birkenhead told Griffith that with his letter they were ready “to face the Ulster Die-hard position.”⁷⁵ The British delegates had, to an extent, dictated the terms of a document that was supposed to reflect Griffith’s position, but did so in a way that made him feel as though he was working with them to bring the northern unionists into an all-Ireland legislature.

Griffith believed that Lloyd George and his Cabinet were firmly on their side in dealing with the northern unionists. He wrote to de Valera after submitting the letter, “if ‘Ulster’ proves unreasonable they are prepared to resign rather than use force against us. In such an event no English Government is capable of formation on a war-policy against Ireland.”⁷⁶ Lloyd George was employing the same negotiating strategy with Griffith and Collins that he had with Redmond and Dillon in 1916. He convinced the Sinn Féin delegation leaders that he was on their side, that they would have to overcome outside opposition in order to achieve a settlement, and that he would resign if their efforts failed.

Another tactic the British delegates used to win Griffith’s and Collins’s trust was to portray themselves as constantly battling Unionist opposition in the interests of peace.⁷⁷ Some British Unionist MPs were angry that the government had called a truce and opened negotiations

⁷² UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1499, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 1 November 1921.

⁷³ The draft and final version of this letter, as well as Griffith’s minutes of his meetings with the British delegates on November 1 and 2, are in IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5.

⁷⁴ UKNA, CAB/43/4/200-201, Arthur Griffith to David Lloyd George, 2 November 1921.

⁷⁵ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith, “Chairman’s Minutes of Sub-Conference,” 2 November 1921.

⁷⁶ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 3 November 1921.

⁷⁷ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1513, Erskine Childers, “Minute of Conversation,” 28 October 1921.

with the Irish republicans. However, when a group of Unionist die-hards in the Commons forced an October 31 censure vote condemning Lloyd George's Irish policy, they mustered just forty-three votes compared with 439 in favor of the government. It was literally a ten-to-one victory for the Prime Minister.⁷⁸ Therefore, he had every reason to believe that the vast majority of the Unionist Party supported his policy. Despite this success, Griffith and Collins were convinced that Lloyd George was fighting a militant unionist opposition to his negotiation policy.⁷⁹ In meetings on November 8 and 9, the Prime Minister said that if he resigned it was likely that Bonar Law, who had resigned from the government in March, would return to lead a "Militarist Government" against Ireland.⁸⁰ This contradicted the impression that Lloyd George had given Griffith just days earlier that "no English government" could prosecute a war in Ireland, but the Sinn Féin delegation leader reported both statements as though they were incontrovertible. Meanwhile, Birkenhead portrayed the upcoming Unionist conference at Liverpool as a showdown between the die-hards and Lloyd George's supporters.⁸¹

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet feared that Bonar Law would return to lead the discontented Unionists, using the "Ulster" issue as a rallying cry. Northern Ireland's government was anxious as to how the negotiations might affect them. After corresponding with British Unionist organizer George Younger and Lord Lieutenant FitzAlan, Craig assured his Cabinet on October 24, "the Unionists in Great Britain were exerting very great pressure to safeguard the interests of Ulster."⁸² Having heard rumors of the course of the negotiations, on November 4 Craig's Cabinet described their stance in two resolutions: "the giving up of any part of the Six Counties was unthinkable," and "they would under no circumstances submit to the Parliament of Northern Ireland owing allegiance or admitting the ascendancy of any Parliament other than Westminster."⁸³ This was phrased in express opposition to "home rule within home rule."

Craig went to London to meet with Lloyd George on November 5. Frances Stevenson said the British Prime Minister "extorted significant concessions," including an all-Ireland

⁷⁸ *The Times* (London), 1 November 1921.

⁷⁹ UCDA, Richard Mulcahy Papers, P7/A/72, Michael Collins to Gearóid O'Sullivan, 31 October 1921.

⁸⁰ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 8 and 9 November 1921.

⁸¹ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 12 and 16 November 1921.

⁸² Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), CAB/4/25, Northern Ireland (NI) Cabinet Conclusions, 24 October 1921.

⁸³ PRONI, CAB/4/26/19, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 4 November 1921.

parliament.⁸⁴ However, two days later Lloyd George told Jones, “Craig will not budge one inch.”⁸⁵ In the interim, Craig met with Worthington-Evans and Chief of the Imperial General Staff Henry Wilson, who had been a key supporter of the Curragh mutiny. They agreed to allow Craig’s administration to take over responsibility for “law and order” in the six counties, including control over the RIC and the Special Constabulary, which would be armed and paid by the War Office.⁸⁶ John McColgan argues that Lloyd George agreeing to transfer some of the “reserved services” to Craig’s government at their November 5 meeting legally finalized partition, implying that this was now impossible to overturn.⁸⁷ This overlooks the fact that Sinn Féin was not demanding the closure of the six-county parliament, but a form of home rule within home rule. It is more likely, as Ronan Fanning asserts, that Craig’s emboldened stance with Lloyd George after November 5 was a result of his newfound power over law and order.⁸⁸

Faced with an imminent breakdown in the negotiations, Lloyd George altered his terms. He tasked Jones with sounding out the Sinn Féin delegates on a twenty-six-county dominion, Northern Ireland retaining its current powers, and a boundary commission to delimit the two areas.⁸⁹ Lloyd George had favored the idea of a boundary commission since 1917. He had reason to believe that Craig would accept the idea, after all the northern unionist leader had suggested it to the British Cabinet in 1919. Jones proposed it to Griffith and Collins on November 8. They rejected the commission. Griffith called Craig’s obstinacy, “a gigantic piece of bluff.” He insisted on plebiscites to alter the northern area. Collins called the commission idea a rejection of Irish unity.⁹⁰ Though this refusal seemed absolute, Griffith told de Valera that a commission would likely “give us most of Tyrone, Fermanagh, and part of Armagh, Down etc.”⁹¹ Jones met Griffith and Duggan the next day. He maintained that the three-parliament idea would be the government’s first proposal, but the Prime Minister wanted to suggest a commission “as a last card.” The Irish delegates were suddenly receptive. Griffith said they

⁸⁴ Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, 234-235, entry for 6 November 1921. Jones confirms that Craig seemed pliable at this first meeting. *Whitehall Diary*, III:160, entry for 10 November 1921.

⁸⁵ Jones *Whitehall Diary*, III:160, entry for 10 November 1921.

⁸⁶ PRONI, CAB/6/27B, “Precis of Meeting at War Office,” 7 November 1921 and James Craig to Robert Horne, 8 November 1921.

⁸⁷ John McColgan, *British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920-22* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 67-70.

⁸⁸ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 290-291.

⁸⁹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:154, entry for 7 November 1921.

⁹⁰ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:156, entry for 8 November 1921.

⁹¹ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 8 November 1921.

would neither accept nor oppose the idea; it would be Lloyd George's responsibility. He added, "We would prefer a plebiscite, but in essentials a Boundary Commission is very much the same."⁹² Other members of the Sinn Féin delegation agreed with this interpretation. Childers described the options to Northern Ireland as, "6 county area subordinate to Irish Parl." or "a Boundary Commission area plebiscite."⁹³

On November 8, prior to receiving the Sinn Féin delegates' assent to the commission, Lloyd George instructed Lionel Curtis to draft a letter to Craig embodying a detailed plan for an all-Ireland parliament. Northern Ireland could opt out of the island-wide legislature, but the six counties would be subject to a commission to "adjust the line both by inclusion and exclusion so as to make the Boundary conform as closely as possible to the wishes of the population."⁹⁴

At a British delegates' meeting on November 10, Lloyd George overcame the Cabinet Unionists' objections to the idea that Northern Ireland would merely maintain the status quo, not receive powers equal to those of the new twenty-six-county legislature. He also insisted that Northern Ireland pay the same taxes as the rest of the United Kingdom. This ensured higher taxation in the six counties, which the Prime Minister believed would induce the northern unionists to join an all-Ireland parliament.⁹⁵ Chamberlain, the Unionist Party leader, disliked the idea of putting any pressure whatsoever on the northern unionists. However, he expected Northern Ireland's government to cooperate. After all, in a July 29 letter to Lloyd George, Craig had called Sinn Féin pressure for wider powers than those within the Government of Ireland Act "repugnant," and declared that "Ulster" would maintain the status quo.⁹⁶ Chamberlain said of Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, "He is a patriot. He will not forget the Empire."⁹⁷ Lloyd George formally invited Craig to join the conference to discuss an all-Ireland settlement.⁹⁸

Craig's reply was a flat refusal to negotiate on the basis of an all-Ireland parliament. He called the idea, "precisely what Ulster has for many years resisted by all the means at her disposal," adding that "no paper safeguards" could protect northern unionists in a united

⁹² IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 9 November 1921; Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:157, entry for 9 November 1921.

⁹³ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1489, Erskine Childers, Diary, 9 November 1921.

⁹⁴ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/181/4/1, Lionel Curtis to David Lloyd George, 8 November 1921.

⁹⁵ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:159, entry for 10 November 1921; Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, 236, entry for 11 November 1921.

⁹⁶ PRONI, CAB/4/10/5, James Craig to David Lloyd George, 29 July 1921.

⁹⁷ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:162, entry for 10 November 1921.

⁹⁸ UKNA, CAB/43/4/160-164, David Lloyd George to James Craig, 10 November 1921.

legislature. He wrote that the northern unionists accepted the Government of Ireland Act “As a final settlement and supreme sacrifice,” but demanded that Northern Ireland be given dominion status and required to pay nothing but a voluntary contribution to the Imperial Exchequer.⁹⁹ Craig’s attitude perturbed the British Cabinet. Chamberlain wrote to Lloyd George that the northern unionists, whom he referred to as “Ulster,” were undermining all of their past declarations of loyalty. Far from maintaining the Union, which they had always declared to be their goal, “Ulster here says that she would prefer exclusion from the Imperial Parliament to inclusion with equal taxation.” He added, “She is false to the claim that she has always made that her only wish was to share the privileges & the burdens of the U.K.”¹⁰⁰ Northern Ireland’s government wanted to publish the letter, a move that Chamberlain said would seriously damage their support among the British public.¹⁰¹

Craig and his colleagues had been promised the principle of reciprocal powers in the Government of Ireland Act, therefore they firmly believed they were right to demand dominion status if it was being offered to the twenty-six counties. Craig told his Cabinet on November 28, “it would be very easy for him to deliver a smashing attack upon the Government quoting from their own speeches and actions and showing how they had broken their pledges.” But he decided to “do nothing to quarrel with those who might again be friendly to our interests.”¹⁰² This urge to embarrass the British administration explains their eagerness to publish. However, the British Cabinet’s certainty that this would damage the northern unionists’ image suggests they were ignorant of the concerns actuating the majority of the British populace. Lord FitzAlan, a former Unionist Party whip, told the Cabinet on November 10 that Edward Carson’s popular strength had “evaporated” in recent years. He added that there was little interest in Ulster among the British public, and “It would be difficult to fight a General Election on Ireland.”¹⁰³

The Prime Minister’s position in relation to the British unionists continued to improve. On November 12 he told the Cabinet that he had met with Bonar Law. The former Unionist leader was willing to agree to Northern Ireland maintaining its current powers, the boundary commission, and placing fiscal pressure on the northern unionists via the tax scheme. He was

⁹⁹ UKNA, CAB/43/4/172-177, James Craig to David Lloyd George, 11 November 1921.

¹⁰⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/7/4/31, Austen Chamberlain to David Lloyd George, 11 November 1921.

¹⁰¹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:163, entry for 12 November 1921.

¹⁰² PRONI, CAB/4/27/11, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 28 November 1921.

¹⁰³ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:161-162, entry for 10 November 1921.

even willing to contemplate the disappearance of the six-county parliament, as long as the area remained within the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁴ However, Bonar Law told Lloyd George that he would oppose an all-Ireland parliament, and he hoped to convince the Unionist Party to join him in doing so. The Prime Minister had a choice as to whether he would pressure Craig for a settlement, or the republicans. Bonar Law told him, “Don’t confine your bullying to Ulster. Try it on the Sinn Féiners too.”¹⁰⁵ It is ironic that, after all that had transpired since 1919, Lloyd George would be accused of bullying the northern unionists and not Sinn Féin.

The Prime Minister met with Griffith on November 12 and said that his next letter to Craig would outline a plan to create an all-Ireland parliament, but allow Northern Ireland to opt out after one year. In that case, the boundary commission and tax penalties would take effect. If Craig refused this offer, Lloyd George promised either to resign or pass an act establishing an all-Ireland legislature. Griffith agreed not to stand in his way.¹⁰⁶ Later, Lloyd George told Francis Stevenson that the Irish delegates “have behaved splendidly all through this fight.”¹⁰⁷

However, events did not transpire as Lloyd George predicted to Griffith. On November 12, Worthington-Evans recommended a series of compromises. They should give the twenty-six counties “Dominion status subject to safeguards,” and confirm Northern Ireland’s current powers, but retain Imperial control over some taxes. They should ensure the functioning of the Council of Ireland, which Worthington-Evans called, “a green umbrella.” If it pleased the Sinn Féiners, they might create an all-Ireland parliament but allow Northern Ireland to opt out. In that case, a boundary commission might operate in the border counties only. He made clear that territory could be exchanged between both areas. Worthington-Evans argued that the only other way to meet Sinn Féin’s demands was to pass an act creating an all-Ireland parliament despite the Ulster unionists’ protests. In that case, they would create “a new set of rebels” who “if not coerced into submission, would render the Act unworkable.”¹⁰⁸

As Worthington-Evans was a Unionist, Lloyd George might have assumed that these ideas would carry weight with his party. The warning note at the end likely prompted the Prime

¹⁰⁴ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:163, entry for 12 November 1921.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London: Eyre and Spottswood, 1955), 431-433; Matthews, *Fatal Influence*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 12 November 1921.

¹⁰⁷ Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, 237, entry for 14 November 1921.

¹⁰⁸ UKNA, CAB/43/2/134-138, Laming Worthington-Evans, “Alternative to the proposals in the letters of the 10th and 11th November, 1921,” 12 November 1921.

Minister to recall the unrest the Ulster unionists had provoked between 1912 and 1914, in opposition to an all-Ireland home rule bill. On November 14, Lloyd George declared that he did not want to see Craig again until after the Liverpool meeting in three days.¹⁰⁹ The Prime Minister's letter to Craig that day did not deliver the ultimatum he had promised Griffith. He rejected the northern dominion idea, but simply repeated the invitation to confer in London.¹¹⁰

The November 17 Unionist conference at Liverpool resulted in an even more overwhelming victory for the Coalition than the October 31 censure vote. Fewer than 70 of the 1,800 Unionist delegates supported a motion condemning the negotiations with Sinn Féin.¹¹¹ Some Unionists interpreted the censure and conference votes, not as signs of confidence in Lloyd George, but as admissions that negotiation was the only way to deal with the Irish problem.¹¹² This is a powerful assertion that British unionists did not want to return to the pre-truce situation. If negotiation was the only option, ostensibly an all-Unionist government would also be forced to negotiate on the Irish question. This was the impression the Prime Minister had given Griffith on November 2, when the latter wrote that no British government could carry out a militant policy in Ireland. After the Liverpool meeting, Walter Long wrote that many of his fellow Unionists distrusted Lloyd George, but "There is a very strong feeling...that there ought to be a settlement, and there is a good deal of ill-disguised impatience with Ulster."¹¹³ The unionist *Saturday Review* went so far as to say after the conference, "It is now certain that Ulster cannot rely for support on the Conservative Party in England. It is equally certain that she cannot rely for support on the electorate in England and Scotland."¹¹⁴

However, even after the government's victory at Liverpool, Lloyd George did not increase the pressure on Craig. On the contrary, he declared that he would not meet with Northern Ireland's Prime Minister again until he had a "fast agreement with Sinn Fein."¹¹⁵ In the space of a few days, Lloyd George moved from intending to compel Craig to join an all-Ireland

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:164, entry for 14 November 1921.

¹¹⁰ UKNA, CAB/43/4/186-188, David Lloyd George to James Craig, 14 November 1921.

¹¹¹ *The Times* (London), 18 November 1921.

¹¹² *Spectator* (London), 5 November 1921; W. A. Hewins, *The Apologia of an Imperialist: Forty Years of Empire Policy*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1929), II:241-243, entries for 30 October and 2 November 1921; Lord Salisbury to Andrew Bonar Law, 18 November 1921 in Lord Beaverbrook [pseud. Max Aitken], *The Decline and Fall of Lloyd George: And Great Was the Fall Thereof* (London: Collins, 1963), 119-121.

¹¹³ British Library (BL), Walter H. Long Papers, Add. Ms. 62405, Walter Long to Lord Derby, 22 November 1921.

¹¹⁴ *Saturday Review* (London), 19 November 1921.

¹¹⁵ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:168, entry for 17 November 1921.

parliament to preparing to pressure Sinn Féin into accepting dominion status, a separate northern legislature, and a boundary commission.

On November 16, the British government sent the Sinn Féin delegates an outline of proposals that were essentially the July 20 terms plus the commission. The document did not mention an all-Ireland parliament.¹¹⁶ Most of the Irish delegation were skeptical, but Griffith approved.¹¹⁷ The Sinn Féin delegates proposed external association on November 22 and 28.¹¹⁸ Chamberlain wrote that they could not accept these terms, but they “must not break” on them either, indicating that many would see them as a reasonable compromise.¹¹⁹ Lloyd George wanted to reject external association out of hand, not on its merits but because he thought that Griffith and Collins had committed to dominion status. He did not appreciate that they had only indicated a willingness to accept this constitutional formula in exchange for a guarantee of Irish unity. The Prime Minister called the November 22 memo a “reversion” to the “independent state.” He sent Jones to tell them that if they did not come into the Empire, “we will make them.”¹²⁰ Such threats had receded in the second and third weeks of November, as Lloyd George and the Sinn Féin delegation cooperated to draw Craig into the talks. After November 22 this method returned to the forefront.

Planning for Failure

While the negotiations progressed, British officials developed plans for returning to a state of hostilities. The major difference from the pre-truce situation would be the imposition of martial law throughout the twenty-six counties.¹²¹ In September, Macready outlined what martial law would entail. Arms possession would be punishable by death, after a court martial. All ports except Cork and Dublin were to be closed. There would be extensive measures to control the civilian population, including a passport system and the possibility of rationing food. Macready wanted either to place “Ulster,” meaning the six counties, under martial law or

¹¹⁶ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Untitled memo that begins, “It is hereby agreed that,” 16 November 1921; UKNA, CAB/43/2/257-259.

¹¹⁷ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1489, Erskine Childers, Diary, 17 November 1921.

¹¹⁸ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, “Memorandum by the Irish Representatives,” 22 November 1921; UKNA, CAB/43/2/260-262.

¹¹⁹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/7/4/34, Austen Chamberlain to David Lloyd George, 28 November 1921.

¹²⁰ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:170-171, entry for 22 November 1921.

¹²¹ UKNA, CAB/24/126/80, Laming Worthington-Evans, “The Irish Situation,” 29 July 1921.

withdraw all troops and require the northern government to defend itself.¹²² In October, Worthington-Evans proposed to accord captured rebels belligerent status. This was a major policy change, but would only be granted if they were uniformed and adhered to the rules of war. He estimated that they would need to increase the Army in Ireland by 85,000 to enforce martial law. He wanted to recruit many of these from the Irish unionist population, particularly by reforming the 36th (Ulster) Division, which had been drawn largely from the UVF.¹²³

Another proposal to avoid a return to the pre-truce situation was to withdraw all troops to the ports and impose a blockade. Lloyd George considered a version of this idea in August, while the Dáil Cabinet debated the July 20 proposals. He described it to H. A. L. Fisher as his plan to “hold the fat bits on the coast while abandoning the interior.”¹²⁴ Dublin Castle officials John Anderson and Andy Cope later proposed versions of this separately.¹²⁵ The latter pointed out that this plan would mitigate the need for sending reinforcements to Ireland, decrease bloodshed, and avoid “The scandal of England reconquering Ireland in the 20th Century.”¹²⁶

Northern Ireland’s government also made plans for resuming hostilities. In September, Craig told Macready that all of Ireland should be placed under martial law, including the “Northern Area.”¹²⁷ However, after the general agreed, Craig made a series of proposals designed to ensure that he or officers close to him oversaw the operation of martial law in the six counties.¹²⁸ Craig told Henry Wilson that the British government would not be able to raise the forces required from the unionist population to carry out Worthington-Evans’s plans.¹²⁹ He predicted that only a few hundred men would join a military formation, compared with the thousands who had flocked to the Special Constabulary.¹³⁰ By November, under Wilson’s advice, Northern Ireland’s Premier concluded that the six counties would not receive differentiated treatment under military governance.¹³¹ While in London to meet with Lloyd

¹²² UKNA, CAB/43/2/79-81, C. F. N. Macready, Report to Cabinet, 13 September 1921.

¹²³ UKNA, CAB/43/2/74-78, Laming Worthington-Evans, “Ireland,” 22 October 1921.

¹²⁴ H. A. L. Fisher, *The Coalition Diaries and Letters of H. A. L. Fisher, 1916-1922: The Historian in Lloyd George’s Cabinet*, ed. F. Russell Bryant, 4 vols. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), III:793, entry for 5 August 1921.

¹²⁵ UKNA, CO/904/232, John Anderson to Robert Horne, 12 November 1921.

¹²⁶ A. W. Cope to Thomas Jones, 24 August 1921 in *Whitehall Diary*, III:100-102.

¹²⁷ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, James Craig to Nevil Macready, 22 September 1921.

¹²⁸ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, James Craig to Nevil Macready, 23 September 1921; PRONI, CAB/6/27A, Minutes of a Conference between Craig and Macready, 20 October 1921.

¹²⁹ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, James Craig to Henry Wilson, 25 October 1921.

¹³⁰ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, James Craig to Henry Wilson, 28 October 1921.

¹³¹ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, Henry Wilson to James Craig, 1 November 1921.

George, he arranged with Worthington-Evans and Wilson that martial law would not extend to Northern Ireland. Instead, all troops would withdraw from the interior of the six counties to “hold the boundary outside Ulster.”¹³²

Northern Ireland’s primary security force was the Ulster Special Constabulary. In November, the regular RIC in the six counties numbered 2,324, compared with 3,472 full-time “A” specials and 15,780 part-time “B” specials. If hostilities resumed, Craig wanted to increase the Constabulary to between 25,000 and 30,000, all armed, equipped, and paid by the British government.¹³³ By September 1921, 1,000 “A” specials had been designated to invade Donegal. They were to be a permanent presence, distributed in nine depots throughout the county.¹³⁴ Northern Ireland’s Police Commissioner C. G. Wickham even referred to his forces for “the Seven Counties.”¹³⁵ There is evidence of similar plans for Cavan and Monaghan.¹³⁶ This belied Craig’s assertions that northern unionists simply wished to govern the six counties in accordance with the Government of Ireland Act. In addition, the northern unionist leader denounced Sinn Féin for trying to acquire six-county territory by means of a boundary commission while his administration developed plans to seize majority-nationalist areas by force.¹³⁷ If hostilities resumed, the northern government intended to extend their area of control using a force equipped and paid by the British government, while the British Army guarded their border.

The IRA was far from idle during the truce. Peace brought a huge influx of recruits, often to the chagrin of those who had endured active service during the most dangerous periods. IRA GHQ encouraged units to focus on training during the lull in operations.¹³⁸ Macready told the Cabinet that by October drilling and arms practice were common throughout the country.¹³⁹ He reported a growing feeling among civilians, even former unionists or non-Sinn Féin

¹³² PRONI, CAB/6/27A, “Precis of Interview at War Office,” 7 November 1921.

¹³³ PRONI, CAB/6/27B, James Craig to Robert Horne, 8 November 1921.

¹³⁴ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, “Resumption of Operations in Northern Ireland,” 24 October 1921; PRONI, CAB/6/27B, “Application of Martial Law to Northern Ireland.”

¹³⁵ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, C. G. Wickham to R. Dawson Bates, 20 September 1921.

¹³⁶ PRONI, CAB/6/27A, G. Moore-Irvine to W. B. Spender, 1 August 1921 and W. B. Spender to G. Moore-Irvine, 3 August 1921.

¹³⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/107/1/98, James Craig to Austen Chamberlain, 15 December 1921; PRONI, CAB/4/31/22, James Craig, “Communique to the Press,” 8 February 1922.

¹³⁸ *An t’Óglac* (Dublin), 5 August and 12 August 1921.

¹³⁹ UKNA, CAB/24/129/30, C. F. N. Macready, Report on the Situation in Ireland, 18 October 1921.

nationalists, that “the rebel Army is in fact capable of justifying its leaders [sic] boast that it could beat the British Army if hostilities were renewed.”¹⁴⁰

On October 1, a colonel on Macready’s staff asserted that the IRA was much larger, better organized, and perhaps better equipped than prior to the truce. The only positive note was that the glut of recruits lessened the difficulty of distinguishing rebels from civilians, as in many districts “all young men have joined the I.R.A.” Republican intelligence captured this memo and sent it to the delegation in London.¹⁴¹ Two weeks later, the Limerick police commissioner reported of the IRA, “there is no intention to fight if it can by any possibility be avoided.” He described their training as “make-believe” and “political manoeuvres.” But he added, “In the unlikely event of fighting, however, I do not under-estimate our difficulties. The hostility of the country as a whole and the very large numbers of the I.R.A. have to be reckoned with.”¹⁴² In addition to recruiting and training, the republicans were importing arms. In the most successful of these efforts, on November 11 an IRA gunrunner landed hundreds of rifles, pistols, and ammunition from Germany on the Waterford coast.¹⁴³ If the British government and military returned to the pre-truce situation, they would face a much stronger militant republican organization, and they were aware of this.

Politically, renewing a coercion policy in Ireland was fraught with pitfalls. Lloyd George’s Cabinet had already alienated British people of all parties with a pre-truce policy that was perceived by some as overly harsh.¹⁴⁴ Support for Northern Ireland’s government might have decreased significantly if they acted as aggressively as they planned. Only the Unionist die-hards would have been pleased by all-out war. Lloyd George hoped that, if the negotiations had to end, they would terminate in a way that enabled him to blame Sinn Féin irascibility, eroding their support in Britain and the dominions. However, on November 25 Liberal Cabinet

¹⁴⁰ UKNA, CAB/24/129/53, C. F. N. Macready, Report on the Situation in Ireland, 25 October 1921.

¹⁴¹ IMA, Collins Papers, A/0622, “The Military Situation at the End of Sept. 1921,” 1 October 1921; Trinity College Dublin Archives (TCDA), Erskine Childers Papers, IE TCD MS 7784/8. The author is not identified beyond his rank, but it was likely Colonel J. E. S. Brind, Macready’s principal staff aide.

¹⁴² UKNA, CAB/43/2/95, W. G. Barron, “Note on the State of North-West Munster,” 15 October 1921.

¹⁴³ BMH WS No. 877, P. J. Paul, 55; BMH WS No. 1,764, Vincent White, 25-28; Charles McGuinness, *Sailor of Fortune: Adventures of an Irish Sailor, Soldier, Pirate, Pearl-Fisher, Gun-Runner, Rebel and Antarctic Explorer* (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith, 1935), 197-205.

¹⁴⁴ Jon Lawrence, “The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War,” *Past & Present* 190 (Feb. 2006): 211-212.

member Edwin Montagu told Lloyd George that the Unionists would desert the government on any excuse, therefore, “the P.M. could not afford to let the negotiations fail.”¹⁴⁵

Historians sometimes downplay British threats of coercion should the negotiations fail as “political theater,” or imply that the threats themselves did not matter, merely that the Irish delegates believed them.¹⁴⁶ Others assert that Lloyd George would have resigned if the talks failed, ushering in a Unionist government under Bonar Law that would have no qualms about coercing Sinn Féin.¹⁴⁷ Without a settlement, the Prime Minister might have resigned, though he had proven adept at making this threat without actually following through. Even had Lloyd George resigned, the institution of a coercion policy by a new government seems unlikely, given that even Unionists opposed to coalition policy admitted the necessity of negotiating with the Irish republicans. John Regan assigns the Prime Minister’s threats of war great importance, asserting that such maneuvers denied Irish people a real choice in their governance.¹⁴⁸ This is true, however, despite the plans in place, it does not seem that the British government was prepared to enact a new regime of coercion. One of Lloyd George’s secretaries, Geoffrey Shakespeare, called his boss’s threat of war a bluff.¹⁴⁹ Some of the Prime Minister’s biographers concur in this analysis.¹⁵⁰ It is likely that, had the negotiations failed, a new round of talks would have begun, whether under Lloyd George or a Unionist Premier.¹⁵¹

Finalizing the Treaty

After the Prime Minister rejected Sinn Féin’s external association proposals of November 22 and 28, his ministers polished their own terms and submitted them as “Proposed Articles of Agreement” two days later.¹⁵² The Sinn Féin delegation took a revised draft to the Dáil Cabinet in Dublin on December 3. Griffith and Collins thought they had achieved considerable concessions on Northern Ireland. Collins considered rejecting the agreement too risky, as,

¹⁴⁵ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:175, entry for 25 November 1921.

¹⁴⁶ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 310; Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 91; Knirck, *Imagining Ireland’s Independence*, 101.

¹⁴⁷ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 506-507; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing, 1912-72* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 187.

¹⁴⁸ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, 69.

¹⁴⁹ Geoffrey Shakespeare, *Let Candles Be Brought In* (London: MacDonald, 1949), 86-89.

¹⁵⁰ Kenneth O. Morgan, “Lloyd George and the Irish,” in *Ireland after the Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 98-99; Roy Hattersley, *David Lloyd George: The Great Outsider* (London: Little, Brown, 2010), 544-546.

¹⁵¹ Bew, *Ireland*, 421; Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland*, 325.

¹⁵² UKNA, CAB/43/4/350-358, “Proposed Articles of Agreement,” 30 November 1921.

“England could arrange a war in Ireland within a week.” Barton and Gavan Duffy asserted that the delegation had not pushed their own ideas strongly enough. The latter said, “England was bluffing,” and “the Irish proposals”—referring to external association—“could be obtained.”¹⁵³ De Valera objected to the oath of allegiance, and stated that he could not “sign any document which would give N.E. Ulster power to vote itself out of the Irish State.” Nonetheless, he felt that if the draft was modified, “it might be accepted honourably,” and he wanted the delegation to make peace if possible. Griffith promised not to sign anything without reference to Dublin.¹⁵⁴

On December 4, the Sinn Féin delegates presented external association again, this time as a series of amendments to the British proposals.¹⁵⁵ Lloyd George asserted that these ideas had already been rejected.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the conference had never held a verbal or written debate on external association. Curtis drafted a reply to the Sinn Féin amendments. He leveraged unionists’ sentimental attachment to the monarchy and implied that Irish unity would be hastened by nationalists’ acceptance of the Crown and Empire. The primary legal argument Curtis utilized was that judicial precedent rested upon litigants being either British subjects or aliens. He called this a “cruel and embarrassing choice” to force upon Irish unionists. The highlighting of sentimental attachments to the monarchy reinforces the idea of the Crown as a symbol, on which the Irish delegation based some of their proposals. Griffith’s idea for dual citizenship might have met the legal argument, but it was never debated after the October 24 conference session. Curtis ended by asserting that external association “would break the Empire in peaces [sic], dislocate society in all its self-governing nations and cancel for ever [sic] the hope of national unity in Ireland itself.”¹⁵⁷ However, Curtis had argued in an October 17 memo, “Dominion Status cannot be defined” and the constituent states were “Free to develop on their own lines.”¹⁵⁸ If this was the case, it is difficult to believe that giving Ireland a different status in relation to the Empire would break it into pieces or cause dislocation in societies such as Australia or Canada. Curtis’s December 4 memo would have been the only formal British reply

¹⁵³ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/4, “Meeting of Cabinet and Delegation: Views of Delegates,” 3 December 1921.

¹⁵⁴ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/4, “Meeting of Cabinet,” 3 December 1921.

¹⁵⁵ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/4, “Amendments by the Irish Representatives to the Proposed Articles of Agreement,” 4 December 1921; UKNA, CAB/43/4/380.

¹⁵⁶ NAI, DE/2/304/1/8, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 4 December 1921, Treaty Exhibition.

¹⁵⁷ UKNA, CAB/21/243, Lionel Curtis, “Draft Reply to the Irish Memorandum,” 4 December 1921.

¹⁵⁸ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, Lionel Curtis, “Memorandum on Dominion Status,” 17 October 1921; UKNA, CAB/43/2/10.

to external association, but it was never sent. Lloyd George's determination to pressure Sinn Féin for a settlement instead of Craig was decisive; academic arguments were unnecessary.

The Prime Minister met with Collins on December 5. The latter declared himself dissatisfied with the British proposals regarding "the North-East." Lloyd George pointed out that Collins himself had asserted that economic exigencies would force Northern Ireland into a united parliament. The Prime Minister emphasized the boundary commission, and Collins predicted that this would "save" Tyrone and Fermanagh, as well as parts of Armagh, Derry, and Down. If Lloyd George replied, Collins did not record it.¹⁵⁹

At a meeting later that day, Lloyd George and Chamberlain berated Griffith as having let them down on "the Ulster proposals." Griffith protested that he wanted an acknowledgement from Craig of Ireland's essential unity before acceding to further British demands. The British ministers replied that this was impossible and unreasonable. Lloyd George trumped Griffith's protests by producing a memo, which the Sinn Féin delegation leader had signed without his colleagues' knowledge, declaring his agreement to all of the Northern Ireland proposals: the right to opt out of an all-Ireland parliament, the boundary commission, and the tax scheme. In the ensuing discussion, the British delegates agreed to drop the stipulation that the Irish government must make a free trade agreement with Britain, ensuring full fiscal autonomy. Abrogating his promise to the Dáil Cabinet, Griffith declared that he would sign. Lloyd George insisted that all of the delegates must do so. He said that he and his colleagues had risked their political futures for an accord, and the Sinn Féiners must do the same. The Prime Minister added, "those who were not for peace must take the full responsibility for the war that would immediately follow refusal by any Delegate to sign the Articles of Agreement."¹⁶⁰ Griffith genuinely wanted to accept the terms, and the threat of war convinced the rest.¹⁶¹ Griffith, Collins, and Barton signed at 2:20am on December 6. Gavan Duffy's and Duggan's signatures were added hours later.¹⁶²

The signed agreement became known as the Anglo-Irish Treaty. In its large aspects, it differed little from the July 20 scheme. Jones wrote the day of the signing, "In essentials we

¹⁵⁹ IMA, Gavan Duffy Papers, CD45/11/4, "Mr. Michael's Collins's Minute of His Interview with Mr. Lloyd George," 5 December 1921.

¹⁶⁰ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/4, "Mr. Barton's Notes of Two Sub-Conferences Held on December 5th/6th, 1921."

¹⁶¹ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1489, Erskine Childers, Diary, 5 December 1921; IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/4, Minutes of a Meeting of the Irish Delegation of Plenipotentiaries, 5 December 1921.

¹⁶² BMH WS No. 979, Robert Barton, 34-35.

have given nothing that was not in the July proposals.”¹⁶³ He and Curtis later asserted that the concessions the Sinn Féin delegates secured “were mainly in matters of phraseology.” The biggest difference was the last-minute grant of fiscal autonomy.¹⁶⁴

Ireland was to have dominion status, subject to certain restrictions. The British Navy would retain specified port facilities. Irish legislators were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown. The dominions’ right of secession was precluded by the British ministers’ insistence that Ireland remain within the Empire. The Sinn Féin negotiators secured some concessions apart from fiscal autonomy, primarily relating to Northern Ireland. The British agreed to abandon the principle of reciprocal powers for the six-county legislature. The idea that Northern Ireland could have an army was dropped. The biggest concession seemed to be the boundary commission. Whether this would result in a substantial benefit for the Free State remained to be seen, but Griffith and Collins believed that it would.

The mainstream nationalist press, which had received the July 20 proposals hesitantly, hailed the Treaty without reserve. The *Irish Independent* published both a glowing editorial and a poem praising the agreement, the first line of which exclaimed, “Hail Freedom! Hail the dawn of Liberty!”¹⁶⁵ The *Freeman’s Journal* declared that the Treaty meant they were entering “halcyon days” for Ireland and praised the signatories as heroes.¹⁶⁶ The *Ulster Herald*, which had denounced the July 20 proposals as perpetual vassalage, greeted the Treaty with an editorial entitled, “Victory!” The paper predicted that majority-nationalist areas in five of the six counties would soon be joined to the Free State.¹⁶⁷

Members of the British military reported that the public did not share the enthusiasm for the Treaty exhibited by the nationalist press. Colonel Brind told the Cabinet that news of the Treaty signing “was received in the country without any particular demonstration of enthusiasm.”¹⁶⁸ A War Office report said the announcement was received “in a manner which can only be described as apathetic.” It explained this lackluster response by saying that Irish

¹⁶³ UKNA, CAB/63/34/89, Thomas Jones to Maurice Hankey, 6 December 1921.

¹⁶⁴ UKNA, CAB/21/243, Thomas Jones and Lionel Curtis, “Note by the Secretaries to the Irish Conference,” 16 March 1922.

¹⁶⁵ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 7 December 1921.

¹⁶⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 8 December 1921.

¹⁶⁷ *Ulster Herald* (Omagh), 10 December 1921.

¹⁶⁸ UKNA, CAB/24/131/63, J. Brind, Report on the Situation in Ireland, 13 December 1921.

people had expected more than the Treaty delivered, “They had been told they were accepting nothing less than non-partition, non-allegiance and a Republic and have got none of these.”¹⁶⁹

The first public sign that the Treaty would not meet with universal acceptance was a December 9 statement from de Valera condemning the agreement.¹⁷⁰ The republican President was most upset that the delegation had actually signed the Treaty, as this would be viewed as final regardless of the stipulation that the Dáil must ratify it. During a December 8 Cabinet meeting, Collins asserted of the Treaty, “We have only recommended it to Dail Eireann.” De Valera responded, “No—Much more.”¹⁷¹ The President had not believed that the negotiations were going to reach a crisis point immediately after the December 3 Cabinet meeting.¹⁷² Griffith’s promise not to sign the draft agreement reassured him of this. In a November 29 letter to Harry Boland, de Valera declared himself resigned to war if the British insisted on Irish allegiance to the Crown, and remaining within the Empire.¹⁷³ He was likely willing to allow the negotiations to break down, thereby forcing the British government to decide whether they would renew hostilities or begin a new round of talks. De Valera expected the British to publish their proposals and intended, at long last, to publish counter-proposals based on external association.¹⁷⁴ The signing of the Treaty precluded this, and placed the onus of deciding between peace and war on the Dáil.

As the Dáil engaged in weeks of debates on whether to ratify the Treaty, de Valera finally put forward external association in what would become known as “Document No. 2.” He used the framework of the Treaty, but added a preface and changed the oath. De Valera said he designed this document to closely resemble the signed agreement to emphasize that the changes required by the Dáil’s anti-Treaty party were so slight that the British would not fight against them.¹⁷⁵ This left him open to the counter that Irish people would not fight *for* them. IRA officer and anti-Treaty Dáil member Seamus Robinson called the Treaty and Document No. 2, “Tweedledum” and “Tweedledee,” adding, “there is a difference but it is not a difference worth

¹⁶⁹ UKNA, WO/35/182A/1, “Reception of the Agreement in Dublin.”

¹⁷⁰ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 9 December 1921; *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 9 December 1921.

¹⁷¹ DIFP, No. 216, “Cabinet Meeting of December 8, 1921, copy of notes taken by Erskine Childers.”

¹⁷² UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1549, Eamon de Valera, “Memo on Oath and Document No. 2,” 18 February 1923.

¹⁷³ DIFP, No. 205, Eamon de Valera to Harry Boland, 29 November 1921.

¹⁷⁴ Eamon de Valera, “Prelude,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 3, 15 December 1921.

¹⁷⁵ Eamon de Valera, “Prelude,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 3, 15 December 1921; UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1549, Eamon de Valera, “Memo on Oath and Doc. No. 2,” 18 February 1923.

fighting about.”¹⁷⁶ The press reacted similarly. The *Freeman’s Journal* accused de Valera of being willing to send men to die for “a grammarian’s formula.”¹⁷⁷ Anti-Treaty republican and writer Sean Ó Faoláin said that external association “puzzled most people.”¹⁷⁸ This is understandable given that few outside the Dáil Cabinet knew of the idea before mid-December. By then the Dáil and the public were engaged in fierce debates over the Treaty. There was little chance that they would seriously consider a concept that seemed only cosmetically different. De Valera’s failure to publish proposals based on external association in August, when there would have been ample time to explain the idea in comparison to the government’s July 20 proposals, continued to undermine his position.

The Dáil ratified the Treaty by a 64-57 vote on January 7, 1922. De Valera resigned as President of the Dáil. Two days later, Griffith defeated de Valera for the presidency by a mere two votes. He formed a Cabinet from the ranks of the pro-Treaty Dáil members, which also functioned as the Irish Free State’s Provisional Government.

The Free State Constitution

Many pro-Treaty members of Sinn Féin asserted that they were still republicans, and accepted the agreement as, in Collins’s words, “not the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it.”¹⁷⁹ This was also expressed as a “stepping-stone” to the Republic.¹⁸⁰ The first step was to be the Free State constitution. Treaty advocates emphasized the new government’s liberty to use the constitution to maximize their separation from the Empire and the monarchy. During the Treaty debate, Griffith quoted a December 13 letter from Lloyd George, “The framing of that constitution will be in the hands of the Irish Government.” Griffith’s opponents pointed out the importance of the Prime Minister’s next phrase, “subject of course to the terms of the Agreement.”¹⁸¹ Nonetheless, Gavan Duffy said, “It will be the duty of those who frame the Constitution...to relegate the King of England to the

¹⁷⁶ Seamus Robinson, “Prelude,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 5, 17 December 1921.

¹⁷⁷ *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 22 December 1921.

¹⁷⁸ Sean O’Faolain, *Vive Moi!* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1934), 187.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Collins, “Debate on Treaty,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 6, 19 December 1921.

¹⁸⁰ Eoin O’Duffy, “Prelude,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 5, 17 December 1921; Alexander McCabe, “Debate on Treaty,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 11, 4 January 1922; P. J. Ward, “Debate on Treaty,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 15, 7 January 1922.

¹⁸¹ Arthur Griffith, “Debate on Treaty Resumed,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 2, 14 December 1921; Erskine Childers, “Debate on Treaty,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 6, 19 December 1921.

exterior darkness as far as they can, and they can to a very considerable extent.”¹⁸² Some anti-Treaty activists asserted that the Provisional Government could avoid a permanent split in the republican movement by enacting a constitution that was acceptable to their point of view.¹⁸³

There were indications that the British government intended to give Griffith’s administration significant latitude regarding the constitution. On January 31, Duggan reported an assurance from Curtis that, after the Treaty’s ratification, approval of the constitution would “go by default.”¹⁸⁴ Churchill proposed that Westminster pass the Treaty and the constitution in a single bill, indicating that neither would arouse much controversy.¹⁸⁵ Curtis argued that the Provisional Government should be given considerable leeway in the drafting process, as their domestic political position would be damaged if their foundational document could be represented as “the work of the British Parliament.” However, it was clear that the British Cabinet could reject the constitution if they considered it was not “consistent with the Treaty.”¹⁸⁶

In the first few months of the Provisional Government’s tenure, a number of developments disturbed the British government. On April 14, members of the anti-Treaty IRA seized the Four Courts and nearby buildings in Dublin to protest what they saw as the betrayal of the Republic. On May 20, Collins made a pact with de Valera that at the forthcoming Free State election they would run pro- and anti-Treaty candidates in a “National Coalition panel.” The goal was to elect representatives from the two sides in the same proportion as the Dáil Treaty vote. Both pro- and anti-Treaty panel candidates would use the name Sinn Féin, avoiding a formal split. Four anti-Treaty legislators would sit in the Free State Cabinet as “extern” members. The result would be a coalition government of pro- and anti-Treaty Sinn Féiners.¹⁸⁷

The election pact incensed the British Cabinet. During a May 23 meeting, Chamberlain said that the Provisional Government “had made a bargain with the enemies of this country.” Churchill said of Griffith’s Cabinet, “Their whole procedure had been to leave intact the

¹⁸² George Gavan Duffy, “Debate on Treaty,” *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 8, 21 December 1921.

¹⁸³ NLI, Thomas Johnson Papers, Ms. 17,143, Frank Aiken to Richard Mulcahy, 15 July 1922; NLI, Joseph McGarrity Papers, Ms. 17,489, Austin Stack to Joseph McGarrity, 3 August 1922; UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1428, “Voice Recording made for the Bureau by the Hon. George Gavan Duffy;” Florence O’Donoghue, *No Other Law (The Story of Liam Lynch and the Irish Republican Army, 1916-1923)* (Dublin: Irish Press, 1954), 203.

¹⁸⁴ NAI, TSCH/3/S3124, “Extract from Provisional Government Minutes,” 31 January 1922.

¹⁸⁵ Winston Churchill to John Anderson, 31 January 1921 in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Volume IV Companion Part 3* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1742-1743.

¹⁸⁶ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/10/2/42(c), Lionel Curtis to Lord Curzon, 6 February 1922.

¹⁸⁷ Griffith explained the idea to the British ministers during a May 26 meeting. UKNA, CAB/43/6/79-91, Conference on Ireland, 26 May 1922.

republican conception whilst at the same time establishing the organisation of the Provisional Government.” Lloyd George declared that he and his colleagues were “drifting into a position of either having to abandon or to re-conquer Ireland... We may have to face re-conquest.”

Churchill said that he was reviewing military options. He favored maintaining British forces to the six counties and Dublin, while imposing a blockade on the rest of the island. Balfour argued that military coercion would fail and interjected, “You might imitate Sherman and burn every house and crop!” Lloyd George wanted a reason for using force that would keep British and dominion opinion on the government’s side. A Free State constitution that clearly violated the Treaty would provide such a justification. Churchill said that they had been prepared to “wink” at some of the Provisional Government’s actions, but under the circumstances, “we are in a position to be much more searching in our examination of the Constitution.”¹⁸⁸

Churchill told Griffith on May 26 that if he formed a government with Dáil members who were not willing to take the oath of allegiance included in the Treaty, the British government would consider this a breach of the agreement.¹⁸⁹ The Free State Cabinet delivered the draft constitution the next day. The first article declared, “Ireland is a free and sovereign nation.” The second said that all governmental authority derived from the Irish people. The British ministers were as concerned over what the draft omitted as what it contained. The clauses outlining the executive did not mention the royal representative. The monarchy was not included as a component of the Free State legislature, and the draft did not admit that legislative authority derived from the Crown. The oath of allegiance was absent. The Free State government assumed treaty-making powers, and did not mention Northern Ireland or the Commonwealth.¹⁹⁰ Lloyd George called the document, “purely republican and but thinly veiled.”¹⁹¹ Curtis saw it as another attempt at achieving external association, to which the British government “must remain unalterably opposed.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ UKNA, CAB/43/1/120-131, Thomas Jones and Lionel Curtis, “Secretary’s Note of a Conference of British Representatives,” 23 May 1922; UKNA, CAB/43/7/9-48, T. St. Quintin Hill, “The Draft Irish Constitution: History of Negotiations between the Signatories of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland, May-June, 1922,” 13 July 1922.

¹⁸⁹ UKNA, CAB/43/6/79-91, Conference on Ireland Meeting Minutes, 26 May 1922.

¹⁹⁰ There is an unedited copy of the draft constitution in NLI, Thomas Johnson Papers, Ms. 17,136/9. For British government criticisms see UKNA, CAB/23/30/9, “Memorandum on the Irish Draft Constitution,” 29 May 1922.

¹⁹¹ UKNA, CAB/23/30/9, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 1 June 1922.

¹⁹² UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/184/3/14, Lionel Curtis, “Irish Draft Constitution,” 31 May 1921.

Lloyd George communicated his displeasure over the draft constitution to Griffith the same day it was delivered. Griffith responded that the document had been drawn up hastily, but “their intention was to conform to the Treaty.”¹⁹³ On June 1, the Prime Minister sent Griffith a letter demanding whether the position of the Crown in the Free State would be as in the other dominions, and whether it “shall be within the empire on the basis of common citizenship, or merely associated with it.”¹⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Churchill met with the Committee on Imperial Defence and fleshed out plans to blockade the island in the event of “Southern Ireland repudiating the Treaty.” The British would withdraw to several ports, including Dublin, Queenstown (now Cobh), and perhaps Limerick. Worthington-Evans said they should hold the fewest ports possible, indicating that while the Cabinet intended to exert coercive pressure on the Provisional Government, Lloyd George’s idea of “re-conquest” was not a viable option.¹⁹⁵

These plans were unnecessary, as Griffith’s reply to Lloyd George indicated that the Provisional Government intended to comply with all of the British demands. He asserted that the Free State would be “not merely associated with, but a member of and within the Community of Nations known as the British Empire.”¹⁹⁶ Over the next two weeks, the Provisional Government’s legal adviser Hugh Kennedy and Lord Chief Justice Gordon Hewart negotiated alterations to the Free State constitution that conceded all of the major British points.¹⁹⁷ Lloyd George declared the constitution to be in compliance with the Treaty on June 15. In a meeting with Craig the next day Lloyd George said of the Provisional Government, “At first it looked as if they were going to fight it out, but they had surrendered completely.”¹⁹⁸

The Boundary Commission

By mid-June 1922, Treaty supporters’ hope that the constitution would give their state greater powers than the agreement itself had vanished. The other benefit they expected to accrue through the Treaty was territorial. As noted, Griffith and Collins expected the boundary commission outlined in Article 12 to transfer large areas from Northern Ireland to the Free State.

¹⁹³ UKNA, CAB/43/7/54, T. St. Quintin Hill, “The Draft Irish Constitution,” 13 July 1922.

¹⁹⁴ UKNA, CAB/24/137/14, David Lloyd George to Arthur Griffith, 1 June 1922.

¹⁹⁵ UKNA, CAB/43/7/89-92, T. St. Quintin Hill, “The Draft Irish Constitution,” 13 July 1922.

¹⁹⁶ UKNA, CAB/24/137/14, Arthur Griffith to David Lloyd George, 2 June 1922.

¹⁹⁷ UKNA, CAB/43/1/77-87, Draft Conclusions of a Meeting of the British Signatories to the Treaty with Ireland, 9 June 1922; UCDA, Hugh Kennedy Papers, P4/363, Hugh Kennedy to Arthur Griffith, 11 June 1922.

¹⁹⁸ UKNA, CAB/43/1/177, Meeting of the British Signatories to the Treaty with Ireland, 16 June 1922.

It is unclear whether Lloyd George or his colleagues encouraged this belief. Robert Barton later claimed that discussion of the boundary commission during the Treaty negotiations were much more concrete than the eventual terms of Article 12. The delegates had primarily discussed plebiscites, and debated whether they should be conducted by parishes, rural districts, poor law union areas, or counties.¹⁹⁹ The Treaty clause merely stated that the border would be adjusted “in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions.”

The Irish negotiators do not seem to have considered that the commission might transfer land from the Free State to Northern Ireland. By contrast, British documents relating to the commission, including the 1919 Cabinet discussions, as well as Curtis’s and Worthington-Evans’s November 1921 memos, assumed that adjustments would be made on both sides of the border. While there is little evidence that the British negotiators deliberately misled their Irish counterparts as to what areas could be transferred or how, there is nothing to indicate that they attempted to clarify these issues. Therefore, pro-Treaty activists interpreted them in their own favor. Lloyd George had not replied to Collins’s December 5 assertions that the boundary commission would result in large territorial gains for the Free State. During a February 5, 1922, meeting with the British ministers, Collins called the boundary commission, “a matter of two whole and two half counties.” According to the minutes, no one responded, and in fact Hewart quickly changed the subject.²⁰⁰ Ten days later, Griffith and Collins asked the British Cabinet to announce that the boundary commission would operate without regard to the existing border, to counter suggestions “that the enquiry will cover only a narrow area.”²⁰¹ No such statement was forthcoming. Vagaries that played on his opponents’ hopes were part of the Prime Minister’s negotiating strategy. In 1916, Lloyd George had allowed Redmond to assume that six-county exclusion would be temporary. He had not initially corrected Redmond as that would have damaged his chances of getting an agreement. Similarly, in 1921 and 1922 he did not dispute the assumption that the boundary commission would transfer large parts of Northern Ireland to the Free State.

¹⁹⁹ BMH WS No. 979, Robert Barton, 44.

²⁰⁰ UKNA, CAB/43/6/26, Conference on Ireland with Irish Ministers, 5 February 1922.

²⁰¹ UKPA, LG/F/20/2/2, A. W. Cope to John Anderson, 15 February 1922.

Lloyd George sent Craig a copy of the Treaty immediately after its signing. He likely expected no opposition from that quarter. Initial indications were positive. A draft letter from Craig to Austen Chamberlain said that, “after long and earnest consultation with those chiefly concerned,” he intended to “recognise” the boundary commission and appoint a representative.²⁰² Craig did not send this letter, however, on December 7 he said publicly, “It now appears to me that peace may possibly be within sight” and praised the “freedom of choice for Ulster” embodied in the Treaty terms.²⁰³ Craig met with Lloyd George on December 9. The British Prime Minister assured his counterpart that the boundary commission “was only intended to make a slight re-adjustment of our boundary line,” adding that any transfers would result in an equal population exchange between Northern Ireland and the Free State.²⁰⁴

Three days later, the northern unionist leader suddenly changed his tone. Craig declared his opposition to the Treaty in a December 12 speech in Northern Ireland’s House of Commons, vehemently denouncing its financial implications and the boundary commission. He accused Lloyd George of breaking his pledge that “the rights of Ulster would neither be sacrificed nor prejudiced.”²⁰⁵ Craig sent messages to Bonar Law and to the Prime Minister venting his anger over the boundary commission.²⁰⁶ Both letters protested that Sinn Féiners were declaring that large areas of Northern Ireland would be transferred to the Free State via the boundary commission.

Craig sent his most strident message to Chamberlain on December 15. He implied that he had never been invited to take part in the Treaty negotiations, and predicted that the boundary commission would lead to “Civil War” between Northern Ireland and the Free State. Craig added, “So intense is local feeling at the moment that my colleagues and I may be swept off our feet,” and, “Loyalists may declare independence on their own behalf, seize the Customs and other Government Departments and set up an authority of their own. Many believe that violence is the only language understood by Mr. Lloyd George and his Ministers.”²⁰⁷ This threat, framed as a prediction of violence, was identical to the tactics northern unionist leaders had employed

²⁰² PRONI, CAB/9/Z/3/1, James Craig to Austen Chamberlain. This letter is marked “Draft” and “Not Sent.”

²⁰³ *The Times* (London), 8 December 1921.

²⁰⁴ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/11/5/28, James Craig to David Lloyd George, 14 December 1921.

²⁰⁵ James Craig in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 13 December 1921.

²⁰⁶ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/107/1/93, James Craig to Andrew Bonar Law, 13 December 1921; UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/11/3/28, James Craig to David Lloyd George, 14 December 1921.

²⁰⁷ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/107/1/98, James Craig to Austen Chamberlain, 15 December 1921.

between 1912 and 1914. He declared that he could not control his followers, who were being goaded into extreme actions by Irish nationalists and the British government. The root of the idea that northern loyalists would form “an authority of their own” lay in Carson’s and Craig’s prewar plans for a provisional government. This concept was rendered ironic by the fact that, in 1922, this “authority” would oppose Northern Ireland’s Unionist executive.

Unlike Bonar Law during the home rule crisis, Chamberlain was not willing to use northern unionist anger to undermine the sitting government, as he was a member of it. Chamberlain’s reply reminded Craig that he *had* been asked to participate in the Treaty negotiations, and had refused. He assured Northern Ireland’s Prime Minister that the commission would work on a narrow basis, and issued the reproach, “I cannot believe that men whose loyalty is their pride are contemplating acts of war against the King.”²⁰⁸

Officials within the government and the Unionist Party were surprised at Craig’s sudden about-face on the Treaty.²⁰⁹ Carson compounded this by speaking out against the agreement on December 14, primarily citing the boundary commission.²¹⁰ Lloyd George was perturbed. He thought that “Ulster” owed him a debt of gratitude, “We have emancipated her and it was very unfair of Craig to talk of betrayal.”²¹¹ It is possible that Carson and Craig were acting in concert with the die-hard Unionists in an attempt to undermine the government.²¹² If this was the case, Bonar Law swept the rug out from under them by returning to Parliament on December 15 to support the Treaty.²¹³ Nonetheless, *The Times* predicted that “Ulster’s” opposition to the Treaty would prompt 150 Unionists legislators to “revolt” against the government.²¹⁴ As it happened, the bill to implement the Treaty passed its final reading with 295 votes in favor and just 52

²⁰⁸ UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/107/1/98, Austen Chamberlain to James Craig, 16 December 1921.

²⁰⁹ Robert Sanders, *Real Old Tory Politics: The Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, ed. John Ramsden (London: Historians’ Press, 1984), 165, entry for 18 December 1921; Thomas Jones to Maurice Hankey, 13 December 1921 in *Whitehall Diary*, III:187.

²¹⁰ Lord Carson, “Address in Reply to His Majesty’s Most Gracious Speech,” HL Deb 14 December 1921 vol 48 cc5-56, Hansard 1803-2005.

²¹¹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, III:189, entry for 14 December 1921.

²¹² Carson was definitely in touch with the die-hard Unionists. UKPA, Bonar Law Papers, BL/107/1/92, Lord Salisbury to Andrew Bonar Law, 13 December 1921.

²¹³ Andrew Bonar Law, “Irish Free State,” HC Deb 15 December 1921 vol 149 cc133-258, Hansard 1803-2005. For northern unionists’ surprise at this see PRONI, D1633/2/25, Personal diary of Lillian Spender, 16 December 1921.

²¹⁴ *The Times* (London), 15 February 1922.

against.²¹⁵ An amendment—inspired by Craig—that Northern Ireland’s territory could not be altered by a boundary commission garnered just a few more votes, and was defeated 302-60.²¹⁶

The wide margins of these votes suggest that the Treaty’s terms were not close to the limit of concessions that most British lawmakers would consider in exchange for peace in Ireland. Lloyd George feared that, if the Treaty negotiations produced a settlement that was more generous to the Sinn Féin point of view, Bonar Law would return to unite the Unionist Party in opposition to it. However, many Unionists supported the coalition government, including the actual party leader, Austen Chamberlain. Moreover, the combined Liberal and Labour MPs elected in 1918 accounted for 224 votes in the Commons, therefore the 382 Unionists would have had to remain substantially united to oppose a more generous deal.²¹⁷ This would have posed a significant challenge given the fractured state of the Unionist Party. Lloyd George could likely have granted greater concessions to Sinn Féin and still passed the resulting settlement through Parliament. This was unnecessary, as Lloyd George assured his government of an easy Parliamentary victory by deciding, in November 1921, to pressure the Sinn Féin negotiators for a settlement instead of Craig.

Despite the Treaty’s widespread support at Westminster, Craig and his Cabinet opposed it, and considered open hostility to the British government. In January 1922 Craig said that they could violently resist the boundary commission, but he did not recommend it as they would likely lose British unionist support.²¹⁸ He continued to state publicly that his government would resist any alteration of their territory.²¹⁹

Some British administrators became concerned at the increasingly hostile attitude of Northern Ireland’s government. On March 18, Thomas Jones and Lionel Curtis submitted a memo to the Cabinet arguing that the Ulster Special Constabulary was a military force disguised as police. Moreover, they were paid and equipped by the British government, while Craig’s threats implied that this force might be turned against that very administration.²²⁰ This

²¹⁵ *The Times* (London), 9 March 1922.

²¹⁶ For the vote totals see *The Times* (London), 18 February 1922. For the amendment as Craig’s inspiration see PRONI, CAB/9/Z/3/1, James Craig to Charles Craig, 11 February 1922.

²¹⁷ These figures are from F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Statistics, 1918-1968* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1968), 2.

²¹⁸ PRONI, CAB/4/29, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 10 January 1922.

²¹⁹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/11/3/32, James Craig to David Lloyd George, 6 February 1922; *The Times* (London), 7 February 1922.

²²⁰ UKNA, CAB/24/134/73, Thomas Jones and Lionel Curtis, “Memorandum on the Present Position of the Imperial Government in Northern Ireland,” 18 March 1922.

potentially alarming analysis did not result in any British policy change. Macready suggested that the government cease arming the Specials, but Churchill rejected the advice.²²¹

Two months later, Craig again stated that Northern Ireland would not submit to any alteration of its territory. This time Churchill rebuked the northern unionist leader, asserting that Craig was “little short of a defiance of the Imperial Government whose aid you seek.” He predicted that among the government, press, and public, “A very strong effort will undoubtedly be made in favour of a policy of Britain disinteresting herself entirely in Irish affairs.”²²² Craig responded that as his government paid taxes they had a right to expect the British government to defend them. He wrote, “you are only doing what would be done if one of the Eastern Counties was threatened by an enemy from without.” The word “without” is ironic as much of the Treaty negotiations had focused on whether the Free State would be within the British Empire. At British insistence it was, and the twenty-six-county government had as much right as its counterpart in the six counties to expect Westminster to uphold their claims. But Craig based his arguments largely on sentiment, not constitutional realities. He wrote, “although I may have acted from time to time in a manner which appeared antagonistic to you and the British Government, I have acted throughout in what I hold to be the best interest of you, as well as of ourselves...we must hang together and win through for the credit of Great Britain and the Empire.”²²³

Craig was confident that he could do virtually anything short of initiating violence against British forces and claim that he did so out of loyalty. British nationalism was strong enough that at least a section of public opinion in the “predominant partner” would respond to an appeal on patriotic grounds. In 1914, this had been a major factor in the home rule crisis. By 1922 there was ample evidence that the “Ulster” lobby was not as powerful as it had been, but Craig bet that Lloyd George’s government would not test this. British ministers’ unwavering support of his administration suggests that he was right.²²⁴ At the end of July, Churchill informed Collins that the British government would not interfere in the internal affairs of the six counties.

²²¹ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/20/2/91, Winston Churchill to James Craig, 28 March 1922.

²²² PRONI, CAB/4/45/6, Winston Churchill to James Craig, 25 May 1922.

²²³ PRONI, CAB/4/45/5, James Craig to Winston Churchill, 26 May 1922.

²²⁴ Churchill believed that Craig wielded great influence among the British Unionists. See Winston Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 4 February 1922 in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume IV Companion Part 3* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1752.

This amounted to a grant of de facto dominion status.²²⁵ Thus, another concession that the Sinn Féin delegation theoretically won during the Treaty debates was abandoned in practice.

The outbreak of civil war between pro- and anti-Treaty factions in June 1922 obviated immediate tensions over the boundary commission. It was March 1924 before the Free State government asked their British counterparts to reopen the issue.²²⁶ British officials wanted Free State President William Cosgrave to negotiate a solution with Craig, who remained Northern Ireland's Prime Minister.²²⁷ In June, Cosgrave told British Premier J. Ramsay MacDonald that the idea of a closed-door conference raised fears in Ireland that "the wishes of the inhabitants were to be subordinated to whims of persons in positions of authority and power." The Free State government assumed that plebiscites would form the basis of the commission, and Cosgrave offered his administration's services in taking a census of Northern Ireland's population.²²⁸

This time, the Free State government was determined to hold the British to the letter of the Treaty, but this raised the issue of the boundary commission's actual powers. On August 9, Chamberlain said that he and his fellow British Treaty signatories had only ever contemplated "a mere question of the rectification of the existing frontier."²²⁹ Duggan countered that the commission idea had been based on self-determination, and envisioned plebiscites throughout the six counties to gauge the wishes of the population. He claimed that Birkenhead had expressed this interpretation on the morning of the Treaty signing.²³⁰ Churchill unearthed a March 1922 letter from Birkenhead to Balfour insisting that the commission would be restricted to small territorial changes only. Any other interpretation had sprung from Collins's "overheated imagination." Churchill sent the letter to Craig and to the press.²³¹ On September 10, 1924, Lloyd George declared that he shared the interpretation in Birkenhead's letter.²³² Cosgrave said that these opinions had been "carefully concealed" during the Treaty negotiations, and if the Irish

²²⁵ TCDA, IE TCD MS 11399, Winston Churchill to Michael Collins, 31 July 1922.

²²⁶ UKNA, HO/45/12296, T. M. Healy to J. H. Thomas, 15 March 1924.

²²⁷ UKNA, HO/45/12296, J. H. Thomas to T. M. Healy, 1 April 1924 and Thomas Jones to W. T. Cosgrave, 1 April 1924.

²²⁸ UKNA, HO/45/12296, W. T. Cosgrave to J. Ramsay MacDonald, 4 June 1924.

²²⁹ Austen Chamberlain at Sandiway Lodge, *The Times* (London), 11 August 1924.

²³⁰ *The Times* (London), 22 August 1924.

²³¹ PRONI, CAB/9/Z/8/1, Lord Birkenhead to Arthur Balfour, 3 March 1922 and Winston Churchill to James Craig, 19 August 1924; *The Times* (London), 8 September 1924.

²³² David Lloyd George at Penmaenmawr, *The Times* (London), 11 September 1924.

delegates had known of them they would not have signed.²³³ Significantly, the two Irish signatories most responsible for the Treaty's passage were no longer alive to give their versions of what the commission should entail. Arthur Griffith died of heart failure on August 12, 1922, and Michael Collins was killed in an anti-Treaty IRA ambush ten days later. Before his death, Collins declared several times that he expected the commission to transfer at least two counties to the Free State, but in 1924 neither he nor his most influential pro-Treaty colleague could reiterate this interpretation.

Craig responded to the imminent establishment of the boundary commission by reverting to his old tactics. In public, he declared that he had "a unanimous loyalist Ulster at his back," by which he meant Northern Ireland's unionist population.²³⁴ However, he and his colleagues also warned that they could not restrain that population from violent outbreaks if large parts of the six counties were transferred to the Free State.²³⁵ At times they even encouraged violence. Northern Ireland's Finance Minister H. M. Pollock said in January 1924, "any arrogant claim to Ulster territory would be resisted by their people to the death."²³⁶ During the boundary commission's sittings between November 1924 and November 1925, Craig discouraged its members from visiting Northern Ireland. He offered to send witnesses to London to give evidence, but a visit might "lead to a disturbance of the peaceful conditions at present prevailing."²³⁷

As it happened, the boundary commission recommended only minor changes. The British-appointed chairman, South African judge Richard Feetham, interpreted Article 12 of the Treaty as assuming the established and continued existence of Northern Ireland as created by the Government of Ireland Act, therefore large-scale changes were out of the question.²³⁸ Further, he considered that if the Treaty framers had intended that plebiscites should be employed to decide the "wishes of the inhabitants" they would have said so, therefore he ruled out this method.²³⁹ The commission recommended transferring 183,290 acres of land and 31,319 people to the Free State, and 49,242 acres with its 7,594 inhabitants to Northern Ireland.²⁴⁰ While this balance

²³³ W. T. Cosgrave [pseud. President], "Treaty (Confirmation of Supplemental Agreement) Bill, 1924.—Second Stage," *DÉ Debates*, Vol. 8, No. 23, 15 October 1924.

²³⁴ *The Times* (London), 12 September 1924.

²³⁵ Lindsay, *Crawford Papers*, 497, entry for 1 May 1924.

²³⁶ H. M. Pollock in Belfast, *The Times* (London), 1 February 1924.

²³⁷ UKNA, HO/45/12296, James Craig to W. Joynson-Hicks, 25 November 1924.

²³⁸ UKNA, CAB/61/162, Report of the Irish Boundary Commission, 34-37.

²³⁹ UKNA, CAB/61/162, Report of the Irish Boundary Commission, 59.

²⁴⁰ UKNA, CAB/61/162, Report of the Irish Boundary Commission, 146.

avored the Free State, it paled in comparison to what they had hoped to receive. Moreover, few within the Free State had seriously considered having to cede any territory.

The *Morning Post* published a premature report of the commission's findings on November 7, 1925. Cosgrave, fearing that nationalist anger at this failure of the Treaty to deliver significant gains for the Free State would cause his administration's ouster, negotiated a deal to suppress the official report in exchange for financial concessions.²⁴¹ The border remained unchanged. The political settlement of the island of Ireland assumed a form that would remain unaltered until the closure of Northern Ireland's parliament in 1972.

Conclusions

During the negotiations that culminated in the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Lloyd George's Cabinet was willing to consider alterations to both major facets of its Irish policy: constitutional status and partition. On the former issue, The Sinn Féin negotiators' tactics did not help their cause. De Valera's decision not to publish a plan based on external association in August 1921 was his biggest mistake during the negotiations. The Irish public did not see the plan, therefore the Sinn Féin delegates at the conference could not argue that they had popular opinion behind it. Moreover, this lack of an apparent constitutional plan from the Irish republicans allowed Lloyd George's July 20 proposals to form the basis of the conference's deliberations by default. The British ministers did not engage with external association in written or oral argument, and the Sinn Féiners made little effort to press for such a debate. By the time the plan came before the Irish public, the Treaty had been signed and published. De Valera's intervention with Document No. 2 was too late.

On the issue of partition, the turning-point in the conference came between November 12 and 17. On the former date, Lloyd George told Griffith that he intended to force Craig into an all-Ireland settlement, or he would resign as Prime Minister. By that time, he had little to fear from the British Unionists. The die-hards had lost the October 31 censure vote by an overwhelming margin. The November 17 Liverpool conference confirmed that, even if they did not trust the Prime Minister, most Unionists considered they had no choice but to negotiate with Sinn Féin. Nonetheless, fearing that Bonar Law might return to galvanize the die-hards, Lloyd George decided to focus his persuasive efforts on Griffith and Collins rather than Craig. What

²⁴¹ UKNA, CAB/23/51/10, UK Cabinet Conclusions, 2 December 1925.

might have happened to the Prime Minister's parliamentary support had he tried to institute an all-Ireland parliament can only be guessed, but his contemporary statements show that he did not think that even a Unionist-led government could return to the pre-truce situation. The large parliamentary majorities in favor of the Treaty indicate that the terms embodied in that document did not approach the limit of what British legislators were willing to grant in exchange for peace.

Several of the Sinn Féin delegates and their supporters believed that they had made significant gains during the Treaty negotiations. However, as the agreement began to operate, the powers they expected the agreement to confer were gradually undermined. Whatever handshake agreements and understandings Lloyd George and his colleagues conveyed to Griffith and Collins at the negotiating table fell by the wayside as they were held to the letter of the Treaty. The revisions the Cabinet demanded to the Free State Constitution showed that the supremacy of the British Crown and Parliament must be recognized, even if it was not exercised. The idea that Northern Ireland would not receive reciprocal powers to the Free State was abandoned as the British government accorded Craig's administration *de facto* dominion status and the Special Constabulary increasingly functioned as an army. The Provisional Government realized that the promises they had given to the Dáil were being undermined, and made occasional protests. Collins asked Churchill in February 1922 why the Treaty was "being interpreted to the great legal disadvantage of Irish ministers." He did not receive a direct response.²⁴²

In 1924 the Free State government forced their British counterparts to implement the final outstanding Treaty clause: the boundary commission. President William Cosgrave and his colleagues were disappointed in the execution. The 1924-1925 commission was the last chance to take a plebiscite of Northern Ireland's population to determine their wishes. This was what Cosgrave and his colleagues wanted and expected. However, Northern Ireland's government was opposed to the entire project, therefore it was up to the British administration to compel such a vote. Not only did they not do so, but Feetham's interpretation of the boundary commission clause resulted in a principle that even nationalist majorities would not be respected if their transfer to the Free State would cause disruption to the status quo in Northern Ireland.

²⁴² UKNA, CAB/43/6/30, Conference on Ireland with Irish Ministers, 5 February 1922.

POSTSCRIPT: WAS THE ANGLO-IRISH TREATY A POPULAR SETTLEMENT?

Irish Free State

Whether the settlement embodied in the Government of Ireland Act and the Treaty can be described as popular is difficult to ascertain. In fact, gauging the level of support for any policy at this time is problematic. As historian Charles Townshend writes, “Public opinion, in 1922, effectively meant press opinion: ordinary people’s views emerged only indirectly.”¹

Leaders of the dominionist movement were pleased with the Treaty. Horace Plunkett described it as “in substance, the Irish Dominion League’s policy.” He wrote that through the agreement Ireland would have a “proud place among the nations who have won their freedom in the British Commonwealth,” and it “laid foundations upon which Irish unity can be surely built.”² Lord Monteagle issued a mild “I-told-you-so” to *The Times* in December 1921. He claimed that the signature and public acceptance of the Treaty marked “the conversion...of the Irish delegates and thousands, perhaps millions, of Irish Republicans.”³ It soon became evident that not so many Irish republicans had been “converted” as Monteagle believed.

Southern unionists took issue with various aspects of the Treaty. The British government still recognized Lord Midleton as the southern unionist leader, and facilitated meetings between him and the Sinn Féin delegates during the negotiations. The southern unionists received assurances on every point they raised.⁴ However, Midleton and his supporters continued to protest to the British government, particularly at the idea of an elected Senate. They submitted a letter protesting “any Senate constituted as proposed by Popular Election.”⁵ In other words, they did not trust to democratic practice. The idea of an elected Senate eventually gave way to a system in which some members were selected by the Dáil and others appointed by the Taoiseach.

¹ Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 358.

² NLI, Horace Plunkett Papers, Ms. 42,222/41, Diaries of Horace Plunkett, 7 December 1921.

³ Lord Monteagle, “Irish Peace,” *The Times* (London), 19 December 1921.

⁴ IMA, Gavan Duffy Collection, CD45/11/5, Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 16 November 1921.

⁵ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 16 June 1922; UKNA, CAB/43/7/194, T. St. Quintin Hill, “The Draft Irish Constitution: History of Negotiations between the Signatories of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland, May-June, 1922,” 13 July 1922.

While these reactions came from rarified political circles, historian Patrick Buckland asserts that, after the Treaty was signed, “most southern unionists accepted it as a *fait accompli*.”⁶

Some historians assert that, as pro-Treaty candidates won a clear majority in the June 1922 election, there was a high level of public support for the agreement.⁷ The press portrayed the Irish population as overwhelmingly in favor. Numerous public bodies passed resolutions supporting the Treaty, though de Valera complained that the press solicited many of these.⁸ The debates on those local government resolutions reveal almost equally balanced pro- and anti-Treaty opinions.⁹

Provisional Government members indicated a level of “buyers’ remorse” among the Irish population after the Treaty’s ratification. In December 1921, Arthur Griffith told Chief Secretary Hamar Greenwood that 95 percent of the public supported the agreement.¹⁰ However, Collins told Churchill in February 1922, “If they did not have an election till after the Constitution were drafted, the Treaty would be beaten in Ireland.”¹¹ Three months later, Eamonn Duggan said that without the Collins-de Valera election pact the Treaty would be “smashed.”¹² Nonetheless, British Cabinet members seized on the idea that the Irish public were overwhelmingly pro-Treaty. Churchill derided de Valera as representing just two percent of the population.¹³

Anti-Treaty republicans admitted that most Irish people were in favor of the agreement. On May 1, 1922, ten anti-Treaty IRA officers issued a statement urging a compromise. Its terms included, “The acceptance of the fact—admitted by all sides—that the majority of the people of Ireland are willing to accept the Treaty.”¹⁴ The anti-Treaty Dáil deputies involved in negotiating

⁶ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism One: The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), 273. Donnacha Ó Beacháin concurs in his recent analysis, “The Dog That Didn’t Bark: Southern Unionism in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Ireland,” *History Ireland* 23, no. 4 (July/August 2015): 47

⁷ R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 280; Tom Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), 134, 166-167; Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); 412; Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland, 1924-23* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), 191; J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 62; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing, 1912-72* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 212-213.

⁸ UCDA, Eamon de Valera Papers, P150/1560, Eamon de Valera to Joseph McGarrity, 27 December 1921.

⁹ Charles Townshend notes both of these dynamics, *The Republic*, 357-358.

¹⁰ UKPA, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/20/1/13, Hamar Greenwood to David Lloyd George, 29 December 1921.

¹¹ UKNA, CAB/43/6/39, Conference on Ireland with Irish Ministers, 5 February 1922.

¹² UKNA, CAB/43/6/90, Conference on Ireland, 26 May 1922.

¹³ UKNA, CAB/43/6/88-89, Conference on Ireland, 26 May 1922.

¹⁴ UCDA, Richard Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/192, “The Army Truce: How It Was Brought About,” 1 May 1922.

the election pact reported, “the Treaty has been approved by the majority of Dail Eireann, and, in the circumstances is accepted by a majority of the people.”¹⁵ To those who portray the anti-Treaty party as anti-democratic, such statements show that they deliberately opposed the will of the majority.¹⁶ However, there is a difference between public opinion and democracy. Public opinion is subject to constant change. Politicians often find that their personal convictions conflict with the popular mood. In that case, individuals in democratic systems are faced with several alternatives: to alter their convictions to accord with the popular judgement, to wait for public opinion to change, or to try to force that change. Many anti-Treaty republicans chose the latter two options. The phrase “in the circumstances” shows that the Treaty’s opponents believed that, under different conditions, most Irish people would reject the agreement. Moreover, Irish republicans had witnessed dramatic swings in public opinion, including from the IPP to Sinn Féin between 1916 and 1918. Treaty opponents saw themselves as representing an Irish desire for complete independence, which was being suppressed by the British and Provisional governments. This was similar to the unionist attitude between 1910 and 1914, as they insisted that the British population were against home rule but were misrepresented by Asquith’s government.

The outcome of the June 16, 1922, election can be interpreted as a significant popular endorsement of the Treaty. Pro-Treaty Sinn Féin won 38.48 percent of the first-preference vote and 58 of the 128 seats in the Dáil. Anti-Treaty Sinn Féin won 21.26 percent and 36 seats. Labour received the second-highest share of the popular vote at 21.33 percent, but just 17 seats. Independents won 10.59 percent and 10 seats, while the Farmers’ Party garnered 7.84 percent and 7 seats.¹⁷ These last three groupings accepted the peace agreement, and combining their totals with pro-Treaty Sinn Féin accounts for 78.24 percent of the popular vote.

However, bare statistics cannot reveal voters’ motivations. After the finalization of the Collins-de Valera pact in May 1922, the anti-Treaty party campaigned, not on their own platform, but as participants in the envisaged coalition. For example, on June 14 the pro-Treaty *Irish Times* reported that de Valera told an election meeting that he was there “to advocate the

¹⁵ NLI, Ms. 870, “Report of Committee on Agreed Election,” 17 May 1922.

¹⁶ Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 280.

¹⁷ Michael Gallagher, “The Pact General Election of 1922,” *Irish Historical Studies* 22, no. 84 (Sept. 1979): 414; Brian M. Walker, ed., *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1992), 104-108.

claims of the panel candidates, irrespective of their views on the Treaty.”¹⁸ Assertions such as these likely influenced some to vote for any Sinn Féin candidate, whether from the pro- or anti-Treaty camp. However, after the results showed a pro-Treaty victory, the agreement’s supporters seized on this as proof of their public support. The *Irish Times* asserted on June 26, “the recent elections were fought largely on the issue of the Treaty, and the results are decisive.”¹⁹ However, anti-Treaty activists did not believe that the election had settled the question. A July 23 proposal for negotiations from anti-Treaty IRA officer Tom Barry included the stipulation, “Election on Treaty issue,” indicating that the June 16 poll had not been fought on that question.²⁰

Churchill told Griffith on May 26 that the British government would not allow a pro- and anti-Treaty coalition, but the latter does not seem to have shared that information. De Valera and his supporters continued to campaign on the pact and a coalition. As late as June 27 the Irish press continued to speculate that the coalition idea might still be viable.²¹ Moreover, the British-approved version of the Free State constitution was not published until June 16, the day of the election, giving most voters no time to digest its contents. These maneuvers undoubtedly increased the pro-Treaty vote, but do not enhance their leaders’ democratic credentials.

Anti-Treaty republican Dorothy Macardle asserts that the election gave a clear mandate for a coalition government. She combines the totals of both Sinn Féin wings to show a two-thirds majority in the new Dáil.²² Townshend asserts that the meaning of the 1922 elections is unclear, citing the British government’s coercive threats.²³ The Civil War began two days after the results were announced, overshadowing the poll. The Provisional Government suspended the new Dáil, another move that undermines its members’ democratic qualifications.²⁴

Northern Nationalists

Reactions to the Treaty in Northern Ireland were also complex. Historian Eamon Phoenix asserts that northern unionists’ rejection of the agreement due to the boundary

¹⁸ Eamon de Valera in Clonmel, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 14 June 1922.

¹⁹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 June 1922.

²⁰ UCDA, Richard Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/192, Memorandum, 23 July 1922.

²¹ *Irish Times* (Dublin), 27 June 1922.

²² Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict with a detailed Account of the Period 1916-1923* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 722.

²³ Townshend, *The Republic*, 402.

²⁴ Jason Knirck, *Imagining Ireland’s Independence: The Debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 181.

commission convinced many six-county nationalists, especially in the border areas, to support it.²⁵ Brian Feeney asserts that, while Sinn Féin split on the Treaty question throughout most of the island, in Northern Ireland the party was almost unanimously in favor.²⁶ After the Treaty's ratification, most northern IRA members seem to have been willing to work in tandem with the Provisional Government.²⁷ Collins cooperated with the anti-Treaty faction in planning an IRA offensive in Northern Ireland for May 1922. Elements within the Free State were to supply large quantities of arms to each brigade in the six counties.²⁸ Commandant Roger McCorley said the effort was designed to bring about "the downfall of the six-county Government."²⁹ The offensive failed amid a welter of conflicting orders, disjointed attacks, unsuccessful arms deliveries, and the rounding up of many active republicans by the Constabulary.

As Sinn Féin and the IRA continued to fragment over the Treaty, a number of northern commanders tried to unite them by highlighting the plight of six-county nationalists.³⁰ These efforts were insufficient to heal the split, and some of the northern IRA fought on different sides in the Civil War.³¹

Historians often assert that the Treaty split was not about partition, citing the fact that during the ratification debates Dáil members paid greater attention to constitutional issues such as the oath, the Crown, and the utilization of Irish ports by the British Navy.³² This idea gained significant credence in historical discourse in 1966 when Maureen Wall asserted that, in the printed version of the Dáil Treaty debates, speeches on partition occupy just nine out of 338 pages.³³ Martin Mansergh attempted to modify this in 1998 by stating that twenty Dáil members

²⁵ Eamon Phoenix, *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland, 1890-1940* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994), 163-166.

²⁶ Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 147.

²⁷ Robert Lynch, *The Northern IRA and the Early Years of Partition, 1920-1922* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 97-98, 129-133.

²⁸ Seamus Woods to Richard Mulcahy, 29 September 1922 in BMH WS No. 365, Thomas Fox; BMH WS No. 410, Thomas McNally, 23-24; BMH WS No. 534, James Short, 6.

²⁹ BMH WS No. 389, Roger E. McCorley, 28-29.

³⁰ UCDA, Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/192, Joseph McKelvey to Liam Lynch, 8 May 1922 and Frank Aiken, P. Lavery, et. al., "Six County Position in the Present National Crisis."

³¹ BMH WS No. 458, Sean Corr, 21; BMH WS No. 693, Patrick Maguire, 15; BMH WS No. 928, John Shields, 24.

³² R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1660-1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 506-507; Garvin, 1922, 27, 193-194; Mary Harris, *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Irish State* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 105-106, 137; Knirek, *Imagining Ireland's Independence*, 152-153; Laffan, *Resurrection of Ireland*, 380; Robert Lynch, *Revolutionary Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 86, 104; Kevin Matthews, *Fatal Influence: The Impact of Ireland on British Politics, 1920-1925* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004), 61; John M. Regan, *Myth and the Irish State: Historical Problems and Other Essays* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 61.

³³ Maureen Wall, "Partition: The Ulster Question (1916-1926)," in *The Irish Struggle, 1916-1926*, ed. Desmond Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 87.

spoke on northern questions.³⁴ While Sinn Féin legislators debated constitutional issues at greater length, historians' characterizations of the idea that partition was not a part of the discussions at times approach the point of caricature. After noting that Collins mentioned partition, Peter Hart asserts, "almost no one else even brought it up."³⁵

A number of Dáil speakers condemned partition. Others discussed Northern Ireland, or "Ulster," the "Partition Bill," as they called the Government of Ireland Act, the status of northern nationalists, and the fear that the British Army might use the six counties as a base to reoccupy the rest of Ireland. In other words, they discussed multiple issues that were either created or exacerbated by partition. By my count, at least thirty-three individual Dáil members discussed issues relating to partition or to Northern Ireland. Nineteen of these voted for the Treaty and fourteen against. There were 125 members of the Second Dáil, therefore thirty-three of the comprises 26.4 percent of the house. According to Jason Knirck, ninety-five individuals spoke during the Treaty debates, consequently 34.7 percent of them mentioned northern issues.³⁶ This is still a minority, but it is a larger group than many commentators allow. Even in the moment there was confusion as to how much time was being devoted to questions relating to Northern Ireland. Ernest Blythe said on January 3, 1922, "There has been a good deal said about the clauses in this Treaty in regard to North East Ulster."³⁷ The next day, Eoin O'Duffy said of "the North-East," "very little has been said about it up to the present."³⁸

Belfast native Seán MacEntee was the principal anti-Treaty spokesman on the northern question. Seán Milroy countered for the pro- side. It is logical that these two conducted the main debate on partition; both sat for constituencies in the nine-county province of Ulster, MacEntee for Monaghan and Milroy for Fermanagh and Tyrone. It was common parliamentary practice for a party to allow or even to designate speakers to focus on a particular topic. This procedure seems to have been followed on partition, as Milroy knew before MacEntee spoke that he was going to criticize the Treaty on that basis.³⁹ Milroy was one of six Dáil members sitting for constituencies in Northern Ireland, five of whom discussed northern issues during the Treaty

³⁴ Martin Mansergh, "The Freedom to Achieve Freedom?," in *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland*, ed. Gabriel Doherty and Michael Keogh (Cork: Mercier, 1998), 170.

³⁵ Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (New York: Viking, 2005), 335.

³⁶ Knirck, *Imagining Ireland's Independence*, 152.

³⁷ Ernest Blythe, "Debate on Treaty," *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 10, 3 January 1922.

³⁸ Eoin O'Duffy, "Debate on Treaty," *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 11, 4 January 1922.

³⁹ Sean Milroy, "Debate on Treaty," *DÉ Debates*, Vol. T, No. 7, 20 December 1921.

debate. The other four were Michael Collins (pro-), Eamon de Valera (anti-), Arthur Griffith (pro-), and Eoin MacNeill (pro-). Seán O'Mahony (anti-) was the only deputy representing a six-county constituency who did not speak on any issue relating to partition.⁴⁰

Anti-Treaty speakers mainly condemned the principle of partition, and the Treaty's recognition of it. Pro-Treaty members had a slightly more discursive field. They also condemned partition, but added that the Treaty would mitigate, or even end it. Pro-Treaty deputies criticized the fact that de Valera reproduced the Treaty's articles relating to Northern Ireland almost verbatim in his suggested alternative, Document No. 2. De Valera later wrote, "I hated these clauses, but I had to deal with Ulster in one way or another." He described including those passages in his document as his biggest mistake during the debates.⁴¹ This highlights the conundrum in which Dáil members found themselves regarding the six counties: they wanted a united Ireland, but had few ideas how to effect it. On issues such as the oath or Ireland's relationship to the Empire, they could protest—as some did regarding partition—but they could also debate phrasing and suggest modifications. On partition, they had few alternatives to discuss. At least one deputy asserted that this should not confuse anyone as to the biggest issue confronting them. Lorcan Robbins of Co. Westmeath said on January 3, "The people in my county care nothing about formulas or oaths; they do care a lot about Ulster being kept out. That is the biggest question. Anything that ever mattered to the people of Ireland was the unity of Ireland." He also argued that the Treaty provided the most practical means to freedom, particularly as it conferred an army, therefore he voted in favor.⁴²

In any case, the Dáil debates provide too narrow a source base to gauge the importance of partition as an issue within nationalism. The nationalist press denounced partition and reported daily on events north of the border. Collins spent significant time attempting to broker deals with Craig, pressure the British Cabinet to safeguard six-county nationalists, and orchestrate the failed IRA offensive. The outbreak of the Civil War and Collins's death distracted from these initiatives, and the failure of the boundary commission largely ended them.

⁴⁰ Seán O'Mahony's speech focused on the oath, "Debate on Treaty," DÉ Debates, Vol. T, No. 11, 4 January 1922.

⁴¹ UCDA, de Valera Papers, P150/1549, Eamon de Valera, "Memo on Oath and Doc. No. 2," 18 February 1923.

⁴² Lorcan Robbins, "Debate on Treaty," DÉ Debates, Vol. T, No. 10, 3 January 1922.

Northern Unionists

Northern Ireland's government ultimately opposed the Treaty, but were they content with the overall settlement? Historians often note the paradox that, despite Irish nationalists' decades-long agitation for home rule, it was their northern unionist opponents that achieved it.⁴³ A greater irony is that, once they were in charge of a self-governing state, unionists strained against the restrictions they had insisted must be included in any home rule bill. In 1910, Carson protested that home rule would make unionists a "permanent minority" in an Irish parliament, but insisted on partitioning an area that placed six-county nationalists in that exact position.⁴⁴ Craig used his May 1921 meetings with Michael O'Flanagan, James O'Connor, and de Valera to try to alter facets of the Government of Ireland Act he found inconvenient. Craig wanted fiscal autonomy, if only through the Council of Ireland, suggested that neither Irish parliament pay any Imperial contribution, and wanted the northern Senate abolished.⁴⁵ All of this is ironic as unionists had refused to countenance allowing a majority-nationalist legislature fiscal autonomy, argued that home rule would be a drain on Imperial resources, and insisted on safeguards that would result in their representation in excess of their population.

Unionists had insisted that certain services be "reserved," or withheld from any home rule government for a period of years, particularly taxation and police. Some powers were temporarily withheld from the six-county government, but even before the Northern Ireland Parliament convened Craig's Cabinet determined to pressure the British government to transfer them as soon as possible.⁴⁶ One of the first measures Craig's government introduced would remove proportional representation, which had been instituted throughout Ireland prior to the 1921 elections in a bid to increase minority representation in both parliaments. Collins protested to Churchill, who replied in a letter justifying the British government's non-intervention. Collins wrote on his copy, "It is a sentence of death or expulsion on every Catholic in the North."⁴⁷ This

⁴³ Patrick Buckland, "Carson, Craig and the Partition of Ireland, 1912-21," in *Nationalism and Unionism: Conflict in Ireland, 1885-1921*, ed. Peter Collins (Belfast: Queen's University Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 87; Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 200; Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 308-309; A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 156.

⁴⁴ Edward Carson in Belfast, *Irish Times* (Dublin), 29 November 1910.

⁴⁵ UCDA, de Valera Papers, P150/1414, Michael O'Flanagan to Eamon de Valera, 14 May 1921; Mark Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries*, ed. Michael Hopkinson (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 177, entry for 15 May 1921.

⁴⁶ PRONI, CAB/4/5/4, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 24 June 1921.

⁴⁷ Trinity College Dublin Archive (TCDA), MS 11399/6, Winston Churchill to Michael Collins, 31 July 1922.

was an exaggeration of the bill's effects, but it is an early demonstration of Northern Ireland's "official Unionists" to monopolize political power. This was the first test of the relationship between the Belfast and London governments, and non-intervention resulted in the precedent that Northern Ireland would have the legislative independence of a dominion, despite its official status as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

No home rule bill had contemplated giving Irish nationalists control of an army, which the northern unionists effectively established in the Special Constabulary. The force became a permanent tool of the six-county government. In November 1922, British General Arthur Solly-Flood, Northern Ireland's military adviser, tried to convince the London administration to take control of the Specials. Craig learned of this intrigue and Solly-Flood resigned.⁴⁸

Craig's description of his policy toward the United Kingdom government indicated his concern for Northern Ireland's finances. He wrote in May 1922, "I have to be very careful on the one hand to get as much as possible out of them free of cost, and on the other, to see that the tax payers in Ulster are not much in too heavy damages regarding the balance."⁴⁹ This policy was vindicated as the British government agreed to pay the entire balance for the Constabulary through March 1923.⁵⁰ They covered part of the cost through 1925.⁵¹

Several scholars assert that Craig had reasons to be worried, as the form of government established in Northern Ireland was doomed from the start. Buckland and Alan Ward argue that the Government of Ireland Act placed too many restrictions on the northern government to facilitate the economic development of the six counties.⁵² While Northern Ireland was accorded the political status of a dominion, its economy remained tied to Britain. This resulted in significant subsidies from the UK treasury, but economic policies were set in London and were not attuned to Northern Ireland's needs. Alvin Jackson and John Kendle assert that the governmental structures in the Act were not intended to operate in isolation long term; the

⁴⁸ CAB/6/52, R. Dawson Bates to James Craig, 24 November 1922; C. H. Blackmore to James Craig, n.d.; Arthur Solly-Flood to James Craig, 5 December 1922.

⁴⁹ PRONI, CAB/6/89, James Craig to Henry Wilson, 10 May 1922.

⁵⁰ PRONI, CAB/4/50/10, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 27 July 1922.

⁵¹ PRONI, CAB/4/89/11, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 6 October 1923; PRONI, CAB/4/134/28, NI Cabinet Conclusions, 27 January 1925.

⁵² Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland, 1921-39* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979), 2-6, 86-91; Alan J. Ward, *The Irish Constitutional Tradition: Responsible Government in Modern Ireland, 1782-1992* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 121-123.

northern state apparatus was designed to facilitate reintegration with the rest of Ireland.⁵³ This never occurred, due largely to unionists' insistence that it should not.

The two primary northern unionist leaders' long-term reactions to the settlement were very different. Edward Carson experienced both failures and successes during the long debates over Irish self-government and partition. Some biographers note that he failed to preserve the Union.⁵⁴ However, as early as 1913 he formulated a demand for six-county exclusion, and saw it implemented despite many difficulties. Nonetheless, Carson was angry at the outcome. During a December 1921 speech denouncing the Treaty he admitted that his anti-home rule campaign had been designed to overturn Asquith's government, not to result in self-government even for a partitioned Ireland. He said, "I was in earnest. What a fool I was. I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland, in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power."⁵⁵ Carson sat in the House of Lords until his death in 1935. He remained bitter, and observed the Free State's increasing assertiveness with disgust.⁵⁶

Buckland blames Craig for much of the economic stagnation and entrenched sectarian politics that characterized Northern Ireland, as he remained Prime Minister until his death in 1940. At the same time, he portrays Craig as largely happy in the state he had helped to build. Buckland writes, "He liked to play down difficulties and to see Northern Ireland as one large happy family with himself as the benevolent and popular pipe-smoking father-figure."⁵⁷ This self-image was facilitated by the fact that the extent of Northern Ireland's problems was not apparent until the 1970s. Writing after the Second World War, in which Northern Ireland had participated as part of the United Kingdom while the Free State's successor Éire had remained neutral, a northern unionist declared that Craig's choices had been "good for Ireland, good for Britain, good for the Commonwealth, good for the world."⁵⁸ Prior to the outbreak of the Troubles, many northern unionists portrayed their state as primarily positive.

⁵³ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 204-205; John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate Over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1921* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 233.

⁵⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Sir Edward Carson* (Dublin: Historical Association of Ireland, 1993), 65-66; Geoffrey Lewis, *Carson: The Man Who Divided Ireland* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), 233.

⁵⁵ Lord Carson, "Address in Reply to His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech," House of Lords Debates (HL Deb) 14 December 1921 vol 48 cc5-56, Hansard 1803-2005.

⁵⁶ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Carson: The Life of Sir Edward Carson, Lord Carson of Duncairn* (London: William Heinemann, 1953), 490-492.

⁵⁷ Patrick Buckland, *James Craig: Lord Craigavon* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 94.

⁵⁸ St. John Ervine, *Craigavon: Ulsterman* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949), 610.

Britain

Historians sometimes attribute Lloyd George's fall from power to British unionist anger at the Treaty.⁵⁹ Joseph Curran asserts that many Unionist legislators never forgave the Prime Minister for his "surrender to murder" in Ireland.⁶⁰ This was true of some, but their numbers were insignificant until other criticisms were leveled at Lloyd George's government. Asserting that the Irish settlement was the prime issue that led to the coalition's downfall places too much emphasis on the "sister island." David Powell highlights industrial unrest and an economic downturn as most damaging to the administration. The event that immediately precipitated Lloyd George's ouster as Prime Minister was his support for the Greeks in their war against Turkey, which by September 1922 threatened to draw the British Empire into the conflict.⁶¹ The coalition's end was a slow process brought on by a number of factors; the Anglo-Irish Treaty was just one of several policies that were not very popular with some Unionists, but that they were bound as coalition members to support.⁶²

The Unionist Party voted to leave the coalition in October 1922. An election the following month saw the Unionists remain the largest single grouping in the Commons, with 38.5 percent of the vote and 344 seats. However, this was slightly fewer votes than the combined coalition and non-coalition Unionists had garnered in 1918, and they lost thirty-eight seats.⁶³ The Unionists did not gain office by harnessing a wave of public indignation over any issue. If there was a change in public opinion after the establishment of Northern Ireland and the Free State, it did not register at the polls. Lloyd George's fall was a palace revolution; the Unionists simply decided to replace him with a member of their own party. Incoming Premier Bonar Law confirmed speculation that a Unionist government would be forced to adopt Lloyd George's Irish policy, as he pledged to complete the process of Treaty ratification and implementation.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Matthews, *Fatal Influence*, 37, 64; Taylor, *English History*, 161; Townshend, *The Republic*, 339.

⁶⁰ Joseph Curran, *The Birth of the Irish Free State, 1921-1923* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1981), 261-262.

⁶¹ David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), 107-113.

⁶² Roy Hattersley, *David Lloyd George: The Great Outsider* (London: Little, Brown, 2010), 549-558; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1974), 163-164; Hugh Purcell, *Lloyd George* (London: Haus, 2006), 94-96.

⁶³ F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Statistics, 1918-1968* (Glasgow: Political Reference, 1968), 1-4.

⁶⁴ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1955), 475-476; Andrew Taylor, *Bonar Law* (London: Haus, 2006), 119.

Lloyd George's reputation has gone through several permutations among scholars. Prior to the outbreak of the Northern Ireland Troubles in the 1970s, claims that Lloyd George had settled the Irish question were common.⁶⁵ Confining their analysis to the immediate exigencies of British political priorities, some authors continue to describe Lloyd George's Irish policy as a success.⁶⁶ These analyses ignore the violence that ensued between 1922 and 1923, or imply that, due to Irish self-government, it was not the British administration's responsibility. The settlement did not enable short-term peace in either part of Ireland, and long-term stability eluded Northern Ireland. This is not a matter of hindsight. Many individuals, some of them close to the British Cabinet, predicted that partition would not result in lasting peace. Historian Michael Hopkinson notes Lloyd George's enabling of reprisals and a "laissez-faire" attitude to events in the six counties after 1920, concluding that he "does not merit the favourable historical press he has generally received on the Irish Question."⁶⁷

Some of Lloyd George's recent biographers assert that he was more interested in getting a deal within the closed confines of a conference than one that could be implemented successfully.⁶⁸ At times this was evident in his negotiations on Ireland, however there was another factor. Whenever he was forced to choose between what might be termed "Unionist" or "Liberal" aspects of Irish policy, he invariably chose the former. In 1910, Lloyd George wanted to form a coalition with the Unionists to implement a federal system. Two years later, he was the first British politician to propose exclusion, foreshadowing a policy that Unionists would later adopt. In 1916 he upheld Carson's priorities over Redmond's. Lloyd George advocated coercing Sinn Féin from 1918. In 1921 he bowed to the threat of pressure from Bonar Law rather than attempt to implement an all-Ireland settlement. Some of these maneuvers were designed to benefit his political career, but he was also motivated by an anti-Catholicism that fed a personal aversion to home rule. Though he remained a Liberal for his entire political career, on Irish policy, Lloyd George is best understood as a unionist.

⁶⁵ Walter L. Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today, 1830 to the Present* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1966), 264; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 17; Taylor, *English History*, 161.

⁶⁶ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 359-361; John McCollgan, *British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920-22* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 132; Hugh Purcell, *Lloyd George* (London: Haus, 2006), 93.

⁶⁷ Michael Hopkinson, "Negotiation: The Anglo-Irish War and the Revolution," in *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923*, ed. Joost Augusteijn (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 126-129.

⁶⁸ John Campbell, *If Love Were All: The Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), 221-222, 236; Hattersley, *David Lloyd George*, 546.

Consequences of the Settlement

It is difficult to determine the cost of the struggle over Irish self-government in terms of human lives and fortunes. More than 500 people died during the 1916 Easter Rising.⁶⁹ In 1936, former IRA and Free State General J. J. O'Connell reported that, between 1919 and July 11, 1921, 1,376 people were killed in Ireland and 1,812 wounded.⁷⁰ Presumably this includes the 103 fatal casualties of Belfast riots between July 1920 and July 1921.⁷¹ After this, the figures become less certain. A number of RIC, soldiers, and suspected informers were killed during the Truce and the buildup to the Civil War. That conflict likely claimed around 1,500 lives.⁷² Between August and December 1921, at least fifty-two people were killed in Belfast as riots continued while the IRA and unionist groups became more active.⁷³ Another 265 people died in Northern Ireland's capital from January to June 1922.⁷⁴ How many died in the six counties outside of Belfast is uncertain. Killings continued in Northern Ireland until at least October 1922, but with the Civil War ongoing in the Free State they garnered little attention.

There were social and economic consequences for the survivors. Gavin Foster points out that anti-Treaty republicans in the Free State were often discriminated against in both public and private sector employment, forcing thousands to emigrate. This ended when de Valera's Fianna Fáil party won a Dáil majority in 1932.⁷⁵ Republicans from Northern Ireland attempting to return to their homes between 1922 and 1923 faced possible arrest or extralegal unionist violence.⁷⁶ Northern nationalists alleged that they too faced employment discrimination. Buckland dismisses these accusations, asserting that unemployment was an endemic problem in Northern Ireland.⁷⁷ As thousands of suspected nationalists and republicans were expelled from their jobs

⁶⁹ Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, *The 1916 Irish Rebellion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 142.

⁷⁰ IMA, Collins Papers, A/0612/9, J. J. O'Connell to Eamon de Valera, 24 April 1936.

⁷¹ *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 September 1921.

⁷² Gemma Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3.

⁷³ This total has been compiled from casualty reports in *The Times* (London), 2 September, 24 September, 26 September, 25 November, 17 December, 20 December, and 28 December 1921.

⁷⁴ *Irish Independent* (Dublin), 17 July 1922.

⁷⁵ Gavin M. Foster, *The Irish Civil War and Society: Politics, Class, and Conflict* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 172-191, 197-202, 218-220.

⁷⁶ BMH WS. No. 672, Thomas Luckie, 6-7; BMH WS No. 609, Feidhlim S. MacGuill, 15; BMH WS No. 1,096, J. J. Murray, 20; Seamus Woods to Richard Mulcahy, 29 September 1922 in BMH WS No. 365, Thomas Fox.

⁷⁷ Patrick Buckland, "A Protestant State: Unionists in Government, 1921-39," in *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 2001), 218.

in the six counties between 1912 and 1922, the idea of economic discrimination seems valid, at least in the early years of partition.

Southern unionists left the Free State in large numbers during this period. Andy Bielenberg has calculated that 106,456 Protestants left the twenty-six counties between 1911 and 1926. Any analysis based on religion does not account for how many Catholic unionists left Ireland, but as census records provide a religious but not a political categorization this may be the only available quantifier. Some Protestant emigrants were members of the British Army or bureaucracy, while others had economic ties to Britain or simply did not want to live under an Irish government. Finally, some were intimidated into leaving by republicans, agrarian agitators, or the general disorder prevailing between 1920 and 1923. Bielenberg asserts that intimidation accounts for a minority of the total Protestant emigrants, approximately 15 percent of the total. He also points out that the majority of Protestants remained in the Free State, and their over-representation in both legislative houses gave them significant influence.⁷⁸ Gemma Clark identifies an “unavoidable trend” of anti-Treaty activists targeting the Protestant minority, but emphasizes multiple motivations at work among the perpetrators, including sectarianism, political identity, class, and gender. She notes that Catholics could become victims for any of the latter three reasons, and adds that the trend of Protestants leaving the area comprising the new state was established long before the conflict over Irish self-government began.⁷⁹

Apart from pro-Treaty officials and dominionists, the settlement enacted between 1920 and 1922 cannot be described as a popular one. Those who supported the Treaty did so largely based on what they thought it might bring in the future, not on its merits or immediate consequences. Scholars sometimes point to the long-term use of the Treaty to achieve wider powers as a retrospective validation of its terms.⁸⁰ However, this did not seem like an obvious outcome to everyone in 1922. While arguing against the Treaty, Seán MacEntee said, “it is the terrible finality of the settlement that appalls me.”⁸¹ The Free State’s eventual constitutional evolution made this assumption of finality a mistaken one, but it highlights that, apart from pro-

⁷⁸ Andy Bielenberg, “Exodus: The Emigration of Southern Irish Protestants during the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War,” *Past & Present* 218 (Feb. 2013): 229-232.

⁷⁹ Clark, *Everyday Violence*, 152-153, 197-203.

⁸⁰ Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Macmillan, 2006), 328; Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 283, 291; Garvin, *1922*, 55, 187; P. S. O’Hegarty, *A History of Ireland under the Union, 1801-1922* (New York: Kraus, 1969), 774.

⁸¹ Seán MacEntee, *DÉ Debates*, 22 December 1921.

Treaty assurances, contemporaries had little reason to believe that the powers granted by the agreement would not remain static for the foreseeable future.

The Provisional Government feared a popular backlash against the Treaty; as evidenced by their maneuvers to avoid an election on the agreement in 1922 and the closing of the Third Dáil. The boundary commission's failure three years later renewed these fears. Though they publicly described the Treaty as "sacred," Cumann na nGaedheal officials began to undo some of its terms by distancing the Free State from the Commonwealth, a process de Valera and Fianna Fáil advanced more dramatically.⁸² Northern Ireland's unionist governors publicly declared their adherence to the Government of Ireland Act and portrayed themselves as having made a great sacrifice by accepting it, but they also agitated for wider powers. The British electorate's voting behavior suggests that they were ambivalent toward the Irish settlement.

In a sign of the settlement's enduring unpopularity in Ireland, the anti-Treaty political movement began to regroup just three years after the Civil War. De Valera returned to mainstream politics by founding Fianna Fáil in 1926. The party won a Dáil majority during a 1932 general election. De Valera enacted a new constitution in 1937 which renamed the Free State, "Éire," removed the monarchist symbolism, and relegated the oath to obsolescence. Treaty signatory Robert Barton interpreted Ireland's evolution away from the Commonwealth as de Valera finally achieving external association. He added that attaining Irish unity would be the "last phase" of this process.⁸³

⁸² D. W. Harkness, *Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the Birth of the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-31* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969), xiv, 254; Jason Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution: Cumann na nGaedheal and Irish Politics, 1922-1932* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 212-213; Ward, *Irish Constitutional Tradition*, 212-238.

⁸³ UCDA, de Valera Papers, P150/1568, Robert Barton to Eamon de Valera, 24 December 1936.

CONCLUSIONS

By providing a detailed analytical narrative that methodically explores the process by which British and Irish politicians reached the 1920-1922 settlement, this dissertation has advanced three major claims. First, the form of Irish self-government was never inevitable, but was instead changeable from the time it became a practical issue in December 1909 right up to the point of implementation in 1922. Both the powers of the Third Home Rule Bill and the area to which it would apply continually changed, despite the measure's introduction in April 1912. Moreover, up to the outbreak of the First World War, Unionist Party leaders hoped that they could win a general election and defeat home rule entirely. Schemes for partition remained vague. In particular, the issues of how to define an "Ulster" area to exclude from home rule and how that area would be administered were undecided. These issues remained unresolved by the efforts to implement home rule during the war, though in 1916 Lloyd George arrived at his personal preference to exclude six counties until Westminster decided otherwise. Irish nationalists still hoped that partition would be temporary, while during the Irish Convention they tried to avoid it altogether by granting unionists an overwhelming influence in the home rule parliament.

Between 1919 and July 1921, both Sinn Féin and groups like the Irish Dominion League proposed settlements that would result in a single Irish state, and grant more extensive powers than home rule. The creation of an all-Ireland parliament was possible as late as November 1921, as Lloyd George entertained the idea during the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. During the Treaty's implementation, the Irish Free State's Provisional Government tried to remove some of the agreement's objectionable features by instituting an essentially republican constitution. By June 1922 it was clear that, at least in the short term, the Free State's powers were fixed by the Treaty. This made negotiations to avoid civil war unrealistic. Some pro-Treaty activists continued to hope that the 1924-1925 Boundary Commission might undo partition, but the narrow interpretation of its powers precluded major alterations.

The second claim made here is that the exigencies of British party politics were a decisive influence in shaping the Irish settlement. Asquith only gave his home rule pledge in December 1909 to win Irish votes in Britain and maintain a majority in the Commons. Between 1909 and 1911 both British parties were open to making a deal between themselves on the future

government of Ireland, without consulting Irish nationalists or unionists. If the constitutional conference or Lloyd George's idea for a coalition government had succeeded, or if the Unionist Party adopted federalism, there would have been no home rule bill. Asquith and his government framed the Third Home Rule Bill in accordance with their own political priorities, a fact most obvious in the measure's financial restrictions. From October 1913 Asquith began negotiating with the Unionists on the principle of exclusion, and within weeks had ceased to consult Redmond on these talks. This pro-unionist bias grew more pronounced during the First World War, as in 1916 Lloyd George adopted the formula for partition that Carson had advocated two years earlier. As Prime Minister, Lloyd George set up the Irish Convention in 1917 as an ostensibly free forum to frame a scheme of self-government for Ireland, only to privately preclude dominion home rule and intrude with his own settlement suggestions. His government framed the expressly partitionist Government of Ireland Act between 1919 and 1920, a measure that was intensely unpopular with most Irish people, both nationalist and unionist. During the Treaty negotiations in 1921, Lloyd George considered altering the status of Northern Ireland, but abandoned the idea in a bid to prolong the life of his government.

Finally, as well as being highly contingent and heavily shaped by British interests, the settlement implemented between 1920 and 1922 was profoundly undemocratic. Even when home rule seemed likely, the powers of an Irish parliament were to be determined by Westminster politicians. This was evident in the framing of the Third Home Rule Bill and Lloyd George's interventions in the Irish Convention. Sinn Féin's calls for self-determination were ignored, as was the Irish Dominion League's appeal for a constitutional convention. The British threat of coercion was a feature of the Treaty negotiations from the first meetings between de Valera and Lloyd George in July 1921. It was the threat of war that compelled several of the Sinn Féin delegates to sign the agreement on December 6. The coercion threat hung over the Dáil debates that eventually ratified the Treaty in January 1922, and was revived five months later during the negotiations on the Irish Free State constitution. All of this denied Sinn Féin activists a free choice as to their form of government. The Free State itself was not established on firm democratic practice. The Collins-de Valera pact was designed to avoid an election on the Treaty issue, and the non-publication of the Constitution gave most voters no time to decide the issue based on the realities of their future governance

The implementation of partition was an overtly undemocratic procedure. Between 1913 and 1914 Asquith gradually negotiated away the principle that plebiscites must determine the area to be excluded from home rule. During the Buckingham Palace Conference in July 1914, Carson asserted that Westminster should determine the area and duration of exclusion, not any segment of Ulster's population. Lloyd George adopted these principles in 1916, and the next year rejected draft bills embodying county option. His Cabinet provided no mechanism for gauging the wishes of the six-county population in framing the Government of Ireland Act. Judge Feetham's decision during the 1924-1925 boundary commission sittings not to enact plebiscites confirmed that this facet of the settlement should be in the hands of political elites.

The individuals most responsible for partition were Edward Carson, H. H. Asquith, David Lloyd George, and James Craig. In 1913, Carson first articulated the form of six-county partition that was eventually implemented. Though he claimed not to want this type of settlement, every move Carson made brought exclusion closer. He reiterated his demand for six-county partition in 1916 and in 1919. Asquith abandoned the idea of temporary exclusion in 1914, and though he usually pushed for plebiscites as to the area involved, he was willing to give way on that point as well. He also outlined an explicitly religious form of partition, emphasizing that a majority-Protestant area should be excluded from home rule. Lloyd George adopted Carson's formula for partition in 1916, and was instrumental in steering his government away from other potential settlements over the next four years. Given an opportunity to create an all-Ireland parliament in November 1921, Lloyd George declined, in a bid to prolong the life of his administration. Craig aided Carson in making his demand for six-county exclusion. Though he claimed not to want a six-county parliament, he ensured that it was implemented to the maximum advantage of northern unionists between 1920 and 1922.

The settlement left considerable unfinished business. The governments of both the Free State and Northern Ireland immediately sought to expand their powers. Partition left a Protestant unionist minority in the twenty-six counties, as well as a Catholic nationalist population in the six. Northern Ireland's Unionist government was conditioned to see the minority population in the six counties as inveterate enemies, and possessed a large, British-sponsored police apparatus with which to suppress political agitation. Republicans across the island engaged in both political and militant campaigns seeking to undo both of these major aspects of the 1920-1922

settlement. In the early 1970s that discontent erupted into the decades-long civil conflict known as “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland.

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