



*An Island Divided:
Eamon de Valera, Michael
Collins, Arthur Griffith, Cathal
Brugha and the 1921 Anglo-Irish
Treaty*

By James Webber



Universiteit Leiden

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Date: December 2012



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Introduction

1) Synopsis and aim of the research

On the morning of 6 December 1921 the “Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland” were signed between the British government and representatives of Dáil Éireann, the newly formed (and self-proclaimed) Irish parliament. The agreement was the result of two months of intense debate and deliberation over Ireland’s future relationship with Great Britain, and it was hoped that it would herald an end to Anglo-Irish discontent and the ruinous fighting that had dogged Ireland since the outbreak of major hostilities in 1919. The signing of the Treaty was a watershed moment; for the first time in over seven hundred years the Irish were given the right to self-govern and the British obliged to withdraw their physical presence. Yet rather than bring peace, the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty would lead Ireland on the path to civil war. The divide that would entrench ordinary Irishmen was mirrored by their political representatives, of whom the four most significant were Eamon de Valera, Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith and Cathal Brugha. The leading question of this paper is twofold: firstly to ascertain what their personal views were regarding Ireland’s future and secondly how closely did their views match those of the Irish public? By looking at these four figures, the aim is to try and explain whether their differences of opinion helped to sow the seeds of civil war. The decision to focus on these particular individuals is due to the fact that they were the most instrumental in how the Treaty was received back in Ireland. The polarisation of their views, with Griffith and Collins in support of the agreement and de Valera and Brugha against, would later be reflected by the two opposing sides that fought the civil war.

2) Overall historiography

This work will look at four very contrasting politicians. As Sheila Lawlor points out, the difficulty in asserting precisely what these figures thought at the time about peace proposals and settlements ‘arises not only out of the shortage of contemporary written evidence, but out of the many and contradictory accounts adopted subsequently by

protagonists and antagonists of the treaty'.¹ The treaty negotiations of late 1921 and the subsequent debates have already been the subject of previous research. Where this paper seeks to contribute to the debate is to look at what de Valera, Collins, Griffith and Brugha *personally* sought to achieve for a future Ireland and how this compared to what was actually achieved by the agreement. Did the men's public comments regarding the country's future differ at all from what they pragmatically expected out of future Anglo-Irish relations? When Collins for instance spoke of the Treaty as being a stepping-stone towards ultimate freedom, how much was this a true belief as opposed to justification for "selling-short" the dream of an Irish Republic? With previous material having tended to only examine the men individually, this research differs by looking at *all* four men and seeing how their thoughts and actions *combined* had a bearing on the course of events.

3) Existing material relating to de Valera and Collins

Of all the individuals concerned, de Valera and Collins have received the most attention, with many biographies and other historical works produced in the intervening years. In popular culture, Collins has become a rather romanticised Irish hero, being one of the most high-profile victims of the civil war (killed by an anti-Treaty IRA unit in August 1922), and thus unable to reflect in later years upon his intentions and actions in the way afforded to de Valera (this is equally true of Brugha and Griffith, both of whom did not survive past 1922). Recent works such as the 1996 feature-film *Michael Collins*, give weight to de Valera's observation in 1966: 'It's my considered opinion that in the fullness of time, history will record the greatness of Collins and it will be recorded at my expense.'² Indeed, recent publications such as John Turi's *England's Greatest Spy* (2009), and the 1999 BBC documentary *De Valera: Ireland's Hated Hero*, do not portray the man in a favourable manner. On the other hand, Diarmaid Ferriter's recent publication *Judging Dev* paints a more positive picture, and highlights just what an enigma de Valera and his legacy continue to be. Such an issue is not so relevant with Collins; rather his enduring legacy has been to go down in history as Ireland's lost leader. Although his (at times) ruthless nature has not gone undocumented, Collins has become

¹ Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland 1914-23* (Dublin: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), p. 99.

² *Michael Collins*, Dir. Neil Jordan. Warner Bros. 1996.

rather sentimentalised over the passage of time, as is much the case with many political figures who have succumbed at an early age (he was 31 when he was killed). The old adage that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” is certainly quite apt in Collins’ case. The historian John Regan writes how ‘the attractiveness of Collins’ story and image has generated considerable interest from biographers and film makers as a vehicle for ‘explaining’ the Irish revolution. Conversely, professional historians have elected, with a few notable exceptions, not to wrestle with Collins either as a historical or mythical figure.’³ In addition, Collins’ own publication *The Path to Freedom* (published posthumously in 1922) offers an intriguing insight into his personal thoughts regarding Ireland’s future, although Regan notes ‘they are the utterings of the public Collins and Collins was primarily a secretive man’.⁴

4) Existing material relating to Griffith and Brugha

Although de Valera’s and Collins’ influence upon the Treaty is duly noted by historians, it often serves to overshadow the equally critical impact of Griffith and Brugha upon events. Such an approach can be partly explained by the less dominant presence of the latter two. Although Griffith founded the Sinn Féin movement, it was de Valera who placed it on a republican footing and built-up the party into a position whereby it became the main outlet through which Irish nationalism was channeled. In the case of Cathal Brugha, whereas he held the position of Minister for Defence between 1919 and 1922, it was Collins who wielded real influence in the Irish Republican Army (as well as the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in his capacity as president), despite his official role being merely that of Director of Intelligence. Even so, this is not to suggest that the efforts of Griffith and Brugha should be sidelined in favour of those of de Valera and Collins. Griffith would lead the delegation of plenipotentiaries in London and help to oversee the Treaty’s ratification by the Dáil in January 1922, going on to succeed de Valera as President of the Irish Republic. Meanwhile, Brugha remained arguably the most fervent republican, seemingly unwilling to compromise on the ideals espoused during the Easter Rising of April 1916, a sentiment shared by many hard-line republicans.

³ John Regan, ‘Michael Collins – The legacy and the Intestacy’, in *Michael Collins and the Making of the Irish Free State*, eds. by Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998), p. 119.

⁴ *ibid.*

5) Sources

A variety of material relating to the course of events in Ireland in the period 1916-1922 (which this paper concentrates on) have been produced, from recent titles such as Diarmaid Ferriter's *Judging Dev* (2007), to older works such as Frank Pakenham's *Peace by Ordeal* (published in 1935 and which is still the definitive work on the finer details of the treaty negotiations). In addition, a selection of newspaper articles and satirical cartoons are used in this research to see how the Treaty and its terms, along with its supporters and opponents, were portrayed in the press. Difficulty arises when looking at the four individuals, in that the amount of available sources (both primary and secondary) differs for each person. For example, in contrast to Collins and de Valera, there is a rather sparse amount of secondary literature relating to the lives of Griffith and Brugha, with biographies akin to those of Collins and de Valera not readily available. On the other hand, there is plenty of sourceable material relating to Griffith's (and to a lesser extent Brugha's) conduct during the treaty negotiations and debates - this is also true of Collins and de Valera. Such material is available via online sources including *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy* (consisting of official correspondence), as well as minutes of historical Dáil Debates, which are accessible via the website of the *House of the Oireachtas* (national parliament). For a more in-depth view into what could be termed the "unofficial" objectives of these political figures, the *Bureau of Military History* is a useful reference point. This collection (which was only made accessible online in January 2012) consists of approximately two thousand witness statements of individuals who were involved in revolutionary activity in the period 1913-1921, and of whom some had contact with the politicians dealt with in this research.

6) Method of analysis

The paper is divided into several parts. The first part examines the backgrounds of the four individuals; to establish what their activities were during the period from the Easter Rising of April 1916 up until the truce of July 1921, when open talks began between representatives of Great Britain and Ireland. The second part concentrates on the period between the truce and the signing of the Treaty in December 1921, looking at the correspondence sent between de Valera and the British Prime Minister David Lloyd

George, as well as proceedings during the negotiations in London. The third part of the research meanwhile concentrates on how the Treaty was received back in Ireland by members of the Dáil, focusing on official minutes from the debates that lasted from December 1921 to January 1922. The latter part of the paper examines how the four gentlemen and the Treaty were regarded by the Irish public. By using press accounts and a selection of satirical cartoons, this part of the paper explores whether the opinions of members of the House were in sync with those of their constituents.

Part I: De Valera, Collins, Brugha and Griffith in the period from April 1916 to July 1921

In order to build-up a better understanding of why the four protagonists took the stances they did regarding the Anglo-Irish Treaty, it is necessary to explore their actions and mindsets in the period beforehand, in particular events from the Easter Rising of April 1916 up to the truce of July 1921, a watershed period in Irish history. These five years saw the United Kingdom lose her firm grip upon the nation, with violence by the British Black and Tans (ex-soldiers brought in to replenish the depleted Royal Irish Constabulary) and members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) bringing bloodshed to the island. The main hostilities of what would become the Irish War of Independence began in January 1919 and were only brought to a close by the truce of July 1921. Amidst this chaos the island had been partitioned by the British and two new entities formed, with the 1920 Government of Ireland Act (which took effect in May 1921) creating a Northern and Southern Ireland. This itself ignored the presence of the Irish Republic, a self-proclaimed state that had come into existence in January 1919 following Sinn Féin's win of the majority of Irish seats in the December 1918 UK general election. The newly-elected members sat in Dublin rather than Westminster, in a new Irish parliament christened Dáil Éireann. Attempts by the head of the new (unofficial) republic, Eamon de Valera, to gain outside recognition and support (including from the Six Counties of Northern Ireland) would ultimately prove futile. Whereas the republic would struggle to exert its physical presence, the psychological impact of its existence would have a profound effect upon Irish nationalists, including those dealt with here.

With the exception of Griffith, the men were all veterans of the Easter Rising, taking part in the six days of conflict which raged on the streets of Dublin. De Valera and Brugha fought as commanders (with Brugha almost dying from wounds sustained during the fighting). Collins meanwhile had helped to defend Dublin's General Post Office, from where Patrick Pearse (one of the leaders of the Easter Rising) had proclaimed the Irish Republic. Griffith on the other hand was a stalwart of Irish politics, differing from the other three in that he proposed the establishment of an Anglo-Irish dual-monarchy (akin to the Austro-Hungarian model) rather than a republic. Yet despite differing opinions

over the future system of government they envisaged, all were committed to the creation of a united, self-governing Ireland. Until the truce of 1921, the four had been bound together by their shared objective to expel British forces from Ireland – only once peace terms were being proposed by Westminster were the personal differences of these men made evident.

7) **Eamon de Valera**

Out of the four men being analysed in this research, de Valera had arguably the greatest bearing over events in Ireland in the years after 1916. Having originally received a death sentence for his part in the Easter Rising, this sentence was subsequently reprieved (possibly helped by his American birth giving him dual citizenship). During the years from 1916 to 1921, de Valera was absent from the country for long periods of time (either when he was languishing in British jails or touring America between June 1919 and December 1920 to drum up support for the cause, especially amongst the prevalent and influential Irish-American community). Indeed, his trip to the United States may have had a slightly detrimental effect. Apart from raising significant funds for the Irish cause, de Valera's trip failed to secure official American recognition of the Irish Republic, with him conceding by May 1921 that 'except in a crisis in which America's own interests are involved and when it might be convenient to hit England through us, is there any chance of securing recognition'.⁵ More crucially, his eighteen-month absence from Ireland during the height of the Irish War of Independence meant that despite being kept constantly notified of events, he had no personal experience of the trouble and chaos endured by the populace, meaning his opinion would always be slightly warped in comparison to those of his colleagues. De Valera's most notable achievement during this period was to alter the official policy of Ireland's foremost nationalist force, Sinn Féin (the organisation founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905). In October 1917 Griffith (amicably) handed the presidency over to de Valera, whom proceeded to abandon the party's policy of a dual monarchy in favour of an independent republic. Almost simultaneously, de Valera was elected president of the Irish Volunteers (later re-

⁵ Eamon de Valera, "Memorandum to Harry Boland", *No. 86 NAI DFA ES Box 27 File 158*, 30 May 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

christened the Irish Republican Army), meaning he was in full control of the independence movement, which in public he made evident was republican in nature:

The only banner under which our freedom can be won at the present time is the Republican banner. It is an Irish Republic that we have a chance of getting international recognition...This is not the time for discussion on the best forms of government. This is the time to get freedom. Then we can settle by the most democratic means what particular form of government we may have.⁶

This address, given at the October 1917 Sinn Féin convention, somewhat belies his inner thoughts, which were more flexible as to what options Ireland could take to achieve her independence. His public commitment to the republican cause veiled his subtle attempts to “test the water” to see if and to what extent fellow republicans would be willing to compromise their objectives in the name of achieving independence. A prime example of such behaviour is an interview de Valera gave to the *Westminster Gazette* in February 1920. In it, he attempted to put pay to the impression many Americans held that Britain had a genuine need to retain influence over Ireland in the name of her own national security. Such opinion undermined the republic’s attempts to win round American sympathy and so de Valera attempted to counteract this by committing Ireland to a permanent neutral status and to draw up an Anglo-Irish settlement similar to the 1901 Platt Amendment between the United States and Cuba (in which the latter guaranteed that her territory would never be used by an outside power). However, the journalist Tim Pat Coogan writes that since Americans regarded Cuba’s position to be that of a ‘political slum’, this analogy was received badly, with John Devoy (a key Irish figure in America) attacking de Valera for abandoning the claim for an Irish Republic and ‘falling prey to moderation’.⁷ De Valera, quickly sensing that his analogy was being received negatively, almost immediately sent the following message to the Cabinet back in Dublin:

To ease the minds of everybody I want you to know at all times that I never in public or private say or do anything here which is not thoroughly consistent with

⁶ Thomas P. O’Neill and the Earl of Longford, *Eamon de Valera* (Dublin: Arrow Books, 1970), p. 68.

⁷ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: The Man Who Made Ireland* (New York: Robert Rinehart Publishing, 2002), p. 190.

my attitude at home as you have known it. That will enable you to judge whether anything I may by newspapers be reported to have said is true or false. Never forget that the Press is an instrument used by the enemy - garbled statements misleading headlines etc.⁸

Although this message indicates that he was trying to distance himself from his previous comments, it remains ambiguous as to whether de Valera seriously considered such a proposal but backed down because fellow republicans disapproved, or whether it was merely a flippant consideration that was taken out of context. D.H. Akenson believes the interview was significant in that it was made without prior consultation and thus was solely his own view.⁹ Certainly, it does illustrate that contrary to his outward committal to a republic, beneath this veneer de Valera was considering other options. In a private letter to the Director of Publicity in April 1921, he emphasised that the following line be put to the press: ‘The Irish people must be recognised as an independent nation with a right to determine freely its own government. Interference or dictation from outside must be ended. That done England and Ireland might well be the most friendly of neighbours.’¹⁰ When one looks at the actual wording de Valera uses (which is always significant given his attention to detail), there is no actual mention of a republic. He simply talks of an independent nation with the right to self-govern and free from outside interference. By expressing himself in this manner, de Valera seemingly did not rule out the possibility of Ireland retaining some sort of link with the British Empire – most likely dominion status akin to members such as Canada. Evidence does exist that de Valera was even considering a compromise *before* his discussions with David Lloyd George in July 1921. During an interview given ten years later, the Irish politician James O’Mara (a supporter of the Treaty) claimed that de Valera had been warning against excessive public demand for a republic long before his meetings with Lloyd George, purportedly telling Harry Boland (a key ally of de Valera):

⁸ Eamon de Valera, “Letter sent to Arthur Griffith”, *No.30 NAI DE 2/245*, 17 February 1920, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922*, [online, accessed 23 September 2012].

⁹ D.H Akenson, ‘Was De Valera a Republican?’, *The Review of Politics*, 33 (1971), 233-253 (pp. 237-238).

¹⁰ Eamon de Valera, “Letter sent to the Director of Publicity”, *No. 130 UCDA P150/1602*, 24 April 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922*, [online, accessed 29 September 2012].

In public statements, our policy should be not to make it easy for Lloyd George by proclaiming that nothing but so and so will satisfy us. Our position should be simply that we are insisting on only one right, and that is the right of the people of this country to determine for themselves how they should be governed. That sounds moderate, but includes everything.¹¹

Such statements, notably made in private rather than in public, indicate that de Valera was considering other options long before his preliminary discussions with Lloyd George confirmed that an Irish Republic independent of the British Empire was not a viable option.

Although the Treaty would eventually divide the four men, it is important to note the respect de Valera commanded amongst his peers. Despite political differences (not as evident during these formative years, in which the main preoccupation was fighting the war against the British), de Valera held amicable working relations with the other three figures. He very much helped to keep the group together; as will be made clear such amicable relations were not shared equally between Collins, Griffith and Brugha (the latter joking during the Treaty Debates: ‘If Eamon de Valera did not happen to be President who would have kept Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and myself together?’).¹² As for de Valera himself, his role as a mediator between different factions of Sinn Féin not only exposed him to their opposing views but quite possibly also influenced his own approach. For example, one senior British official working in Ireland at the time, Mark Sturgis, noted that de Valera relied upon the (British born) Irish nationalist Erskine Childers (whom Sturgis viewed as a “fanatical” convert) to assist in preparing his speeches and letters and that owing to Childers dominance ‘it is difficult to say what are de Valera’s real views and what his attitude would be left to himself’.¹³ The position in which de Valera found himself during this time (and indeed for the duration of the period

¹¹ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to Harry Boland”, *The O’Mara Papers*, MS 21 (549), 29 March 1931 (quoted in correspondence with James O’Mara), Source: *National Library of Ireland* [cited in T.R. Dwyer, *Michael Collins and the Treaty: His Differences with De Valera* (Dublin, 1981), p. 30.].

¹² Cathal Brugha, “Debate Vol. T No. 16”, *Dáil Éireann*, 9 January 1922, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 3 November 2012].

¹³ Mark Sturgis, *The Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries*, ed. by Michael Hopkinson (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), p. 215.

covered by this paper) was encapsulated by the famous cartoonist David Low in a piece from September 1921:

THE STAR, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1921.



Whoa!

Figure 1: David Low, *The Star*, 19 September 1921

Although a satirical take on the situation (one must also note that it was produced for a British rather than Irish audience), Low captures the awkward position in which de Valera found himself, having to tentatively restrain the “whole hog demands” of die-hard republicans such as Brugha, whilst also avoiding compromising Ireland’s wish for independence.

8) Michael Collins

In the period 1919-1922, Michael Collins would attain a similar level of prestige as that enjoyed by de Valera. Not only was he in the eyes of some “the man who won the war”, it was Collins and not de Valera who had extracted a settlement out of the British. As Fintan O’ Toole of *The Irish Times* points out, Collins ‘had become *the* first person in Irish history, ever, to be able to come back and say “We’ve got a State”. And I think de Valera, in his own mind, had always figured himself out to be that person.’¹⁴ It has often been proposed by certain historians that de Valera used Collins for fear that he posed a threat to his authority, and to use him as a scapegoat to avoid tarnishing his own political clout when the republic was put in doubt. The historian Francis Costello for instance suggests that de Valera’s later siding with Brugha and other hard-line republicans was out of a personal motivation to secure his own position and counter against Collins’ rising status.¹⁵ Although de Valera might have perceived Collins to be a threat, was it truly a case of de Valera *using* Collins? Certainly, the two held differences of opinion; although they shared a broadly common goal in securing an independent republic, their thoughts on how to achieve this varied. This became evident during the War of Independence, when Collins (who despite only officially holding the title of Director of Intelligence of the IRA, along with Minister for Finance, actually wielded more influence) dismissed tactical suggestions put forward by de Valera. The latter had called for regular and sizeable engagements against the British, so as to redress the argument put forth by the enemy that the problems in Ireland were merely civil disorder and that the IRA were a “murder gang”. To give weight to Ireland’s bid for independence, it was important to

¹⁴ Fintan O’Toole, “De Valera: Ireland’s Hated Hero”, *BBC*. 1999.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppmznpM_xxw&feature=relmfu> [accessed 1 October 2012].

¹⁵ Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923: Years of Revolt* (Dublin, 2003), p. 232.

show the international community (whose support and recognition they were trying to obtain) that the IRA was the official army of the Irish Republic, and that this was an Anglo-Irish war. Despite this, Collins opposed de Valera's suggestion, not out of a sense of personal rivalry but because of practicalities. To engage the British using conventional military techniques as de Valera was proposing, could decimate the strength of the IRA within a short period of time. Given that de Valera was touring America at the height of the War of Independence, it is natural that Collins had a more realistic grasp on the situation in Ireland. This is suggested in a statement given by Ernie O'Malley (a prominent IRA member who would later become a commander of the anti-Treaty IRA during the civil war), who recalls of de Valera during a meeting in January 1921: 'He had lost personal contact during the year and a half he had been away. [...] His questions showed that he did not understand the situation in the South. The main strengths of the enemy he knew, but things had changed since he had been in Ireland.'¹⁶ Although Collins was likely aware that the use of guerrilla warfare would not force the British out of Ireland, he was probably conscious that prolonged fighting could bring the British to the negotiating table, by which a favourable settlement could then be reached. Despite publicly outlining his famed "stepping stone" concept only once an agreement had been reached with the British in December 1921, a statement given by Richard Walsh T.D. would suggest that this concept had been devised long before the Treaty:

Collins, to my knowledge, at an early stage after his release from Frongoch in 1916, talked about the Irish people getting into their hands the powers of partial self government and by so doing gaining a tremendous advantage by the exercise of such powers for the completing of the struggle for our complete independence.¹⁷

This statement is very enlightening, for it suggests that Collins' stepping stone approach to independence was not a spur of the moment defence of his signing of the Treaty, but rather a long-held strategy.

¹⁶ Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1979), p. 293.

¹⁷ Richard Walsh T.D., "Document W.S. 400", 28 June 1950, pp. 152-153, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 19 October 2012].

As with the other figures under analysis, one has to pay close attention to what Collins said in public compared to what his private thoughts were. In public he frequently portrayed himself as an ardent republican, such as in a 1920 interview with the American *Evening Public Ledger* newspaper. When asked whether he would accept dominion home rule, Collins replied ‘the same effort that would get us dominion home rule will get us a republic’.¹⁸ However, the historian Peter Hart notes that off record, he was said to be much more accommodating.¹⁹ This is significant, not only because it illustrates that Collins’ approach to independence was flexible, but also because the journalist who conducted the interview, an American named Carl W. Ackerman, also happened to be a British spy.²⁰ In addition timing is important; by August 1920 Ireland had been engaged in hostilities for over a year and a half, and yet the situation remained unchanged. Meanwhile, attempts to gain international recognition had failed; despite the Allies’ professing the right of small nations to self-determination, Ireland’s cause was not being heard. There is evidence of Collins making contact with the British before the truce of July 1921, in an attempt to break the stalemate (for instance with the British Assistant Under-Secretary in Ireland Andy Cope). Mark Sturgis makes mention in his diary entry for April 1921 of a discussion he had with James MacMahon (Under Secretary for Ireland) regarding Collins’ aforementioned interview: ‘I asked what about the Ackerman story and MacMahon said it was exactly what Michael Collins *would* say to any newspaper man’, implying that his public utterances were at odds with his personal opinions.²¹ Indeed, in January 1921 he had gone so far as to privately endorse the development of the idea of dominion Status for Ireland, admitting in a letter to Griffith that such a scheme ‘would be of advantage to us’.²² In his 1922 publication *The Path to Freedom*, Collins would state that ‘the Irish struggle has always been for freedom – freedom from English occupation, from English interference, from English domination – not from freedom with any particular label attached to it’.²³ Although this could be

¹⁸ Carl W. Ackerman, “Sinn Fein Leader Uncompromising”, *Evening Public Ledger*, 26 August 1920, p. 4, Source: *Historical American Newspapers – Chronicling America (The Library of Congress)* [online].

¹⁹ Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (2005: Macmillan, London), p. 293.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Sturgis, *The Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries*, p. 155.

²² T. Ryle Dwyer, *Michael Collins and the Treaty: His Differences with de Valera* (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1981), p. 32.

²³ Michael Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (Cork: Talbot Press, 1922), p. 32.

construed as an attempt to defend what some deemed to be his “betrayal” of the republic, this non-explicit commitment to a republic was concurrent with one of his election campaign addresses given in November 1918: ‘You are required by your votes to assert before the nations of the world that Ireland’s claim is to the status of an independent nation, and that we shall be satisfied with nothing less than our full claim.’²⁴ The term “independent nation” rather than “independent republic” is noteworthy, although it must be highlighted that as a Sinn Féin candidate it would have been self-evident to the electorate that Collins was seeking votes on the mandate of creating an Irish Republic (as proclaimed in 1916) and withdrawing Irish representation from the British parliament.²⁵ As will be discussed in further detail, the omission of the term “republic” from official documents and public comments would become a critical issue for Collins and the other figures.

9) Cathal Brugha

Out of all four figures, Cathal Brugha was the most hard-line republican, dedicating his life to the founding of a united Ireland completely severed of all British ties. Appointed the first president of Dáil Eireann in January 1919, from April 1919 to January 1922 he then held the position of Minister for Defence, a role which would bring him in close contact with the IRA’s Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins, against whom he would foster a deep loathing and of which Coogan argues ‘was to be a casual factor in creating civil war’.²⁶ There are several theories as to why this personal animosity towards one another developed. One suggestion is that the feud was due to the different positions the men held. One former IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood) member, Dan MacCarthy, put the feeling of bitterness down to popularity: ‘I believe it all developed as a result of prominent I.R.A. Officers coming up from the country looking for Collins rather than Cathal Brugha who was Minister for Defence. Collins was always more popular with all

²⁴ Michael Collins, “Election Address”, *Southern Star*, November 1918 [cited in Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography* (London: Arrow Press, 1990), p. 92.].

²⁵ Sinn Féin standing committee, ‘General Election: Manifesto to the Irish People’, December 1918, Source: *CELT (Corpus of Electronic Texts)* [online, accessed 5 December 2012].

²⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography* (London: Arrow Press, 1990), p. 34.

these Officers. This was resented very much by Brugha.²⁷ Whether jealousy truly played a factor in Brugha's distaste towards Collins is unclear; what is evident is that Brugha distrusted Collins. According to Richard Walsh, the supposed 'German Plot' of May 1918 (in which the British claimed the Germans were planning to help support another Irish uprising, a claim Collins denied) exposed this distrust: 'His whole attitude towards Collins's [...] denials was skeptical, and his general attitude towards Collins after this was one of suspicion. This incident at the testing of the Executive was, in my opinion, the real start of the feud.'²⁸ Ernest Blythe (a supporter of the Treaty), who was a regular attendant of the weekly Cabinet meetings, spoke of frequent friction between the two 'in connection with all sorts of matters', with Brugha purportedly always being very sarcastic with Collins when they disagreed, and Collins distinctly rough in talking to Brugha.²⁹ On the other hand, it would be ill-founded to suggest that the rift between Collins and Brugha was solely attributed to their characters – there were serious differences of opinion in the tactics that should be used against the British. Tim Pat Coogan argues that Brugha was a 'static warfare' man: 'It's doubtful if he ever seriously believed they could win the war. For him, carrying on the fight was the important thing'.³⁰ Herein lay a key difference between the men; whereas Collins was patriotic albeit pragmatic, Brugha believed in the necessity of personal sacrifice if it safeguarded the republic. Coogan's assessment though that Brugha was a proponent of static warfare is slightly misleading, for the Minister for Defence did in fact propose taking the war to the British mainland. General Seán MacEoin reflects upon a meeting he had with Brugha in March 1921, in which the minister outlined arguably his most daring scheme:

To save Ireland, you have got to wipe out the guilty ones who sent the Black and Tans here. We have got to wipe out every member of the British Cabinet. I brought

²⁷ Dan MacCarthy, "Document W.S. 722.", Date unknown, p. 24, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 25 September 2012].

²⁸ Walsh, "Document W.S. 400.", p. 44.

²⁹ Ernest Blythe, "Document W.S. 939", 12 April 1954, p. 127, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 26 September 2012].

³⁰ Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography*, p. 70.

you here today to order you to lead to London, and in London, a party that will do it. To each one of you will be named the Member of the Cabinet he is to execute.³¹

MacEoin added that when he re-laid the plan to Collins, the latter exclaimed: ‘You are mad! Do you think that England has only the makings of one Cabinet?’³² Brugha’s other plans included machine-gunning members in the House of Commons, as well as members of the public in British cinemas, along with acts of arson and sabotage (the latter being carried out to a limited extent). Even when the British were willing to enter into a truce, Brugha displayed a reluctance to cease hostilities, Blythe recalling him saying in one meeting ‘that the country had been brought up to a high pitch of resolution and that if the fighting were stopped it might not be easy to get things going again’.³³

People who knew and worked with Brugha spoke of a man dedicated to the cause but difficult to work alongside, with Walsh describing him as having ‘a great sense of justice and fair play’ but also being extremely stubborn.³⁴ Although there was a degree of respect for the minister because of his heroism in 1916, there was also contempt for the naiveté of his views.³⁵ Such character traits brought him into conflict with many of his peers, the animosity towards Collins serving as a prime example. Arthur Griffith was another senior Irish politician with whom Brugha shared fraught relations, with de Valera noting on one occasion how it had been his special role ‘to mediate the vast fundamental differences between the ideals of men like Cathal Brugha and Arthur Griffith’.³⁶ J.J. O’Kelly (an opponent of the Treaty and, according to Ernest Blythe, Brugha’s only real “yes-man” within the Cabinet) claimed how one issue of contention was over what direction Sinn Féin should take:³⁷

The main feature of the meetings was the difference in outlook between Cathal Brugha and Griffith, Cathal maintaining that the policy of Sinn Fein should be of a

³¹ General Seán MacEoin, “Document W.S. 1716”, 6 December 1957, p. 162, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 7 September 2012].

³² MacEoin, “Document W.S. 1716”, p. 166.

³³ Blythe, “Document W.S. 939”, p. 130.

³⁴ Walsh, “Document W.S. 400”, p. 150.

³⁵ Blythe, “Document W.S. 939”, p. 127.

³⁶ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to O’Brien”, *UCD, de Valera Papers, P150/1622*, 16 March 1923 [cited in Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 46].

³⁷ Blythe, “Document W.S. 939”, p. 127.

fully military character, and Griffith having a different view. Cathal had his way and it was he that outlined the main resolution for the policy and constitution of the organization.³⁸

A deep ideological divide between the two is also testified by Robert Brennan (one-time Irish Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs), who commented:

In the days succeeding the Rising and before the historic Ard Pheis of 1917, they came near the breaking point several times. Griffith was striving very hard to keep Sinn Fein to its original purpose and policy [...] Brugha willing to adopt the name Sinn Fein – which had been forced by press and public on to Volunteers - would have nothing to do with the Constitution of 1782 and scorned passive resistance.³⁹

Meanwhile the historian Padraic Colum wrote that during this period, Brugha had complete contempt for Griffith's "moderation": 'When Griffith disagreed with Brugha on any point, the reply in so many words was, "I didn't expect *you* to agree. We know where you stand. You would be more at home in a constitutional movement. We are fighters, and you have no standing among us."⁴⁰ It should be clarified that despite the wide schism between their ideological beliefs, Brugha and Griffith still shared a mutual respect for one another. Brennan said that in spite of rarely ever agreeing on anything, Griffith was genuinely fond of Brugha, that he had 'always a warm corner in his heart for Brugha and more than once I heard him defend him in his absence, paying tribute to his single-mindedness and whole-hearted sincerity'.⁴¹ In comparison, Blythe testifies that in the period up until the truce, Brugha 'had at this time great respect for Griffith's political judgment, and very frequently deferred to him in a marked way on matters of general a policy'.⁴²

³⁸ J. J. O'Kelly, "Document W.S. 427", 11 November 1950, p. 3, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 25 September 2012].

³⁹ Robert Brennan, "Document W.S. 779 (Section 2)", Date unknown, p. 508, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 25 September 2012].

⁴⁰ Padraic Colum, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1959), pp. 223-224.

⁴¹ Brennan, "Document W.S. 779 (Section 2)", p. 509.

⁴² Blythe, "Document W.S. 939", p. 111.

10) Arthur Griffith

Arthur Griffith began his career as a journalist, and by the turn of the twentieth century was producing political publications such as the *United Irishman*, which were read by men including Collins.⁴³ His biggest contribution to Irish politics was his founding of Sinn Féin in 1905, which would become the key nationalist movement after the Easter Rising (although the British authorities would wrongly attribute responsibility for the rising to the organisation). In comparison to the other three gentlemen, Griffith was more reserved in his approach to securing Irish independence. Rather than achieving this goal through an act of revolution such as attempted in 1916, Griffith sought to undermine the British through a policy of passive resistance – namely persuading Irish MPs to abstain from Westminster. Such a scheme was inspired by the Hungarian nationalist movement, which in the 1860s had succeeded in getting the restoration of the Hungarian parliament via active agitation at home and refusal to send representatives to the Imperial parliament in Vienna.⁴⁴ This is not to say that Griffith was a pacifist *per se*, but rather that he regarded the use of violence to be generally counterproductive (no doubt in part shaped by his time spent in South Africa during the late 1890s amongst the Boers, witnessing first-hand their struggle to cut themselves loose from the Empire). Instead, he held faith in a political approach to resolving Anglo-Irish differences, with his 1904 publication *The Resurrection of Hungary* advocating the creation of an Anglo-Irish dual monarchy akin to that of Austro-Hungary. This approach is however slightly contradicted by a statement given by Robert Brennan (who sided with the anti-Treaty faction), who recounts a disagreement Griffith had whilst incarcerated in Gloucester jail in 1919:

‘We need not’, said A.G. [Arthur Griffith], ‘care what the English called the country if we were satisfied we had got what we wanted.’ Tom Hunter, who was no diplomat, said bluntly: ‘What about your King, Lords and Commons, A.G.?’ ‘That’s right,’ said Pierce McCann, ‘you were always in favour of the restoration of the dual monarchy.’ [...] A.G. turned on Pierce, ‘When did I say that?’ he asked,

⁴³ Bulmer Hobson, “Document W.S. 82.”, 26 January 1948, p. 3, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 20 September 2012].

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

and there was thunder in the air. ‘Why, you've always said it.’ said Pierce, ‘in every issue of Sinn Fein and Nationality and in ‘The Resurrection of Hungary’.’ [...] [A.G.] ‘I never said anything of that kind. What I said was that the Irish people should refuse to treat with England till she had conformed to the Act in which the English Government renounced their claim to legislate for Ireland and declared inalienable the right of the King, Lord and Commons of Ireland so to legislate.’ ‘Ain't that the same thing?’ asked Pierce, innocently. ‘It's nothing of the kind. When you say you refuse to treat with England until they restore a certain kind of regime, it does not mean that that regime is your final aim.’ ‘So under your plan we could go on to a republic?’ ‘Under my plan, as you call it, your hands would not be tied. You could go on to anything the Irish people wanted.’⁴⁵

Griffith's comments in the latter part of this encounter (one has to keep in mind that Brennan was relaying this conversation purely from memory) bear much similarity to Collins' later stepping stone analogy. Indeed, the *Irish Independent* newspaper records Griffith spoke words to that effect at a lecture in Belfast in November 1917, saying that for his part, if Sinn Féin ‘got a stepping stone to separation he would have no hesitation in taking it’.⁴⁶ This was a rather pragmatic approach; Britain would never grant Ireland total freedom for fear that it would undermine the Empire by encouraging independence movements in regions such as India. Ultimately, Griffith's faith in a dual-monarchy system acceptable to all would not be realised, with Unionists and republicans both disinterested and dismissive of the proposal.⁴⁷

11) Observations

During the period 1916-1921, all four men were united under the banner of Irish nationalism; with efforts concentrated on expelling British forces out of Ireland, their political differences were put to one side. As the War of Independence dragged on this

⁴⁵ Brennan, “Document W.S. 779 (Section 2)”, p. 508.

⁴⁶ “Lecture on Sinn Fein Policy”, *Irish Independent*, 30 November 1917, p. 2, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 15 November 2012].

⁴⁷ Michael Laffan, “Griffith, Arthur Joseph”, *The National Archives of Ireland: Treaty Exhibition*. 2009. <<http://treaty.nationalarchives.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Griffith.pdf>> {accessed 23 September 2012}.

began to change, with tensions becoming more visible, as Robert Barton recalled after his release from prison in June 1921:

I found there was internal dissension which had not existed when I was arrested. [...] Previously we had been a very happy family. Then I returned, I found personal animosity between members of the Cabinet; this very much disturbed me. [...] Ministers were not co-operating in the way they had before.⁴⁸

Although all four men were members of Sinn Féin, there were no other circumstances dictating that they ought to share a strong alliance. They had only become *au fait* with one another after the Easter Rising, and had had relatively little personal contact with one another, on account of their time spent incarcerated or abroad (such as de Valera's eighteen month absence in America).⁴⁹ In reality, the only common concern of all four men was to expel the British from Ireland. The real issue of contention was how to do this. Griffith sought the political route, bound by the realisation that the British would not agree to totally relinquish Ireland. De Valera also preferred the political approach, trying in vain to secure official recognition of the Irish Republic from the United States, and trying to take advantage of the Allies' claim to the rights of small nations to self-determination. With the birth of new small nations in Eastern Europe and the recent Russian revolution(s), such faith was not as short-sighted as may seem in hindsight. Indeed, as Frank Pakenham (de Valera's official biographer) observed, 'in an age of self-determination it was rather curious that Ireland should face the dilemma of either a war of extermination from a neighbouring Empire of friendly congenial citizens, or disestablish her declared Republic and risk the possibility of civil war'.⁵⁰

Collins and Brugha on the other hand were military men, although again their tactics differed. The former used guerilla warfare to eventually bring the British to the negotiating table; the latter believed in a terror campaign on the British mainland. In the disorder of war, and with the men often separated from one another, although there were

⁴⁸ Robert Barton, "Document W.S. 979", 27 July 1954, p. 25, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 24 September 2012].

⁴⁹ O'Neill and the Earl of Longford, *Eamon de Valera*, p. 116.

⁵⁰ Frank Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal: An Account, from first-hand sources, of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London: Sidgwick Publishing, 1935), p. 7.

signs of disagreement over Ireland's future, these would only really manifest themselves once hostilities had ceased and they were re-assembled in Dublin. Despite these differences, their alliance during this period was instrumental in preserving a unified Nationalist front in Ireland against Britain, as Robert Brennan alluded to:

It is true that without him [Collins] Sinn Fein could not have achieved the success it did in the time it did, but this is not less true of Eamon de Valera or Arthur Griffith. For instance, Collins could never have brought about the unity of the Republicans in 1917, or that of all classes in the nation in 1918, as de Valera did; nor could he have voiced the nation's will so brilliantly and so persuasively as did Arthur Griffith.⁵¹

⁵¹ Brennan, "Document W.S. 779", p. 406.

Part II: The Treaty Negotiations in London

As discussed, prior to the truce of July 1921 it was already evident that de Valera, Collins, Griffith and Brugha were divided in terms of their approach to how Ireland should gain independence and what political model the country should adopt. In spite of their differences of opinion, they still managed to work alongside one another in a combined effort to combat the British. Only once open Anglo-Irish talks began did these opposing views start to create serious tensions within Sinn Féin. This part of the paper deals with the period from July 1921 to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in London on 6 December 1921, looking at how miscommunication, coupled with the men's political differences, allowed a Treaty to be signed that would break their alliance irrevocably.

12) De Valera in the period July – October 1921

Dialogue between Eamon de Valera and the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, began on 14 July 1921, with the two politicians meeting in London for a series of one-to-one meetings. The following week Lloyd George sent de Valera the first set of British proposals for a settlement, in essence a limited form of dominion status. This would apply to the whole of Ireland, but would also still allow for 'full recognition of the existing powers and privileges of the Parliament of Northern Ireland, which cannot be abrogated except by their own consent'.⁵² This opening offer by the British was rejected unanimously by the Dáil, de Valera clarifying why this was so in a letter dated 30 August.⁵³

They were not an invitation to Ireland to enter into 'a free and willing' partnership with the free nations of the British Commonwealth. They were an invitation to Ireland to enter in a guise, and under conditions which determine a status definitely inferior to that of these free States. Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand

⁵² David Lloyd George, "Letter to Eamon de Valera", *No. 141*, 21 July 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

⁵³ Eamon de Valera, "Letter to David Lloyd George", *No. 149*, 24 August 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

are all guaranteed against the domination of the major State, not only by the acknowledged constitutional rights which give them equality of status with Great Britain and absolute freedom from the control of the British Parliament and Government, but by the thousands of miles that separate them from Great Britain. Ireland would have the guarantees neither of distance nor of right.⁵⁴

Although these terms were rejected by the Dáil, as has been previously mentioned, prior to the truce de Valera had implied (albeit through slightly veiled comments) that he would consider the option of dominion status. He had even reputedly remarked to Jan Smuts (the former Boer independence leader now a prominent South African and British Commonwealth statesman) on one occasion that ‘if the status of Dominion rule is offered, I will use all our machinery to get the people to accept it’.⁵⁵ In addition, during a speech given on 17 August 1921, de Valera alluded that for the sake of Irish unity he ‘would be willing to suggest to the Irish people to give up a good deal in order to have an Ireland that could look to the future without anticipating distracting internal problems’.⁵⁶ Despite being a slightly ambiguous statement (a reoccurring trait of the man), one can surmise that in order to eliminate such ‘distracting internal problems’, namely those connected with the six northern counties, de Valera would consider re-evaluating Irish demands for a republic so as to conform to Unionist and British needs, the most likely outcome of which would be dominion status. Just before making the statement, the newly-anointed President of the Irish Republic had said to the Dáil that he and other members of the Cabinet were not ‘Republican doctrinaires’, as well as inferring that when given the choice, the electorate had voiced their desire for ‘Irish freedom and Irish independence’ rather than strictly a republican form of government.⁵⁷ Such observations were indicative of his own personal desire to extract himself from “the strait-jacket of a Republic”, but also serve to highlight what an enigmatic figure de Valera was. As exemplified in the *Westminster Gazette* interview, he had a tendency to say one thing and

⁵⁴ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to David Lloyd George”, *No. 151*, 30 August 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

⁵⁵ Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923: Years of Revolt*, p. 235.

⁵⁶ T. Ryle Dwyer, *‘I Signed my Death Warrant’: Michael Collins and the Treaty* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2006), p. 47.

⁵⁷ Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. S No. 1”, *Dáil Eireann*, 16 August 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

then disassociate himself from his previous comments if they were judged negatively. This tendency was evident during his correspondence with Lloyd George in September 1921, asserting in one letter ‘our nation has formally declared its independence and recognises itself as a sovereign State’⁵⁸, only to follow this up a week later (when the Prime Minister threatened to break off talks) by clarifying ‘we would have thought it as unreasonable to expect you, as a preliminary, to recognise the Irish Republic formally, or informally’.⁵⁹ One could argue that such (contradictory) behaviour is a trait of politics; in the case of Eamon de Valera he seemingly veered between being pragmatic and staunchly idealistic, with the historian Diarmaid Ferriter commenting how ‘his critics quite legitimately pointed to the inconsistency of his position; having prepared for compromise with Lloyd George “he had then rushed back to the rock of republicanism”’.⁶⁰

One of the enduring questions surrounding the Anglo-Irish negotiations is why de Valera chose not to attend, with instead a team of plenipotentiaries sent, including Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. Debate has arisen over whether de Valera shirked his responsibilities in not attending, or whether his absence was part of a ploy to extract maximum concessions from the British. Certainly, given his experience, stature, and the fact that members of his own party wanted him to attend, it was puzzling why he remained absent.⁶¹ In an address to the Dáil on 23 August 1921 de Valera stated:

The one chief reason I had in going myself to these preliminary negotiations I saw it gave me a definite opportunity to bring Ireland's case before the world. I can stay at home where I will be more valuable and it will be quite evident to the public the reason I do not want to be one of them is that the duties at home require my attention.⁶²

⁵⁸ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to David Lloyd George”, *No. 153*, 12 September 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

⁵⁹ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to David Lloyd George”, *No. 155*, 19 September 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

⁶⁰ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev: A Reassessment of the Life and Legacy of Eamon de Valera* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2007), p. 67.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁶² Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. S No. 5”, *Dáil Eireann*, 23 August 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

In 1963, de Valera clarified what such duties back home comprised of:

Whilst the negotiations were in progress it was imperative that the British should realise that they had to face here a determined people, ready to accept a renewal of the war rather than give way on the essentials. For this reason, my presence at home was desirable so that I might play my part in keeping public opinion firm and in doing everything possible to have the Army well organised and strong. Besides, I apprehended that rumours of “surrender” were sure to be rife the moment it was reported that a settlement was in sight. It was important that I should be at hand to deal with any public uneasiness to which these might give rise.⁶³

The timing of this latter statement is interesting, for in 1963 he was speaking as President of the Republic of Ireland (which came into existence in 1949), reflecting upon a time when he was the President of the Irish Republic (in existence, albeit non-officially, from 1919 to 1922). The stance de Valera wanted to publicly exhibit was that he needed to remain at home to act as a figurehead with whom the Irish people could rally. A more subtle reason, as given to the Dáil on 14 September 1921, was that as head of state he felt it was not his position to participate directly in the negotiations:

He really believed it was vital at this stage that the symbol of the Republic should be kept untouched and that it should not be compromised in any sense by any arrangements which it might be necessary for our plenipotentiaries to make. [...] It was not a shirking of duty, but he realised the position and how necessary it was to keep the Head of the State and the symbol untouched and that was why he asked to be left out.⁶⁴

Indeed, for himself to enter into negotiations as president of a self-proclaimed republic that people had sacrificed their lives for, only to come back with a settlement that effectively disestablished that republic, would be political suicide. Critics of de Valera have used the aforementioned factors to suggest that the president neglected his position;

⁶³ Ferriter, *Judging Dev: A Reassessment of the Life and Legacy of Eamon de Valera*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. S No. 10”, *Dáil Eireann*, 14 September 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

that he used men such as Collins and Griffith to “do the dirty work”. One such critic, the journalist and historical writer Tim Pat Coogan, argues for instance that de Valera acted as he did out of narrow self-interest and that ‘after four meetings alone with the British Prime Minister he, more than any man alive, knew what Lloyd George was putting on the table – it did not, could not and would not contain a republic’.⁶⁵ On the other hand, such lines of thought ignore the logic behind de Valera’s decision to remain in Ireland. As the historian T. Dwyer explains, de Valera opined that if Lloyd George tried the strong-arm tactics he had used in July, the delegation could always use the necessity of consulting him as an excuse to prevent it being rushed into any hasty decisions.⁶⁶ Once again, de Valera would be acting as a mediator.

From the start of the truce de Valera appeared to distance himself from an unswerving committal to the establishment of a republic. Just prior to his accepting of his presidential role, he stated to the Dáil:

I cannot accept office except on the understanding that no road is barred, that we shall be free to consider every method. [...] I want you to understand I have not in my mind made up as to anything. I have kept my mind in a fluid state as long as I am in a responsible position to the country and it is only on that basis that I can accept office.⁶⁷

De Valera appointed the plenipotentiaries on 14 September 1921, consisting of George Gavan Duffy, Éamonn Duggan, Robert Barton, Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith (chairman of the delegation). They were to be granted full powers ‘because if they go over they needed to have the moral feeling of support of the position to do the best they could for Ireland’.⁶⁸ This was slightly contradicted however by de Valera’s personal stipulation that before making any decisions, the plenipotentiaries would send the details back to Dublin to await approval.⁶⁹ Thus the plenipotentiaries’ powers were notably

⁶⁵ Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long fellow, Long shadow* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), p. 244.

⁶⁶ Dwyer, *‘I Signed my Death Warrant’: Michael Collins and the Treaty*, p. 60.

⁶⁷ De Valera, “Debate Vol. S No. 5”, *Dáil Éireann*, 23 August 1921.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Eamon de Valera, “Instructions to plenipotentiaries from the Cabinet”, *No. 160 UCDA P150/1925*, 7 October 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 18 October 2012].

curtailed by de Valera's contradictory and rather ambiguous note, with Coogan adding that 'nowhere was there written down a clear, rounded statement of what the delegation was actually supposed to work towards and settle for'.⁷⁰ What reasoning lay behind de Valera's choice of plenipotentiaries? Sheila Lawlor proposes that after his meetings and correspondence with Lloyd George, the president possibly became convinced that the constitutional limits of a settlement were already fixed and that even if he were willing to accept such a position, he could not hope to bring the extremists, or the ideologues, or the IRA men with him. 'For that, Collins would be necessary; and Collins would drive the hardest bargain with Lloyd George. Griffith would go as a man of experience, as a popular name, as the father of Sinn Féin.'⁷¹ In the case of Griffith, although he was now Minister for Foreign Affairs, it was still a puzzling choice to appoint him as chairman, given that he had openly been a dual-monarchist (a fact well-known to the British), thus weakening whatever slim chance there was of achieving anything close to British recognition of an Irish republic.⁷² Robert Barton implied that such a decision might have been swayed by the fact that de Valera had more confidence in Griffith's judgement as a negotiator than Collins, influenced in part by the fact that Brugha distrusted Collins and that he and de Valera were very close.⁷³ In the case of Collins, as with Lawlor, the academic Jason Knirck also surmises that Collins was picked for the delegation as he would be the one who could extract the most from the British: 'According to de Valera, the British considered Collins a hard-liner, and his presence in London would thereby induce the British to make concessions, knowing that Collins would have to be satisfied if any settlement was to be accepted by other die-hard republicans.'⁷⁴ Such die-hard republicans included Harry Boland (a close friend of de Valera and Collins), whom at a meeting of the IRA Executive early in 1921 argued that Collins should be included in any forthcoming peace talks, 'since 'a "gunman" will screw better terms out of them than an ordinary politician'.⁷⁵ On the other hand though, writing to Joe McGarrity (a leading Irish republican in the United States) in December 1921 de Valera made the following claim:

⁷⁰ Coogan, *De Valera: Long fellow, Long shadow*, p. 256.

⁷¹ Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland 1914-23*, p. 111.

⁷² Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923: Years of Revolt*, p. 244.

⁷³ Barton, "Document W.S. 979", pp. 38-39.

⁷⁴ Jason K. Knirck, *Imagining Ireland's Independence: The Debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 87.

⁷⁵ Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923: Years of Revolt*, p. 248.

‘That Griffith would accept the Crown under pressure I had no doubt [...] from the preliminary work which M.C. [Collins] was doing with the IRB, of which I had heard something, and from my own weighing up of him I felt certain that he too was contemplating accepting the Crown.’⁷⁶ This personal thought of de Valera is slightly curious in that he admits that Griffith’s and Collins’ acceptance of the Crown was not a complete shock, even though in public he seemed in disbelief when he first held of the terms the two had conceded. This example of de Valera’s inner thoughts helps to support those critics of his whom believe his decision to send Collins in particular was more personally motivated, Coogan for example arguing it was ‘in order to further his secret campaign to gain supremacy over Collins’.⁷⁷ Certainly, it was quite a turnaround for the president now to send Collins to London, despite the latter’s protest (coupled with the fact his request to attend the July talks had been declined). Rather though than some personal scheme regarding a possible power-struggle, one has to remain conscious of the president’s overriding concern with keeping the different factions within Sinn Féin unified. Collins commanded large influence, especially amongst the IRA and the IRB; Griffith meanwhile was representative of a sizable number of moderates within the Sinn Féin movement who favoured diplomacy rather than violence to achieve independence. The historian Michael Hopkinson uses a similar line of argument, believing that the appointment of the delegation was done in order to appease the various elements within the Sinn Féin coalition: ‘Griffith was chosen to represent the Sinn Féin constitutional approach, Collins the army and IRB, while Robert Barton and George Gavan Duffy, together with Erskine Childers as secretary, were meant to represent de Valera’s interests and to act as a check on Griffith and Collins.’⁷⁸

13) Events during the negotiations

Discussions between the Irish plenipotentiaries and members of the British Cabinet were held in Downing Street over a two month period from 11 October to 6 December 1921. Despite repeated pleas for de Valera to join the discussions, he along with Cathal Brugha

⁷⁶ Dwyer, *I Signed my Death Warrant: Michael Collins and the Treaty*, p. 63.

⁷⁷ Coogan, *De Valera: Long fellow, Long shadow*, p. 244.

⁷⁸ Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gil & Macmillan Ltd., 1988), p. 24.

remained in Dublin, kept informed by daily dispatches from the delegates, a somewhat cumbersome arrangement which proved detrimental to their effectiveness. In the Treaty Debates de Valera would criticise the plenipotentiaries for reneging on his instruction to refer any settlement back to Dublin for approval. However during the negotiations themselves he ignored warnings that this safeguard might not be working. For instance at the beginning of November Seán T. O'Kelly (second President of Ireland) suggested that through the “domination” of Griffith and Collins, the delegates were surrendering on many points, including the status of sovereignty, but de Valera assured himself that everything was safe inasmuch as the delegates could not sign anything without first submitting it for the Cabinet’s approval.⁷⁹ The key question is what exactly were the plenipotentiaries expected to gain for Ireland? This would become a major source of contention during the Treaty Debates, for when the Irish delegation departed for London they were given no set list of demands to be put forth to the British; even on major issues such as Ulster a firm line had not been achieved until after the negotiations had begun. Broadly speaking, it was understood by the plenipotentiaries to try and bring back a united Ireland with as little political affiliation with the British Empire as was possible, what Padraic Colum described as an “Atlantic Switzerland”.⁸⁰ There were naturally going to be issues of difference between the Irish and British delegates, defence being one such issue (for it had a bearing on the true sovereignty of any future Irish state, especially in terms of neutrality). The British wanted to retain control of four Irish ports (which they ultimately did), but Griffith argued against this, questioning what country at war with England would count as neutral an Ireland that rendered such vital assistance to her enemy.⁸¹

Another more contentious issue was that relating to the status of Ulster. In May 1921 the Government of Ireland Act came into effect, which partitioned Ulster (referring to the six counties of Northern Ireland) from the twenty-six southern counties. It was agreed that if a breakdown in talks were to occur, the Irish would be in a stronger position (in the eyes and sympathies of international observers) if the break were to occur over Ulster and

⁷⁹ Right Rev. Monsignor M. Curran P.P., “Document W.S. 687 (section 1)”, 5 June 1952, p. 559, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 24 September 2012].

⁸⁰ Colum, *Arthur Griffith*, p. 290.

⁸¹ Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal*, p. 148.

desires for national unity, rather than over the ambiguities of allegiance to the British Crown. The issue was always going to be of difficulty for the Irish; by the time of the truce the British had created a new Northern Parliament, thus meaning that whatever the outcome of the talks, there was never any possibility of the status of this new government being compromised. In spite of the importance of the issue of Ulster to the Irish negotiation strategy, indecision meant that by the third day of talks in London, a clear list of proposals regarding the North still had not reached the plenipotentiaries, who were forced to simply try and put off such discussions until instructions were sent from Dublin.⁸² Whereas the academic Michael Laffan suggests it might have been indicative of how little the North mattered to the Dáil Cabinet, it is perhaps more indicative of the inexperience of the Irish delegation when it came to serious political negotiations.⁸³ The aforementioned example of Ulster and the plenipotentiaries' failure to explicitly demand a united Ireland at the beginning of the talks showed, according to John McColgan, 'an unfortunate lack of tactical sense'.⁸⁴ The team of plenipotentiaries, comprised of individuals such as Collins (who did not even wish to be part of the team), were attempting to negotiate with British delegates who were well versed in international diplomacy, and who had the added (psychological) benefit of negotiating within their own surroundings. Robert Barton epitomised this in a later interview: 'We Irishmen were nervous and ill at ease, it was our first introduction to diplomacy. The English were at home and confident in surroundings where they had met and out-manoeuvred or intimidated their opponents in a hundred similar struggles.'⁸⁵ Griffith and Collins were further hindered by the need to constantly refer (and sometimes travel) back to Dublin.

The other issue of contention (which seems to have been of more concern) was Ireland's future relationship with the British Empire. Collins and Griffith would have been conscious of the fact that to hardliners such as Brugha, to accept any terms whereby the British Monarch still remained as a figurehead in Ireland, no matter how vague,

⁸² Arthur Griffith, "Letter to Eamon de Valera", *No. 166 NAI DE 2/304/1*, 14 October 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 8 November 2012].

⁸³ Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland 1911-1925* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1983), p. 80.

⁸⁴ John McColgan, *British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920-22* (London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1983), p. 67.

⁸⁵ Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography*, p. 240.

would be unacceptable. The issue was discussed in detail during a Cabinet meeting in Dublin on 3 December 1921:

At the meeting Cathal Brugha objected to any form of oath. Of course, he said, if the British wanted an oath from us to respect whatever “Treaty” was made, we might give it, provided they swore to us in return. The President also wanted to know where lay the need for an oath of any kind. Mr. Collins said it was to be sugar-coating to enable the English people to swallow the pill. “Well”, said the President, “if it be really necessary and that we get all else we want, what harm would it be if we had an oath like this”; and he spoke words paraphrasing the form in the draft “Treaty”. Cathal still persisted in refusing to consider any form of oath whatever, and there the matter ended.⁸⁶

At this stage the British proposal was an oath recognising the King as the head of state and of the Empire.⁸⁷ This explains Brugha’s refusal to accept such terms; although the allegiance of Irishmen would be sworn firstly to their own constitution, some semblance of allegiance would still be owed to the British Crown and thus this did not constitute full independence. Crucially at this meeting however, Colm Ó Murchadha (a Cabinet secretary) testified that neither Brugha nor indeed de Valera actually proposed that the British terms be rejected, but that they should be improved upon.⁸⁸ De Valera sought to re-word the document so that the British monarch would be the recognised head of a future association rather than of the Irish state. However in a private letter sent to Harry Boland four days previously, he wrote:

The British ultimatum is allegiance to their King. We will never recommend that such allegiance be rendered. You know how fully I appreciate all that WAR means to our people, and what my misgivings are as to the outcome of war. Without

⁸⁶ Mrs. Austin Stack, “Document W.S. 418”, Date unknown, pp. 53-54, Source: *Bureau of Military History* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

⁸⁷ David Lloyd George, “Copy of draft treaty sent to Arthur Griffith”, No. 207 NAI DE 2/304/1, 30 November 1921, *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 8 November 2012].

⁸⁸ P.S. O’Hegarty, *A History of Ireland under the Union 1801 to 1922* (London: Methuen & Co., 1952), p. 753.

explanation you will understand then that if I appear with those who choose war, it is only because the alternative is impossible without dishonour.⁸⁹

Aside from seeming to have already resigned himself to the inevitability of a breakdown in talks, de Valera inferred that if forced to choose, he would stand by rather than compromise the republic. It reiterated what he had disclosed to Griffith in a memorandum in October 1921, namely that an allegiance to the King was unacceptable, even if this meant war.⁹⁰ This contrast of private and public thoughts does allow us to identify how far de Valera was willing to compromise. For the unity of Ireland, he was willing to acknowledge the British Crown, but only as the head of any future association with the Empire, not as head of the Irish state itself. This subtle but highly significant difference, which Griffith (and to a lesser extent Collins) apparently did not appreciate, was part of de Valera's innovative "External Association" concept, which would in time grow to be accepted by more hard-line men such as Brugha. On the other hand, with negotiations still ongoing, de Valera was continuing to press the plenipotentiaries to gain more from the British. Immediately after the Treaty's signing, the president said of the situation: 'A win meant triumph, definite and final. If we lost, the loss would not be as big as it seemed, for we would be no worse than we had been six months ago.'⁹¹ In essence, de Valera had wanted the delegates (possibly with Collins "the gunman" specifically in mind) to risk the renewal of war in order to gain maximum concessions (most plausibly external association) but this was one risk Collins was unwilling to take, having purportedly said to Griffith at one point 'I will not agree to anything which threatens to plunge the people of Ireland into a war – not without their authority'.⁹² Although he would claim afterwards that he regarded the British threat of renewed war to be a bluff, during the final stages of negotiations he was under the impression that the strength of the

⁸⁹ Eamon de Valera, "Letter to Harry Boland", *No. 205 NAI DFA ES Box 27 File 158*, 29 November 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 17 October 2012].

⁹⁰ Eamon de Valera, "Memorandum to Arthur Griffith", *No. 177 NAI DE 2/304/1*, 25 October 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

⁹¹ Colm Ó Murchadha, "Copy of secretary's note of meeting of the Cabinet and Delegation", *NA, Barton Papers, 1093/14*, 3 December 1921 [cited in John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Gil & Macmillan Ltd., 1999), p. 22].

⁹² Dwyer, *Michael Collins and the Treaty: His Differences with de Valera*, p. 88.

IRA had been diminished to such an extent (Hopkinson quotes one figure of just three thousand active members) that a protracted campaign against the British was untenable.⁹³

14) Collins' and Griffith's role in the negotiations

When Michael Collins put his signature to a treaty partitioning Ireland, falling short of a republic, many were surprised and dismayed that he had committed such an act, branding him a traitor. As already mentioned, those who knew Collins believed he would be an asset to the republican cause, since he maintained the figure of a hard-liner. Richard Walsh however gives an enlightening view into possibly the real thoughts of Collins:

He seemed to my mind at times to be obstinately determined to preserve what we claimed as our national rights - sovereign independence for all parts of the national territory and at other times he, during his thinking aloud periods, seemed prepared to compromise on what we held to be the first principles of nationalism. In my opinion [...] Collins was trying to find out, as far as he could, how the country was thinking and what way opinions were drifting from time to time.⁹⁴

This description implies that Collins was very similar to de Valera, in that despite having the outward appearance of a hard-line republican, in private he was more flexible as regards to Ireland's political future. Walsh also adds that in private (but never at meetings or public gatherings) Collins made the remark that had past attempts to introduce Home Rule for Ireland been successful, 'it would have been a great asset to us, as we would undoubtedly have got control of such bodies and services in the government of the country which could be used effectively as a lever to extract further measures of freedom'.⁹⁵ Such utterances are concurrent with the pragmatic nature of Collins; in the War of Independence he had discounted conventional warfare in favour of a guerrilla campaign to play to Irish strengths. Now Collins was using a similar approach for diplomacy (an area in which he had little experience) - use the British offer as the first

⁹³ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Walsh, "Document W.S. 400", pp. 152-153.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

stage in a longer-term process towards reunification and full independence for Ireland. As he wrote in private: ‘It is the first step [...] more than this could not be expected.’⁹⁶

As for Griffith, it has often been suggested that he signed the Treaty on account of Lloyd George’s dramatic ultimatum on 5 December calling for the signing of the agreement or the renewal of war. Although such an ultimatum may have intimidated some into signing (possibly Collins), it must be appreciated that what was achieved under the Anglo-Irish Treaty was remarkably close to what Griffith had originally envisaged under his dual monarchy concept. Ireland would be free to self-govern whilst still retaining links with Britain, albeit that the country would not become a separate kingdom.

15) Observations

The period between July and December 1921 saw the first cracks appear within Sinn Féin, with the different aspirations of the four figures starting to become more evident. The physical separation of Griffith and Collins from de Valera and Brugha in Dublin helped to widen the ideological gap between their own approaches. Without directly engaging in the negotiations Brugha stuck to the “rock of republicanism”, willing to risk renewed war (buoyed by his own personal judgment that by December 1921 the IRA was in a stronger position to fight than six months earlier) rather than compromise the republic he was prepared to sacrifice his life for.⁹⁷ De Valera meanwhile sought to maintain unity between idealists such as Brugha, and realists such as Collins and Griffith, but in the process of keeping this unity, the president’s own views regarding the republic remained obscured (with him inclined towards the idea of external association). To Collins and Griffith however, meeting the British face-to-face brought home the realities of the situation. Although the Irish had achieved much in bringing the British to the negotiating table, they were still dealing with one of the foremost global powers, who were not going to bow down to Irish demands with ease.

As for de Valera and Collins, this period also marked the first strains on their friendship. Whereas in the period between 1916 and 1921 the men had been close allies,

⁹⁶ Dwyer, *Michael Collins and The Treaty: His Differences with de Valera*, p. 103.

⁹⁷ Cathal Brugha, “Debate Vol. T No. 2”, *Dáil Éireann*, 14 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 19 October 2012].

it now seemed as though this was being lost. Many have argued that de Valera used Collins as a scapegoat to save himself from the unpleasant task of quashing dreams of an Irish Republic (certainly Collins himself was recorded as thinking this). Although there may be some semblance of truth to this, as previously noted, to purely take this stance also ignores the logic of de Valera's strategy; had the plenipotentiaries fulfilled their obligation to refer back to the Cabinet for approval, then Collins would not have found himself in the position whereby some labeled him as a traitor. When passing judgement on de Valera's conduct, the limiting of the delegates' powers, coupled with indecision over the best course of action regarding Ulster and a refusal to attend the talks in person, all of this suggests a man who was not fully secure in his own approach or of his own position. Upon becoming president de Valera had chosen to distance himself from Anglo-Irish negotiations, without appreciating the impact this would have on his influence over the other key figures. By the time he realised his misjudgement it was too late; an agreement had been signed and it was not he, but rather Collins and Griffith, who many amongst the Irish populace believed were bringing freedom and independence back to the country.

Part III: The Treaty Debates

Between 14 December 1921 and 10 January 1922 the terms of the agreement signed in London were deliberated by members of the Dáil, with the Treaty approved on the 7 January by a narrow margin of 64 votes to 57. This outcome emphasised just how divisive the terms of the settlement were to Irish politicians, with Michael Hopkinson arguing that it was the decisive event which led to the Irish Civil War: ‘No document could have more effectively brought out into the open divisions in the philosophy and leadership of the Sinn Féin movement.’⁹⁸ Whereas it is true that the movement had become irrevocably divided, were this and the signing of the Treaty instrumental in creating the right conditions for internal conflict? This part of the research examines the utterances of the four men during the debates, looking at what aspects of the Treaty caused them and other members of parliament to split into two groups.

16) Questions regarding the conduct of the plenipotentiaries

The proceedings began with much debate over whether the plenipotentiaries had exceeded their powers in signing the agreement with the British, in particular their renegeing on de Valera’s clear instruction to submit any draft treaty to the Cabinet in Dublin and await a reply before signing.⁹⁹ Collins and Griffith were quick to point out that what they had signed did not bind Ireland to the Treaty, since it would have to be ratified by the Dáil (as well as by the British government) in order for it to take effect.¹⁰⁰ The initial stages of the Treaty Debates were also spent discussing what the plenipotentiaries had been expected to secure for Ireland, namely the republic. Both Griffith and Collins argued that this demand had not once been explicitly put in writing, the latter noting that the British communication on 29 September 1921 had made it clear that the Irish were entering into a conference *not* on the recognition of the Irish Republic: ‘If we all stood on the recognition of the Irish Republic as a prelude to any conference we

⁹⁸ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 35.

⁹⁹ De Valera, “Instructions to plenipotentiaries from the Cabinet”, *No. 160 UCDA P150/1925*, 14 October 1921.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Griffith, “Debate Vol. T No. 2”, *Dáil Éireann*, 14 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

could very easily have said so, and there would have been no Conference [...] it was the acceptance of the invitation that formed the compromise.’¹⁰¹ As already touched upon, although men such as Collins sometimes failed to specifically mention the term “republic”, there was no misunderstanding that a republic is what Sinn Féin strove for. Therefore, although Collins and Griffith were technically right to observe that the word “republic” had not been mentioned in documentation or made an express objective of the plenipotentiaries, they could not ignore the fact that the Treaty compromised many of the ideals fellow colleagues had been fighting for, as well as the republic that had been founded in January 1919.

As previously discussed, Collins regarded the Treaty as a stepping stone to eventual Irish independence (which indeed would be the case), stating: ‘In my opinion it gives us freedom, not the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it’.¹⁰² During the debates Griffith also used this line of argument: ‘It does not for ever bind us not to ask for any more [...] in the meantime we can move on in comfort and peace to the ultimate goal.’¹⁰³ As the *Irish Independent* article from November 1917 also indicates, he had publicly stated that he would not hesitate in adopting a phased approach to seeking full independence, if circumstances permitted this. On the other hand, Griffith did not disguise his own belief that so long as freedom was assured, he did not object to remaining affiliated with the British Empire: ‘I do not care whether the King of England or the symbol of the Crown be in Ireland so long as the people of Ireland are free to shape their own destinies.’¹⁰⁴ Although such a view was far-removed from those of hardliners such as Brugha, Griffith supported his own position by reminding the members of the House that unlike Brugha (as well as de Valera), the plenipotentiaries had not refused to attend the talks in London, even though they could have shirked the responsibility.¹⁰⁵ De Valera robustly defended his choice not to attend the talks by claiming that aside from believing his absence would allow for a stronger tactical

¹⁰¹ Coogan, *De Valera: Long fellow, Long shadow*, p. 253.

¹⁰² Michael Collins, “Debate Vol. T No. 6”, *Dáil Éireann*, 19 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 3 November 2012].

¹⁰³ Arthur Griffith, “Debate Vol. T No. 15”, *Dáil Éireann*, 7 January 1922, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 3 November 2012].

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Griffith, “Debate Vol. T No. 6”, *Dáil Éireann*, 19 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 1 November 2012].

position¹⁰⁶, he ‘wanted to keep that symbol of the Republic pure even from insinuation—lest any word across the table from me would, in any sense, give away the Republic.’¹⁰⁷ Yet at the same time he also sought to clarify that he had never been solely a republican: ‘I never made a statement that I was altogether for the Republic or nothing. I was careful on that point if you go through anything I have said at any time. I have been perfectly consistent. I have been classed as a moderate. [...] I believe I am a moderate.’¹⁰⁸ The president was now seemingly claiming that he had never been a committed republican, thus publicly exposing the suggestible political approach he in reality held. One could view such behaviour as political manoeuvring aimed at securing his own position, with one observer of de Valera’s performance during the debates (the pro-Treaty Sinn Féin member Piaras Béaslaí) opining:

Having used every device of a practised politician to gain his point, having shown himself relentless and unscrupulous in taking every advantage of generous opponents, he would adopt a tone of injured innocence when his shots failed, and assume the pose of a simple, sensitive man, too guileless and gentle for this rough world of politics.¹⁰⁹

It would appear that the president was using the debates not just to get the Treaty rejected, but also to reaffirm his own dominance and to regain some of the initiative he had lost to Griffith and Collins. He would do this by presenting a new treaty proposal, known as Document No. 2.

17) Document No. 2

Document No. 2 was a proposal for external association, a concept which in itself was not new, having first been suggested in September 1921. In essence, the Irish Republic would be externally associated with the British Empire, with the British monarch as head

¹⁰⁶ Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. T No. 2”, *Dáil Éireann*, 14 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 19 October 2012].

¹⁰⁷ Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. T No. 11”, *Dáil Éireann*, 4 January 1922, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 3 November 2012].

¹⁰⁸ De Valera, “Debate Vol. T No. 2”, *Dáil Éireann*, 14 December 1921.

¹⁰⁹ Piaras Béaslaí, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland, Vol. II* (Dublin: The Phoenix Publishing Company Ltd., 1926), p. 335.

of the associated states, including Ireland.¹¹⁰ It was a bold attempt to bridge the divide that had enveloped the Dáil but ultimately it was still a compromise akin to the treaty already signed. The principle difference was that Document No. 2 would permit an Irish Republic, albeit still with formal ties to the British Empire. In spite of the fact this new proposal was still a compromise, de Valera argued that it was a republican document (even though it contained no explicit reference to an Irish Republic), so as to garnish support from hardliners such as Brugha.¹¹¹ During the Treaty negotiations Brugha had written:

We are prepared to recommend our people that the accepted head of Great Britain be recognised as the head of the new association. We are prepared to co-operate with them, and send a representative to, whatever council is appointed to conduct the affairs of the group. In matters that do not affect the group we continue to act independently; our form of government remains the same as at present, and can only be altered by the Irish people themselves.¹¹²

Given that Brugha was a devout republican, it leaves one questioning what made him agree to such a proposal. Document No. 2 did not require members of the Dáil to swear an oath of faithfulness to the British Monarch; instead the document merely stated: ‘That, for the purposes of the Association, Ireland shall recognise His Britannic Majesty as head of the Association.’¹¹³ This was the crucial difference for Brugha and men of his mindset. Their opposition to the Treaty was that Irish citizens would be willfully accepting themselves to be British subjects and would voluntarily take the oath of allegiance to the English King.¹¹⁴ With Document No. 2 however, Brugha stated in the debates:

We are prepared to enter into an agreement, an association with the British Commonwealth of Nations as it is generally called, on the same or similar lines as

¹¹⁰ Padraig de Burca and John F. Boyle, *Free State or Republic?* (Dublin: T.F. Unwin Ltd., 1922), p. I.

¹¹¹ Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. T No. 4”, *Dáil Éireann*, 16 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 1 November 2012].

¹¹² O’Neill and the Earl of Longford, *Eamon de Valera*, pp. 154-155.

¹¹³ Eamon de Valera, *Document No. 2* (Dublin, 4 January 1922).

¹¹⁴ Cathal Brugha, “Debate Vol. T No. 15”, *Dáil Éireann*, 7 January 1922, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 3 November 2012].

that on which one business firm enters into combination with another or several others. [...] We are prepared, on the same terms, to enter into an association with the British Commonwealth of Nations, and for the purposes of that combination we are prepared to recognise the English Government as the head of the combination.¹¹⁵

One could argue that had Collins or Griffith produced such a document, Brugha would not have so easily put forward his backing, given his aforementioned distrust towards both gentlemen. However, to believe that he offered support for external association merely because de Valera was its architect would be too simplistic a conclusion. During one session of the debates, Griffith had spoken of the slight difference in language used in the Treaty compared with Document No. 2, but as Costello notes, what for Griffith was a mere ‘quibble’ of words¹¹⁶, ‘Brugha saw as the basis for justifying a major schism, not only within the ranks of Sinn Féin, but within Ireland itself’.¹¹⁷ Although de Valera’s proposal withdrew any explicit oath of allegiance to the British Crown, the rest of the terms were criticised by opponents as being too vague in detail. Writing after the Treaty had been ratified, Collins argued that de Valera’s proposal would have committed Ireland ‘to an association so vague that it might afford grounds for claims by Britain which might give her an opportunity to press for control in Irish affairs as ‘common concerns’, and to use, or to threaten to use, force’.¹¹⁸ By this, Collins was referring to the section of the document which stated that Ireland would ‘exist in association with the States of the British Commonwealth for the purposes of common concern, such as defence, peace and war and political treaties’.¹¹⁹ Although the terms of the agreement were restrictive, the Treaty was arguably more secure in that it placed Ireland on an equal footing with the other Dominions, who according to Coogan ‘would have a vested interest in preventing Britain from setting a precedent for Imperial meddling’.¹²⁰ The proposal itself was introduced on 15 December 1921 in a private session of the Dáil, but the historian John

¹¹⁵ Brugha, “Debate Vol. T No. 15”, *Dáil Éireann*, 7 January 1922.

¹¹⁶ Griffith, “Debate Vol. T No. 6”, *Dáil Éireann*, 19 December 1921.

¹¹⁷ Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923: Years of Revolt*, p. 271.

¹¹⁸ Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (Cork: Talbot Press, 1922), p. 41.

¹¹⁹ De Valera, *Document No. 2*.

¹²⁰ Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow*, p. 291.

Regan argues that such an early introduction ‘had a catalytic effect on the debate, by further polarising opposing sides and clarifying that the choice [...] was between the Free State and the republic, and in absolute terms war and peace’.¹²¹ De Valera is reported to have commented about his proposal: ‘It is my last effort [...] and it is a poor one. It is only a bad best.’¹²² Such a comment reflects the difficulty in trying to develop a solution which catered for all the different interests group that made-up Sinn Féin. Towards the end of the debates de Valera made the following statement regarding the opposing views of hard-line republicans and moderates:

I had a difficult task to play for four years, to try, so to speak, to hold the balance even in public discussion, no matter what my own personal views might be; and privately, and certainly in public never did I do anything which would tend to lead to the disruption of these two forces.¹²³

This statement is particularly noteworthy in that he infers to how his own opinions were seemingly veiled by his efforts to keep all sides happy. This can help to explain why he often either contradicted himself on past comments or appeared to backtrack on certain ideas. Nevertheless, when first putting forth in the Dáil his proposal for external association, he claimed this had always been his intention: ‘There is a question [...] of whether we stand for the Republic or not. I said from the start we stood for external association. I was always for external association.’¹²⁴ This had first come to light in a letter he wrote to Lloyd George on 10 August 1921 when he suggested a ‘free association’ between Ireland and the British Commonwealth, a proposal which was rejected by the Prime Minister on numerous occasions during the negotiations.¹²⁵ For its time, it was a visionary concept (and one that would be implemented later on by other Commonwealth members) but different factions within the Dáil were collectively unwilling to seriously consider the idea. Although de Valera and Brugha believed it

¹²¹ John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Gil & Macmillan Ltd., 1999), p. 42.

¹²² O’Neill and the Earl of Longford, *Eamon de Valera*, p. 172.

¹²³ Eamon de Valera, “Debate Vol. T No. 14”, *Dáil Éireann*, 6 January 1922, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 3 November 2012].

¹²⁴ De Valera, “Debate Vol. T No. 2”, *Dáil Éireann*.

¹²⁵ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to David Lloyd George”, *No. 147*, 10 August 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 6 November 2012].

would satisfy (fellow) hard-line republicans, it actually served more to divide rather than unite these hardliners, with many sticking firmly to the solid rock of the isolated republic, unwilling to accept a compromise of any kind.¹²⁶ As for those members in support of the Treaty, the difference between Document No. 2 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty was so marginal that it furthered their resolve to implement the agreement already signed in London. The difference in words would be no justification for a renewal of hostilities.

18) The issue of partition

When one looks at the political schism caused by the Treaty, it is of note how little the partition of Ireland was discussed in the debates. The creation of Northern Ireland (consisting of the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone) had been brought into effect in May 1921. A Northern Government with Sir James Craig as its Prime Minister now sat in Belfast, a government representing a Protestant and Unionist majority at odds with the aspirations represented by those sitting in the Dáil. Attempts to win-round the support of Northern loyalists were hindered by the South's cultural and economic philosophy, with its emphasis on Gaelic revivalism, economic protectionism and the Catholic Church.¹²⁷ Although partition was physically concocted by the British, these southern policies only sought to entrench the internal division of Ireland in the psyche of some Irishmen. In addition, the pro-Treaty IRA member Eoin O'Duffy claimed that the position of Nationalists in Northern Ireland was treated with complete indifference by the rest of Ireland, except at Election time, or when it served party purposes to exploit it.¹²⁸ The question is why was the partition of Ireland not the foremost concern of the four men, but rather the oath recognising the British Crown?

For de Valera, as for the other three gentlemen, the partitioning of Ireland was naturally not an outcome which he favoured. His first views regarding the Northern question can be traced back to his American tour, in which he affirmed that 'this Ulster is

¹²⁶ O'Neill and the Earl of Longford, *Eamon de Valera*, p. 173.

¹²⁷ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 22.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 88.

a thing of the mind only, non-existent in the world of reality'.¹²⁹ Such a comment can be interpreted as an attempt to strike against British propaganda, which was attempting to accentuate the political and religious differences within Ireland, so as to legitimise their decision to bring about partition. On the other hand, for de Valera to dismiss the issue of Ulster as 'non-existent in the world of reality' was to gloss-over the very real polarisation that had fostered itself between Ulstermen and the rest of their fellow Irishmen. It was evident that the Six Counties would not be willing to join with the rest of Ireland without retaining some degree of independence and so de Valera put forth suggestions that would see an autonomous rather than partitioned Northern Ireland. One such plan, mentioned during his time in the United States, was to suggest the creation of a federalised Irish Republic, akin to the American model: 'It is certainly a project I would be ready to support – we would divide the island into four little States so that we might have greater decentralization of government.'¹³⁰ Another option, as outlined in an interview with the *Neue Zeitung* newspaper in May 1921, was to allow Northern Ireland to exist in its current state, but to make it subordinate to the parliament in Dublin rather than London:

Provided the unity and independence of Ireland is preserved, we are ready to give such local autonomy to Ulster, or to any other part of Ireland, as would be practicable, if it would make for the contentment and satisfaction of the citizens resident there. I feel certain that the Republic would be ready to give to the Six Counties [...] far more substantial powers than those they are to possess under the British Partition Act.¹³¹

As with his earlier comparison with the Platt Amendment, de Valera's views regarding Ulster show that he was more imaginative and suggestible to certain issues than his outward persona implied. One has to read very carefully into what he would say, such as in his message to Lloyd George dated 10 August 1921. Despite decrying British attempts to "mutilate" the country in order to satisfy a small minority, de Valera also stated: 'We

¹²⁹ Eamon de Valera, *Gaelic American*, 24 January 1920 [cited in John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster Question 1917-1973* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 8].

¹³⁰ De Valera, *Gaelic American* [cited in John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster Question 1917-1973* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 41].

¹³¹ Dr. Zehnder, "Interview with Eamon de Valera", *Neue Zeitung* (Zurich, 3 May 1921).

do not contemplate the use of force. If your Government stands aside, we can effect a complete reconciliation. We agree with you “that no common action can be secured by force.”¹³² With a Northern parliament already established, de Valera’s pledge not to use coercion therefore meant that he was resigning himself to the likelihood that partition would remain in force after a peace agreement was reached with the British. This came despite the fact that just eleven days earlier in a personal letter to Jan Smuts he stated: ‘Unless the North East comes in on some reasonable basis no further progress can be made. An Ireland in fragments nobody cares about. A unified Ireland alone can be happy or prosperous.’¹³³ The reason why de Valera was not willing to use coercion against the North could be attributed to several factors. Practicality almost certainly influenced such a conclusion; having been strained by their campaign against the British, the IRA would not be in an ideal position to wage a war against the Six Counties for the present time. Secondly though, to use force against the North would directly contradict the values de Valera had been espousing ever since the Easter Rising. He had been arguing Ireland’s case for freedom on the principle of people’s right to self-determination and so to force Unionists to align with the South would be characteristic of the oppression the new state sought to banish. Thus the only viable option left open to de Valera was diplomacy, although he wanted this to be firmly in the control of Dublin rather than Westminster. When he put forth his alternative to the Treaty, his Document No. 2 tried to defuse the Northern question by treating it as an internal Irish affair, albeit that ‘in the sincere regard for peace’ he was once again acknowledging the reality of partition.¹³⁴

In the case of Michael Collins, despite having signed a settlement in which Ireland remained partitioned, he made clear his belief that partition was a hindrance to the nation’s future, noting that ‘union must come first, unity first as a means to full freedom’.¹³⁵ In his 1922 publication *The Path to Freedom*, Collins outlined:

If they join in, the Six Counties will certainly have a generous measure of local autonomy. If they stay out, the decision of the Boundary Commission, arranged for

¹³² De Valera, “Letter to David Lloyd George”, *No. 147*, 10 August 1921.

¹³³ Eamon de Valera, “Letter to Jan Christian Smuts”, *No. 145 UCDA P150/1914*, 31 July 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

¹³⁴ De Valera, *Document No. 2*.

¹³⁵ Collins, *The Path to Freedom*, p. 82.

in clause 12, would be certain to deprive ‘Ulster’ of Fermanagh and Tyrone. Shorn of those counties, she would shrink into insignificance. The burdens and financial restrictions of the Partition Act will remain on North-East Ulster if she decides to stay out. No lightening of these burdens or restrictions can be effected by the English Parliament without the consent of Ireland. Thus, union is certain. The only question for North-East Ulster is – *How soon?*¹³⁶

If these aforementioned areas had have been transferred to the South, the area left separated in the North (namely Belfast and her environs) would not in the long term be economically viable in the eyes of Collins. Thus the South would not have to devote much time and energy to the Northern question – economics rather than persuasion or coercion would secure national unity. Yet in spite of Collins’ public faith in a future Boundary Commission, Lord Birkenhead (who was a member of the British negotiation team and formed an unlikely friendship with Collins) rejected Collins’ claims that the Boundary Commission would transfer large tracts of Northern Ireland to the South. In a letter to Arthur Balfour, Birkenhead argued that Collins was likely to have made the claim to garner support for his position on the Treaty and that in reality the claim had ‘no foundation whatsoever except in his overheated imagination’.¹³⁷ In addition, Kevin O’Shiel (a member of the Southern Boundary Commission) said in May 1923 that in private Collins ‘never made any secret of his distrust in the Boundary Commission as a means of a settlement per se’.¹³⁸ Behind the scenes, Collins did plan for an eventuality whereby northern areas would not be transferred to the Irish Free State. For instance, in April 1922 he involved himself in plans to dispatch a large consignment of arms to IRA divisions north of the border but ineffective communications between these divisions meant the offensive proved a failure.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Collins, *The Path to Freedom*, pp. 79-80.

¹³⁷ Lionel Curtis, “Letter to Alfred Cope”, *Tom Jones Collection, National Library of Wales*, 23 August 1922 [cited in Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923: Years of Revolt* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), p. 268].

¹³⁸ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 79.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 84.

The position of Brugha with regards to the North is not readily documented, although given his unswerving objective of a united Irish Republic, it can be surmised that unity at all costs was in his mind. During the Treaty Debates he made the following comment:

You may go ahead with your Treaty and your Southern Parliament, but as far as we are concerned we are not going to co-operate with you, but we are not going to hamper you. Go ahead, but we are certainly going to see, so far as we can help it, that Dáil Eireann remains in existence until the electorate turns it down.¹⁴⁰

Although he does not explicitly mention Ulster, his reference to the Southern Parliament and his determination to stand by Dáil Eireann does illustrate the difference he recognised between the two bodies; only did the latter stand for the *whole* of Ireland. As for Arthur Griffith, it is evident that he was more pre-occupied with “essential unity” rather than securing a republic, as his original concept for an Anglo-Irish dual monarchy testified. According to Ernest Blythe (born in the northern county of Antrim), although Griffith had at one point during the negotiations belittled the British about their ignorance of key statistics regarding Ulster¹⁴¹, Griffith himself ‘was as completely ignorant of Northern conditions as the ordinary average Southerner who has never spent any time in the north-eastern area’.¹⁴² In spite of a questionable awareness of Northern conditions, coupled with his approval of a Treaty affirming partition, this is not to say that he was less committed to reunifying Ireland as the other men. Robert Barton (who emphasised that Collins and Griffith were not partitionists) noted that Griffith shared Collins’ belief that economics would dictate the position of Northern Ireland: ‘Griffith so often exclaimed, ‘Well, if the North refuses to come in, we will have a boundary commission, and they will lose half their territory, and they cannot stay out’. Over and over again he made that statement.’¹⁴³ Thus, although he had put his name to an agreement which secured the partition of Ireland, Griffith shared Collins’ view that this would be a temporary arrangement, that even with a Boundary Commission still allowing for the

¹⁴⁰ Brugha, “Debate Vol. T No. 16”, *Dáil Éireann*, 9 January 1922.

¹⁴¹ Arthur Griffith, “Memo to Eamon de Valera”, *No. 166 NAI DE 2/304/1*, 14 October 1921, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 22 October 2012].

¹⁴² Blythe, “Document W.S. 939”, p. 120.

¹⁴³ Barton, “Document W.S. 979”, p. 15.

existence of a separated northern state, economics would eventually force that state to merge with the South. Upon reflection however, this (self-) assurance that the commission would rule in favour of the Free State seems curiously misguided. Article twelve of the Treaty stated that any future commission would determine a boundary ‘in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions’, a rather vague statement.¹⁴⁴ The commission would consist of three persons; one from the Irish Free State, one from Northern Ireland and one from Great Britain. The key to any ruling would be how the vote was organised. If a simple nationwide plebiscite were carried out in Northern Ireland, then it would more than likely rule in favour of remaining part of the United Kingdom, on account that the majority of the population was (protestant) Unionists. On the other hand, the Free State only stood a chance of gaining the nationalist areas of Ulster if a vote were carried out on a more localised scale, such as by electoral divisions. One aide of Griffith recalled:

I pointed out to him that I considered that the clause was too vague and that it left too much power to the Boundary Commission. I suggested that some unit (such as a Barony or Electoral Division) should be specified, that a vote should be taken in such a unit and that the unit should automatically come to us or stay in the North according to the majority of the votes. He immediately saw the point, but said he did not know whether it would be possible at that stage to have the clause altered.¹⁴⁵

In the end the Treaty did not stipulate precisely how any future commission would determine a boundary in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants. In addition, the researcher K. Rankin argues that ‘it was a fallacy to assume that sheer physical size would dictate the economic viability of the North, as it was not a separate state but part of the United Kingdom’.¹⁴⁶ Although the benefit of hindsight allows one to reflect upon opinions that reunification would be a foregone conclusion as slightly naïve, given that

¹⁴⁴ *Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 6 December 1921).

¹⁴⁵ Colum, *Arthur Griffith*, pp. 295-296.

¹⁴⁶ K. J. Rankin, “The Provenance and Dissolution of the Irish Boundary Commission”, *Institute for British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin* (2006).
<http://www.ucd.ie/ibis/filestore/wp2006/79/79_kr.pdf> [accessed 7 December 2012].

partition had only been enacted in 1921 it was understandable that many members of the Dáil believed that the partition of Ireland could be easily reversed, even if the issues behind its introduction were to take longer to rectify. Yet upon the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in January 1922, Ireland remained divided, with the rather ironic result being that the North now had Home Rule, the only part of the country which had not campaigned for such powers. A month later, the new president, Arthur Griffith, re-affirmed that although logically possessing the right, the Free State would not coerce the North:

It is a matter, not of logic, but of practical politics. It is governed by that letter of President de Valera to Mr. Lloyd George in which he declared he would not coerce Unionist Ulster. We shall not coerce Unionist Ulster, but equally we shall not permit Nationalist Ulster to be coerced. Against that part of Ulster which votes itself out of the Free State we shall not use force.¹⁴⁷

Hence the border remained unaltered and so the boundary concocted by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act is the very one which remains to this day.

19) Observations

The debates revealed that under the banner of Sinn Féin there existed two broad groupings – realists and idealists. D. Akenson argues that the latter were republicans, unbounded by the pleasantries of constitutional politics and preferring ‘to fight the holy war for their republic rather than obtain peace by compromising their ideal.’¹⁴⁸ One could place Brugha in such a category; during the debates he was accused by the politician Sean Milroy of disliking the Treaty because he disliked peace.¹⁴⁹ The Minister for Defence on the other hand argued that he felt that the republic was within reach, but that the plenipotentiaries had compromised this by resigning themselves to British proposals:

¹⁴⁷ Arthur Griffith, “Press statement on Northern Ireland policy”, *No. 236 NAI DT SI801*, 3 February 1922, Source: *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1 1919-1922* [online, accessed 19 October 2012].

¹⁴⁸ Akenson, ‘Was De Valera a Republican?’, p. 234.

¹⁴⁹ Sean Milroy, “Debate Vol. T No. 7”, *Dáil Éireann*, 20 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 1 November 2012].

From the way these people over in England were yielding to us, I was beginning to believe that we might come to an arrangement which would be satisfactory to everyone [...] that we could come to an arrangement without any fighting but I am afraid that this thing which has happened within the last fortnight makes a fight inevitable.¹⁵⁰

Such words however were spoken by a man who had not been exposed to the pressures of the British delegation, notably Lloyd George's ultimatum of peace or war. Whereas Collins would later claim that he had been unperturbed by the ultimatum since he did not regard it as genuine, Griffith admitted in the debates that he did not believe that the Prime Minister was bluffing.¹⁵¹ Griffith also sought to "defend" the actions of the Irish delegation by arguing that had they not signed the agreement and thus re-committed the nation to war, the Irish public would have questioned why this was so.¹⁵² As for de Valera, whose position hovered between that of an idealist and a realist, the academic David Fitzpatrick comments: 'At the heart of the confusion among all factions was the paradox that de Valera, the suspected moderate with his reiterated disavowal of 'doctrinaire republicanism', had exchanged roles with Collins, the supposed diehard.'¹⁵³ This was partly a result of the exposure of agendas the men had kept disclosed in the years beforehand; in the case of Collins, that he was not committed to the republic at all costs (wanting to avoid renewed war if it could be helped). De Valera meanwhile was now placing himself firmly within the republican camp, having previously shown himself to have been considering other political options (albeit in private).

The four politicians were now firmly divided over Ireland's future – Collins and Griffith in support of the Irish Free State, with de Valera and Brugha continuing to recognise the Irish Republic. Although this divide would form the opposing sides in the civil war, were these personal differences a direct cause of later internal conflict? To ascertain the root cause of such conflict it is necessary to also look at public reaction to

¹⁵⁰ Cathal Brugha, "Debate Vol. T No. 4", *Dáil Éireann*, 16 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 1 November 2012].

¹⁵¹ Collins, *The Path to Freedom*, p. 31.

¹⁵² Griffith, "Debate Vol. T No. 2", *Dáil Éireann*, 14 December 1921.

¹⁵³ David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland's Irish Revolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), pp. 258-259.

the Treaty; to see whether the public was as firmly polarised as their elected representatives.

Part IV: Public opinion towards the Treaty

So far, the focus has been on the personal thoughts of de Valera, Collins, Griffith and Brugha. Returning to one of the key questions of this paper, was the men's divide over the Treaty a reflection of general opinion or did their political split help to create public tensions that would ultimately lead to civil war? This final part concentrates on the public's opinion of the Treaty. One of the most effective ways to ascertain their views is to look at how the press covered events – did the press help to shape public attitudes?

20) Public opinion in the period April 1916 – July 1921

When the Treaty was debated in the Dáil, one of the main counter-arguments used by those opposed to the agreement was that the Irish people had endorsed a republic, which de Valera concluded could only be de-established by the people. In the UK general election of December 1918 Sinn Féin had obtained a landslide victory, winning 73 out of 105 Irish parliamentary seats on a mandate of creating a republic. Following the harsh repressions by the British authorities in the wake of the Easter Rising (coupled with their attempt to introduce conscription in 1918), people became more receptive of calls for independence. On the other hand, the possibility exists that some voted for Sinn Féin, not because they explicitly desired a republic, but because they did desire Irish self-governance and thus used the election as a protest vote against the British. The Sinn Féin politician Roger Sweetman (elected to the Dáil in the 1918 election but who stood down in 1921), wrote to the *Irish Independent* in December 1921 arguing:

There has not been a contested election for the Dail since December 1918, and I think it would be a bold person who would contend that the electorate then gave a mandate for a Republic sans phrase. There has been no election (contested or otherwise) since the truce and the subsequent offer of the British Government, which pair of events, I think, so transformed the situation that it is even more

difficult than before for Dail members to suggest that the majority of their constituents are Republicans sans phrase.¹⁵⁴

Such a ‘bold person’ described by Sweetman would have included Cathal Brugha, who stood by the 1916 Easter Rising Proclamation: ‘We hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a sovereign independent state, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom.’¹⁵⁵ As the historian Michael Laffan writes, ‘IRA men had made sacrifices in fighting for their beloved republic and they would not allow their gains to be frittered away by civilians, however numerous these might be’.¹⁵⁶ For these men the results of the 1918 election were enough to satisfy them; a majority share of the vote had been cast in favour of Sinn Féin’s mandate of a republic, a wish which the new Irish Free State could not fulfill. De Valera on the other hand, although an advocate of the republic, was not of the same fixed mindset. Interviewed in May 1921 he stated publically that although ‘the Irish people in the last elections declared unequivocally for the Irish Republic’, at the same time he also added that ‘if the Irish people at any time wish to change their constitution or *form* of government, it is, of course, their right to do so’.¹⁵⁷ The president had even said in August 1921 that he and his Cabinet were not ‘Republican doctrinaires’.¹⁵⁸ Some members of the Dáil argued that the election results signaled more of a public desire for independence rather than necessarily a republic, with Robert Barton surmising that ‘great numbers of people were not Republicans [...] they were sympathetic but not sincere Republicans. They suffered willingly and gave the Republican leadership enthusiastic support because public opinion and patriotism demanded it and because the Irish Army could punish as well as the English.’¹⁵⁹ Arthur Griffith meanwhile made the following statement during the Treaty Debates:

I am told that the people of Ireland elected us to get a Republic. They elected us in 1918 to get rid of the Parliamentary Party; they elected us in 1921 as a gesture, a

¹⁵⁴ Roger Sweetman, “Mandate of the Electorate”, *Irish Independent*, 29 December 1921, p. 6, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 14 November 2012].

¹⁵⁵ *Easter Proclamation of 1916* (Dublin, 1916).

¹⁵⁶ Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 358.

¹⁵⁷ Zehnder, “Interview with Eamon de Valera”.

¹⁵⁸ De Valera, “Debate Vol. S No. 1”, *Dáil Eireann*, 16 August 1921.

¹⁵⁹ Dwyer, *‘I Signed my Death Warrant’: Michael Collins and the Treaty*, p. 47.

proper gesture of defiance to the Black-and-Tans: they elected us, not as doctrinaire Republicans, but as men looking for freedom and independence.¹⁶⁰

To truly decipher whether these men's utterances were attempts to "cover" their own actions in signing away the Irish Republic, or were their genuine beliefs is challenging. What can be deciphered however from Barton's statement, is that the Irish public did not necessarily lead the call for secession from the United Kingdom, with him also adding: 'To the outside observer the demand for complete independence may have appeared to spring from the people; in reality the people were infused by the leaders and the strength of the National demand.'¹⁶¹ D. Harkness identifies a difference between how people defined true freedom: 'To some, freedom and a 'Republic' had become synonymous; to others less doctrinaire, and anxious only to be rid of England so that the Irish people could pronounce its voice, freedom meant freedom to choose.'¹⁶² This divide was exemplified not only by the four individuals under scrutiny, but was also applicable to the general public and the IRA. Following the hardships of the War of Independence, many ordinary Irishmen were likely acceptant of the Treaty not necessarily because they heartedly approved of it, but because it would bring about a return to normality. To those in the IRA however, having been tarnished with the label of "murder gangs" and seen many of their comrades killed, they were now expected to be acceptant of a Treaty in which Ireland would still have a British King, along with a British presence in some of her ports and the separation of her compatriots in the North. Little wonder that many members had become indifferent to the cost of continued warfare.¹⁶³

21) The attitudes of the public and the press towards the Treaty

With the Irish public questionably not as wholeheartedly committed to a republic as the election results of 1918 (along with some hard-line republicans) suggested, how did they regard the Treaty? At the same time as politicians were deliberating over the agreement, a broad swath of public bodies from across the country reported their approval, ranging

¹⁶⁰ Griffith, "Debate Vol. T No. 15", *Dáil Éireann*, 7 January 1922.

¹⁶¹ Dwyer, *I Signed my Death Warrant: Michael Collins and the Treaty*, p. 47.

¹⁶² D.W. Harkness, *The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations 1921-31* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 17.

¹⁶³ Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923*, p. 348.

from labour and farmer's organisations, to Chambers of Commerce and perhaps most crucially (given the importance and influence of religion in Irish society), members of the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁴ Michael Hopkinson suggests that such broad support existed because of the composition of the Dáil, whose members were often Sinn Féin and IRA activists, rather than for instance Southern Unionists or individuals representing labour interests.¹⁶⁵ This would thus suggest that the "voice" of the Dáil was not necessarily in sync with that of the Irish people, a fear expressed by one member of the public in a letter to the *Irish Independent*: 'If the members of the Dail do not voice the wishes of the constituents then they misrepresent those who sent them there.'¹⁶⁶ Whereas this would suggest that the division amongst members of the Dáil was at odds with their constituents, the support of public bodies and institutions in favour of the Treaty was merely a generalised parameter of public opinion. The first detailed record of public opinion on the Treaty was the Irish general election of 16 June 1922 (which for the first time Sinn Féin contested as a disunited grouping). In the six months between the Treaty's ratification by the Dáil and the public vote, tensions between pro- and anti-Treaty forces had not lessened, despite talks between de Valera and Collins, as well as the latter's attempts to heal the rift within the IRA. In March 1922 de Valera had founded a new republican party, Cumann na Poblachta (with Brugha as its vice-president). He also toured the country, giving a series of vitriolic speeches, in which he prophesied freedom would not be achieved through the Treaty but by wading through the blood of fellow Irishmen. These speeches however were interpreted by some as an incitement to civil war; even though de Valera withdrew from making such comments when accused of inciting violence, it is hard to say with certainty whether or not they had any effect on tensions during the period. In the election itself, a total of 58 pro-Treaty Sinn Féin candidates (led by Collins) were elected, as were 35 anti-Treaty candidates (led by de Valera), representing 38.5% and 21.3% of the vote respectively.¹⁶⁷ In addition, 35 candidates (including independents and members of the Labour and Farmers' parties) were also elected, broadly in support of the Treaty.

¹⁶⁴ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁶⁶ "Voice of South Offaly", *Irish Independent*, 2 January 1922, p.6., Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 15 November 2012].

¹⁶⁷ "Dáil Elections since 1918", *ARK (Access Research Knowledge Northern Ireland)*, 2007. <<http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/gdala.htm>> [accessed 4 December 2012].

Although the election result represented a majority support for the Treaty (only in Sligo and East Mayo did anti-Treaty candidates win a majority of the votes), it represented neither strong public confidence in the Provisional Government (created at the beginning of 1922, coexisting with rather than replacing Dáil Éireann), nor a clear disapproval of republican values.¹⁶⁸ This turn of events contrasted with press accounts during the time of the Treaty Debates, with the press at both a local and a national level being almost unanimous in supporting the settlement.¹⁶⁹ This had been a crucial asset to the plenipotentiaries, providing them with the ideal platform on which to convince the Irish people that they had made the right decision in London. The fact that even many nationalists and republicans were purportedly acceptant of the Treaty was reported widely in the press as further proof that hardliners were out of touch with the general public:

Every hour that passes sees the wave of approval for the Anglo-Irish Peace Treaty increase in volume and in force. The Irish people has spoken in no uncertain voice, whether through the medium of its local representatives or through the more direct, but no less unanimous, medium of the parish assembly. More than a dozen county councils, a score of Sinn Fein executives, and numerous other representative bodies have declared for the Treaty.¹⁷⁰

Such tones were prevalent even in pro-republican papers such as the *Meath Chronicle*, which affirmed that although a republic was desirable, they believed that senior politicians (perhaps with the exception of Brugha) had already concluded that an Irish Republic, standing in rigid isolation, was not practical.¹⁷¹ With this in mind, de Valera's refusal to accept the Treaty was frequently criticised by the press, on account of widely reported public support for the agreement. *The Irish Times* for example implied on one occasion that the president was obstructing the people's will, by affirming: 'We believe, the vast majority of Southern Irishmen have accepted it [the treaty] with joy [...] now Mr

¹⁶⁸ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁰ *Irish Independent*, 4 January 1922, p.4, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 14 November 2012].

¹⁷¹ "How Stands the Issue?", *Meath Chronicle*, 24 December 1921, p. 5, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 15 November 2012].

de Valera steps between Ireland and her hopes.¹⁷² Meanwhile the *Freeman's Journal* spoke of de Valera's increasingly autocratic behavior and 'his defiance of the people's demand for the Treaty', part of his attempt to 'carry the devastating split as far as his influence could reach': 'His political formula has, in his mind, taken the place of the nation. The "external association" which he would like but cannot get, has obsessed him to the exclusion of the fate of millions of our people. The formalists have forgotten the men, women, and children who compose the nation.'¹⁷³ At one point during the debates, Griffith reminding members: 'We are here, not as the dictators of the Irish people, but as the representatives of the Irish people.'¹⁷⁴ The president simply retorted: 'A war-weary people will take things which are not in accordance with their aspirations', implying that the British threat of renewed war hung over the minds of many, thus accounting for their support of the Treaty.¹⁷⁵

In stark contrast to de Valera, Collins and Griffith were often portrayed in a positive manner by the press, whom depicted them as having orchestrated a peaceful outcome to Anglo-Irish tensions. One paper, the *Kilkenny People*, said of the two: 'We have no hesitation in saying, when it is a question of pronouncing judgement on the Peace Treaty, that what is good enough for Mr. Arthur Griffith and Mr. Michael Collins is good enough for us.'¹⁷⁶ Although this was a perfectly valid opinion, it serves to highlight the limitations of press accounts of the day. This particular example for instance does not make mention of whether such a sentiment was shared by the local populace in this part of Ireland. Dorothy Macardle outlines how the press was guilty of misrepresenting true public opinion: 'Public bodies which showed a majority for acceptance were reported as favouring it "unanimously." Letters supporting it were published at full length [...] all warnings against the Treaty, all cautions as to the dangers latent in it, all opposition to

¹⁷² *The Irish Times*, 9 December 1921 [cited in Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gil & Macmillan Ltd., 1988), p.35].

¹⁷³ "Attitude of Mr. de Valera", *Freeman's Journal*, 5 January 1922, p.4, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 15 November 2012].

¹⁷⁴ Griffith, "Debate Vol. T No. 6", *Dáil Éireann*, 19 December 1921.

¹⁷⁵ Eamon de Valera, "Debate Vol. T No. 6", *Dáil Éireann*, 19 December 1921, Source: *Houses of the Oireachtas* [online, accessed 1 November 2012].

¹⁷⁶ "The Irish Free State", *Kilkenny People*, 10 December 1921 (Kilkenny, Ireland).

Partition, even, seemed flung to the winds.’¹⁷⁷ One example of such reporting can be identified in a piece from the *Ulster Herald* in December 1921, which affirmed: ‘Throughout the North-West Nationalist opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of the Treaty [...] at the public meetings held the demand for ratification had been practically unanimous.’¹⁷⁸ The tone of such comments would imply that nationalists were more than obliging to accept the Treaty, which was not necessarily the case. Published just a few days later, the *Freeman’s Journal* gave an account of proceedings at the Tyrone County Council:

Mr. A.B. Donnelly (chairman), proposed the following resolution:- ‘That we, the Tyrone Co. Council, whilst fully realising that the Anglo-Irish Treaty does not satisfy the rightful claim of the nation to complete freedom, feel nevertheless that, inasmuch as it gives the Irish Free State full control of all vital national affairs, it provides such opportunities for national development as will eventually secure us the full measure of our rights and bring about an enduring peace between the people of Ireland and Great Britain.’¹⁷⁹

This extract indicates how support for the Treaty was quite often dictated by pragmatism rather than enthusiasm. In addition to using selective language, the press also used debatable figures to back up their claims that the public were almost unanimous in their pro-Treaty stance. A correspondent (based in Galway) writing for the *Freeman’s Journal* and the *Connacht Tribune*, on 27 December 1921 wrote ‘it is probably true to say that 95 per cent of responsible opinion in Co. Galway favours acceptance of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in its present form’¹⁸⁰, a figure which just four days later had unaccountably increased to 98 per cent.¹⁸¹ Without giving any sources for obtaining such figures (such

¹⁷⁷ Dorothy Macardle, *A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a detailed account of the Period 1916-1923* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1937), p. 647.

¹⁷⁸ “An Dail and Voting”, *Ulster Herald*, 31 December 1921, p. 6, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 14 November 2012].

¹⁷⁹ “Tyrone wants Treaty”, *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 January 1922, p.5, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 15 November 2012].

¹⁸⁰ “The Danger of Disunity: Responsible Opinion in Galway Favours the Treaty”, *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 December 1921, p. 3, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 16 November 2012].

¹⁸¹ “West seeks Unity”, *Connacht Tribune*, 31 December 1921, p.5, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 16 November 2012].

as how many people were surveyed), along with the turn of phrase ‘it is probably true to say’, the reliability of this account is questionable.

So why did the press sometimes exaggerate the amount of public support for the Treaty? One has to consider what the agreement meant for the press industry. Two major Irish newspaper titles, the *Irish Independent* and the *Freeman’s Journal*, had suffered IRA attacks on their premises (in December 1919 and March 1922 respectively) when they had printed material criticising the organisation. Meanwhile the editor of *The Irish Times*, John Edward Healy (who was a staunch Unionist), had had shots fired into his home by Republicans during the War of Independence.¹⁸² The personalities of the four men also likely accounted for which side the press aligned itself to. Arthur Griffith had begun his career in journalism and would therefore have retained personal contacts within the industry; Michael Collins meanwhile was approachable to the press, having given a number of interviews whilst on the run from the British. In comparison, de Valera had often spoken out against the press, and in the case of the IRA attacking the premises of the *Irish Independent*, this had happened whilst Cathal Brugha was Minister for Defence (thus making him responsible for the actions of the army). These factors would therefore have had a bearing on how these major newspaper titles reported events to their readerships - to support pro-Treaty forces would be a safer option than placing their faith in hard-line republicans, whose wrath they had experienced first-hand.

Despite the degree of bias in how the press reported the public’s support for the Treaty, the fact remains that a majority of the general public was in favour. Such an opinion was voiced not just by those who were not strongly political, but also by self-confessed republicans. One journalist writing for the *Donegal News* (representing an Ulster province) reported the following:

I have tried to obtain from Sinn Fein officials an accurate and impartial expression of the views of the members of their Clubs, and I have been assured by those who know exactly how the “public pulse” is beating, that if a plebiscite were taken of

¹⁸² Joe Joyce, “The Irish Times 1859-2009: The Editors”, *The Irish Times*, 2012. <<http://www.irishtimes.com/150/articles/the-editors.htm>> [accessed 7 December 2012].

the Sinn Fein and other Nationalist electors in the county that NOT MORE THAN FIVE PER CENT would be found on the Anti-Ratificationist side.¹⁸³

Although the journalist's findings may have been slightly exaggerated, it is still clear that those opposed to the Treaty constituted the minority rather than the majority. Aside from written articles, attitudes towards the Treaty and the four politicians were also encapsulated in satirical cartoons, on both side of the Irish Sea:



Figure 2: David Low, 'The Joy-Jig-Jazz', *The Star* (London, 8 December 1921).

¹⁸³ "The Nation and the Treaty: Voice of the People", *Donegal News*, 31 December 1921, p. 4, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 14 November 2012].

This particular example was produced by the famous cartoonist David Low, published in the London newspaper *The Star* immediately after the signing of the Treaty. The implication that the author is 'burning all the excellent cartoons he would have published if they hadn't made peace' implies that Low, like many, had not anticipated a successful outcome to the talks. As for an outsider's perspective of the Irish plenipotentiaries, the fact the illustration depicts Lloyd George with (solely) Collins rather than Griffith, suggests that from a British standpoint, it was the former who had played the decisive part in the talks. Aimed at a British readership, this particular cartoon reflects the optimism many expressed, believing that the centuries-old Irish question had now been laid to rest. Such optimism was not as abundant in Ireland, with reservations about the agreement apparent in the following cartoon:

THE GLITTERING GATES



ST. DAVID LLOYD GEORGE : " In you go."
ARTHUR : " Righto, it'll be heavenly."
MICHAEL : " I'm a bit doubtful, but I'll try
it for a while."
EAMONN : " I'll go below ; it may be easier
to get out ! "

Figure 3: Arthur Booth, 'The Glittering Gates', Dublin Opinion (1921).

Published in *Dublin Opinion*, this cartoon captures the three-way divide between de Valera, Collins and Griffith. Lloyd George is depicted coercing the men into the “glittering gates” of the Irish Free State, with mixed results. Griffith is shown to be gladly willing; Collins is more hesitant (given his links with the IRA and IRB, both staunchly republican organisations), whilst de Valera would rather risk ‘immediate and terrible war’. Although Brugha is absent from the cartoon, had Booth decided to include the Minister for Defence, then one could surmise that he would be depicted also following the path of ‘immediate and terrible war’, given his vocal readiness to suffer death for the cause of Irish freedom.¹⁸⁴

22) Observations

The selection of newspaper articles documented here clearly shows that the press were almost unanimously supportive of the Treaty, implying to their readership that their approval was shared by a majority of Irishmen. In the period of the Treaty Debates, this did appear to be true, with a wave of organisations representing different interests groups within Irish society voicing their approval. On the other hand, when the electorate were given the chance six months later to voice their support for either pro- or anti-Treaty interests, although a majority were still in favour of the Treaty, the result was not as unanimous as press accounts suggested would be the case. Some republicans later argued that the shift in public opinion (in favour of the agreement) was essentially “manufactured” by the press.¹⁸⁵ The benefit of hindsight suggests that public opinion was not manufactured by the press but was certainly exaggerated. Had a public vote taken place in January 1922, the wave of approval from different organisations suggests that the Treaty would have been approved by a very high margin. Although in the debates Brugha, as Minister for Defence, claimed that the IRA were in a stronger position than when the truce had come into effect, there was not wholesale public support for a renewal of hostilities. As Bill Kissane notes, ‘the peace enjoyed during the truce increased the gulf between public opinion and the elitist traditions of the IRA’.¹⁸⁶ However, on the eve

¹⁸⁴ “Minister of Defence: Mr. Cathal Brugha Makes a Statement”, *Freeman’s Journal*, 18 August 1921, p. 3, Source: *Irish Newspaper Archives* [online, accessed 15 November 2012].

¹⁸⁵ Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁶ Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 32.

of civil war in June 1922, election results showed that public opinion on the Treaty was similarly split to those of de Valera, Collins, Griffith and Brugha. This leads us to an important conclusion – internal conflict was not a direct result of the political split but was exasperated by the gulf between these four figures. There was enough discontent amongst certain sections of Irish society (especially members of militant groups such as the IRB and the IRA) with the Treaty, that even had the four individuals been less disjointed over the agreement, then there was still a cohort of Irishmen still willing to defend the Irish Republic at all costs and prevent the Irish Free State from gaining a foothold.

Conclusions

The focus of this research has been on Ireland's rocky path to independence in the period from the Easter Rising of 1916 to the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in January 1922. In December 1921, agreement in London between Irish and British delegates had seemed to have resolved the centuries old "Irish question". Instead, the Anglo-Irish Treaty ultimately brought war, not peace to the island. It divided the nationalist movement irrevocably and created such tensions that within just half a year of the Treaty's ratification, the country had been plunged into civil war. At the heart of this division were four figures – Eamon de Valera, Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith and Cathal Brugha. Their two-way split over the Treaty would subsequently be replicated by the opposing sides in the civil war – namely those in favour of the Irish Free State against those in support of the Irish Republic. The aim of this paper has been not only to understand why these leading Irish politicians of the day became so divided over the Treaty, but also to ascertain whether their views were concurrent with their fellow countrymen and played a part in sowing the seeds of civil war.

The research has drawn-up several findings. Firstly, each of these men initially had very opposing views regarding Ireland's future, contrasting with their later alliances in support (Collins and Griffith) and against the Treaty (de Valera and Brugha). The only shared consensus amongst the four was that Ireland should be a united, sovereign state. Aside from this, their views on how to achieve this goal, along with what form of governance the country should adopt, varied considerably. Such views were not just dependent on their own beliefs; world events were also critical. The Russian Revolution(s), coupled with the Allies' (purported) belief in the self-determination of individual peoples, suggested that the age of Imperialism was at an end. Even so, the British Empire (which reached its zenith in the period immediately after the First World War) retained its standing as one of the foremost global powers and thus the Irish still faced a formidable task in seeking independence. This was confirmed when de Valera met Lloyd George for preliminary negotiations in July 1921, although several examples have been cited whereby the president explored possibilities other than a republic before

the truce. For him, many of his decisions were influenced just as much by the need to keep moderates and hardliners united, as by his own personal political convictions. Griffith was one such moderate who de Valera was conscious of; having dropped his scheme for an Anglo-Irish dual monarchy in October 1917 (when his presidency of Sinn Féin was passed on to de Valera), he ended up signing an agreement much akin to his earlier proposal, albeit that the Treaty did not see Ireland become a coexisting kingdom alongside Great Britain. Collins meanwhile signed the Treaty in the belief that it would steer Ireland in the right direction towards eventual freedom. The “gunman” who had been instrumental in the IRA’s campaign of the War of Independence, was also resigned to the opinion that a renewed and prolonged war against the British would end unfavourably for the nation. The Treaty however would allow the country time to recover and provide room for further negotiations with the British and Northern Ireland governments at a later date (and indeed allow the strength of the IRA to be rebuilt if renewed conflict broke-out). These men’s view sharply contrasted with those of hard-line republicans such as Cathal Brugha. For Brugha, all ties with the British Empire would have to be severed so as to guarantee true independence, even if this came at the cost of renewed conflict. Such a mindset was due not only to a personal willingness to sacrifice his own life for the republic; it was also born out of the belief that this republic had been ratified by the people in the election of 1918. To support the Treaty would therefore be a betrayal, not just of the people and *their* republic, but of the martyrs of 1916, whom he had fought alongside.

23) The position of Eamon de Valera

The position of de Valera regarding the nation’s future was often obscured by his contradictory behavior; as Hopkinson observes: ‘De Valera’s complex position was made the more difficult to understand by his tendency to cloak political compromise and ambiguity in the language of principle.’¹⁸⁷ This leads to another important finding, namely the difference between the private and public thoughts of each man. T. Dwyer claims that the president ‘tended to portray a moderate public image while privately

¹⁸⁷ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War*, p. 71.

advocating a more hard-line approach'.¹⁸⁸ Evidence gathered here however contradicts this line of argument; his outward commitment to the republic was in contrast to his concealed willingness to stray from the republican path. Up until December 1921, he had used his presidency to act as a mediator between the different factions that made up Sinn Féin, helping to keep the coalition together. The Treaty however changed this; when his attempts to bridge the schism with his Document No. 2 failed, he took the anti-Treaty side. Debate has frequently focused on whether the president used the plenipotentiaries as scapegoats to safeguard his own position, or whether (as he personally argued) his duty was at home, keeping public opinion firm (along with all nationalist factions united) and the army organised, ready for renewed war if talks broke down. Whereas evidence exists to suggest that de Valera knew well before the signing of the Treaty that a republic was not achievable (thus inferring that he used the delegates to secure his own position), this paper has also provided many examples of de Valera's suggestible commitment to the republic; even his entertaining of dominion status for Ireland. Although critics of de Valera could argue that such behaviour was used to political ends, it is more likely that it was born out of personal indecision. Acting as a mediator between moderates and hardliners, de Valera's own suggestions (such as Document No. 2 and the creation of an Anglo-Irish agreement akin to the U.S. Platt Amendment with Cuba) were often rebuked. Only once the Treaty had been signed did it become apparent where de Valera stood – he would continue to fight for the Irish Republic, even if this were at the cost of 'renewed and terrible war'. Yet instead of fighting the British, this war would be fought against fellow Irishmen.

24) The position of Michael Collins

Although history has served to depict Collins as unequivocally republican, such a depiction is not concurrent with the true political nature of the man. As Peter Hart comments, 'despite his warlike image, he had never attached himself publicly to the full republican demand. In his speeches, his election addresses, his correspondence, even his interviews with the press, the word 'republic' was almost completely absent'.¹⁸⁹ Collins'

¹⁸⁸ Dwyer, *Michael Collins and the Treaty: His Differences with de Valera*, p. 31.

¹⁸⁹ Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins*, p. 293.

signing of the Treaty came as a shock to many precisely because of this warlike image, and yet he now supported an agreement which effectively destroyed the republic many Irishmen had given their lives for. Some have argued that Collins was “tainted” by the London atmosphere of the negotiations - that he was somehow duped into a compromise, which he defended with his stepping stone analogy. However evidence (notably the witness statement provided by Richard Walsh) suggests that long before the Treaty, Collins had envisaged Ireland taking not a single “revolutionary” step to freedom, but rather a staggered approach. This is similar to his tactic during the War of Independence – secure freedom by making the country ungovernable, thus forcing the British either to withdraw or negotiate. Given the close working relationship between Collins and de Valera in the period before the truce (along with the latter’s admittance that during the negotiations, he felt certain that Collins was contemplating accepting the Crown), one questions how well the president was aware of the minister’s intentions.¹⁹⁰ Although critics would once again use this as proof to suggest de Valera deliberately used Collins as a scapegoat, evidence has shown that Collins was susceptible to making public statements at odds with his private thoughts. As with de Valera, Collins was more politically suggestible than his outward stance implied.

The most important issue to remember with Collins is that he did not regard the Treaty as a final settlement, as outlined just before his death in August 1922:

The freedom we have secured may unquestionably be incomplete. But it is the nearest approach to an absolutely independent and unified Ireland which we can achieve amongst ourselves at the present moment... Let us realise that the free Ireland obtained by the Treaty is the greatest common measure of freedom obtainable now, and the most pregnant for future development.¹⁹¹

The intriguing aspect when looking at Collins during this period is his somewhat involuntary transformation from a rebel leader into a political negotiator. Having been instrumental in helping to spearhead the guerilla campaign against the British presence in Ireland during the War of Independence, he would then take on a decisive role in

¹⁹⁰ Dwyer, *‘I Signed my Death Warrant’: Michael Collins and the Treaty*, p. 63.

¹⁹¹ Collins, *The Path to Freedom*, pp. 82-83.

negotiations with his former enemy. Although the Treaty would split Irish opinion, ultimately Collins' stepping-stone approach to independence would be the means employed to effect by de Valera in later years, culminating in the establishment of the Republic of Ireland (*Éire*) and withdrawal from the British Commonwealth in 1949.

25) The position of Arthur Griffith

The most experienced politician of all four men, Griffith was also the only figure not to have been directly involved in the Easter Rising. Possibly this can help to partially explain his moderate stance in comparison to the other three men, who had personally fought against the British on the streets of Dublin during that April week. Of more significance however was his 1904 publication *The Resurrection of Hungary*. Taking his inspiration from the Hungarian independence movement of the 1860s, Griffith advocated the establishment of an Anglo-Irish dual monarchy. This is not to imply that Griffith willfully opted to retain links with the British Empire, but it does show that he was inclined towards pragmatism rather than idealism. As he admitted during the Treaty Debates, he was not concerned with whether the symbolism of the Crown remained in Ireland, so long as the country was free to self-govern.¹⁹² His discarding of de Valera's Document No. 2 because of the mere "quibble" of words he believed differentiated it from the signed agreement was in stark contrast to the opinions of the document's author and devout republicans such as Brugha, who were not so seemingly *laissez-faire* when it came to the issue of the Crown. The ideological gulf that separated Griffith's moderate stance from hard-line republicanism epitomised by Brugha was evident long before negotiations with the British commenced. This leads one to question why de Valera chose a moderate to chair the Irish delegation in London, being fully aware that Griffith regarded allegiance to the British Crown to be an acceptable part of any future agreement.¹⁹³ Although critics of the president would once again suggest that he was using Griffith as a scapegoat (as has been suggested for Collins), this (again) ignores his tactical approach. As has been discussed, de Valera often sought to keep all factions within the Sinn Féin movement united; Griffith was the founder of this movement and

¹⁹² Griffith, "Debate Vol. T No. 15", *Dáil Éireann*, 7 January 1922.

¹⁹³ Akenson, 'Was De Valera a Republican?', p. 244.

was a man of experience (in contrast to Collins). In addition, according to Robert Barton the president held more faith in Griffith's judgement as a negotiator in comparison to Collins.¹⁹⁴ Although placing a moderate in charge of negotiating for a republic was a risky strategy, one has to recall de Valera's explicit instruction requiring the plenipotentiaries to submit any proposal to Dublin before signing, a commitment which was broken. In addition, during the Cabinet meeting of 3 December 1921, Griffith had personally assured de Valera that he would not sign any final agreement without referral back to Dublin, yet just three days later he and the other plenipotentiaries signed the Treaty without having consulted Dublin. Although this act did not officially commit Ireland to the agreement (it would first have to be ratified by the Dáil), one can see how rather than de Valera manipulating those around him, it was those very people who in fact misled the president.

26) The position of Cathal Brugha

Out of all the four politicians, Brugha remains the least-documented. Although material relating to his personal involvement in proceedings is less plentiful than of that relating to the other three figures, what is available does allow several conclusions to be drawn. Foremost, Brugha was the embodiment of hard-line Irish republicanism. Evidence here has shown that throughout the period analysed, Brugha resisted nearly all suggestions of compromise with the British. Whereas his willingness to sacrifice his own life for the republic could lead one to label him as a "fanatic", one also has to be aware of his mindset. In January 1919 an Irish Republic had been proclaimed; to agree to a settlement that would dismantle this republic would in the eyes of Brugha be a gross betrayal. Yet, Brugha did support de Valera's proposal for external association, in itself a compromise, for Ireland would still have partnered herself with the British Empire over issues of "common concern". Thus, to argue that the man was stubbornly committed to the republican ideal would be an incorrect assertion. So long as Ireland was a united, sovereign nation, he would be acceptant (albeit begrudgingly) of retaining links with the British Empire, so long as the latter did not infringe upon Ireland's right to self-governance.

¹⁹⁴ Barton, "Document W.S. 979", pp. 38-39.

27) The attitudes of the four figures regarding the issues of sovereignty and Ulster

The main issue of contention between the men would be over the issue of sovereignty, in particular allegiance to the British Crown. This divide, along with the absence of a firm policy on how to resolve the issue of Ulster, would arguably have the greatest impact on the future of Ireland and provide the catalyst for civil war. The fact that the four individuals were split down the middle over the issue of the British Crown meant that whatever decision was reached over the Treaty, the decision would be contentious, as was proved when it was passed by a slim majority of just seven votes. De Valera tried to avoid such a situation arising with his proposal of external association, which he wrongly believed extreme republicans in his Cabinet would accept (even though Brugha himself was acceptant of it).¹⁹⁵ Griffith at one point during the Treaty Debates belittled the “quibble” of words that divided the Treaty and Document No. 2, but as Peter Hart notes, the issue was not just symbolic. ‘At stake were the fundamental nature of the Irish constitution, the source of governmental authority (the people or the king), the relationship with Britain (equal or subordinate) and, in concrete political terms, the survival of the republican movement and the prospect of civil war.’¹⁹⁶

Equally crucial to Ireland’s future was the approach taken to the issue of Ulster. By the time negotiations commenced with the British, the island had been partitioned and the task now facing the men was not just for independence, but also for reunification. Despite the importance of the issue of Ulster, it is surprising to observe how this was not the primary focus of the four individuals. Instead it would be sovereignty rather than unity – the oath rather than partition – that emerged as the divisive issue.¹⁹⁷ Whereas in public the men spoke of the importance of “essential unity”, they failed to assert themselves over this key requisite during the negotiations, epitomised by de Valera’s delay in sending the plenipotentiaries the Cabinet’s official stand on the Northern issue. None of the four men failed to recognise the clear religious and cultural differences between north and south, yet they did not share a collective approach to the problem. Whereas Brugha’s

¹⁹⁵ Mary C. Bromage, ‘De Valera’s Formula for Irish Nationhood’, *The Review of Politics*, 13 (1951), 483-502 (490).

¹⁹⁶ Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins*, pp. 310-311.

¹⁹⁷ Roy Douglas, Liam Harte and Jim O’Hara (eds.), *Drawing Conclusions: A Cartoon History of Anglo-Irish Relations 1798-1998* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1998), p. 179.

thoughts are not readily documented, in the case of de Valera he was open to allowing for an autonomous Northern Ireland, so long as it was ultimately answerable to Dublin and not Westminster.

Collins and Griffith on the other hand believed that economic pressures upon the North would lead to reunification. This was born out of a (ultimately misguided) trust in the findings of a future boundary commission, which they believed would transfer the predominantly nationalist and catholic areas of Northern Ireland to the Irish Free State, leaving the former too small to remain isolated from the rest of the country in the long run. In the end the boundary remained unaltered and ninety years later, the Six Counties remain divided from the rest of Ireland.

28) Final observations

If one were to take either de Valera, Collins, Griffith or Brugha out of the equation, then the course of events during this part of Irish history would have been very different. Each man represented differing factions within Sinn Féin – Griffith stood for moderates, Collins was a man of the IRA and the IRB and Brugha championed the position of hard-line republicans. Meanwhile de Valera, who commanded a loyal following and respect from those around him (including from the three other men) stood for an external Irish Republic, sharing retained links with the British Empire. Although there were many other Irish politicians of the day who had a critical bearing on events, ultimately it was these four figures that had the largest impact. Their influence was as much about their personal standing as their political stances; Tom Hales (the man in charge of the anti-Treaty IRA unit that assassinated Collins) later said: ‘If Dev had come back with a document that Collins didn’t like, there’d have been no civil war.’¹⁹⁸ These personal standings have already been the focus of much debate, particularly in regards to de Valera and Collins. In the case of de Valera, some writers (for instance the journalist Tim Pat Coogan) have argued that he manipulated those around him, especially Collins, so as to secure his own political position. This paper argues otherwise, noting that the president’s absence from the negotiations was a logical safeguard to Ireland’s position (the need to refer any decisions back to Dublin before approval would avoid any hasty decisions being made),

¹⁹⁸ Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography*, pp. 318-319.

but that miscommunication and misunderstanding compromised this tactic. As for Collins, although he has often been portrayed as the archetypal republican, evidence here has indicated that he, along with de Valera, outwardly portrayed themselves as committed to the Irish Republic, whilst privately being a lot more politically suggestible. The positions of Griffith and Brugha meanwhile are more straight forward; the former was openly a moderate and the latter openly a hard-line republican. Even so, the personal standing of de Valera was such that he was able to convince Griffith to place *his* party onto a republican footing and to convince Brugha to accept the principle of external association (even though it was a compromise). Despite the later joint alliances formed between the men over the Treaty (namely Collins and Griffith in favour, with de Valera and Brugha against), this belies the very individual and opposing views held by each of them. Insomuch as they marched together under the banner of Sinn Féin, their viewpoints ranged from strict republicanism to a willingness to accept dominion status for Ireland.¹⁹⁹

As to the question of whether the two-way split of these four individuals over the Treaty directly led to the civil war, this paper concludes that whereas it provided a catalyst for internal strife, it was not the sole cause. The Treaty confronted ordinary Irishmen with a stark choice - either they could choose to fight on for the Irish Republic, or they could accept the Treaty and therefore partition and allegiance to the British Empire. This choice however did not arise from the Treaty itself; it had been first put forward to the electorate in the 1918 election, when they were given the choice of voting for an independent Irish Republic or for the island (as this stage still one entity) to remain part of the United Kingdom, albeit with greater autonomy (i.e. Home Rule). At this stage the Irish people voted categorically in favour of Sinn Féin and their mandate for a republic, but as has been noted this result may also have resulted from public dissatisfaction with the British and previous (Irish) attempts to gain more autonomy, rather than a specific desire for an Irish Republic *per se*. By the time of the June 1922 election, the results showed a much more divided nation. Parties supporting the Treaty still received a majority share of the vote, but it was not unanimous and indeed could not prevent civil unrest breaking out just a few weeks, resulting in a war bloodier than that had consumed the country in the period 1919-1921. This turn-around in public opinion

¹⁹⁹ Akenson, "Was De Valera a Republican?", p. 233

(in which the majority now voiced their support for a non-republican Irish state) was no doubt influenced by the political divide that emerged between the four individuals but it was not created by the schism. The destruction of the War of Independence and the threat of a renewal of hostilities would have weighed on the minds of many when considering the Treaty. Ultimately the question confronting Irishmen was a simple one – what would offer them a better future, the Irish Republic or the Irish Free State? In the end the latter choice won out but dreams of a republic did not disappear and in 1949 Ireland finally became a republic, albeit still partitioned from Northern Ireland, a situation which to this very day continues to bring violence to the island.

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