

The Irish Boundary Crisis
and the Reshaping of British Politics:
1920-1925

by

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The London School of Economics and Political Science

A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of London.

2000



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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the interaction between the evolution of the Irish Question and the re-emergence of Britain's two-party political system after World War I. It challenges the contention summed up in A.J.P. Taylor's suggestion that David Lloyd George 'conjured' the Irish Question out of existence with the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Here, it is shown that on the contrary the Irish dispute continued to be a highly sensitive issue for successive British governments until the Treaty's Boundary Commission report was shelved in 1925.

This was so because British politics was then undergoing a profound revolution. Its climax was the 1924 general election, which established the Conservatives as the dominant players in British politics, ensured Labour's place as the leading party of the left, and confirmed the eclipse of Liberalism. The first of this study's two aims is to set the Irish dispute within this wider context. Specifically, it examines how the answer to the Irish Question that was devised by Lloyd George and his Coalition partners was constructed and then dismantled as a result of this revolution.

The second aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the Boundary Commission was only one element in the Treaty's Ulster clauses, all of which were designed to

bring about Ireland's re-unification. The intent was to exploit the financial restrictions of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and thus pressure Ulster Unionists into joining a single Irish Parliament. This aspect has been overlooked in other studies, though it posed as serious a threat to Northern Ireland's survival as the Commission itself.

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PREFACE

The field of Anglo-Irish history is both a crowded and, given its resonance in current-day politics, a sometimes dangerous place in which to tread. Nonetheless, one corner of this field has never been explored fully. The aim of this study is to place the settlement of the Irish Question in the 1920s within the context of the broader revolution which was taking place in British politics at that time and to show how each affected the other.

It is, for example, difficult to understand David Lloyd George's handling of the 1921 Irish Treaty negotiations without taking into account the underlying purpose which was behind his decision to enter those talks in the first place: namely, his goal of merging the Conservative and Liberal wings of his Coalition government into a new political party. Yet, scholars have been curiously hesitant to analyse the negotiations from this perspective. Their disinclination to examine the interrelationship between developments in Ireland and at Westminster seems to intensify when it comes to writing about the post-independence period.¹ It is almost as if an admission of Britain's continuing influence over Irish affairs is viewed as tantamount to

¹For a recent example, see T. Garvin, 1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy (Dublin, 1996).

sustaining the larger country's domination over its smaller neighbour. For their part, historians of 1920s British politics have approached the Irish Question with a certain world-weariness. Their reluctance to delve into the subject suggests an aversion to the idea that the issue could have had as great and continuing an influence on Britain's public life.

I am indebted to a number of people for making it possible to research and write this thesis. Even before my work formally began at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Jack Murray, Holly Buchanan, and the Rev. Canon William C. Neuroth generously assisted me in gathering together the foundation material on which this thesis is based. I owe an equal debt of gratitude to the Cummins and Malone families who welcomed me into their homes while I was in Dublin to work in the Irish archives.

Michael Collins, nephew of the Irish independence leader, kindly shared a number of insights about his uncle and steered me away from several errors in my early research. My thanks also go to the Viscount Davidson and to his son-in-law, Richard Oldfield, for allowing me to quote from the unpublished correspondence of Joan Davidson and Stanley Baldwin. Equally, I wish to thank the many copyright holders for allowing me to quote from the letters, diaries, and other documents which I have researched.

Dr Anthony Howe, John Barnes, and Ronald Brennan read drafts of my work at various stages and I am indebted to them for their advice. I also wish to thank the administrative secretaries of the LSE's Department of International History - especially Pat Christopher, Mary McCormick, Brigid Spillane, and Susanne Umerski - who were generous with their time, their expertise, and with their friendship. Without the help and guidance and, again, friendship of Larry Ward, and of Carole Simpson and Joanne Bourne of the LSE's Information Technology department, it would have been impossible for me to research and write this thesis using a computer. Their support was crucial.

The staffs of all of the research institutes and libraries which I visited were unfailingly kind and often went out of their way to assist me in my work. In particular, I would like to thank the staff of the House of Lords Record Office; the Rev. Father Ignatius Fennessey, OFM, of the Franciscan Library, Killiney; and Godfrey Waller, supervisor of the manuscripts department at Cambridge University Library.

Financing this work was not an easy task. I wish to thank the University of London's Central Research Fund and the Royal Historical Society for providing assistance which enabled me to undertake research in both Britain and Ireland over the past several years. My thanks also

go to the LSE's Student Union Hardship Fund.

Most of all, I wish to thank my mother, Florence Matthews, and my twin sister, Leah Kay Matthews. They have never lost faith in me, and they have always been there when I have needed them. I owe an equal, and equally unpayable, debt to Andrea Heatley for her understanding and for her patience over the past several years.

Finally, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor David Stevenson. His advice has been invariably accurate, his criticism has always been constructive, and his encouragement has been unflinching. Most of all, he allowed me to go my own way, to chart my own course, and for that I shall always be grateful.

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A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY CITATIONS, AND ABBREVIATIONS

Works on Anglo-Irish history follow a number of different, sometimes contradictory rules when referring to political parties, factions, and organizations. Here, the terms 'Northern Ireland' and 'Ulster' are used interchangeably when referring to the six-county state. In the same way, 'Ireland' and 'Irish' is used interchangeably with 'Free State' and 'Free Stater' to refer to the 26-county state.

Although the British Conservative Party was still officially the 'Unionist Party', it and its supporters are referred to as 'Conservative' or 'Tory' throughout. The term 'Unionist' is reserved for the Northern Ireland government and the supporters of partition, while 'Nationalist' has been employed as a generic term to refer to the supporters of Irish unification in both parts of the island. 'Imperial' is used interchangeably with 'British' as this was the fashion of the time.

For the sake of brevity, secondary sources are given a full citation only on first reference. Thereafter, the source is cited by the author's last name and an abbreviated title. Unless otherwise noted, portions of quotes are emphasized or contain irregular spellings only when this is the case in the original text.

A number of abbreviations are used in the footnotes and, occasionally, in the text. These abbreviations are listed below. Northern Ireland Cabinet documents are prefaced with PRONI to distinguish them from British Cabinet records.

ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Austen Chamberlain Papers
AJB-B	Arthur James Balfour Papers, British Library
AJB-S	Arthur James Balfour Papers, Scottish Records Office
BBK	Lord Beaverbrook Papers
BL	Andrew Bonar Law Papers
C.	Conclusions of British Cabinet meetings and conferences
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CJ	Records created or inherited by the Northern Ireland Office
Cmd.	Command Papers
CO	Colonial Office Papers

Comp II-V Churchill/Gilbert Companion series
of printed documents
C.P. Cabinet Paper
CSC Clementine Spencer Churchill Papers
Dáil Deb Dáil Eireann Debates
Dáil Deb I Minutes of the First Dáil
Dáil Deb II:
Private Sess. Minutes of the Second Dáil, Private
Sessions
Dáil Deb II:
Public Sess. Minutes of the Second Dáil, Public
Sessions
Dáil Treaty
Deb Dáil Treaty Debates
DE Dáil Eireann Papers
DFA Department of Foreign Affairs Papers,
Irish Free State
DO Dominions Office Papers
D/T Department of the Taoiseach Papers
HC Deb Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons
Fifth Series (unless otherwise indicated)
HL Deb Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords
Fifth Series
HHW Henry Wilson Papers
HO Home Office Papers
IO India Office Papers
JDPF John French Papers
JRM James Ramsay MacDonald Papers
L.C. Leaders Conference - minutes of meetings
and committee reports of the Conservative
Shadow Cabinet
LG David Lloyd George Papers
NC Neville Chamberlain Papers
NEBB North-Eastern Boundary Bureau Papers
NI HC Deb Parliamentary Debates. Northern Ireland
House of Commons. First Series
NUA National Unionist Association
PG Provisional Government of Ireland
P.G.I. Provisional Government of Ireland
Committee Papers (British Cabinet)
PRO Public Record Office, London
PRONI Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RF Richard Feetham Papers
S(4) 4th Marquess of Salisbury Papers
SB Stanley Baldwin Papers
T Treasury Papers
TD Teachtaí Dála - Member of Dáil Eireann
TJ Tom Jones Papers
Vol. I-III Tom Jones's Whitehall Diary, published
texts
W-E Sir Laming Worthington-Evans Papers
WSC Winston Spencer Churchill Papers

INTRODUCTION

St. Patrick came to see the land
 From which the snakes he'd banished
 'What's this across my path?' he cried,
 'I thought they all had vanished.'

A monstrous serpent squirmed around
 From Antrim Glens to Derry;
 'Bad luck to it,' a Southern said,
 'Shure, isn't that the boundary.'¹

One mid-summer's morning in June 1923, a motorcade sped along the back roads of Northern Ireland bound for the Irish frontier. The excursion was organised by Stephen Tallents, former secretary to Ireland's Lord Lieutenant, now the British government's representative in Northern Ireland.² Two guests accompanied Tallents on his tour of the boundary: Sir Wilfrid Spender, secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet, and Spender's wife, Lilian.

'[O]ur route corkscrewed about in the most bewildering manner', Lady Spender wrote in her diary. Not wanting to stray into Free State territory, the party took 'innumerable by-roads in order to avoid crossing the Border' but were often frustrated, as happened at Clady, where 'here again the Boundary was an imaginary line across the middle of the river bridge.'

To Sir Wilfrid, who had served in the Ulster Division during World War I, the boundary 'reminded him

¹"The Boundary Serpent" by "Turf Clod", Derry Sentinel, ? December 1925, Feetham Papers, 7/1, ff. 42.

²Tallents to Anderson, 22 June 1923, HO 317/68.

more than anything else' of the Western Front, 'complete with blockhouses, sandbags, barbed wire' and trenches - most of which 'we have cut ... wherever the roads cross the Border'. To Lady Spender, it was the 'beautiful wild country' that was most striking, and it was this memory that remained with her after the trip. 'The beautiful blue mountains of Donegal', she wrote

stood up in the west, cut off from us, alas, by this tragic state of civil war. It gave one a strange feeling to see a country so unnaturally and ungeographically divided - like seeing a living creature cut in two.³

Despite its seeming permanence - despite the trenches, blockhouses, and customs huts - few on either side of this, the only international land border in the British Isles believed that a boundary so unnatural and ungeographical would long remain. And for good reason. The boundary travelled by Tallents and the Spenders was the result of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and its creation of two Irish governments: one for the twenty-six counties of south, west, and northwest Ireland, and another for the six counties of northeast Ulster. Although the 1920 Act temporarily divided the island, its 'ultimate aim', according to its creators, 'was a united Ireland with a separate Parliament of its own, bound by the closest ties to Great Britain'.⁴

³Lady Spender's diary, 25 June 1923, D. 1633/2/26.

⁴C. 10(19), 3 December 1919, CAB 23/18. Unity remained the legislation's stated aim. 'The Act', Irish Chief Secretary Sir Hamar Greenwood told Parliament, 'provides for the political unity of Ireland'. See HC Deb, Vol. 138, Col. 647, 21 February 1921.



A general map of Ireland
 Source: R.W.G. Carter and A.J. Parker, ed.,
Ireland: Contemporary Perspectives on a
 Land and Its People (London, 1989), p. 2.

Even before the 1920 Act reached the Statute Book few believed that 'such an artificial creation' would be the government's 'last word' on Ireland.⁵ Nor was it. A year later the 1920 Act was supplanted by the Irish Treaty, creating one government for the whole of Ireland, including the six partitioned Ulster counties, and granting to it 'the same constitutional status' in the British empire as the dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.⁶ But what this first article of the Treaty gave in the way of Irish unity was taken back by a series of clauses beginning with Article 11, which temporarily suspended the new government's jurisdiction over the six counties. There then followed what one of the Treaty's framers later admitted were its 'elements of dynamite': Article 12.⁷ The first half of this article gave Ulster's government the choice of opting out of the new Irish dominion for good. In that case, the terms of the 1920 Act would remain in place as far as Northern Ireland was concerned; but once Northern Ireland opted out,

a Commission consisting of three persons, one to be appointed by the Government of the Irish Free State, one to be appointed by the Government of Northern Ireland, and one who shall be Chairman,

⁵Hoare to Midleton, 9 November 1920, Templewood Papers, I: 12 (18). Anti-Partition League to Lloyd George, 13 March 1920, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/79.

⁶Cmd. 1560: Articles of Agreement for a Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1921), Article 1. The Treaty is reprinted in Appendix II.

⁷The speaker was Lord Birkenhead. See HL Deb, Vol. 62, Col. 1232, 9 December 1925.

to be appointed by the British Government, shall determine, in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions, the boundaries between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, and for the purposes of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, and of this instrument, the boundary of Northern Ireland shall be such as may be determined by such Commission.⁸

For the Treaty's critics in Britain, Article 12 immediately became the focal point of controversy. Former Conservative Party leader Andrew Bonar Law called it his one 'serious objection' to the Treaty.⁹ Whether the Commission was empowered to make only minor readjustments to the border, or whether it had the right to transfer whole counties from North to South was a matter of hot dispute. Changes, though, there would be. As one Ulster Unionist MP put it, by the time the Boundary Commission was finished the six counties would be 'so cut up and mutilated that we shall no longer be masters in our own house.' It would mean the end of partition and the reunification of Ireland.¹⁰

But the boundary that Lady Spender saw in 1923 did not change. Eighteen months later the Boundary Commission's award was suppressed just as it was about to be released. All of the politicians had been wrong, except one. From the moment the boundaries of his new

⁸Appendix II, Article 12.

⁹HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 203, 15 December 1921.

¹⁰Ibid, Col. 56-57, 14 December 1921. Also, see N. Mansergh, The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing, 1912-1972 (New Haven, 1991), p. 221.

state were challenged, Northern Ireland Prime Minister Sir James Craig told his followers that there would no concessions to anyone. 'What we have', Craig declared, 'we hold'.¹¹ So they did.

There, it is supposed, the story ends. Writing many years after the fact, A.J.P. Taylor memorably explained that with the 1921 Treaty British Prime Minister David Lloyd George had not merely answered the Irish question for 'good or ill'; he had 'conjured it out of existence'.¹² Historians find Taylor's imagery seductive and for the most part have been content to echo his verdict. Lloyd George, one wrote, 'for good or ill, effectively settled the "Irish Question" as generations of British people had understood it', and this, another noted, explains the 'quickly diminishing importance of the Irish question ... in British domestic politics' after the Treaty was signed.¹³

¹¹NI HC Deb, Vol. 2, Col. 598, 23 May 1922.

¹²A.J.P. Taylor, English History: 1914-1945 (Oxford, 1965), p. 161, 236.

¹³K.O. Morgan, 'Lloyd George and the Irish', in R. Blake, Introduction, Ireland After the Union: Proceedings of the Second Joint Meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and the British Academy, London, 1986 (London, 1989), p. 83. S. Lawlor, Britain and Ireland: 1914-1923 (Dublin, 1983), p. 154. 'Except for a brief flare-up in 1922', writes Michael Kinnear, 'the Irish question was now shelved until the 1970s'. See The Fall of Lloyd George: The Political Crisis of 1922 (London, 1973), p. 15. D.G. Boyce writes that Ireland played a major role 'for the last time with its departure from the centre of the British political stage in 1922'. See The Irish Question and British Politics: 1886-1986 (London, 1988), p. 31.

Certainly, British politicians were ready to turn their backs on Ireland. Their wish was granted when in 1923 most discussion of Irish affairs in Parliament was ruled out of order by the Speaker of the House of Commons. A year later this ban was further narrowed so that MPs could not raise 'any matters of administration for which a Minister in Northern Ireland is responsible.'¹⁴

In this way, the Irish problem was left to fester. As a government white paper explained in 1973, 'the uncomfortable lessons of history provided every inducement to the Government in London to keep Northern Ireland out of United Kingdom politics.' This code of silence extended to every level and branch of government. Civil servants soon learned that they 'would get little thanks in Whitehall or Westminster' if they forced ministers and MPs to look too closely into Britain's attic; the door was to be kept closed and bolted shut.¹⁵

Nor were the men who were supposed to have solved the Irish riddle particularly inclined to talk about their handiwork. Winston Churchill excepted, their recollections (along with an authorised biography of Lord Birkenhead) are singularly uninformative when it comes to

¹⁴HC Deb, Vol. 162, Col. 2246-2247, 19 April 1923; Vol. 171, Col. 549-550, 19 March 1924.

¹⁵Cmd. 5460: Royal Commission on the Constitution, 1969-1973 [The Kilbrandon Report] (London, 1973), para. 1303.

the Coalition's handling of the Irish Question.¹⁶ This seeming lack of interest has proved contagious, and their biographers have also largely disregarded Ireland once the Treaty negotiations are got out of the way.¹⁷

Yet, nearly two years after the fall of the Lloyd George Coalition, Herbert Asquith rose in the House of Commons to warn that the British people were 'confronted with precisely the same problem' which had taken them to the brink of civil war in the summer of 1914.¹⁸ The Irish Question, an issue that dominated British politics for the better part of forty years, had not been conjured

¹⁶See, e.g., D. Lloyd George, Is It Peace? (London, 1923), p. 267-275. A. Chamberlain, Down The Years (London, 1935), p. 144-150. Ephesian [pseud. Bechhofer Roberts], Lord Birkenhead (London, 1926), p. 85-88. Churchill, characteristically, took the opposite approach. See The World Crisis, Vol. V: The Aftermath (New York, 1929), p. 289-372.

¹⁷John Campbell makes only passing reference to the troubles the Irish Treaty caused Birkenhead's political career. See F.E. Smith: First Earl of Birkenhead (London, 1983), p. 601, 603, 650. Nor does he address Lloyd George's flirtation with the Irish issue in 1924 in Lloyd George: The Goat in the Wilderness, 1922-31 (London, 1977). The same is true of Peter Rowland's David Lloyd George (New York, 1975); of Charles Petrie's The Life and Letters of the Right Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain: Vol. II (London, 1940); and David Dutton's Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics (Bolton, England, 1985). Catherine Shannon, in Arthur J. Balfour and Ireland: 1874-1922 (Washington, 1988), p. 279, notes that Balfour sought to influence the Boundary Commission's deliberations but does not explore his actions. Martin Gilbert, in Winston S. Churchill, Vol. V: 1922-1939 (London, 1976) devotes only a page and a half to Churchill's role in the 1925 Boundary Commission crisis. See p. 137-138. This is difficult to explain given that in Winston Churchill - Companion V, Part 1 (London, 1979) his selection of documents demonstrates the importance of Ireland in Churchill's post-Coalition career. See p. 151-152, 172-174, 183-197, 203-204, 389-390, 469, 591-593, 603-617.

¹⁸HC Deb, Vol. 177, Col. 46, 30 September 1924.

away. Magic is, after all, based on illusion, and so was the notion that Lloyd George had made the Irish Troubles disappear.¹⁹ Instead, the problem was distilled to what was and perhaps still is its intractable core, the 'central and almost insuperable difficulty' of Anglo-Irish relations: 'the question of Ulster'.²⁰

The issue at hand in 1924 was the same as in 1914 and in 1921. As Asquith told the Commons, the Irish dispute 'centred, as it centres now, mainly or exclusively upon the position of the two counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh'.²¹ With their Nationalist majorities, these two counties were emblematic of the larger issue at stake. Both Ulster Unionists and Irish Nationalists passionately believed that on the fate of Fermanagh and Tyrone hung Ireland's future as a united or a divided country.²² It is revealing that in the aftermath of World War I an official in Dublin Castle

¹⁹According to R.W.G. Carter and A.J. Parker, ed. Ireland: Contemporary Perspectives on a Land and Its People (London, 1989), p. 3, the Irish partition created 'an island under stress'. Also, see J. Neville, H. Douglas, and P.A. Compton, 'The Northern Ireland - Irish Boundary', Space, Populations, Sociétés, No. 2, 1992, p. 215-226.

²⁰'His Conscience Must be Clear', New Statesman, 5 November 1921.

²¹HC Deb, Vol. 177, Col. 46, 30 September 1924. Also, see Churchill's speech, HC Deb, Vol. 150, Col. 1270-1271, 16 February 1922; Craig's address in NI HC Deb, Vol. 2, Col. 1151-1152, 7 December 1922; and C.P. 503(25), 3 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

²²See, e.g., Michael Collins's speech in 'Sinn Fein and Ulster', The Times, 5 September 1921. For the opposite view, see 'Saving the Conference', 6 November 1921, The Observer.

called Fermanagh and Tyrone the 'Alsace Lorraine' of the Irish Question.²³

Because the most contentious element in the Irish dispute - the future of Northern Ireland - was not settled, it returned to haunt Britain's leaders, and it did so just as they were caught up in 'a revolution in English politics' as profound as any which had been experienced in nearly a hundred years.²⁴ By the end of this revolution, the Liberals were eclipsed as the leading party of the left. In their place, Labour under Ramsay MacDonald joined with the Conservatives under Stanley Baldwin to re-establish Britain's two-party political system. This reformation was the outcome of a period of extraordinary upheaval in the country's politics, a time in which there were four governments and three general elections in the space of three years. Nothing was certain, and for a time it seemed just as possible that the Conservatives not the Liberals would be consigned to electoral oblivion.²⁵

When it was signed, the Irish Treaty had 'almost unanimous approval' and was hailed as the 'crowning achievement' not only of the Coalition government of

²³Sturgis diary, 14 November 1921, PRO 30/59/5.

²⁴The Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad, 1924 (London, 1925), p. 8.

²⁵M. Cowling, The Impact of Labour: 1920-1924 (Cambridge, 1971), p. 419-421.

Liberals and Conservatives, but of Lloyd George's career.²⁶ A scant three years later, its Ulster clauses were being condemned as 'one of the damnable legacies of Lloyd Georgeism.' The rebuke, though made by a Labour newspaper, could just as easily have rolled off the lips of most Conservatives.²⁷ In the midst of Britain's political turmoil, the Tories in particular feared being trapped in the Irish 'cul-de-sac'.²⁸ Baldwin spoke for many public figures, certainly for most Conservatives, when he warned Craig: 'I do not want the Irish conflict revived in the House of Commons in any shape or form if it can justly be avoided.'²⁹

Revived, though, it would be, inspiring hope for Lloyd George's political resurrection, hastening the downfall of Labour's first government and, throughout, threatening Baldwin's reconstruction of the Conservative Party as he attempted to reunite those Tories who had supported the Lloyd George Coalition with those who had destroyed it. Even after the Conservatives' overwhelming electoral victory in 1924, another year would elapse before the interwar generation of British politicians

²⁶'Towards Irish Peace', The Times; and 'The New Peace', Manchester Guardian, 8 December 1921. 'A Free State', Pall Mall and Globe; and 'Real Hope', Daily Herald, 7 December 1921.

²⁷'Ulster Boundary Crisis', Daily Herald, 29 April 1924. Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 3 August 1924, NC 18/1/446.

²⁸See, e.g., Wood to Baldwin, 10 September 1924, Halifax Papers, A4.410/14/1.

²⁹Baldwin to Craig, 14 January 1924, SB Vol. 101, ff. 197-198.

could safely say that the Irish Question had been put behind them. As Churchill reminded fellow MPs in 1925, 'only a year ago this boundary question very nearly became a disastrous and dominating issue in our political life'.³⁰

The aim of this study is to set these attempts to answer the Irish Question within the wider context of the revolution then taking place in British politics. Specifically, it means to show how the 'answer' devised by Lloyd George and his Coalition partners was constructed and then dismantled largely because of this revolution.³¹

The construction began with the Government of Ireland Act and, when that proved to be insufficient, was completed with the Treaty of 1921. In neither instance was Lloyd George primarily concerned with settling the Irish conflict. His chief ambition was to win such a triumph so as to justify calling a general election. Victory at the polls would then be used as the basis for reorganising the Coalition as a political party in its own right. These plans came unstuck in part because Lloyd George failed to settle the question of Ulster, and within a year his government fell.

³⁰HC Deb, Vol. 189, Col. 360, 8 December 1925.

³¹This point has been alluded to elsewhere but seldom explored in detail. See, e.g., G.J. Hand, Report of the Irish Boundary Commission: 1925 (Shannon, 1969), p. viii. Paul Canning's British Policy Towards Ireland: 1921-1941 (Oxford, 1985) takes a broad look at many of the issues specifically addressed in this study.

In its place, a new set of politicians came to the fore with a very different agenda. This was bound to affect those parts of the Irish settlement that were yet to be implemented. The rest of this narrative examines how the Treaty's inducements for Irish unity were dismantled, indeed how they were reversed in Northern Ireland's favour, as Coalition politics gave way to a return to the traditional two-party system.

When considering whether or not the Treaty's negotiators seriously attempted to resolve the Ulster Question, other studies have focused almost exclusively on the Boundary Commission.³² In fact, the Treaty contained a series of inter-related and self-reinforcing clauses in Articles 11 through 15 which were designed to bring about 'the eventual establishment of a Parliament for the whole of Ireland'.³³ These clauses were themselves linked to other parts of the agreement which gave the Free State fiscal autonomy but bound Ulster to the restrictive provisions of the 1920 Act.³⁴ 'The

³²See, e.g., M. Laffan, The Partition of Ireland: 1911-1925 (Dundalk, 1983), p. 72-125. Lord Longford concludes that successive British governments intentionally misled Free State leaders over the Boundary Commission which was, anyway, a fraud. See F. Pakenham, Peace by Ordeal (London, 1935 [1972 edition]), p. 258, 273, 303-305. Peter Rowland's judgment in Lloyd George, p. 555, that Griffith and Collins 'believed with a touching faith' that the Boundary Commission alone would bring about unity, does not stand up under examination.

³³'The Council of Ireland', Commonwealth Relations Office memorandum, 19 April 1949, HO 45/23466.

³⁴Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 198-199, hints at this aspect of the negotiations.

reason of course was obvious', one Whitehall official later explained, 'to offer as much inducement as possible to the North to come in' to a single Irish state.³⁵ A large part of this study is devoted to exploring these economic and financial inducements, and to their undoing. In the province itself, the dismantling of these provisions helped to fossilize politics into the sectarianism still practised by both sides. Running through this story is an account of how the Unionist Party ensured the continued support of working-class voters while Roman Catholics were marginalised in the new state.

Ireland sent ripples through British politics well into the 1920s and beyond. According to Winston Churchill, the fall-out from the Irish Treaty paved the way for the 'Baldwin-MacDonald Regime', nearly a decade and a half during which Baldwin 'in political brotherhood' with MacDonald was 'the ruling political figure in Britain.'³⁶ Not least, these attempts to settle the Irish Question vindicated the politics of appeasement to a generation of politicians who came of age during the interwar years.³⁷ In the Treaty's wake

³⁵Waterfield to Upcott, 6 April 1923, T 160/163/F.6282. Also, see 'Unemployment Insurance in Northern Ireland', Hawtrey memorandum, 12 November 1923, T 160/187/F.7136/1.

³⁶W.S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston, 1948), p. 21.

³⁷Paul Canning calls the Treaty appeasement's 'first visible manifestation'. See British Policy, p. 177. But the term was applied earlier to the Government of Ireland Bill. See 'The Irish Impasse', Westminster Gazette, 30

grew a conviction not only that appeasement should 'make itself felt far more widely' across the British empire but that it had 'lessons also for [British] policy in Europe.'³⁸

Early opposition to Lloyd George's Irish policy brought into working partnership Sir Samuel Hoare and Edward Wood. With other Tory MPs, they formed the 'Group', a collection of backbenchers who were to figure prominently in inter-war British politics.³⁹ For different reasons and at different times, two other MPs were to be plucked from obscurity because of their attacks on Lloyd George's Irish legacy. One, Anthony Eden, would go on to become prime minister.⁴⁰ The other, Oswald Mosley, was destined to lead the British Union of Fascists.⁴¹

March 1920.

³⁸'The New Peace', Manchester Guardian, 8 December 1921. 'The Irish Peace', The Times, 5 December 1925. After the Treaty was signed, one leading journal advocated an appeasement policy in all but name in an article foreshadowing many of the crises that were to plague Europe for the next twenty years. See 'From the Old Policy to the New', The Nation, 10 December 1921.

³⁹'The Coalition Parliament', unpublished memoir, Templewood Papers, XX: (A) 5, p. 3-4. Also, see J.A. Cross, Sir Samuel Hoare, A Political Biography (London, 1977), p. 61-62.

⁴⁰HC Deb, Vol. 177, Col. 402-404, 2 October 1924. Eden was particularly pleased with the report of his speech in The Times, 'the best that there has been so far', he wrote. See R. Rhodes James, Anthony Eden (London, 1986), p. 82. 'Irish Boundary Bill. Unionists and the Commission', The Times, 3 October 1924.

⁴¹O. Mosley, My Life (London, 1968), p. 150-163. R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London, 1975), p. 96-107.

Beginning with an overview of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, this study outlines the genesis of partition as an issue in post-war British politics. Next, it considers the impact of the Irish Question on the Lloyd George Coalition, the first unravellings of the Treaty settlement, and the role these events played in bringing about the downfall of this century's last Liberal prime minister. This is followed by an examination of how the Treaty's clauses were further nullified under a succession of governments led by Bonar Law, Baldwin, and MacDonald. Finally, the suppression of the Boundary Commission's report is considered, a move that helped plant the seeds for later conflict which eventually exploded in 1969.⁴²

This study does not claim that the Irish boundary dispute was alone responsible for shaping British politics in the 20th century. But it does mean to show that the Irish Question continued to resonate in the nation's public affairs well after most historians, Irish as well as British, inexplicably shelve it away. Until recently few studies have attempted any detailed examination of the boundary dispute after the fall of

⁴²Brian Cathcart, 'It all Began with a Line on a Map', Independent on Sunday Magazine, 22 May 1994, points out that had the Commission's award been implemented, most of what security forces later called 'bandit country' - areas loyal to Irish Republican guerrillas - would have been transferred to the South.

Lloyd George's government.⁴³ The Irish conflict seems to bore British historians of the interwar period, many of whom apparently believe that its importance lies in the earlier 1912-1914 Home Rule Crisis.⁴⁴

Irish historians seem to be equally indifferent. In separate works, Ronan Fanning and Joseph Lee have used identical words to claim that the 'story of the Boundary Commission is well known' and, one of them adds, 'soon told'.⁴⁵ This aversion masks a general reluctance to delve into an embarrassing episode.⁴⁶ It is a chapter in Ireland's history when no one, North or South, Free State or Republican, Nationalist or Unionist, covered themselves in honour, never mind glory.

A year after Baldwin was returned to power in 1924, the press magnate Lord Beaverbrook described for an American friend 'three difficulties which might have

⁴³An exception is E. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Majority in Northern Ireland, 1890-1940 (Belfast, 1994), though it does not explore the dispute's ramifications in British politics.

⁴⁴See, e.g., R. Rhodes James, The British Revolution: 1880-1939 (New York, 1977). David Marquand's otherwise comprehensive biography of Labour's first prime minister gives no indication of the threat Ireland posed to MacDonald's government in 1924. See Ramsay MacDonald (London, 1977).

⁴⁵R. Fanning, Independent Ireland (Dublin, 1983), p. 90. J.J. Lee, Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society (Cambridge, 1989), p. 145.

⁴⁶Laffan's Partition is much richer in detail though it, too, fails to consider how the revolution in British politics affected the outcome of the partition question. For an Ulster Unionist perspective, see B. Follis, A State Under Siege: The Establishment of Northern Ireland, 1920-1925 (Oxford, 1995).

developed fatally' for the new government. Of the three, the 'far more dangerous risk for the Conservative Ministry was the Report of the Irish Boundary Commission'. Had that report turned out as it should have, Beaverbrook explained, 'the Ministry would have fallen.' Then, he wrote, 'a miracle happened.'⁴⁷

This is the story of that miracle.

⁴⁷Beaverbrook to Brisbane, 30 November 1925, BBK C/64.

Chapter 1

Lloyd George's dilemma

[Ireland] ... is a most unfortunate country. Something awkward always occurs at critical moments in her history.

- David Lloyd George¹

'A story', Graham Greene wrote at the beginning of his novel The End of the Affair, 'has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.' What Greene said of fiction is no less true of fact, especially when the facts happen to be Irish ones. Although the story told here covers only a few years after the end of World War I, the controversies that give it substance were born in earlier struggles, just as in this period the seeds were sown for later conflict in Northern Ireland.

To begin at the beginning, this story might record the general election of 1918 when, as prime minister, Lloyd George ruled out the 'coercion of Ulster' in any settlement of the Irish Question.² But to explain that decision it is necessary to go back into the war itself when Lloyd George attempted to broker a settlement after the Easter Rising. A better starting point might be the Home Rule Crisis of 1912-1914, when the Irish Question

¹Riddell diary, 21 December 1919, in G. Riddell, Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After: 1918-1923 (London, 1933), p. 153.

²Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 2 November 1918, LG F/68/1.

took Britain to the brink of civil war. Or, perhaps, the storyteller must go back further still, to a time when a young Winston Churchill heard his father warn Parliament of 'the gathering storm' in Irish affairs.³

Even a sketch of these complex events would be impracticable in this account. Here, the moment of experience begins on 23 December 1920 when, a year and a day after its introduction, the Government of Ireland Bill went onto the Statute Book. The date is a good point of departure not merely because this legislation formalised Ireland's partition. It is also a good place to begin because it brings to the fore the related issues which were to give the boundary dispute its substance over the next five years.

The controversies explored in this chapter begin with the nature and extent of Ireland's partition, the steps taken by Ulster Unionist leaders to maintain a cohesive majority within their new state and, not least, the financial elements of the 1920 Act which nearly sabotaged the partition settlement. Underlying the decisions taken on these questions was the state of British politics. The Coalition government which framed the 1920 Act declared that this very limited grant of self-rule would be Britain's final answer to the Irish Question. Yet, within a year this same Coalition was to issue a much wider dispensation. The reasons for this

³HC Deb, Third Series, Vol. 253, Col. 1649, 5 July 1880.

sudden turn-around, and its ramifications, are also explored in this chapter.

'The ultimate aim'

The 1920 Act created two separate parliaments for Ireland: one for the six northeastern counties in Ulster, and another for the remaining 26 counties. A federal assembly, or 'Council of Ireland', made up of an equal number of members from both North and South, would enable the two parliaments to deal with matters of common concern and, eventually, would serve as the springboard to a single government.⁴ Despite objections from some Conservative members of the Cabinet, it was agreed

that the ultimate aim of the Government's policy in Ireland was a united Ireland with a separate Parliament of its own, bound by the closest ties to Great Britain, but that this must be achieved with the largest possible support, and without offending the Protestants of Ulster⁵

This commitment was never as real as it seemed, however, because the imperial government was of two minds about the Irish Question. Though led by a Liberal, the Coalition was effectively the instrument of the Conservative Party. Moreover, the Conservatives who dominated the Coalition (Arthur James Balfour, Austen Chamberlain, Walter Long, and Lord Birkenhead) had been among the most strident opponents of Home Rule before the war. This was particularly true of their leader, Andrew

⁴For the genesis of this legislation, see N. Mansergh, 'The Government of Ireland Act, 1920: Its Origins and Purposes; The Working of the "Official" Mind', Irish Historical Studies, Vol. IX, 1974, p. 19-48.

⁵C. 10(19), 3 December 1919, CAB 23/18.

Bonar Law. Cool and rational in other matters, Bonar Law's mind, one confidant later wrote, was entirely controlled by 'ancient prejudice' when it came to Ulster.⁶

By contrast, the Coalition's leader was ambivalent about the Irish Question. Although Lloyd George called himself a 'Gladstonian Home Ruler', there was less to this claim than he would have his listeners believe.⁷ In any event, by 1920 Ireland was not his primary concern. In order to escape his dependence on the Conservatives, Lloyd George set himself the task of nothing less than a wholesale re-structuring of British politics. By combining or 'fusing' the two wings of the Coalition, he planned to create a new 'Centre Party' with, of course, himself at its head.⁸ Fusion was the long-term goal of Lloyd George's post-war premiership, and much of what he did with regard to Ireland is best understood when this aim is kept in mind.

⁶'Bonar Law. His Chief Service to the Empire', Western Mail, 22 May 1923. Tom Jones is credited with the article in E.L. Ellis, T.J. A Life of Dr Thomas Jones, CH (Cardiff, 1992), p. 251.

⁷C. 59(20), Appendix III, 13 October 1920, CAB 23/23. Even those who knew him best disagreed about the extent of Lloyd George's commitment to Home Rule. Frances Stevenson called it 'one of the chief planks' of his political philosophy. See F. Lloyd George, The Years that are Past (London, 1967), p. 189. According to his Welsh alter ego, on the other hand, Lloyd George never was 'a crusader for Home Rule'. See T. Jones, Lloyd George (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), p. 186-187.

⁸This idea had been germinating in Lloyd George's mind before the election. See, e.g., Chamberlain to Strachey, 19 March 1918, Strachey Papers, S/4/5/8.

Those hoping to settle the Irish Question had to contend with another political fact of life: the 1918 general election had produced the most reactionary Parliament of modern times. These were the MPs whom Stanley Baldwin famously called the 'hard-faced men who look as if they had done very well out of the war.'⁹ Numbered among these hard-faced men were the 'Die-hards' - a wing of the Conservative Party which, though relatively small, exercised influence out of all proportion to its numbers. The Die-hards first came to prominence during the pre-war struggle over reform of the House of Lords, and at one time or another included Lords Salisbury and Selborne, John Gretton, William Joynson-Hicks and, from Ireland, the two leaders of the anti-Home Rule movement, Sir Edward Carson and Sir James Craig.¹⁰

The earthquake in British politics brought on by the 1918 election was mirrored by an equally dramatic altering of Ireland's political landscape. Ushered in by the Easter Rising of 1916, this realignment swept away the constitutional Nationalism practised by the Irish Parliamentary Party and replaced it with the physical-force Republicanism espoused by Sinn Féin. Before the

⁹'Politics and Affairs', The Nation, 5 November 1921. J.M. Keynes, The Economic Consequences of the Peace (London, 1919), p. 133. Jones diary, 25 November 1923, in T. Jones, Whitehall Diary: Vol. I, K. Middlemas ed. (London, 1971), p. 255-256.

¹⁰The name originated at the 1811 Battle of Albuera. See 'The End of Coalition', Quarterly Review, No. 474, January 1923, p. 199. R. Fanning, '"Rats" versus "Ditchers": The Die-Hard Revolt and the Parliament Bill of 1911', Irish Historical Studies, Vol. XL, 1983, p. 191-210.

1918 election, Ireland's Parliamentary constituencies were held by sixty-eight members of the IPP, eighteen Unionists, and seven Sinn Féiners. In its wake, Sinn Féin took seventy-three seats and the Unionists twenty-six, while Nationalists held onto only six constituencies. Equally significant, after 1918 all of the Unionist MPs, except for two, and all of the Nationalists, save one, represented seats in Ulster.¹¹

With their grip on the South secure, Sinn Féin's MPs refused to take their seats in the House of Commons. British leaders affected to be not the least bit concerned by this development. Once the Sinn Féiners discovered that they could not draw their salaries, the Irish viceroy wrote, they would 'soon go bag and baggage to Westminster'.¹² Instead, the Sinn Féin MPs reaffirmed the republic declared during the Easter Rebellion and established their own parliament, Dáil Eireann, on 21 January 1919. The Irish Republican Army's guerrilla war began that same day.

Six versus nine counties

It was against this back-drop that the terms of the 1920 Bill were thrashed out. After the Cabinet agreed on partition, one issue stood out above all others: namely, whether the whole of Ulster or only a part of it was to be separated from the rest of Ireland. And if the answer

¹¹C. O'Leary, Irish Elections, 1918-1917: Parties, Voters and Proportional Representation (Dublin, 1979), p. 7.

¹²French to Long, 14 January 1919, JDPF 8/3.

to this question was the latter, which part?

Although the province was made up of nine counties, only four of these - Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry - were considered predominantly Protestant and Unionist. The populations of three other counties - Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan - were, by contrast, overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and Nationalist. That left Fermanagh and Tyrone, whose disposition had vexed British leaders since the eruption of the Home Rule Crisis in 1912.¹³ Despite their slim Nationalist majorities, Unionists were determined that the two counties should be excluded from any plan of Irish self-government. This impasse led the Cabinet to consider a number of schemes, including one that would have allowed them to join an Irish Parliament - but only if 55 per cent of each county's voters agreed to do so. The idea was rejected as 'so obviously artificial a departure' from the principle of majority rule, however, that even the Unionists' allies in the Cabinet agreed it would be impossible to defend.¹⁴

The issue again came to the fore during the drafting of the Government of Ireland Bill in 1919. Once it was agreed that a four-county partition was out of the question, debate revolved around whether partition should

¹³Churchill, World Crisis: I, p. 203-205.

¹⁴War Cabinet 120, 16 April 1917, CAB 23/2. 'Draft Bill for the Government of Ireland', G.T. 8238, 8 May 1917, CAB 24/89.

include six or all nine of Ulster's counties.¹⁵ During these meetings the creation of a Boundary Commission was discussed by the Cabinet for the first time.¹⁶ After taking a vote of residents 'in those districts on either side of and immediately adjoining the boundary', it was proposed that a commission would be empowered to place Catholic areas in the South and Protestant ones in the North. Any adjustments would be minor and would not entail the transfer of whole counties. On the other hand, no mention was made of taking economic or geographic conditions into account; the wishes of the inhabitants would be the sole criterion for any boundary change. Given future events, it is ironic that the Commission was suggested by Sir James Craig.¹⁷

At these same meetings, Craig made it plain that the idea of governing Ulster's three overwhelmingly Nationalist counties 'was not relished' by his Unionist followers.¹⁸ While he could count on support from Conservative allies, other members of the Cabinet were just as adamant that the Northern assembly's jurisdiction 'should extend over the whole of Ulster' as this 'included both Roman Catholics and Protestants, both urban and rural districts, and by its size was more

¹⁵C. 16(19), 19 December 1919, CAB 23/18.

¹⁶The idea was mooted in Parliament much earlier. See HC Deb, Vol. 39, Col. 809-810, 11 June 1912.

¹⁷C. 14(19), 15 December 1919, CAB 23/18.

¹⁸C. 12(19), 10 December 1919, CAB 23/18.

suitied to possess a separate Parliament.' The important point was that a more evenly balanced Ulster assembly was more likely to lead the way to eventual Irish reunification.¹⁹ Rather than allow a split to develop in the government itself, the issue was placed squarely in the lap of the Ulster Unionist Council.

Settling this question was not so simple for the Unionists as it might sound. A six-county partition meant repudiation of the pre-war Ulster Covenant in which Unionists throughout the province pledged 'to stand by one another' in the fight against Home Rule.²⁰ But any appeals to honour were more than balanced out by fears that the Unionist Party might be out-voted in a nine-county parliament. Added to these worries was an alarming perception that 'the Unionist working men of Belfast could not be depended on' as had once been the case.²¹ Following a trip to Ireland, Walter Long reported that 'people in the inner circles' adamantly opposed the 'inclusion of Donegal, Cavan, and Monaghan' precisely for this reason. In a nine-county assembly, 'the supremacy of the Unionists would be seriously

¹⁹See, e.g., C.P. 681, 10 February 1920, CAB 24/98. C. 16(19), 19 December 1919, CAB 23/18.

²⁰'Why I Voted for the Six Counties', April 1920, reprinted the 1912 Covenant, in P. Buckland, Irish Unionism, 1885-1923: A Documentary History (Belfast, 1973), No. 220.

²¹Ibid, 'Ulster and Home Rule. No Partition of Ulster', April 1920, No. 221. Also, see A. Morgan, Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class, 1905-23 (London, 1991), passim.

threatened' and there was 'a real danger that on certain questions the Unionist Labour Party in Ulster might vote with the Roman Catholics.'²² This threat would be blunted in a smaller parliament, where rural Unionists could be counted on to off-set any discontent among Protestant working-class voters.

In short, the desire to hold on to power proved to be irresistible. At a meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council chaired by Carson on 10 March, the decision was taken and the three-county Unionists were thrown overboard. A ruthless choice had been made, illustrated by an equally ruthless analogy. On a sinking ship with lifeboats for only two-thirds of the ship's company why, asked one Belfast MP, should everyone on board 'condemn themselves to death because all could not be saved?'²³

So it was that the Ulster Unionists, those safely in the lifeboat of the six counties at any rate, rowed away from their drowning brethren as fast as they could. Anticipating their vote, the Cabinet actually agreed to a six-county partition before the Council meeting was even held. The Cabinet's minutes, though typically vague, indicate that Bonar Law was responsible for this decision.²⁴

The arguments rehearsed within the confines of the

²²C.I. 58, 4 February 1920, CAB 27/69.

²³I. Colvin, The Life of Lord Carson: Vol. III (London, 1936), p. 383-384.

²⁴C. 12(20), 24 February 1920, CAB 23/20.

Council were later aired before the wider world when it fell to Charles Craig to explain the Ulster Unionist position in the House of Commons. 'We quite frankly admit that we cannot hold the nine counties', he said. In a parliament for the entire province, Unionists could be sure of a majority of only three or four. 'A couple of Members sick, or two or three Members absent for some accidental reason, might in one evening hand over the entire Ulster Parliament and the entire Ulster position ... a dreadful thing to contemplate.'²⁵

These were, pointed out one Labour MP, 'remarkable admissions'.²⁶ Not least, Craig's own words undercut subsequent claims that the three outlying counties 'were generously given up' in return for a government promise that this would be the last demand made upon them. His speech dramatically testified to the fact that these assertions were 'disingenuous in the extreme'.²⁷

'A Protestant state'

The determination of Unionists to ensure their ascendant position in the future Northern Ireland reached beyond the controversy over the number of counties to be included in the new state. Two additional factors came into play in 1920. The first of these was a Unionist decision to get rid of proportional representation in

²⁵HC Deb, Vol. 127, Col. 990-993, 29 March 1920.

²⁶Ibid, Col. 993.

²⁷'Irish Boundary', Cope memorandum, 3 September 1924, LG G/20/2/6.

their elections; the second, was the creation of a paramilitary force, the Special Constabulary.

A year before its introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill, the Coalition instituted proportional representation (PR) for all Irish elections.²⁸ In place of the traditional winner-take-all system, in which candidates were elected by a simple majority, Irish voters were given the 'single transferable vote' allowing them to cast ballots for several candidates in order of preference. According to one of Lloyd George's subordinates, the 'express purpose' of the bill was to protect both Protestants in the South and Roman Catholics in the North by ensuring minority representation in all elected assemblies. British officials further hoped that the legislation would 'blunt the edge' of Sinn Féin, following its overwhelming success in the 1918 general election.²⁹

Ulster Unionists made no secret of the fact that they detested PR. The system was bound to cause 'difficulties' and why Conservative members of the Cabinet had ever allowed it to be introduced, Carson scornfully wrote, 'I don't know.'³⁰ This abhorrence was confirmed by the results of urban council elections held in January 1920. In Ireland as a whole, Unionists were

²⁸'Local Elections in Northern Ireland', 22 April 1924, DO 35/893/1/x11/123.

²⁹O'Leary, Irish Elections, p. 1-9. 'Irish Boundary', Cope memorandum, 3 September 1924, LG G/20/2/6.

³⁰Carson to Bonar Law, 26 January 1920, BL 98/6/4.

out polled by both Sinn Féin and Labour candidates.³¹

Even in Ulster, Unionists had little to cheer about. Although they edged out an alliance of Sinn Féin and the Nationalists, retaining control of twenty-four towns as against twenty-one, these victories were off-set by some spectacular losses. Sinn Féin-Nationalist coalitions now controlled Omagh, Newry and, what was the greatest blow to Unionist pride, Londonderry.³² The results in Belfast were just as unsettling. The city remained in Unionist hands - indeed, it was the only city or borough in all of Ireland which still had a Unionist mayor. But whereas under the old system the party regularly took fifty-two of the council's sixty seats, under PR its total dropped to thirty-seven. Ten seats now went to the Sinn Féin/Nationalist alliance. But what was most disturbing to Craig and his followers was the twelve seats that were won by Labour.³³

Ulster Unionist MPs were determined to get rid of PR and the sooner the better. A provision of the 1920 Bill imposed a moratorium preventing either Irish parliament from abolishing PR for at least three years. Craig and his followers successfully fought off an attempt to extend the moratorium even though this would have afforded some protection to Unionists living in the

³¹Inspector General's report, 14 February 1920, CO 904/111.

³²Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 73-75.

³³Morgan, Labour and Partition, p. 257.

South.³⁴ Their action bore out an earlier observation that a Unionist government in Ulster would have little interest in giving 'reasonable representation' to the minority within its own borders.³⁵

Arming the Protestants

In June 1920 a wave of deadly sectarian riots swept across the six counties. The first disturbances in Londonderry were followed a month later by the expulsion of 7,500 workers from the Belfast shipyards. Though the declared intent of the expulsions was to rid the yards of Roman Catholics in general and Sinn Féiners in particular, labour activists were ousted as well and even included an ex-master of an Orange Lodge. As the expulsions spread to other businesses, a number of Catholics and Protestants were killed over the next three days.³⁶ Sporadic rioting continued into September.

According to later analyses, the shipyard expulsions were provoked by IRA action in the six counties.³⁷ Others traced the immediate cause of the disturbances to

³⁴HC Deb, Vol. 134, Col. 1240-1244, 10 November 1920.

³⁵'Local Government in Ireland', The Times, 26 March 1919.

³⁶Morgan, Labour and Partition, p. 265-284. M. Farrell, Northern Ireland: The Orange State (London, 1976), p. 28-30.

³⁷See, e.g., C. Townshend, Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1848 (Oxford, 1983), p. 341-342. Laffan, Partition, p. 75-76, claims that the riots were the result of Unionist 'unease' over violence in the South.

the fatal shooting of an Ulster-born RIC officer in Cork.³⁸ While IRA activity in the North had increased, the RIC's monthly reports show that as late as June its presence in the six counties was negligible when compared with the rest of the country.³⁹ A likelier explanation for the sudden explosion of Unionist anger can be found in the election returns for county councils and rural district councils held in June.

Announced only days before the Derry riots, the results of these elections confirmed the spectacular inroads that Sinn Féin was making throughout Ireland thanks to proportional representation. Craig and his followers were reduced to control of only four county councils, while a Sinn Féin-Nationalist alliance retained control of Fermanagh and, for the first time, took control of Tyrone County Council. The results from the rural district council elections were just as disconcerting for the Unionists. Of Ulster's fifty-five such councils, thirty-four were now controlled by Sinn Féin or by the Sinn Féin-Nationalist alliance.⁴⁰

In the face of this latest electoral setback, Carson

³⁸Belfast RIC Commissioner's report, 1 August 1920, CO 904/112. T.H. Burns to Tallents, 7 July 1922, CO 906/23.

³⁹See Inspector General's reports, 14 February, 18 March and 14 July 1920, CO 904/111 and 112. According to the chief secretary's office, between 1 January 1919 and 29 March 1920, there were 95 outrages in Ulster, none of them fatal. The breakdown for the other three provinces was: Connaught - 137; Leinster - 269; Munster - 588. See Cmd. 63: Outrages (Ireland), 1920, xl, 799.

⁴⁰Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 84-86. D. Macardle, The Irish Republic (New York, 1937), p. 352.

decided that it was time to rally his Unionist followers. At the annual 12th of July celebrations, he furiously denounced county councils that swore allegiance to the Irish Republic and vowed that Ulster 'would tolerate no Sinn Fein organisation or methods' within its borders. His toughest words were reserved for the leaders of the independent Labour movement. These leaders were no friends of the Protestant working man. 'Their real object' was 'to bring about disunity amongst our people'. Like an Old Testament prophet, Carson exhorted his wayward followers to return to the true religion lest they find themselves 'in the same bondage and slavery as is the rest of Ireland'.⁴¹

In such a tinderbox atmosphere, Carson's rhetoric all but invited the shipyard expulsions which took place a few days later. There was, in fact, no evidence that Protestant labour leaders were in league with Sinn Féin. There was however a good deal of evidence, supplied by that year's local elections, to demonstrate that independent Labour posed a serious challenge to the Unionist party. That could not be allowed to continue. As Richard Dawson Bates pointed out, it was imperative 'for all Unionists to work as one Party' if they were to retain their dominant position.⁴²

One way to glue the old Unionist alliance back

⁴¹'Record Twelfth in Ulster', Belfast News-Letter, 13 July 1920.

⁴²Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 74. Morgan, Labour and Partition, p. 224.

together would be to resurrect the pre-war Ulster Volunteer Force. Carson had, in fact, mooted this idea at the 12th of July celebrations in 1919. Then, his proposal was roundly denounced by English supporters; Bonar Law, it seems, even considered condemning the speech.⁴³ But by the time Carson raised the issue a year later, a change of attitudes had taken place.

As it happened, the notion of forming the UVF into officially sanctioned units had since been floated about in government circles.⁴⁴ At a Cabinet conference on 23 July, both Lloyd George and Churchill were attracted to the idea as a way of relieving troops for duty not only in the south of Ireland but elsewhere in the empire.⁴⁵ Craig, not surprisingly, jumped at the idea and came up with a plan that went well beyond establishing the UVF as a paramilitary police force. In addition, he called for the appointment of an RIC commissioner with sole authority in the six counties and, more importantly, proposed that an under-secretary of state should be appointed to represent the British government in the North. To gain support for his proposal, which would effectively partition Ireland even before the 1920 Bill was passed, Craig made a thinly veiled reference to Sinn

⁴³'Statesmanship in Ulster', The Times, 14 July 1919. Bayford diary, 19 July 1919, in Lord Bayford, Real Old Tory Politics: The Political Diaries of Lord Bayford, J. Ramsden, ed. (London, 1984), p. 127-128.

⁴⁴See, e.g., French to Long, 1 July 1920, JDPF 8/3.

⁴⁵C.P. 1693, 23 July 1920, CAB 24/109.

Féin's recent electoral victories. The party had already established its dominance 'over a considerable portion' of Ulster, he pointed out, and 'rebel influences are spreading'.⁴⁶

Bonar Law promptly backed Craig's proposals. 'We cannot afford to have everyone in Ireland against us', the Tory leader reasoned. Unless the government acted promptly, there was 'a danger of the Orangemen getting completely out of hand and something like a general massacre happening in Belfast'.⁴⁷

This logic was perverse, as was underscored by the response of both civil and military authorities. Sir John Anderson was horrified. 'I sincerely trust there is no foundation for [this] rumour', he wrote to the Conservative leader. 'You cannot in the middle of a faction fight recognise one of the contending parties and expect it to deal with disorder in the spirit of impartiality and fairness'. General Sir Nevil Macready, the commander of British military forces in Ireland, was equally appalled and wanted to have no part in 'raising Carson's army from the grave'. The chief of the imperial general staff agreed. The government's plan, Sir Henry Wilson wrote, was 'simply inviting trouble'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Craig to Bonar Law, 1 September 1920, BL 102/10/3. C. 53(20), Appendix IV, 2 September 1920, CAB 23/22.

⁴⁷Bonar Law to Lloyd George, 2 September 1920, LG F/31/1/43.

⁴⁸Anderson to Bonar Law, 2 September 1920; Macready to Anderson, 18 June 1920, CO 904/188(1) and (4). Wilson to Macready, 14 September 1920, HHW 2/2B/2.

According to Wilson, Bonar Law realised that 'arming the Ulstermen means civil war'.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, at a conference on 8 September, the Cabinet gave Craig everything he asked for. By creating a Unionist paramilitary force, observed the Daily News, Lloyd George and his colleagues had abandoned any pretence of impartiality and in the process raised serious questions about 'the sanity of the government'. Wrote one army officer in Dublin: 'Where, oh where, are Gilbert and Sullivan!' Macready saw less a comic opera than a tragedy in the making. Once the Specials began operating in the six counties, he predicted, they 'would most assuredly paint the place red.'⁵⁰

Appeals for a government investigation into the continuing violence in Ulster were, meanwhile, brushed to one side.⁵¹ Irish Chief Secretary Sir Hamar Greenwood showed a callous indifference to the plight of the expelled workers, telling the House of Commons that it was quite beyond his power 'to compel employers to employ or workmen to work'.⁵² While the government sat on its hands, the problem was allowed to fester so that, as Craig later put it, the issue became 'one of the most

⁴⁹Wilson to Macready, 2 September 1920, HHW 2/2A/50.

⁵⁰C. 53(20), Appendix V, 8 September 1920, CAB 23/22. 'Order' in Belfast', Daily News, 15 September 1920. Greer[?] to Anderson, 1 September 1920, BL 102/7/1. Macready to Wilson, 1 September 1920, HHW 2/2A/49.

⁵¹See, e.g., HC Deb, Vol. 134, Col. 1379, 11 November 1920.

⁵²HC Deb, Vol. 132, Col. 1977, 2 August 1920.

delicate and difficult stumbling blocks to peace'.⁵³

Paying for Partition

After the Government of Ireland Bill went on to the Statute Book, one Presbyterian minister lamented that his fellow Ulster Protestants had accepted 'a form of Home Rule that the Devil himself could never have imagined'.⁵⁴ But most of his co-religionists were more than happy with the bargain they had struck. By any measure, it was a victory for the Ulster Unionists and their Conservative allies. Summing up their achievement, Charles Craig told Belfast shipyard workers that once the Unionists had their own Parliament 'no power on earth would ever be able to touch them.'⁵⁵

If that achievement can be marked down to one man, his name was Bonar Law. Without his 'uncompromising support' there would have been no Northern Ireland.⁵⁶ That said, he himself realised that the 1920 Act was not the end of the Irish contest. On the contrary, Bonar Law was playing a long game which, at this stage, meant passing the 1920 Bill 'with as little alteration as possible'. This would then place the Unionists in a strong position for the real battle over Ireland's future which still lay ahead. 'I feel certain', he wrote,

⁵³Craig to Churchill, 30 January 1922, WSC 22/11/52-53.

⁵⁴J. Bardon, A History of Ulster (Belfast, 1992), p. 440, 514.

⁵⁵'Despair in Ireland', The Times, 7 October 1920.

⁵⁶R. Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law (London, 1955), p. 531.

that at the moment it is not possible to have any sort of an understanding with the Sinn Feiners; that such an understanding may be possible later but, if so, the fewer concessions we make now the better for whatever we give at present would not be looked upon as final but would be regarded as a jumping off ground for further concessions.⁵⁷

On one issue, however, Bonar Law and the Ulster Unionists had failed to secure their six-county state.

Except for the provisions partitioning Ireland, nothing in the 1920 Act generated as much criticism as its financial clauses. Opponents attacked the provisions as so complicated and so restrictive that it would be nearly impossible for the two Irish parliaments to govern.⁵⁸ Fourteen of the Act's seventy-six articles and nine schedules dealt solely with tax and finance.⁵⁹ Roughly speaking, revenue for the Dublin and Belfast Parliaments was to come from two sources. 'Transferred taxes', such as death and motor vehicle duties, were to be collected directly by the Irish governments within their respective areas. 'Reserved taxes', such as customs and excise duties, and income and corporation taxes, were to be collected by the imperial government so that they would be maintained at the same level throughout the United Kingdom. Estimates vary as to the

⁵⁷Bonar Law to Long, 30 September 1920, BL 103/5/9.

⁵⁸Stephen Gwynn called the provisions 'wanton'. See 'The Better Government of Ireland Act', Contemporary Review, Vol. CXVII, April 1920, p. 483.

⁵⁹Follis, State Under Siege, p. 117. For the government's defence of the bill's taxation scheme, see HC Deb, Vol. 127, Col. 1032-1036, 29 March 1920. Also, see Cmd. 645: Outline of Financial Provisions (London, 1920), xl, 771.

percentage of total revenue that the two parliaments were expected to take in from transferred taxes. In any case, it was known from the outset that the main source of revenue for both Irish governments, reserved taxes, would be beyond their control.⁶⁰

Moreover, London held prior claim to revenue collected from reserved taxes for what was called the 'imperial contribution'. This sum went towards defence, foreign affairs, and payment of the United Kingdom's debts. Once the imperial contribution was paid for, a separate deduction would then be taken from the reserved taxes to pay for 'reserved services', i.e. those governmental duties to be administered in Ireland by London. Both the contribution and the reserved services bill would be determined annually by a Joint Exchequer Board made up of British and Irish officials.

Only after the imperial contribution and reserved services had been paid for would the two Irish governments receive most of their funding. This amount, known as 'reserved revenue', would then be added to whatever was received from transferred taxes. From this combined total the two governments were expected to fund 'transferred services', i.e. those governmental duties for which they were now responsible - notably law and order, and social services such as unemployment

⁶⁰R.J. Lawrence, The Government of Northern Ireland: Public Finance and Public Services, 1921-1964 (Oxford, 1965), p. 40-41. P. Buckland, The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland, 1921-39 (Dublin, 1979), p. 81-83.

insurance.

It has since been argued that the act's financial provisions were unrealistic, based as they were on estimates of Ireland's wealth made during the short-lived economic boom following World War I. The Treasury, it is worth noting, vigorously denied this assertion.⁶¹ In any case, because these clauses were not adequately thought through they were bound to cause trouble down the road.

'The Troubles'

The problem with the 1920 Act, F.S.L. Lyons once wrote, was that it was '[t]otally divorced ... from the realities of political life in Ireland'.⁶² This same verdict could as easily be applied to the government's Irish policy in general. Confronted by an insurrection unlike anything previously experienced, the government's reaction was contradictory and, ultimately, self-defeating.⁶³ Publicly, ministers vowed to use every available force and every available resource to defeat Sinn Féin's campaign of secession.⁶⁴ But, despite this tough rhetoric, they refused to admit that they were fighting a war as that 'would be a confession of

⁶¹Buckland, Factory of Grievances, p. 82. Cmd. 786: Government of Ireland Bill - Basis of Financial Estimates, 1920, xl, 787. Niemeyer to Colwyn, 19 May 1922, T 163/6/8/G.256/042.

⁶²F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine (London, 1971), p. 412.

⁶³Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 29 December 1919, AC 5/1/147.

⁶⁴HL Deb, Vol. 40, Col. 430, 19 May 1920.

failure'.⁶⁵ Rather than increase the number of regular army units stationed in Ireland, the Cabinet decided to recruit ex-soldiers who would then be deployed as members of the RIC. The soon-to-be nicknamed 'Black and Tans' were joined a few months later by a separate contingent of ex-officers, or Auxiliaries. A policy of unofficial, followed by officially sanctioned reprisals soon turned the conflict into a struggle between alien mercenaries and the native population.⁶⁶

Politically, this course was ruinous. In Britain, no one was pleased; nearly everyone was alienated. While the government's policy did not go far enough to satisfy those who wished to wage all out war on Sinn Féin, it drove away those who believed that there should be a compromise settlement. 'Collective punishment', Robert Cecil told his brother, Lord Salisbury, was 'sometimes a necessary evil'. He could live with that. 'Casual felony' was quite another matter.⁶⁷

In the face of such criticism, senior Conservatives in the government nonetheless were determined that there should be no reversal of government policy.⁶⁸ Their stubbornness, though, was costing Lloyd George politically, and that was something he could not ignore.

⁶⁵C. 23A(20), 30 April 1920, CAB 23/21.

⁶⁶K.O. Morgan, Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition, 1918-1922 (Oxford, 1979), p. 128.

⁶⁷Cecil to Salisbury, 11 October 1920, S(4) 93/122-123.

⁶⁸Long memorandum, 25 July 1920, LG F/180/5/6/272.

Being saddled with a Government of Ireland Act which his own supporters admitted fell 'far short of the Liberal standard', left him especially vulnerable to attack by former colleagues led by Herbert Asquith.⁶⁹ The 'Wee Free' Liberals exploited this opportunity to stoke up the fires of anti-Coalition feeling with a sustained attack on the government's entire Irish policy. These attacks hit home and had already helped to defeat an attempt at fusion in mid-March.⁷⁰

At the same time, the Irish War was having a corrosive effect on Lloyd George's relations with a group of younger, first-time MPs who formed the nucleus of the New Members Coalition Group.⁷¹ Though hardly sympathetic with Sinn Féin, many of these MPs were disgusted by British conduct in Ireland.⁷² This included 'one of the most interesting of the newcomers', Oswald Mosley. However disreputable his future was to be, Mosley at this time established himself as a courageous figure in

⁶⁹Scott diary, 16 March 1920, in C.P. Scott, The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott: 1911-1928, T. Wilson, ed. (London, 1970), p. 382.

⁷⁰'Ireland a Dominion', Daily Telegraph, 21 May 1920. Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 186.

⁷¹Riddell diary, 7 September 1919, in G. Riddell, The Riddell Diaries: 1908-1923, J.M. McEwen, ed. (London, 1986), p. 290. D. Close, 'Conservatives and Coalition After the First World War', Journal of Modern History, Vol. 45, No. 2, June 1973, p. 244.

⁷²Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 177-178. Colin Coote, in A Companion of Honour: The Story of Walter Elliot (London, 1965), p. 63, recalled that Elliot was 'more distressed' by the government's conduct in Ireland 'than by any of the other post-war disappointments'.

Parliament, where his attacks on the government won him praise for breaking up 'the Black and Tan savagery'.⁷³

As the year wore on, it seemed to some that the government's only real objective in Ireland was a desire to avoid 'traversing the old difficulty' lest it cause a break-up of the Coalition.⁷⁴ Even worse, it was all too apparent that plans to implement the 1920 Act had no chance of success, at least in the 26 counties.⁷⁵ The threatened alternative, crown colony government, made no impression on the Irish people. This point was brought home to the Cabinet when, in December, Maccready warned its members to prepare for an IRA-led boycott of elections for the Southern Parliament. As Lloyd George pointed out, if the Sinn Féin leader Michael Collins 'could stop three million people using their vote it did not say much for the policy His Majesty's Government were now pursuing.'⁷⁶

Bonar Law resigns

From about the middle of 1920 onward, nothing seemed to go right for the Coalition. A post-war economic boom, for which the government had claimed credit, burst towards the end of the year and, as Lloyd George told his

⁷³C. Coote, Editorial: The Memoirs of Colin R. Coote (London, 1965), p. 103. O'Connor to Cynthia Mosley, 10 December 1923, in Mosley, My Life, p. 157.

⁷⁴HC Deb, Vol. 127, Col. 977, 29 March 1920.

⁷⁵'Memorandum on the present political situation in Southern Ireland', 12 February 1921, LG F/181/1/1.

⁷⁶C. 79A(20), 29 December 1920, CAB 23/23.

colleagues, the country was 'in for a bad time'.⁷⁷

Between December 1920 and March 1921, unemployment more than doubled. By the following June, over two million would be out of work. Although this figure then began to fall, the jobless rate would never drop below one million for the next twenty years.⁷⁸

In the spring of 1921, the government found itself staring into the abyss of a general strike led by a 'Triple Alliance' of coal miners, railwaymen, and transport workers. Within the United Kingdom, the army had enough units to fight the Irish rebellion or to contain industrial unrest before it exploded into revolution. It could not do both at the same time. 'Denuded of troops', Edwin Montagu wrote, the Cabinet faced the unknown 'with a certain grim determination; but with no undue optimism'.⁷⁹

In the middle of this crisis, Bonar Law unexpectedly resigned from the government. Despite emphatic statements that his departure was brought on by ill-health, 'a genuine case of "doctor's orders"', as Lady Spender put it, it was soon being rumoured that a split had erupted between the Tory leader and Lloyd George over the Irish Question.⁸⁰ Bonar Law's own physician helped

⁷⁷C. 61(20), 17 November 1920, CAB 23/23.

⁷⁸Taylor, English History, p. 145.

⁷⁹Montagu to Reading, 7 April 1921, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/3, No. 1.

⁸⁰Spender diary, 19 March 1921, D.1633/2/24. Also, see Sturgis diary, 20 March 1921, PRO 30/59/4.

feed this speculation, telling one newspaper editor that his patient's sudden departure was 'due to one thing only - cold feet about Ireland'.⁸¹

Years later, Bonar Law's biographer would conclude that he was indeed ill and likely suffering from a case of high blood pressure.⁸² It is just possible that both sides were correct, that Bonar Law's symptoms were real but were brought on because he knew that talks with Sinn Féin could no longer be avoided. By January 1921 Lloyd George was clearly toying with the idea and at one meeting persistently raised the issue even though Bonar Law 'tried to put the subject off'.⁸³ From an earlier Cabinet meeting, Bonar Law knew that these negotiations must include Michael Collins, as he was the only Irish leader 'with whom effective business could be done'. Perhaps shaking hands with 'the organiser of murder' was something that Bonar Law could not bring himself to do.⁸⁴

For Conservatives, the shock of Bonar Law's sudden exit was compounded by Walter Long's retirement a month earlier. Although Long's departure was not unexpected, his resignation meant that yet another member of the government who regarded negotiations with Sinn Féin as 'unthinkable' had departed the scene. Isolated, only

⁸¹Stevenson diary, 11 November 1921, in F. Lloyd George, Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson, A.J.P. Taylor, ed. (New York, 1971), p. 236-237.

⁸²Blake, Unknown Prime Minister, p. 423-424.

⁸³Jones diary, 30 January 1921, Vol. III, p. 49-50.

⁸⁴C. 77(20), 24 December 1920, CAB 23/23.

Arthur Balfour remained.⁸⁵

Almost by default, Bonar Law's position as Conservative leader fell to Austen Chamberlain. This proved to be a momentous decision both for the party and for the course of Anglo-Irish relations. Although Chamberlain's accession to the leadership was supported by the party's hierarchy, most Tory MPs found him to be an aloof, even distant figure.⁸⁶ Nor was Chamberlain popular in the country. As chancellor of the exchequer, it had fallen to him to put through a series of measures that had proved to be particularly odious to Tory voters.⁸⁷

His greatest problem, though, was summed up by one of his successors. 'He was respected', Harold Macmillan wrote of Chamberlain, 'but never feared'.⁸⁸ This fact, more than any other, did not augur well for a government about to face its toughest challenge since the war. To grasp the nettle of the Irish Question, Chamberlain would have to take his party where it did not want to go. For that, he would need to be both feared and trusted by his followers and he was neither.

⁸⁵J. Ramsden, A History of the Conservative Party: The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940 (London, 1978), p. 150. Long to Midleton, 26 July 1920, PRO 30/67/43. Jones diary, 6 July 1921, Vol. III, p. 85.

⁸⁶Davidson to Bonar Law, 24 March 1921, BL 107/1/4. Austen to Hilda Chamberlain, 20 March 1921, AC 5/1/194.

⁸⁷George Younger[?] to Long, 18 March 1921, Long Papers, Add. MSS 62,426, ff. 33-38.

⁸⁸H. Macmillan, The Past Masters: Politics and Politicians, 1906-1939 (London, 1975), p. 128.

Negotiations versus War

In late April and again in mid-May, the Cabinet engaged in a wide-ranging debate over whether or not it should make a public offer to negotiate with Sinn Féin. At both meetings, Lloyd George stubbornly opposed concessions or any let-up in the war against the IRA. 'These people will come round sooner or later', he assured his colleagues.⁸⁹ Yet, a mere six weeks later he was preparing for talks with Sinn Féin's president. 'No British Government', Winston Churchill later wrote, 'has ever appeared to make so complete and sudden a reversal of policy'.⁹⁰

The reasons for this turnaround are extraordinarily tangled, but roughly three factors added up to make for Lloyd George's decision to negotiate: the results of the Irish elections, the military situation and, an issue that is seldom explored, his own political survival.

The Irish elections

At the end of May, voters went to the polls to elect representatives to the two Irish parliaments created by the 1920 Act. In the South, Sinn Féin candidates stood virtually unopposed in 124 of 128 seats, putting paid to any lingering hopes that the party might be sidelined. Their victory was then used to constitute the Second Dáil

⁸⁹Jones diary, 27 April and 12 May 1921, Vol. III, p. 55-63 and 66-70.

⁹⁰Churchill, World Crisis: V, p. 303.

Eireann.⁹¹

The results for the Northern Parliament told a different story. There, Sinn Féin won only six seats and the Nationalists an identical number, while Unionists swept the polls electing forty MPs.⁹² This was true even in the depressed, working-class areas of Belfast. Independent Labour candidates, who had declared that partition was 'an unworkable stupidity', were soundly rejected.⁹³

In any event, the elections were important from the government's perspective, because they demonstrated that it was fulfilling its pledges to the Ulster Unionists. This gave Lloyd George some leeway to explore an alternative arrangement with the South.

The military deadlock

In the early months of 1921, it looked as if British military efforts in Ireland were at last bearing fruit. 'The Forces of the Crown are gradually wearing down the Irish Republican Army', Greenwood confidently told Lord Curzon, 'and bringing this Irish business to a head.'⁹⁴ All too soon, however, it was clear that these estimates were wildly optimistic. In late spring, the Cabinet's

⁹¹O'Leary, Irish Elections, p. 9.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³'To the Electors of South, East, and West Belfast', Irish News, 21 May 1921. Follis, State Under Siege, Appendix 1, p. 195-197.

⁹⁴Greenwood to Curzon, 8 May 1921, IO, MSS Eur. F. 112/220(a), ff. 68.



Irish Situation Committee began to discuss imposing martial law throughout the 26 counties. Given that the government still refused to admit that a war was even taking place in Ireland, it was going to be hard to justify so drastic a step. In any event, Macready warned that there must be no more 'half-hearted coercion'. It had to be 'a case of "all out" or "nothing"', he told the committee. 'Could the Government go "all out"?'⁹⁵

Both politicians and generals faced a conundrum. Sir Henry Wilson advocated 'flattening out the rebels' with a summer-long, win-the-war offensive. Yet, he was well aware that this would be impossible 'unless England was on our side'. England, Worthington-Evans told him, 'was not on our side and could not be got on it'. Support would come about only when the government had devised a strategy with some reasonable chance of bringing the war to a conclusion. At that, even Wilson had to concede 'that it would be madness' to carry on with the war any further.⁹⁶

The coup against Lloyd George

A couple of weeks before the Irish elections, Frances Stevenson confided to Mark Sturgis that 'in his inmost heart' Lloyd George still hoped to impose the 1920 Act on southern Ireland 'without any additions

⁹⁵S.I.C. 9th Conclusions, 15 June 1921, CAB 27/107.

⁹⁶C.P. 2965, 24 May 1921, CAB 24/123. Wilson diary, 22 June 1921, HHW 1/30/1.

whatsoever'.⁹⁷ Despite Sinn Féin's victory at the polls, he held onto this conviction and pressed ahead with plans for all-out war against the IRA until the end of June.

Then, the turn-around. This points to another factor behind the decision to negotiate with Sinn Féin. In a nutshell, that factor was Lloyd George's political survival.

Throughout his four and a half years as prime minister, Lloyd George was beset by heirs apparent, none more so than Birkenhead and Churchill.⁹⁸ His relations with both men, and with Churchill in particular, reached a breaking point in the spring of 1921 when he thwarted his junior partner's desire to become chancellor of the exchequer.⁹⁹ According to Lord Beaverbrook, Churchill was now 'the bitter enemy of [Lloyd] George', while Birkenhead intended to 'challenge Chamberlain's leadership of the Tory Party.'¹⁰⁰

Initially, it seems that the two men attempted to concoct a plot centring on Lloyd George's removal of Dr Christopher Addison from the Ministry of Health and his subsequent appointment as a minister without portfolio. When this plan failed to attract support, it was decided that a far larger collection of opponents might be

⁹⁷Sturgis diary, 11 May 1921, PRO 30/59/4.

⁹⁸See, e.g., Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 18 January 1920, NC 18/1/240.

⁹⁹Churchill had harboured this ambition since 1919. See Wilson diary, 25 October 1919, HHW 1/28/1.

¹⁰⁰Beaverbrook to Borden, 12 May 1921, BBK C/51.

assembled against Lloyd George on the charge that he had lost his way in Ireland.¹⁰¹

Within both wings of the Coalition, discontent with the government's Irish policy was by now boiling over. Even in Lloyd George's own backyard, Asquith's Liberals were making inroads by focusing on the government's handling of the Sinn Féin rebellion. 'Ireland, Ireland, Ireland', reported one of the prime minister's Welsh supporters, 'they keep harping on that one string and people listen, - to our loss!'¹⁰²

From the other side of the Coalition, members of the 'Group', a collection of influential Tory backbenchers, had also emerged as leading opponents of government policy. After a trip to Ireland in March, one of the Group's main figures, Sir Samuel Hoare, confronted Lloyd George at a private meeting, telling him that 'his show in Ireland was rotten from top to bottom'.¹⁰³

With the premiership seemingly ready to drop like a piece of overripe fruit, Lloyd George's opponents proceeded to shake the tree for all they were worth. Throughout the spring and summer, Lord Beaverbrook attempted to broker an alliance between discontented leaders such as Birkenhead and Churchill and backbench

¹⁰¹Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 98-103. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 120.

¹⁰²C. Price White to Winifred Coombe Tennant, 24 March 1921, LG F/96/1/15.

¹⁰³Hoare to Beaverbrook, 13 June 1921, Templewood Papers, I:12 (36).

Tories.¹⁰⁴ In the hothouse atmosphere of Westminster it was impossible to keep such a plot secret for long. For the better part of a month, Lloyd George bided his time pretending that nothing but the usual problems troubled him. 'Crises', he airily wrote to Bonar Law, continued to chase 'each other like shadows of clouds across the landscape. Miners, unemployment, reparations, Siberia and always Ireland'.¹⁰⁵

On 21 June, Birkenhead implicitly attacked the government's Irish policy while ostensibly defending it in the House of Lords. Contrary to the government's previous claims, he now admitted that 'a small war' was going on in Ireland. Worse, he conceded that the British effort to defeat the IRA was failing. Under the current leadership, however, there would be no change of policy, no concessions, nothing to leaven the terms of the 1920 Act.¹⁰⁶

Lloyd George chose this moment to strike back.¹⁰⁷ Word of the plot to oust the prime minister because of his Irish policy was leaked to two newspapers: first to the Daily Mirror, and a day later to the Manchester

¹⁰⁴See, e.g., Birkenhead to Bonar Law, 5 May 1921, BL 107/1/22; and Beaverbrook to Hoare, 9 July 1921, Templewood Papers, I:12 (37).

¹⁰⁵Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 7 June 1921, BL 107/1/35.

¹⁰⁶HL Deb, Vol. 45, Col. 679-696, 21 June 1921.

¹⁰⁷Lord Beaverbrook, The Decline & Fall of Lloyd George (London, 1963), p. 72-74.

Guardian.¹⁰⁸ No one who might be a challenger escaped censure in one or other of the reports, including Bonar Law. Immediately, the articles punctured any schemes to remove Lloyd George from the premiership. A 'Coup D'Etat' now, Lord Winterton admitted, 'would be ... fatal'. The best that could be hoped for was 'a gradual stampede' in the autumn, and that would depend on Birkenhead and Churchill leaving office to lead the dissidents.¹⁰⁹ In the circumstances, however, neither man was willing to take such a risky move.

With his position secure, at least for the time being, Lloyd George could at last change course on Ireland. The issue had proved to be a potential Achilles Heel. But, as he had earlier told his colleagues, they must be patient and wait for the 'best opportunity', not the 'first opportunity', to negotiate with Sinn Féin.¹¹⁰ The end of June afforded Lloyd George the best opportunity to make his move and, he realised, it might not come again.

The offer to talk

While the plot against Lloyd George was spinning out in London, George V was in Belfast for the formal opening of Northern Ireland's Parliament. The occasion allowed

¹⁰⁸'Queer Plot to Oust Mr. Lloyd George', Daily Mirror, 22 June 1921. 'The Scheme that Failed. Attempted Unionist Revolt Against the Premier', Manchester Guardian, 23 June 1921.

¹⁰⁹Winterton to Hoare, 11 July 1921, Templewood Papers, I:12 (38).

¹¹⁰Jones diary, 12 May 1921, Vol. III, p. 67.

the king to appeal for reconciliation between North and South, and to call on Irishmen and women to 'forgive and forget'.¹¹¹ What was said was less important than the fact that the speech gave the government the excuse it needed for a dramatic break in policy.¹¹²

Two days later, at an emergency Cabinet meeting, Lloyd George suggested that the time was right to invite both Craig and Sinn Féin President Eamon de Valera to come to London for talks. Disregarding his own previous advice, he now said that such an offer would not be a sign of weakness. On the contrary, if de Valera refused, the government would be in a much stronger position to wage all-out war against the IRA. At any rate, a 'last attempt at peace' had to be made, Chamberlain told his sister, Hilda, 'before we go the full lengths of martial law'.¹¹³

As it happened, de Valera was willing to talk - but he refused to have anything to do with a conference where he and Craig were seen to be on an equal footing. On reflection, this also suited the British, as separate discussions might enable them to put the Ulster Question to one side. On 8 July Macready and de Valera met at the Mansion House in Dublin where they signed a formal truce ending the Anglo-Irish War. Fighting lasted another

¹¹¹'King's call for a new Spirit in Ireland', Manchester Guardian, 23 June 1921.

¹¹²But see Lyons, Ireland, p. 425.

¹¹³Jones diary, 24 June 1921, Vol. III, p. 79-81. Austen to Hilda Chamberlain, 26 June 1921, AC 5/1/202.

three days, before hostilities finally ended at noon, on Monday, 11 July. 'The last revolver shot' of the Anglo-Irish War was fired at five minutes before the hour. In Ulster.¹¹⁴

The Lloyd George-de Valera talks

By most accounts, Lloyd George's discussions with de Valera were not one of his happier experiences. After their first encounter, one assistant later wrote, the leader of the British empire emerged 'white and exhausted' having made no impression whatsoever.¹¹⁵

Nor did Lloyd George find the going any easier in separate talks with Craig and his colleagues. At a meeting with the Unionists on 18 July, Lloyd George made it plain that a settlement with Sinn Féin was impossible unless the six-county state accepted some sort of arrangement for an all-Ireland government. He then outlined five suggestions for an accommodation, only to be told that 'none of them were acceptable'. Instead of putting forward counter-proposals, Craig abruptly announced that further discussions 'would serve no useful purpose' and that he and his colleagues were returning to Belfast. So far as Craig was concerned, the negotiations with Sinn Féin turned solely on relations between Southern Ireland and Great Britain. If, and when, the interests of Ulster became involved 'in a practicable

¹¹⁴C.P. 3130, 13 July 1921, CAB 24/126.

¹¹⁵G. Shakespeare, Let Candles be Brought In (London, 1949), p. 76.

manner', the Northern Ireland Cabinet would return to London for further consultations.¹¹⁶

News of Craig's departure nearly brought the entire negotiations crashing down.¹¹⁷ Lloyd George managed to hold the situation together just long enough so that he could put forward his government's initiative for a comprehensive settlement with Sinn Féin.¹¹⁸ Compared to the 1920 Act, these proposals were an extraordinary step forward. In a carefully-worded letter to Bonar Law, Tom Jones explained that the Irish were being offered 'Dominion Status' with all sorts of important powers, but no Navy, no hostile tariffs, and no coercion of Ulster'. As usual, Jones wrote, the 'crux of the problem' was 'this question of unity'.¹¹⁹

De Valera's immediate response was, in Lloyd George's own words, 'not very hopeful'. The Sinn Féin president was unwilling to accept Dominion status unless it included Ulster. His 'only other alternative', Lloyd George told Craig, was 'complete independence for Southern Ireland.' Lloyd George hoped that Craig would meet with de Valera to demonstrate that Ulster was a

¹¹⁶'Rough Notes' of a meeting, 18 July [misdated June] 1921, PRONI, CAB4/3/1.

¹¹⁷De Valera to Collins, 19 July 1921, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 151.

¹¹⁸'Proposals of the British Government for an Irish Settlement', 20 July 1921, Dáil Éireann: Official Correspondence Relating to the Peace Negotiations, June-September 1921 (Dublin, 1921), p. 6-8.

¹¹⁹Jones to Bonar Law, 22 July 1921, BL 107/1/46.

'fact' not a 'figment' created by the British. Otherwise, he feared, 'a settlement will always be unattainable'.¹²⁰

Craig was not about to do anything of the kind. On the contrary, he refused to meet with de Valera again until the Sinn Féin leader acknowledged Northern Ireland's separate status. Ulster had already made its 'sacrifice' for peace by agreeing to have its own government. 'Much against our wish', Craig wrote, 'we accepted this as a final settlement' and, he emphatically concluded, 'we have nothing left to give away'.¹²¹

The political fall-out

The dramatic turn of events in Ireland had an immediate impact on British politics. On his left, Lloyd George's move suddenly cut the ground out from underneath anti-Coalition Liberals. Though they wanted a settlement ('God grant it', wrote Lord Crewe), peace in Ireland would remove one of the Wee Frees' main grievances against the government. Furthermore, if Lloyd George could pull a deal out of his hat, he would almost certainly call a general election for which the Asquith Liberals were not prepared.¹²²

On Lloyd George's right, a number of Conservative MPs were 'a good deal perturbed' that de Valera had been

¹²⁰Lloyd George to Craig, 21 July 1921, Grigg Papers, MSS Film 1010.

¹²¹Craig to Lloyd George, 29 July 1921, LG F/11/3/15(a).

¹²²Crewe to Asquith, 11 July 1921, Crewe Papers, C/40.

invited to London in the first place. A Tory Party resolution 'condemning such dealing altogether' was resisted but only in return for another which expressed 'anxiety' about the talks - hardly a ringing endorsement of the government or its leaders.¹²³ As time dragged on, these misgivings increased. 'I think that we shall have a split over the Irish question', Austen Chamberlain confided to his step-mother, with as many as thirty or forty MPs defecting from the party. 'Ireland will be the reason for some and the excuse for others.'¹²⁴

The 20 July proposals were not officially rejected by the Irish Cabinet until 10 August.¹²⁵ Among other objections, de Valera denied that Britain had any right to solve 'our local problem' by partitioning the six counties. 'If your Government stands aside', he asserted, 'we can effect a complete reconciliation'. Quite how this was to be accomplished was unclear, though international arbitration was suggested as one possibility. But the most obvious method was specifically ruled out. De Valera emphatically stated that his government did not 'contemplate the use of force.'¹²⁶

Although Lloyd George welcomed de Valera's pledge

¹²³Bayford diary, 16 July 1921, p. 158.

¹²⁴Austen to Mary Chamberlain, 25 August 1921, AC 4/1/1207.

¹²⁵De Valera to Lloyd George, 10 August 1921, LG F/14/6/14.

¹²⁶Ibid.

not to attack the North, he was not about to refer the Irish Question to foreign mediators.¹²⁷ Throughout August and September, newspaper accounts continued to stress that Ulster was 'the crux of the Irish problem'.¹²⁸ In fact, the real bone of contention was de Valera's demand for the recognition of Irish national sovereignty and Lloyd George's refusal to concede it.¹²⁹ The knot was finally cut by the prime minister's proposal to ascertain 'how the association of Ireland with the community of nations known as the British Empire may best be reconciled with Irish national aspirations.' De Valera's reply was in effect to agree to disagree.¹³⁰ Formal talks were set to begin on the 11th day of October.

The two sides had taken 'a big step', Mark Sturgis wrote in his diary.¹³¹ Even so, he and others recognised that the Ulster Question might still block a final settlement. 'To ask the Irish people to leave Ulster out', one Cabinet official observed, 'would be like asking the English Parliament to leave Yorkshire outside

¹²⁷Lloyd George to de Valera, 13 August 1921, LG F/14/6/15.

¹²⁸See, e.g., 'The Crux of the Irish Problem', The Observer, 28 August 1921; and 'A Signal for Peace', Manchester Guardian, 7 September 1921.

¹²⁹For the exchange of letters between Lloyd George and de Valera, 24 August - 20 September 1921, see LG F/14/6/16-26.

¹³⁰Lloyd George to de Valera; and de Valera to Lloyd George, 29-30 September 1921, LG F/14/6/27 and 28.

¹³¹Sturgis diary, 30 September 1921, PRO 30/59/5.

their jurisdiction.'¹³²

The point of no return

By opening negotiations with Sinn Féin, Lloyd George crossed his Rubicon, setting in motion a chain of events which would culminate with his downfall a year and a half later. In direct response to the Irish initiative, eighteen Die-hards formed the nucleus of the group which was to be instrumental in overthrowing the Coalition.¹³³ Equally important, this was the one issue which might draw Bonar Law out of retirement. The question was not if, but rather how long he could ignore appeals to lead Conservative opposition to the 'Surrender policy in Ireland'.¹³⁴

In that sense, Lloyd George was taking a calculated risk; but did he have any choice? The Coalition's initial response to the Irish Question - its 1920 Government of Ireland Act, coupled with suppression of Sinn Féin - had clearly failed. Moreover, while these actions may have satisfied Ulster Unionists and a section of the Tory Party they eroded support for the Coalition in general.

However much members of the Cabinet, including Lloyd George, might have despised the Irish rebels and what they stood for, they could not be wished away. This

¹³²'Rough notes on views of Irish delegates', 21 July 1921, LG F/29/4/61(b).

¹³³Kinnear, Lloyd George, p. 96-97.

¹³⁴Menzies to Bonar Law, 13 August 1921, BL 107/1/51.

point was driven home by the government's chief civil servant, the permanent secretary to the Treasury, Sir Warren Fisher. It was no good 'withholding recognition of Sinn Fein as a political party', Fisher wrote. 'It is a political party, however much people may dislike it'.¹³⁵ Lloyd George, no less than his Tory allies, was reluctant to accept this advice. But once the political damage being inflicted on the Coalition began to tell, he had no hesitation about altering course.

Although this sudden change of direction opened Lloyd George to the charge that his Irish policy was unprincipled and capricious, this was not the case. Quite the contrary, by his lights it was the sort of action that made the difference between 'ordinary and extraordinary men'. As he explained it to Lord Riddell: 'when the extraordinary man is faced by a novel and difficult situation, he extricates himself by adopting a plan which is at once daring and unexpected'.¹³⁶ No other words better sum up Lloyd George's own approach to Ireland.

Even so, by the summer of 1921 Lloyd George had still not escaped his dilemma. If anything, the 1920 Act and the related concessions made to the Ulster Unionists had created new difficulties from which he would find it hard to extricate himself. Bargaining with Sinn Féin saw

¹³⁵Fisher memorandum to Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Chamberlain, 15 May 1920, HO 317/50.

¹³⁶Riddell diary, 3 April 1919, Intimate Diary, p. 45.

off the immediate threat to his premiership but only at the cost of giving his opponents a possible issue, and a possible alternative leader, around whom to rally.

A fortnight after the failed coup to oust Lloyd George, Harold Laski penned a letter to American Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. 'I think Lloyd George will be in for another ten years', Laski unhappily predicted, 'so that one might as well cultivate one's private garden and be screened from the public view'.¹³⁷

Lloyd George would have been amused by that thought. If only he could be so sure.

¹³⁷Laski to Holmes, 6 July 1921, in M. DeWolfe Howe, ed., Holmes-Laski Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Harold J. Laski, 1916-1935, Vol. I (Cambridge, 1953), p. 348.

Chapter 2

The Treaty and After

Not much rest for the wicked in this life.

- Lord Birkenhead¹

On the evening of 10 October 1921, the Meteorological Office reported that weather conditions 'over these islands' were about to assume 'a somewhat complex character'. Through the night a low-pressure system rolled in from Ireland, breaking a spell of unseasonably warm temperatures. On the 11th rain fell over London, accompanied by thunder and lightning.²

In this unpromising atmosphere, the Irish Treaty negotiations finally got under way. Five delegates representing Dáil Eireann - Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Eamon Duggan, Robert Barton, and George Gavan Duffy - were to press the claim for an independent, united Ireland. Eamon de Valera, his status recently elevated to that of president of the Irish republic, refused to attend. Facing the Sinn Féin delegates across a conveniently wide table, was Lloyd George, Birkenhead, Churchill, Greenwood, Worthington-Evans, and Sir Gordon Hewart. Austen Chamberlain joined the negotiations the next day.³

¹'Notes, Irish meeting', 5 December 1921, LG F/101/139(e).

²See weather reports, The Times, 11-12 October 1921.

³'Difficult Problems for the Irish Conference', Daily Telegraph, 14 October 1921.

Little was accomplished at these early sessions. Incredibly, the Irish delegates were sent to London without a detailed alternative to Lloyd George's 20 July proposals. While de Valera continued to spin out his theory of 'External Association', a half-way house between his cherished republic and Dominion status, the Irish delegates were sent packing with a bare-bones proposal called 'Draft Treaty A' which, revealingly, did not address the Ulster Question.⁴

Such were the uncertain beginnings of the negotiations that were to end with Ireland's independence. Five issues stood in the way of agreement: free trade within the British Isles versus protection for Irish industry; Ireland's liability for a proportion of the United Kingdom's debt versus Irish claims of over-taxation; defence; Dominion status versus a republic; and partition. Neither of the first two issues was likely to disrupt the talks; nor was defence, although the problems there were trickier. The break, if it were to come, would be over Ireland's continued allegiance to the crown, or over the partition of Ulster.⁵

A day-by-day, sometimes hourly, chronicle of the Treaty talks has been written elsewhere, and it is not within the ambit of this study to repeat that exercise. In his account, Lord Longford maintained that 'Ulster was

⁴The document is reprinted in Macardle, Irish Republic, Appendix 16, p. 937-939.

⁵Pakenham, Peace by Ordeal, p. 89-97.

not the main issue' dividing British and Irish negotiators, but instead became 'a strange abstract factor in tactics'.⁶ This conclusion is largely based on the fact that the Ulster Question hardly figured in the Dáil's subsequent Treaty debates. It is indeed astonishing that in a public debate which took some 338 pages to record, only nine of those pages are devoted to partition. The private sessions are even less enlightening, 'as fewer than five of 182 pages deal with Ulster.'⁷

But that was not the way the matter was viewed by the participants, least of all by the British. Among mainstream politicians, certainly those within the Coalition, the idea of allowing an Irish republic was never seriously entertained. The 'fly in the ointment', as Alfred Cope put it, was 'the "Ulster Question" and not the "Republic".'⁸

The object here is to show that partition continued to be the fly in the ointment throughout the Treaty negotiations and after. Once it became clear that the Ulster Unionists would not agree to a single government for Ireland, and that this refusal would be supported by the Conservative Party, Lloyd George devised a complex

⁶Ibid, p. 93.

⁷M. Wall, 'The Ulster Question', in D. Williams, ed., The Irish Struggle: 1916-1926 (London, 1966), p. 87. J.M. Curran, The Birth of the Irish Free State: 1921-1923 (University, Alabama, 1980), p. 314, n. 7.

⁸Cope to Jones, 15 August 1921, TJ G/2/11.

arrangement to turn this refusal against itself. This arrangement became the Treaty's Ulster clauses, of which the Boundary Commission was just one part. Hidden beneath the other clauses was a trap designed to ensnare the Ulster Unionists in the complicated restrictions of the 1920 Act. Compared with the freedoms offered by Dublin, these restrictions would be so onerous as to make the lure of an Irish parliament irresistible. In this way, Lloyd George could say that he had kept his pledge not to fiddle with the 1920 Act while, at the same time, he could sell the agreement to the Irish delegates as a contract that made reunification inevitable.

What is important to remember is that Lloyd George's goal in the autumn of 1921 was to remove the Irish Question from his list of problems. An agreement would take what was a political liability and, with a bit of skilful handling, turn it into a platform for the next general election. This in turn could provide the springboard from which to launch his long-desired Centre Party. Viewed from this angle, the details of an Irish agreement were secondary. As Lloyd George reminded his colleagues: 'We are after a settlement - that [is] our objective.'⁹ Coming to grips with the consequences of the settlement was for a later time. In fact, they would occupy British politicians to a greater or lesser degree for the better part of the next four years.

For now, Lloyd George's concern was that he not

⁹Jones diary, 14 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 164.

become bogged down in an Irish war fought over partition. 'Men will die for the Throne and Empire', he pointed out to his Cabinet. 'I do not know who will die for Tyrone and Fermanagh.'¹⁰ If the war had to be renewed, the government would need the widest measure of public support. That made it imperative that any breakdown should occur over allegiance to the crown, not over two distant Irish counties.

A few days into the negotiations, the twin rocks of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerged once again to block Lloyd George's way. In no uncertain terms, the Irish delegates declared that they could not agree to a partition including those two counties. 'This', Lloyd George told Jones, 'is going to wreck [the] settlement'.¹¹

The Ulster discussions

The positions taken by both sides during their initial discussions on Ulster can be immediately summarised. The negotiators first came to grips with partition at their fourth and fifth sessions, held on 14 and 17 October. Hammering home Sinn Féin's contention that the six county partition was 'unnatural', Griffith argued that the dispute in Ireland was not between Protestant and Catholic. Sectarianism, he held, was being used to divert the average Ulsterman 'from

¹⁰Jones diary, 7 September 1921, Vol. III, p. 110-111.

¹¹'Notes at Cabinet meetings', 17 October 1921, TJ G/2/32.

industrial questions'.¹² If the British stood aside, Sinn Féin would make 'a fair proposal' to persuade Unionists to join a single Irish government. If the Ulstermen refused, they could retain their separate Parliament; but its reach would cover only those constituencies voting for exclusion and which formed a 'territorially continuous group'. Moreover, any such government must be subordinate to the national Parliament in Dublin, not Westminster.¹³

Lloyd George dismissed these arguments out of hand, telling the Sinn Féiners that they 'must face facts'. No British government could coerce the Ulster Unionists into an all-Ireland Parliament; it 'would only lead to civil war'. Yes, the six county partition was not 'logically defensible'. But would the Sinn Féiners prefer putting all nine Ulster counties under a Belfast Parliament?¹⁴

The first breakthrough came a few days later, when Griffith dangled the possibility of Sinn Féin accepting Dominion status - but only if the British ended partition. This link was more explicitly drawn the following day. 'In the end', Griffith wrote, 'I told them that no Irishman could even discuss with his countrymen any association with the British Crown unless

¹²Chamberlain's Notes, 14 October 1921, CAB 21/253/1.

¹³The proposal is reprinted as Appendix 1 in J. Bowman, De Valera and the Ulster Question: 1917-1973 (Oxford, 1982), p. 339. S.F.(C) 7, 17 October 1921, CAB 21/208.

¹⁴Ibid, S.F.(C) 7. Chamberlain's Notes; and Jones's Notes, 14 October 1921, CAB 21/253/1 and 3.

the essential unity of Ireland was agreed to' by both sides. This position was formally confirmed a few days later by the Irish delegation as a whole.¹⁵

If the offer was sincere, the British negotiators were in dangerous territory. 'We can't give way on the six counties', Churchill pointed out to his colleagues, 'we are not free agents.' Already facing a vote of no confidence in Parliament, it would be politically suicidal for Lloyd George and his colleagues to propose an all-Ireland Parliament to Craig, at least for the time being. In any case, Lloyd George was not willing to play Griffith's game. Before he would take any risks on Ulster, he had to be sure that the Irish would give up their republic.¹⁶

Lloyd George 'smites the Die-hards'

At the end of October roughly three dozen Tory MPs tabled a motion demanding that the government abandon its talks with Sinn Féin and work the 1920 Act.¹⁷ The number of Conservatives supporting the motion was not unexpected, Chamberlain told his wife, though 'one or two of the names are a surprise to me.'¹⁸ Faced with what amounted to a vote of no confidence, Lloyd George decided

¹⁵Griffith to de Valera [extracts], 24 and 25 October 1921, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 347. S.F.(C) 21A, 29 October 1921, CAB 43/3.

¹⁶Grigg's Notes, 25 October 1921, CAB 21/253/2.

¹⁷HC Deb, Vol. 147, Col. 1367, 31 October 1921.

¹⁸Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 26 October 1921, AC 6/1/433.

it was time that he 'threw down the glove'. If the motion succeeded, he announced that he would resign and call a general election.¹⁹ At the same time, he decided to use the Parliamentary drama to focus minds in the Irish delegation.

On the 27th, Griffith and his colleagues received a memorandum from their British counterparts insisting that they declare once and for all whether or not they were prepared to accept Dominion status, as well as the government's other demands concerning defence, trade, and finance. Ulster was carefully side-stepped. Griffith's response was to turn these questions back on the British, making any agreement conditional on the 'unimpaired unity of Ireland'.²⁰ This sparring match set the stage for a private meeting between Lloyd George and Griffith on the eve of the Commons censure debate. What exactly transpired between them is a matter of dispute. According to Collins, at any rate, the result was that the two sides had reached 'absolute dead level'. In return for a united Ireland, the Dáil would have to accept membership within the British Commonwealth, along with safeguards for the Ulster Unionists and guarantees for British security. Otherwise, he told the IRA's chief of staff, there would be war and 'no fooling about it

¹⁹Sturgis diary, 28 October 1921, PRO 30/59/5.

²⁰S.F.(C) 21 and 21A, 27 and 29 October 1921, CAB 43/3.

either.'²¹

Griffith reported to de Valera that the British had to be 'certain of real good-will on our side' before they would risk their careers in a fight with the Die-hards. 'If I would give him [Lloyd George] personal assurances on this matter', Griffith wrote, 'he would go out to smite the Diehards, and would fight on the Ulster matter to secure essential unity.'²²

It is difficult to see how Lloyd George could have kept such a bargain, unless he was prepared to sacrifice his Coalition partners. As Chamberlain explained to his wife: 'F.E. and I are so pledged that we could not honourably alter the Ulster boundaries (by subtraction, I mean) or powers without Craig's consent'. If an attempt was made to 'force Ulster into a sacrifice', both men would be forced to resign from the Cabinet.²³ Whether Lloyd George was willing to carry matters that far is unclear, though he did put out tentative feelers to the Wee Frees suggesting that together they might form an alternative government. But his threat to call a general election was never really serious. 'It would be foolish to do so', he admitted to Donald Maclean, 'unemployment

²¹Collins to Mulcahy, 31 October 1921, Mulcahy Papers, P7/A/72.

²²Griffith to de Valera [extract], 31 October 1921, F.L.K. de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

²³Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 30-31 October 1921, AC 6/1/441.

being as rampant as it was.'²⁴

In the end, no drastic measures were needed to survive the censure vote. Lloyd George did indeed smite the Die-hards, crushing his opponents by 439 votes to 43. It was a brilliant performance, though Tom Jones had to admit that more than once his master 'was on very thin ice'.²⁵

On 2 November, the personal assurance that Griffith had given to Lloyd George in the run-up to the Commons debate was put into writing. Again, everything was 'conditional on the recognition of the essential unity of Ireland'.²⁶ The British, he reported to de Valera, were now 'satisfied to face the "Ulster" question on it, and assure me that if "Ulster" proves unreasonable they are prepared to resign rather than use force against us.' Even if they failed, Griffith was certain that no one could form an alternative government which committed itself to 'a war-policy against Ireland'.²⁷ Britain's military commander in Ireland agreed. It would be insane, Macready wrote, to go to war 'merely if Ulster

²⁴Maclean memorandum, ? October 1921, Maclean Papers, Dep. c. 466, ff. 103.

²⁵HC Deb, Vol. 147, Col. 1412-1427, 1479-1484, 31 October 1921. Jones diary, 31 October 1921, Vol. III, p. 152.

²⁶S.F.(B) 45, 2 November 1921, CAB 43/2. In an earlier draft, Griffith explicitly stated that he could not recommend Dominion status if 'the unity of Ireland were denied in form or in fact' [sic]. See Griffith to Lloyd George, same date, LG F/21/1/1.

²⁷Griffith to de Valera [extract], 3 November 1921, F.L.K., de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

objects to a plebiscite in Tyrone and Fermanagh.'²⁸

Bonar Law intervenes

On 5 November Craig was summoned to London for urgent consultations. The gist of the British proposal to be presented to him was that Ulster's government would retain its powers within the six counties but that its representatives would sit in Dáil Eireann rather than the British Parliament. Austen Chamberlain thought that the British might persuade Ulster's premier to see the advantages of this new arrangement. As matters stood, it would be difficult if not impossible for Craig to govern Tyrone and Fermanagh 'with their Sinn Fein majorities'.²⁹

Craig seems to have been unprepared for what awaited him in the British capital. The government's proposals, he said afterward, gave him 'the biggest shock' he had ever had in his life. Worse still, he discovered 'many "backsliders" amongst old friends and colleagues'.³⁰ His reaction was to seek help from any quarter but, above all, from Bonar Law. As early as September Lloyd George had foreseen that his former colleague's presence might be a problem if the Irish negotiations became tricky. His solution was to dispatch Bonar Law, along with Balfour, to represent Britain at the Washington Naval Conference. Balfour accepted, as did Bonar Law - until

²⁸Macready to Wilson, 3 November 1921, HHW 2/2F/46.

²⁹Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 2 November 1921, AC 6/1/447.

³⁰Lady Craig's diary, 5 November 1921, D.1415/B/38.

he learned that Lloyd George was to remain in London to orchestrate the discussions on Ireland.³¹

Just as he had feared, Bonar Law quickly emerged as the chief obstacle to the government's peace plan. 'B.L. is rampaging', Chamberlain told his wife, and 'seeing red on the subject of Ulster'. It was only a matter of time before the former Tory leader's uncompromising attitude began to infect the Cabinet. Chamberlain knew that he could depend on Birkenhead. Horne was also reliable, though he seemed at times 'puzzled and troubled' by the government's Irish policy. Curzon, Chamberlain suspected, 'does not know where he is. Worthy puzzles me a little and, if trouble arises, Baldwin would be much under Bonar's influence.'³²

Despite their pledges of loyalty, Lloyd George also suspected that his Coalition partners would desert him if the Irish issue became too hot. They had made the same sort of pledges before, on that occasion to Asquith just before Lloyd George had forced his resignation. Within days, he reminded Tom Jones, 'I was putting the nose bags of office round their necks. Curzon, L. W.-E. and Baldwin, they will all go over to Bonar if the opportunity comes.'³³

³¹Grigg to Curzon, 14 September 1921, IO, MSS Eur. F. 112/220(a), ff. 78-81.

³²Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 7, 8, and 9 November 1921, AC 6/1/455, 458, and 459.

³³Jones diary, 8 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 156.

The Boundary Commission

With support ebbing away, it seems that Lloyd George actually considered resigning at about this time. 'There is just one other possible way out', he told Jones. Namely, Southern Ireland would be granted Dominion status, while Craig's government would retain the powers granted to it by the 1920 Act, as well as representation in the imperial Parliament. But, the Ulstermen would do so at the cost of bearing a higher proportion of taxation than the South. Under no conditions would Northern Ireland be granted Dominion status. Furthermore, the Unionists would have to accept a Boundary Commission which would be charged with redrawing the Irish frontier.³⁴

What prompted Lloyd George to resurrect the Boundary Commission is unclear. When he had mooted the proposal during an earlier round of the Treaty negotiations, the Irish were decidedly cool to the idea.³⁵ It is plausible that Lloyd George returned to the concept because a similar commission, then at work in Upper Silesia, was much in the news.³⁶ An additional attraction was that Craig himself had proposed just such a commission the

³⁴Ibid, Jones diary, 7 November 1921, p. 155.

³⁵Jones's Notes, 14 October 1921, CAB 21/253/3.

³⁶These provisions in the Treaty of Versailles later figured in the Free State's case to the Irish Boundary Commission. See North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, Handbook of the Ulster Question (Dublin, 1923), p. 149-152.

year before.³⁷ In that case, it would be hard for him to object to it now.

Whatever its origins, Collins instinctively disliked the idea when it was put to him and Griffith.³⁸ Jones raised the offer again the following day, this time with Griffith and Duggan. Lloyd George, he said, 'was prepared to play the Boundary Commission as an absolutely last card', but he would do so only 'if he could feel sure that Sinn Fein would take it, if Ulster accepted.' Jones's choice of words was crucial, and so was Griffith's. 'It is not our proposal', the Irish leader replied, and he would not pledge that the Sinn Féin delegates would accept the scheme. 'We would prefer a plebiscite', he told Jones, 'but in essentials a Boundary Commission is very much the same.'³⁹

The idea for a Boundary Commission was initially put to Griffith with only the six counties in mind. Jones was later told to make it plain that the Commission's writ must apply to all nine Ulster counties, and he claimed that he passed this information along to the Irish leader.⁴⁰ Neither of Griffith's letters to de Valera over the following two days, however, mention this. On the contrary, throughout his correspondence Griffith makes it clear that the Commission's sole

³⁷See chapter 1.

³⁸Jones diary, 8 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 155-156.

³⁹Ibid, 9 November 1921, p. 156-157.

⁴⁰Ibid, 9-10 November 1921, p. 157-158.

function would be to 'delimit' Northern Ireland's territory.⁴¹ That is a very different proposition from the British understanding that the Commission would 'adjust' the boundary to both include as well as exclude territory in either direction.⁴²

The trap of the 1920 Act

As well as asserting that the Boundary Commission would only be empowered to take territory away from the six-county state, Griffith's reports also informed de Valera that whatever remained of Northern Ireland would find itself handcuffed by the terms of the 1920 Act. Specifically, the truncated Ulster state 'would have to bear itself its proportion of British taxation' and would be 'subject to equal financial burdens with England.'⁴³

In order to win Cabinet approval to negotiate with Sinn Féin in the first place, Lloyd George's 20 July offer had to stipulate that any settlement 'must 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'.⁴⁴ Craig and his supporters in the Conservative Party

⁴¹Griffith to de Valera [extracts], 8, 9, 11, 12 November 1921, F.L.K., de Valera Papers, File No. 347. Austen Chamberlain also spoke of a 'new delimitation' of the six-county state. See Chamberlain to Lloyd George, 11 November 1921, LG F/7/4/31.

⁴²Curtis memorandum, 8 November 1921, LG F/181/4/1/204.

⁴³Griffith to de Valera [extracts], 9 and 12 November 1921, F.L.K., de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

⁴⁴See British proposals, 20 July 1921, DE: Official Correspondence, p. 7.

assumed that this statement gave them an iron-clad guarantee, making it impossible for Lloyd George to do a deal with the Irish rebels behind their backs.

The genius of Lloyd George's latest proposal was that it turned this pledge on its head. If, he pointed out to his colleagues, 'Belfast wanted to remain with Gt. Britain then she must carry the same burdens as Glasgow, Liverpool and Birmingham.' The choice before Craig and his followers was both simple and fair: either join the Irish Dominion or remain within the United Kingdom. The Unionists, he said, 'can't expect to get all the benefits of both systems.' According to Jones, 'the atmosphere was at once electric' when the 'great and sudden revelation' of Lloyd George's offer to Griffith dawned on the Conservatives. Chamberlain, in particular, was 'disturbed' by its implications, but no one could refute the prime minister's logic.⁴⁵

Lloyd George's arguments carried the day in Cabinet, setting the stage for the exchange of a series of letters between the British and Ulster prime minister during mid-November.⁴⁶ The first of these placed two alternatives before Northern Ireland's Cabinet: participation in an all-Ireland Parliament with Belfast's government retaining the powers conferred on it by the 1920 Act, the

⁴⁵Jones diary, 10 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 159, 161.

⁴⁶Cmd. 1561: Correspondence Between His Majesty's Government and the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland Relating to the Proposals for an Irish Settlement; Sess. II., i, 83.

advantages of lower taxation, a voluntary imperial contribution and the assurance that trade and commerce between the North and the rest of Ireland would not be hindered. Alternatively, Northern Ireland could maintain its separation from the rest of Ireland, but only at the price of bearing higher taxation, a 'proportionate share' of the imperial debt and the certain erection of a customs barrier on the Irish frontier. As for the boundary, this question was in either case 'reserved' for further discussion; but it was made clear that 'an amicable settlement' of the issue would be much more likely if the Unionists were willing to participate in a single Irish government.⁴⁷

The response of Craig's Cabinet was unyielding. So far as the Unionists were concerned, they had already made the 'supreme sacrifice' by accepting the 1920 Act. Furthermore, negotiations were impossible so long as the possibility of an all-Ireland Parliament was 'open to discussion'. But Craig and colleagues then tried having it both ways. Although Northern Ireland's territory was deemed to be an 'essential' component of the 1920 Act, the legislation itself was far from sacrosanct. Quite the contrary, Craig and his colleagues now proposed that Northern Ireland should be granted Dominion status as well. Such a move meant, of course, the end of the United Kingdom. But this was a price Unionists were willing to pay, as they regarded 'the loss of

⁴⁷Ibid, Lloyd George to Craig, 10 November 1921.

representation at Westminster as a less evil than inclusion in an All-Ireland Parliament.'⁴⁸

Griffith was elated by Craig's reply. Here was proof of 'Ulster's sordidness', all 'for the sake of a lower income tax'. Jones encouraged this thinking, telling the Irish leader that if Lloyd George could rely on the Sinn Féiners' continued support, 'we might have Ulster in before many months had passed.'⁴⁹

Although Craig's arguments found some support in the Cabinet, they were soon given short shrift.⁵⁰ Lloyd George even enlisted the help of an unlikely ally, Bonar Law, in his cause. At a meeting on 12 November, the Cabinet was told that the former Tory leader was willing to accept a Boundary Commission and, further, that he agreed that the Ulster Unionists must pay the same taxes as those levied in Britain. 'That is coercion of Ulster', Lloyd George observed. 'It is fair but it is fiscal pressure.'⁵¹

As was so often the case with Lloyd George, this was only half the story. Bonar Law's point was that if the Unionists could not be won over by the promise of lower taxation, then Irish unity could be achieved only if Sinn

⁴⁸Ibid, Craig to Lloyd George, 11 November 1921.

⁴⁹Jones diary, 12 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 163.

⁵⁰Amery to Worthington-Evans, 22 November 1921, W-E, MSS Eng. hist., c. 910, ff. 209-210. Also, see Worthington-Evans memorandum, S.F.(B) 25, 12 November 1921, CAB 43/2.

⁵¹Jones diary, 12 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 163.

Féin resorted to force. That the British would never allow.⁵² Nevertheless, he made it clear to Craig that he was no more inclined to give the Unionists the 'benefits of both systems' than was Lloyd George. 'As regards the question of the taxation of Ulster', Bonar Law wrote:

I will repeat the exact conversation between Craig and myself on that subject the first day I saw him. I said to him 'you will be told that the alternative to going into an All-Ireland Parl. is remaining in the U.K. and paying our taxes - what do you say to that?' His reply was 'We would jump at it.' I told him that his reply was very gratifying to me as I could not have undertaken to share in fighting their battle here on any other terms. He said to me that any other position was quite indefensible. They could not say when it is a question of the form of Govt. 'We are part of the U.K. and our right to remain part of it is not diminished because we live in the island of Ireland' and then say when it is a question of taxation 'We are a part of Ireland and must be treated not in the same way as the rest of the U.K. but in the same way as the rest of Ireland.' In other words they cannot claim the privileges (such as they are) of remaining with us and refuse to bear our burdens.⁵³

Craig and his friends appeared to be trapped. 'I do not know of any explicit pledge that the North should have economic equality with the South', admitted Ronald McNeill. '[W]e have to face the fact that our demand has always been for a "clean cut" out of Home Rule and it may be said against us that if we demand the privileges of remaining in communion - if not union - with England, we must bear our share of the burdens'.⁵⁴

Be that as it may, the Coalitionists themselves were

⁵²Bonar Law to Croal, 12 November 1921, BL 107/1/83.

⁵³Bonar Law to Salisbury, 2 December 1921, BL 107/4/17.

⁵⁴McNeill to Hugh Cecil, 19 November 1921, Quickswood Papers 29/231-232.

in an equally vulnerable position. At this most delicate moment of the Irish negotiations, the Conservatives were due to hold their annual National Unionist Association Conference in Liverpool, 'the stronghold of Orange Toryism'. This occasion would be Chamberlain's first address to the party's rank and file as their leader. Added to his 'catalogue of troubles' was Bonar Law, 'itching to be back in politics where he is disposed to think that the first place might & ought to be his.' Chamberlain believed that he was fighting for his political life.⁵⁵ And not just his alone. Watching from the sidelines, Edwin Montagu wrote: 'I can't say whether the Government will survive or not'.⁵⁶

The Liverpool Conference

In the run-up to the Liverpool Conference, the Coalition's opponents believed that their hour, and their man, had finally come. Bonar Law's letter bag was filled with correspondence urging him to re-join the battle to save Ulster from 'the tender mercies' of the IRA.⁵⁷ Initially, this was exactly what he intended to do. 'If L.G. goes on with his present proposals I will oppose them', he told one confidant. More than that, 'I shall

⁵⁵Austen to Hilda Chamberlain, 13 November 1921, AC 5/1/220. Austen to Neville Chamberlain, same date, NC 1/27/57.

⁵⁶Montagu to Reading, 17 November 1921, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/3, No. 24.

⁵⁷Ormsby Gore to Bonar Law, 15 November 1921, BL 107/1/68.

try to get the Conservative party to follow me.'⁵⁸

It was all but certain that if the former Tory leader appeared at the Liverpool Conference there would be a stampede of support in his direction. Prior to the conference, Sam Hoare warned Churchill that there were deep resentments welling up among Tory MPs. 'Give them a big issue and they will move off in a solid formation. Ulster will give them the issue they want, it may also give them the leader they need.'⁵⁹

But Bonar Law did not lead a revolt at Liverpool; in fact, he did not even attend the conference.

Instead, on 10 November he met with Lloyd George in an attempt to persuade him that he could not coerce Ulster and preserve the Coalition at the same time. Bonar Law had another suggestion. 'Don't confine your bullying to Ulster. Try it on the Sinn Feiners too.' Warming to this idea, he proposed telling Griffith that, despite their best efforts, the British had found it impossible to win any concessions from Northern Ireland's Cabinet. That being the case, the Southern Irish would be invited to form their own Dominion government with the knowledge that it would be in Ulster's material interest eventually to join with the South.⁶⁰

This indeed was the line taken by Lloyd George when

⁵⁸Bonar Law to Croal, 12 November 1921, BL 107/1/83.

⁵⁹Hoare memorandum to Churchill [copy], 12 November 1921, BBK C/307.

⁶⁰Bonar Law to Croal, 12 November 1921, BL 107/1/83.

he next met with Griffith.⁶¹ As a result, the Irish leader gave his assent to a memorandum promising not to reject the offer of a Boundary Commission. According to Griffith, this document merely clarified his earlier willingness to consider the proposal and that the Irish would not repudiate it while the Coalition Tories faced their opponents at the Liverpool Conference.⁶² But when shown to Chamberlain and Birkenhead, Lloyd George interpreted the memorandum to mean that the Irish would not break on the Ulster issue at all.⁶³

Without a leader, the Die-hard threat at Liverpool began to disintegrate.⁶⁴ However, the overwhelming defeat of the Die-hards' motion condemning the Irish talks 'was far from being a vote of confidence in the P.M.'⁶⁵ The situation looked good 'on the surface', Lord Derby told Lloyd George. But underneath, there was 'a good bit of disquiet' among the party faithful which would erupt at the mere hint of a 'breach of faith' regarding Ulster.⁶⁶

⁶¹Stevenson diary, 14 November 1921, p. 237.

⁶²Griffith to de Valera [extract], 12 November 1921, F.L.K. de Valera Papers, File No. 347. A version of the memorandum appears in Chamberlain's Notes, 5 December 1921, CAB 21/253/1.

⁶³Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 13 November 1921, AC 6/1/463.

⁶⁴NUA Conference Minutes, 17-18 November 1921, NUA 2/1/37.

⁶⁵Jones to Hankey, 25 November 1921, CAB 63/34.

⁶⁶Derby to Lloyd George, 18 November 1921, LG F/14/5/33.

Treaty talks: the final phase

The outcome of the Liverpool Conference confirmed Lloyd George in his determination to follow Bonar Law's advice. On 16 November Griffith and his colleagues were handed a proposed draft treaty. Ireland would be firmly situated within the British empire as a Dominion and would allow the Royal Navy to maintain bases on its soil to guarantee British security. Craig's government would have up to one year to opt out of the new Irish state. If it did so, 'the provisions of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, ... shall continue to be of full force and effect' - code words meaning that the six counties would pay British rates of taxation and a proportion of the imperial debt. At the same time, a Boundary Commission would determine the boundary between the two Irish states. The sole criterion for any border change would be 'the wishes of the inhabitants'.⁶⁷

This draft serves to confirm the later testimony of one of the Irish delegation's principal secretaries. According to John Chartres, Griffith's willingness to accept Dominion status was 'expressly contingent' on the agreement also ending the 'exclusion of large bodies of Nationalist Irishmen' from the Irish state. 'No one ever mentioned "minor rectifications" of the existing boundary', Chartres wrote, and he rejected claims that Griffith would have made even a tentative offer to

⁶⁷S.F.(B) 46, 16 November 1921, CAB 43/2. Liddell's Notes, 18 November 1921, CAB 21/253/6.

recognise the crown in return for so minor a commitment.⁶⁸

To support his assertion, Chartres pointed to the 16 November proposal. 'In that draft', he pointed out, 'the wishes of the inhabitants are made subject in the proviso to NO LIMITATION WHATEVER. There is not a word about economic or geographical considerations.' Chartres continued:

The limiting words were introduced afterwards in case the Boundary Commission should feel itself obliged to transfer small, distant, non-contiguous districts, such as the Glens of Antrim. The Glens of Antrim were mentioned by Lloyd George (pointing to a map) to illustrate possible exceptions to the general rule. On Mr Collins acquiescing in this, Mr Lloyd George said, 'Then there will be no difficulty about the wording.' The limiting words were inserted simply and solely to provide for such a case as the Glens of Antrim, Mr Lloyd George himself raising and stating the point in the presence of all the British none of whom made any demur, correction, exception or addition.⁶⁹

Nearly a week elapsed before the Irish responded to the 16 November proposals with what amounted to a re-statement of External Association; a complete breakdown of the talks was only narrowly averted by a meeting of the principal players.⁷⁰ This episode set the tempo for a series of nerve-wracking back and forth encounters that lasted until the Treaty was finally signed. The nadir occurred during a disastrous confrontation on 4 December

⁶⁸Chartres to Mulcahy, 5 February 1924, D/T, S 1801/E. 'Note on the Boundary Negotiations', 19 October 1924, F.L.K., de Valera Papers, File No. 354.

⁶⁹Ibid, 'Note'.

⁷⁰S.F.(B) 47, 22 November 1921, CAB 43/2. File No. 22/N/1, 23 November 1921, CAB 21/208.

when Griffith, along with Barton and Gavan Duffy, once again proposed External Association as the basis for a settlement. No new proposals were put forward concerning the Ulster question, justifying a British belief that partition was no longer an issue.⁷¹ Instead, the impasse was reached on the crown and allegiance. 'Our difficulty', Duffy admitted, 'is to come inside the Empire'.⁷²

'In that case it is war', declared one of the British negotiators, bringing the discussion to an abrupt end.⁷³

It is commonly acknowledged that at this juncture Tom Jones's intervention was decisive. The result was a personal meeting between Lloyd George and Collins on the morning of the 5th. With characteristic bluntness, Collins said that he was 'perfectly dissatisfied' with the British proposals and especially 'with the position as regards the North East'. Shortly afterwards, Collins wrote:

He [Lloyd George] remarked that I myself pointed out on a previous occasion that the North would be forced economically to come in. I assented but I said the position was so serious ... that for my part I was anxious to secure a definite reply from Craig and his Colleagues, and that I was as agreeable to a reply rejecting as accepting. In view of the former we would save Tyrone and Fermanagh, parts of Derry, Armagh and Down by the

⁷¹C. 89(21), 5 December 1921, CAB 23/27.

⁷²File No. 22/N/1, 4 December 1921, CAB 21/208.

⁷³Ibid.

Boundary Commission⁷⁴

This encounter was just enough to keep the negotiations going. Collins walked away from the meeting under the impression that Britain's prime minister agreed with his assessment of what would result from the proposed Ulster clauses. A couple of hours later, however, Lloyd George was saying something quite different. In this instance, he assured his Cabinet colleagues that the Boundary Commission would provide for nothing more than 'a re-adjustment of the boundaries'. Nor was anything said about Ulster being 'forced economically to come in' to an all-Ireland Parliament.⁷⁵

Later that same day, the two sides met again. This time Collins was joined by Griffith and Barton; Lloyd George had assembled Chamberlain, Birkenhead, and Churchill. Griffith again tried to make Sinn Féin's acceptance of Dominion status conditional on Craig's government accepting Irish unity. Lloyd George refused and accused the Irish delegates of breaking faith, producing as proof the 12 November memorandum in which Griffith agreed not to reject the government's Ulster proposals.⁷⁶

In the most widely disseminated account of this meeting, Griffith then replied: 'I said I would not let

⁷⁴Collins memorandum, 5 December 1921, F.L.K., de Valera Papers, File No. 1327.

⁷⁵C. 89(21), 5 December 1921, CAB 23/27.

⁷⁶Barton's Notes, 5 December 1921, Dáil Deb II: Private Sess., Appendix 14.

you down on that, and I won't.'⁷⁷

However, Austen Chamberlain's notes show that there was more to this exchange. When challenged about his earlier acceptance, Griffith said to Lloyd George: 'Then in that case, if you stand by the Boundary Commission, I stand by you.' In other words, Griffith would stand by his pledge so long as Lloyd George stood by his. To this the British prime minister, according to Chamberlain, agreed.⁷⁸

Then followed Griffith's more celebrated remark, after which Lloyd George's colleagues said that they too 'stood by the proposal for a Boundary Commission'. A little later still, the Irish delegates said that instead of allowing Northern Ireland six months to decide whether or not to join in with the rest of Ireland, they would prefer that Craig's government 'should give its answer at once[,] i.e. within one month of the passing of the Act.' The Irish had good reason to insist on this final demand, believing it was altogether likely that Bonar Law might be prime minister within the year. In that case, the Treaty's Ulster clauses might 'be put into the waste paper basket with all other promises.'⁷⁹

Having satisfied himself on these points, Griffith announced that he was ready to sign the Treaty. He was speaking for himself only, not for his colleagues. This

⁷⁷Pakenham, Peace by Ordeal, p. 237.

⁷⁸Chamberlain's Notes, 5 December 1921, CAB 21/253/1.

⁷⁹Ibid. Sturgis diary, 6 December 1921, PRO 30/59/5.

final snag prompted Lloyd George's controversial threat to declare war - 'and war within 3 days' - unless the agreement was accepted by Irish delegation as a whole.⁸⁰

Others have recorded the emotional, sometimes bitter struggle that ensued between the Irish delegates and the final dramatic moments before the agreement was finally signed in the early hours of 6 December.⁸¹ The 'Articles of Agreement for a Treaty', or the 'Treaty' as most were soon calling it, was a richly complex document, intricate in its simplicity.⁸² The first ten of its eighteen articles spoke of Ireland as a whole, granting to it 'the same constitutional status' as the other Dominions of the British Empire.⁸³ Not least, the Irish Free State, as it was to be called, was granted full fiscal autonomy. Article 5 pledged the Irish to assume a share of the United Kingdom's debt up to the granting of independence. The exact figure would be settled by arbitration.⁸⁴

These measures alone signalled a fundamental change. Where the two Irish states were treated as equals under

⁸⁰Ibid, Chamberlain's Notes.

⁸¹Pakenham, Peace by Ordeal, p. 243-249. T.P. Coogan, Michael Collins: A Biography (London, 1990), p. 274-276. Churchill, World Crisis: Vol. V, p. 321-322.

⁸²See Appendix II.

⁸³It has been suggested that in these articles 'the prospect of reunification was more imaginary than real'. See Fanning, Independent Ireland, p. 23. Ulster Unionists felt rather differently. See Craig to Lloyd George, S.F.(B) 42, 14 December 1921, CAB 43/2; and Charles Craig's speech in HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 54, 14 December 1921.

⁸⁴Appendix II, Article 5.

the 1920 Act, these clauses placed the Ulster Unionists at a decided disadvantage should they insist on remaining outside the Irish Dominion.

This set the stage for Articles 11 through 15, what became known as the Treaty's Ulster clauses. Both of the first two of these articles declared that the 'provisions of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 ... shall, so far as they relate to Northern Ireland, continue to be of full force and effect'.⁸⁵ Later arguments over the Treaty's Northern Ireland articles have focused almost exclusively on the second half of Article 12, which established the Boundary Commission. Article 11 and the first half of Article 12 have been overlooked.⁸⁶ But in the view of British civil servants familiar with the negotiations, Northern Ireland's financial obligations, as affirmed in these two articles, posed at least as big a threat to Craig's government as the Boundary Commission.

According to a later Treasury memorandum, the two articles made formal 'a pledge [that] was given by H.M.G. to the Southern Ireland representatives' not to extend the Ulster government's powers in any way, shape or form. 'The reason of course was obvious':

namely to offer as much inducement as possible to the North to come in. If she could hope for a gradual extension of her autonomy ... naturally she would be less disposed to abandon her

⁸⁵Appendix II, Articles 11 and 12.

⁸⁶See, e.g., Lee, Ireland, p. 148-149.

independence.⁸⁷

Explained another Treasury official, it was because of the 1920 Act's restrictive financial provisions 'that the Free State representatives secured the insertion of Article 11', and any 'concession which makes separate existence more attractive to Northern Ireland is really a breach of this condition of the Treaty.'⁸⁸

These interpretations, along with a memorandum written by Lionel Curtis, explain the wording of Lloyd George's letter to Craig which accompanied a copy of the Treaty. The letter, in confirming Northern Ireland's right to opt out of an all-Ireland Parliament, explicitly told Craig that the price of such a decision would be to 'share the rights and obligations of Great Britain.'⁸⁹

If these inducements were not enough to bring about unity, Article 13 ensured that Dublin nevertheless would have a voice in the North's affairs through the Council of Ireland. No such reciprocal right for Belfast remained. The last two articles provided for the North's entry into the Free State, guaranteeing to its government a range of safeguards concerning patronage, taxation, trade and, even, the right to establish and control its

⁸⁷Waterfield to Upcott, 6 April 1923, T 160/163/F.6282.

⁸⁸Upcott to Snowden, 30 January 1924, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1.

⁸⁹Curtis to Devonshire, 17 November 1922, CO 739/8/56786. Lloyd George to Craig, 5 December 1921, LG F/11/3/25.

own military force.⁹⁰

Across the political spectrum, the British press greeted news of the settlement as an unrivalled triumph.⁹¹ Beyond Ireland itself, Lloyd George's skill had vindicated the broader policy of appeasement. 'Nothing henceforth can be as it was before', the Manchester Guardian confidently predicted. In the Treaty's wake, not only should appeasement 'make itself felt far more widely' across the British empire but that it had 'lessons also for [British] policy in Europe.'⁹² For a man already casting an eye in that direction, this was music to Lloyd George's ears.

An ocean away, one absent member of the Cabinet was rather more restrained in his appraisal. Arthur Balfour agreed that there was much to be said for the Treaty, not least that it would 'make an immense difference' to Anglo-American relations. But, he told his sister, 'I cannot help feeling a little uneasy about Ulster, - I trust without good reason.'⁹³

Ulster Says 'No'

Balfour's misgivings did not begin to compare with

⁹⁰Appendix II, Articles 13-15.

⁹¹'Downing St. Drama of the Negotiations', Daily Chronicle, 7 December 1921. 'Towards Irish Peace', The Times; and 'The Settlement', Daily Telegraph, 8 December 1921. For a dissenting opinion, see 'The Provisional Agreement', Morning Post, 7 December 1921.

⁹²'The New Peace', Manchester Guardian, 8 December 1921.

⁹³A.J. to Alice Balfour, 9 December 1921, AJB-S, GD 433/2/76, Reel 8.

the unease felt by his friends in Northern Ireland. The predominant reaction of the Unionist press to news of the Treaty was 'one of profound astonishment', which soon turned to anger. 'Ulster has been betrayed', declared the voice of Unionism in County Tyrone, by that 'Judas Iscariot' - Lloyd George. This same newspaper was even more scathing, if that is possible, when it came to Chamberlain and Birkenhead, the last of whom was 'the most despicable of all'.⁹⁴ This sense of betrayal carried right the way across the Unionist community. A friend told Lady Spender that

it was the saddest day of her life. "England doesn't want us," she said, with a depth of bitterness I cannot convey. ... And now we know that worse is to come, and further pledges are to be broken, for two of the six counties may be taken from us - Tyrone and Fermanagh.⁹⁵

Craig, 'very suspicious of [the] Boundary clauses and financial arrangements', rushed to London where he conferred with Lloyd George and Chamberlain on the 9th. Accounts of what took place vary wildly. Lloyd George emerged from the discussions claiming that Craig was ready to consider Sinn Féin's proposals for an all-Ireland settlement.⁹⁶ According to Lady Craig, her husband said nothing of the kind insisting, instead, that 'on no account' would he give up portions of the six

⁹⁴'Belfast Uneasiness', Irish Independent, 8 December 1921. 'The Agreement with Sinn Féin'; and 'Ulster Betrayed', Tyrone Constitution, 9 and 16 December 1921.

⁹⁵Lady Spender's diary, 16 December 1921, D.1633/2/25.

⁹⁶Lady Craig's diary, 7 December 1921, D.1415/B/38. Jones diary, 9 December 1921, Vol. III, p. 186.

counties. Craig further demanded that the Treaty's financial arrangements should 'be drastically amended.' She also wrote that Lloyd George assured Craig that 'mere rectifications of the Boundary' were all that was envisaged by Article 12, and that the territorial changes would involve 'give and take on both sides'.⁹⁷

It is clear, however, that Craig toyed with the idea of appointing a Boundary Commissioner - provided that the British government would guarantee 'full compensation' to any Unionist who was transferred to the Free State.⁹⁸

Two peers (Lords Dunedin and Clyde) were approached about chairing the Commission; from the Unionist point of view, Bonar Law wrote, 'either of the appointments would be good.'⁹⁹ Meanwhile, an unnamed person was approached to represent Northern Ireland on the tribunal.

'Personally', Charles Craig told his brother, 'I think that with either of the two people as Chairman who were mentioned on Monday, and with our friend as our Commissioner, nothing very serious could happen to us.'¹⁰⁰ Even so, Craig was still apprehensive. 'There is nothing in the terms of the treaty', he pointed out to

⁹⁷Ibid, Lady Craig's diary, 9 December 1921. Also, see Craig to Lloyd George, S.F.(B) 42, 14 December 1921, CAB 43/2.

⁹⁸Craig to Chamberlain [not sent], 14-15[?] December 1921, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/1.

⁹⁹Bonar Law to Lloyd George, 19 December 1921, LG F/31/1/60.

¹⁰⁰Charles to James Craig, 21 December 1921, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/1.

Bonar Law, 'to show that the Boundary Commission must necessarily limit its functioning' to 'little re-adjustments'.¹⁰¹

Any last thoughts that Craig had about going along with the Ulster clauses were erased by Lloyd George's performance during the Treaty debates in the House of Commons. His address, especially on the 'vexed question of Ulster', was vintage Lloyd George, giving with one hand what the other promptly took away.

'[N]ever for a moment' had the government sought to coerce Ulster - but, that 'did not preclude us from endeavouring to persuade Ulster to come into an All-Ireland Parliament.'

A 're-adjustment of boundaries' was all that was envisaged when the Treaty's negotiators drafted Article 12. On the other hand, there was 'no doubt - certainly since the Act of 1920 - that the majority of the people of two counties prefer being with their Southern neighbours to being in the Northern Parliament.'

Just as it would be wrong to coerce Ulster, the government did not 'believe in Ulster coercing other units.'

Before sitting down, Lloyd George also confirmed John Chartres's later assertion that the economic and geographical qualification in the boundary clause was inserted solely to prevent the transfer of isolated areas

¹⁰¹Craig to Bonar Law, 13 December 1921, BL 107/1/93.

such as the Glens of Antrim.¹⁰²

The speech immediately set off alarm bells. Craig sent a threatening letter to Chamberlain insisting on the right of Unionists to arm themselves 'forthwith'. As matters stood, he warned, many of his followers now believed that 'violence is the only language understood by Mr. Lloyd George and his Ministers.'¹⁰³ Chamberlain flatly rejected Craig's allegations that the Unionists had been betrayed. They had only themselves to blame if they were presented with a fait accompli, he reminded Ulster's premier, because Craig and his colleagues had refused to join the Treaty negotiations unless an all-Ireland Parliament was specifically ruled out of the discussions. If the British 'had accepted your condition for attending the Conference', Chamberlain pointed out, 'there would have been no Conference for you to attend.'¹⁰⁴

In any event, the Tory leader assured Craig that the British had not 'overlooked your interest'. It was obvious that any boundary revision could not 'be carried out by Counties as a whole'. To back up his argument, Chamberlain cited Bonar Law's speech in the Commons only the day before, which 'quite correctly interpreted the spirit and the method' in which the Boundary Commission

¹⁰²HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 38-42, 14 December 1921.

¹⁰³Craig to Chamberlain, 15 December 1921, AC 31/2/48.

¹⁰⁴Chamberlain to Craig, 16 December 1921, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/1.

would work.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, to the surprise of many, certainly to the chagrin of quite a few, Bonar Law endorsed the Treaty when he spoke in the House of Commons. Notwithstanding his 'serious objection' to Article 12, he was convinced that the Ulster Unionists had nothing to fear from the agreement.¹⁰⁶

Lloyd George, meanwhile, quickly back-peddled from the controversial statements made during the first day of the Treaty debates. Faced with accusations that he had promised Tyrone and Fermanagh to the Irish negotiators, he solemnly declared that no deals had been struck. He also now implied that the economic and geographic qualifications in Article 12 would sufficiently curb the Boundary Commission's remit.¹⁰⁷

The bitterness displayed in the Commons debate was more acrimonious still in the House of Lords. 'What a fool I was', Lord Carson famously declared. 'I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland, in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power.' It is worth noting that Carson did not address himself to the Boundary Commission but, rather, to the Treaty's financial clauses which he believed to be a greater threat to his Ulster supporters.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Salisbury to Bonar Law, 13 December 1921, BL 107/1/92. Sturgis diary, 17 December 1921, PRO 30/59/5. HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 196-209, 15 December 1921.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, Col. 314-315, 16 December 1921.

¹⁰⁸HL Deb, Vol. 48, Col. 36-53, 14 December 1921.

Birkenhead's response, in which he likened Carson's speech to the ravings of an 'hysterical school-girl', was equally withering. Nor would the lord chancellor give any credit to claims that the government was attempting to coerce Northern Ireland. Was it coercion to insist that if Ulstermen remained in the United Kingdom they ought to pay the same rate of income tax as other British subjects? Surely not. '[W]ith the single exception of the Boundaries Commission', Birkenhead declared, the Ulster Unionists retained all the powers granted to them by the 1920 Act.¹⁰⁹

Both houses of Parliament voted for the Treaty by lopsided majorities on 16 December. In the Commons, 401 MPs supported the agreement, while 58 were opposed. In the Lords, 166 peers were 'content' with the Treaty; 47 members were 'not-content'. Three days later, Parliament was prorogued until the end of January.¹¹⁰

While these debates were taking place in London, a longer drama was being played out in Dublin. Others have explored Dáil Eireann's Treaty debates in such detail that it would be superfluous to cover them here.¹¹¹ And, as has already been pointed out, the agreement's Ulster clauses played but a minor role in these debates. Irish unity hardly rated as a concern to the Treaty's critics,

¹⁰⁹Ibid, Col. 196-213, 16 December 1921.

¹¹⁰Annual Register: 1921, p. 146.

¹¹¹See, e.g., M. Hopkinson, Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War (Dublin, 1988), p. 34-40.

so consumed were they by hatred of the oath of allegiance. 'The difficulty', de Valera admitted during one private session, 'is not the Ulster question'.¹¹²

Nevertheless, the Dáil's dilatory handling of the agreement dashed Griffith's hopes of settling the Ulster Question in the near term. His willingness to sign the Treaty was based in part on Lloyd George's pledge to submit the agreement to Parliament 'as early as possible'. Griffith, in turn, planned to call the Dáil 'within a week' to have the Treaty ratified.¹¹³ Instead, nearly three weeks elapsed between the Dáil's opening debate on the agreement and its acceptance of the Treaty by the slim margin of 64 votes to 57.¹¹⁴ The result, Austen Chamberlain admitted, 'does not promise any too well for the future.'¹¹⁵

Lloyd George was 'furious' when the Dáil failed to come to a quick decision on the Treaty. With his Irish triumph in hand, he wanted to call a snap general election to lay the foundation for his long-cherished Centre Party. But those plans could not be advanced so long as the decision in Dublin was in doubt. 'It has only lately dawned on him', said one observer, 'that the

¹¹²Dáil Deb II: Private Sess., p. 153, 15 December 1921.

¹¹³Chamberlain's Notes, 5 December 1921, CAB 21/253/1.

¹¹⁴Dáil Treaty Deb, p. 345-346, 7 January 1922.

¹¹⁵Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 8 January 1922, AC 6/1/474.

signing in London hasn't disposed of the matter.'¹¹⁶

'Groping in the dark'

The Irish Treaty was the crowning achievement of Lloyd George's post-war administration. 'Nothing has happened since the Armistice', The Nation told its readers, 'that is comparable to this act in importance.' The political ramifications were enormous. Many saw the Treaty not merely as 'a vindication of the principle of Coalition' government but also as the 'funeral of Unionism'. In the Commons debate on the Treaty, wrote one reporter, 'the listener could hear the hollow thud of the earth upon the coffin.'¹¹⁷

That was why so many Tories loathed the achievement.

At first glance, the biggest losers to come out of the Treaty negotiations were the Ulster Unionists and their Die-hard allies. Seeing his government placed on an unequal footing with its Southern counterpart, Craig spent the last days of 1921 fending off Northern Irish businessmen who, 'afraid of their pockets', thought 'they would be better under Dublin than Westminster'.¹¹⁸ Even if they withstood the economic pressure designed to bring them into an all-Ireland Parliament, there was still the Boundary Commission, whose decision would be 'a matter of

¹¹⁶Sturgis diary, 20 December 1921, PRO 30/59/5.

¹¹⁷'Events of the Week', The Nation, 10 December 1921. 'The Peace', Evening Standard, 7 December 1921. 'The Funeral of Unionism', Westminster Gazette, 17 December 1921. Carson agreed. See HL Deb, Vol. 48, Col. 36, 14 December 1921.

¹¹⁸Lady Craig's diary, 20 December 1921, D.1415/B/38.

life and death' to Unionists.¹¹⁹

But the reality was that Craig's government was in a much stronger position than had been the case only a month before. To retain the loyalty of Tory backbenchers during the Commons censure debate on 31 October, Lloyd George gave in to a demand for the transfer of executive power to the Northern Ireland government.¹²⁰ On 22 November a range of executive functions were handed over to the Belfast ministries further entrenching partition. Further transfers covering local government, education and other services were staggered over the next three months.¹²¹ Most importantly, this first transfer gave Craig's government 'unfettered control' of law and order and the administration of justice within the six counties, including supervision of the Special Constabulary. This decision was taken even though it was well-known within government circles that relations between Northern Catholics and the 'B' Specials were 'extremely bitter' and likely to cause trouble. As Mark Sturgis predicted, the government's decision now made 'Ulster the danger point' in the Irish conflict.¹²²

¹¹⁹HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 56-57, 14 December 1921.

¹²⁰C.P. 3369, 6 October 1921, CAB 24/128. HC Deb, Vol. 147, Col. 1414-1415, 31 October 1921. Birkenhead to Lloyd George, 1 November 1921, LG F/4/7/32.

¹²¹J. McColgan, British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920-22 (London, 1983), p. 53-70.

¹²²Sturgis diary, 14 November 1921, PRO 30/59/5. 'Ulster Cope memorandum to Jones, November 1921, CAB 21/243.

It is against these concrete gains that the Treaty's transitory promises must be weighed. At the outset, it should be said that Griffith and his colleagues were sent to London to do the impossible: to secure Irish unity and, if not a republic, then a form of government with greater independence than that of a Dominion. This is not the place to renew the debate over External Association. Rather, the question here is did Griffith and Collins really believe that the Treaty's Ulster clauses would bring about Irish unity in the near term?

Most certainly, the answer is yes. At their meeting with the British negotiators on the afternoon of 5 December, both men pressed Lloyd George to ask Craig whether or not he would join an all-Ireland Parliament. 'It might help us even if it was a negative', Collins said, as this would mean that they would 'have a Boundary Commission at once.'¹²³ Because re-unification was not achieved, Griffith and Collins have since been accused of too readily assuming that Article 12 meant the same thing to both sides.¹²⁴

But according to Lloyd George, it did. Writing many years later, he argued that in such disputes the 'guiding principle' of peace should be the allocation of national groups 'to their motherlands'. This 'human criterion', he held, 'should have precedence over considerations of

¹²³Chamberlain's Notes, 5 December 1921, CAB 21/253.

¹²⁴Joseph Lee, for example, blames the boundary debacle on 'the immaturity of nationalist thinking'. See Ireland, p. 52-53.

strategy or economics or communications, which can usually be adjusted by other means.'¹²⁵ If this was true in other parts of Europe, how was the Irish situation any different? Moreover, in the Irish case, if the Boundary Commission failed to bring about unity in the near term, Craig's government would find itself slowly strangled by the financial restrictions of the 1920 Act. These elements of the agreement have since been overlooked.

This inescapably leads back to the promises made, or not made, by Lloyd George. It is tempting to write off his handling of the Treaty negotiations as crafty at best and, at worst, 'an offence against the light of nations'. In Lord Longford's estimation, Lloyd George may have been an 'inspired negotiator', but his handling of the Irish question showed him to be 'out of place in peace-making.'¹²⁶

Judgments such as these have been made too easily and, anyway, they fail to take account of the state of British politics at the time. It should be remembered that Lloyd George had decided to negotiate with Sinn Féin for a number of reasons. Beset on all sides by threats to his government, his aim was to use an Irish agreement first to neutralise his opponents, then as a steppingstone for a new general election, before moving on to the creation of his Centre Party. Once he realised

¹²⁵D. Lloyd George, The Truth About the Peace Treaties: Vol. I (London, 1938), p. 406.

¹²⁶Pakenham, Peace by Ordeal, p. 259.

that he could not achieve Irish unity, he looked for the next best thing.

This helps to explain his sudden willingness to drop the goal of an all-Ireland Parliament and to switch the pressure he had applied to the Ulster Unionists onto Griffith and his colleagues. As was pointed out earlier, the details of the Irish agreement were not important to Lloyd George. 'We are after a settlement', he reminded his colleagues, 'that [is] our objective.'¹²⁷

On at least one front, Lloyd George scored a clear-cut victory. Ireland 'was the one topic on which the [Wee Free] Liberals could fairly criticise our Coalition policy'. But, Lloyd George said triumphantly, 'we've got rid of it.'¹²⁸ Carson was another casualty. His intemperate opposition to the Treaty accelerated his political eclipse, so much so that one former colleague was forced to conclude that Carson was doing 'a lot of harm' to the Unionist cause.¹²⁹

Nonetheless, the British politician who was to pay the highest price for the Irish Treaty turned out to be Lloyd George himself. During the Irish negotiations, he more than once lived up to his own definition of the 'extraordinary man', extricating himself time and again by doing the 'daring and unexpected'.¹³⁰ But in the

¹²⁷Jones diary, 14 November 1921, Vol. III, p. 164.

¹²⁸Ibid, 9 December 1921, p. 187.

¹²⁹Long to Bonar Law, 6 February 1922, BL 107/2/9.

¹³⁰Riddell diary, 3 April 1919, Intimate Diary, p. 45.

process, Lloyd George justified the worst suspicions about himself. The Irish Treaty was very much his personal creation, and thus was a reflection of him at his best and at his absolute worst.

These suspicions were confirmed by Lloyd George's performance during the Treaty debates. The result was 'a strained atmosphere all round', especially on the Conservative backbenches. 'Half are dissatisfied with Austen', Freddie Guest reported, and few believed that the Treaty had any real chance of success. The only thing stopping a full-fledged revolt was the absence of a leader of 'sufficient standing'.¹³¹

That was no longer true. Despite repeated denials, Bonar Law had emerged as the unofficial leader of the Die-hard movement. Even if the former Tory leader continued to sit on the backbenches, his 'designs', as one reporter put it, 'are on the command'.¹³²

Earlier in the year, Tom Jones had suggested to Lloyd George that 'if he settled Ireland he might be satisfied and "go to Heaven,"' but Lloyd George would not hear of such a fate. '"There is still Europe,"' he told Jones.¹³³ With Ireland at last 'settled', he now contemplated 'a new Conference on the economic world

¹³¹Guest to Churchill, 14 December 1921, Comp IV, 3, p. 1690-1691.

¹³²'Comments', The New Statesman, 3 December 1921. 'Premier and Sir J. Craig', The Times, 19 November 1921.

¹³³Jones to Bonar Law, 22 July 1921, BL 107/1/46.

outlook'.¹³⁴

The truth, of course, was that he had not settled Ireland. Bonar Law recognised this, even if Lloyd George did not. 'It is absurd to think we have settled the Irish Question', he told the Commons. On the contrary, Bonar Law saw 'terrible difficulties' ahead.¹³⁵

Mark Sturgis called the Dáil's vote in favour of the Treaty 'another milestone' in settling the Irish conflict. But, he wrote, 'if Ireland - or England - expects that the Golden Age is dawning I hope they won't be too roughly disillusioned. It is a huge gamble and we are groping in the dark.'¹³⁶

¹³⁴Jones to Hankey, 6 December 1921, CAB 63/34.

¹³⁵HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 208, 15 December 1921.

¹³⁶Sturgis diary, 7 January 1922, PRO 30/59/5.

Chapter 3

The Churchill Dispensation

Then came the Great War. Every institution, almost, in the world was strained. Great empires have been overturned. The whole map of Europe has been changed. The position of countries has been violently altered. The modes of thoughts of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world. But, as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world.

- Winston Churchill¹

In December 1921 Lloyd George stood at the summit of his post-war premiership. Accolades for his Irish settlement flowed in from every nation. 'Even the French', Maurice Hankey reported from the Washington Naval Conference, 'crowded round with tributes'.² Bonar Law's earlier prediction - that Lloyd George could be 'Prime Minister for life if he wants' - looked as if it might be true after all.³ Much as Beatrice Webb detested Lloyd George, she too agreed that he had 'revolutionized the political situation'. With the Irish Treaty in his pocket, he could now call a general election and romp home with 'a secure majority of personal followers'

¹HC Deb, Vol. 150, Col. 1270, 16 February 1922.

²Hankey to Lloyd George, 9 December 1921, CAB 63/34.

³M. Pugh, Lloyd George (Harlow, 1988), p. 128.

leaving his critics in the dust.⁴ Then, at long last, he could build his new Centre Party.

But instead of going from strength to strength, the last ten months of the Coalition government were to be punctuated by a succession of crises in which Ireland figured prominently. Lloyd George's plans for a snap general election had to be delayed and then finally abandoned in the face of stubborn Conservative opposition. Neville Chamberlain was not the only Tory MP who was determined not to be led into the next election by that 'dirty little Welsh attorney'. Nor would he fight a campaign based on an Irish policy which was 'not yet settled' and which was supported by Conservatives only 'very reluctantly'.⁵

Once the Treaty election was abandoned, Lloyd George turned his back on Ireland to embark on a series of international conferences aimed at restoring Europe's pre-war prosperity. '[A]ll his hopes are concentrated on Genoa', wrote Lord Riddell, referring to an international conference scheduled for mid-April.⁶ Irish affairs were turned over to the Colonial Office and to a Cabinet committee chaired by Churchill, where they could absorb his boundless energy.⁷

⁴Webb diary, 7 December 1921 and 4 January 1922, Vol. 36, 3871-3872 and 3881.

⁵Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 7 January 1922, NC 18/1/333.

⁶Riddell diary, 23 March 1922, [McEwen], p. 366-367.

⁷P.G.I. 1, 21 December 1921, CAB 27/154.

Far from proving to be an electoral asset, the Treaty turned out to be something of a liability for the Coalition, at least among Conservatives. In the meantime, the Anglo-Irish War did not end so much as degenerate into a series of violent clashes within Northern Ireland and along the Irish frontier. By June 1922 Irish Nationalists and Ulster Unionists would be in a virtual state of war with one another. Only the advent of civil war in the South between pro- and anti-Treatyites would prevent the resumption of full-scale hostilities between Britain and the IRA.

These events have been explored elsewhere and it is not proposed to delve into them in great detail here.⁸ The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the Treaty settlement began to unravel as Lloyd George and his colleagues found themselves in an increasingly untenable political position. Both the Treaty and the political situation reflected and, in the process, altered the other. Just as mounting chaos in Ireland accelerated the Coalition's demise, so the government's increasing instability forced the Coalition's leaders slowly to back away from the inducements in the Treaty that were supposed to bring about Irish re-unification. In particular, this chapter will scrutinize the decisions taken by Winston Churchill. During the last ten months of the Lloyd George government, no British politician was

⁸See, instead, Curran, Irish Free State, and Hopkinson, Green Against Green.

more important in Irish affairs. At the same time, Churchill was beginning his long trek from the Liberal Party back to the Conservatives. The decisions he took on Irish policy were bound to be affected by this journey and by his isolated position in British politics.

Churchill's efforts, however, would not be enough to save the Coalition government. Looking back many years later, Leo Amery recalled that with each new incident in Ireland Tory MPs felt a mounting 'sense of shame and indignation' that they had ever allowed themselves to be persuaded to support the Treaty.⁹ Far from fading away, Ireland was the thunder of a storm gathering force just beyond the horizon. The rumble of discontent over the Irish settlement was a warning of what was to come when the storm finally hit, sweeping Lloyd George from power forever.

Ambiguities in the Treaty

A week after Dáil Eireann voted for the Treaty, the Southern Ireland Parliament created by the 1920 Act met to elect a Provisional Government to administer Ireland until the Free State formally came into being. It then dispersed, never to sit again. Two days later, Collins, as head of the Provisional Government, formally took possession of Dublin Castle and the British Army began its withdrawal from the 26 counties. Here was an 'outward and visible sign that British rule was indeed at

⁹L.S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol. II: War and Peace, 1914-1929 (London, 1958), p. 231.

an end'.¹⁰ Already, though, there were problems with the agreement. It was clear that the British and the Irish interpreted the Treaty differently and that their disagreements centred, not surprisingly, on Ulster.

As Sir James Masterton-Smith, the Colonial Office's chief civil servant, explained it, the matter boiled down to a distinction between two words. The Irish were under the impression that the British Parliament's December vote on the Treaty had 'ratified' the agreement, when in fact it had merely been 'approved'. Ratification of the Treaty would come later with the simultaneous ratification of the Irish Free State Constitution, a process that was going to take several months to complete. Only then would the Treaty's 'Ulster month' commence, the four-week interval during which Craig's government would have to decide if it was going to join the Free State. 'This', Masterton-Smith conceded, 'will be a disappointment to the Irish signatories, who took the view that they ought to be informed, within a month or two of the approval of the Treaty by the Dail, whether Northern Ireland intended to stay out or come in.'¹¹

That was an understatement. The new Free State leaders were more angry still when they learned that instead of proceeding with the Treaty's ratification, Parliament first had to give the Provisional Government

¹⁰Annual Register: 1922, p. 9-10.

¹¹Masterton-Smith to Churchill, 4 January 1922, WSC . 22/11/2.

'a legal existence', allowing it to administer the South, to write a Constitution, and to call an election. Both Griffith and Collins objected. Collins pointed out that the Treaty was signed on the understanding that Ulster would have a month in which to decide whether or not to join the new dominion. If not, the South could expect to gain 'two whole and two half counties' from Craig's state. Now, however, they 'found the Treaty working out on different lines'.¹²

Collins's determination to settle the Ulster dispute sooner rather than later had already resulted in the first of what became known as the Craig-Collins Pacts.¹³ In short order the Pact set aside the Boundary Commission and proposed that the two leaders would 'mutually agree' to Ireland's 'future boundaries'. Likewise, the Council of Ireland was to be dropped in favour of 'a more suitable system ... for dealing with problems affecting all Ireland.' Collins further pledged to end the 'Belfast Boycott', a Sinn Féin-led campaign against the city's businesses in response to the shipyard expulsions of 1920. Craig, in turn, pledged to see to it that the expelled workers were allowed to return to their jobs - economic conditions permitting. Collins also pressed for the release of political prisoners being held in Northern

¹²Minutes of conferences with Irish Ministers, 22/N/60(3) and (5), 5-6 February 1922.

¹³M. Hopkinson, 'The Craig-Collins Pacts of 1922: Two Attempted Reforms of the Northern Ireland Government', Irish Historical Studies, Vol. XXVII, No. 106, November 1990, p. 145-158.

jails.¹⁴

Although the agreement was widely hailed in the British press, it ran into trouble within a fortnight.¹⁵ According to Craig, his discussions with Collins were premised on his opening statement that 'an All Ireland Parliament was out of the question' and that one could not be expected for 'years to come - 10, 20, or 50 years'. Craig pointed out to his Cabinet that the new boundary agreement, as well as getting rid of the hated Commission, was significant for two reasons: first, it meant that Collins recognised that Northern Ireland was here to stay and, second, the amending of Article 12 meant that the entire Treaty 'was now no longer inviolate'. In other words, the Provisional Government could have no room for complaint if the Ulster Unionists and their Conservative allies further revised the Treaty in the House of Commons. Craig said little about the Pact's economic clauses, except about the Boycott. As for the promise of an amnesty, Ulster's premier said that he looked upon political prisoners as '"trump" cards to be played' in return for Sinn Féin displays of good behaviour.¹⁶

Collins's reasons for signing the Pact could not

¹⁴C.P. 3644, 21 January 1922, CAB 24/132.

¹⁵'The First Step Towards Unity', Westminster Gazette; 'A Step Towards Irish Unity', Yorkshire Post; 'Towards Irish Unity', Liverpool Post; 'Irish Union', Manchester Guardian, all dated 23 January 1922.

¹⁶Cabinet conclusions, 26 January 1922, PRONI, CAB4/30/1.

have been any more different. His object was to 'exclude English influence' from Irish affairs, especially on the boundary question. It had lately dawned on Collins that the real power to determine Ireland's frontier lay with the Boundary Commission's British-appointed chairman. Taking London out of the equation changed all that. 'It will be for us to insist upon our interpretation', Collins declared, and although his government was committed to a 'peace policy', it was prepared to 'fight for that [interpretation] in the event of the North refusing to come in.'¹⁷

The breakdown of the Craig-Collins Pact on 2 February exploded 'like a bombshell in the Coalition ranks'. Parliament was due to begin debate on the Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill to give the Provisional Government legal standing. The bill stood no chance in a Conservative-dominated House of Commons if the Treaty would allow counties or parts of counties to vote themselves out of Northern Ireland.¹⁸ Even Churchill was baffled. 'Everything is in the soup again', he told Curzon, 'and I have no idea at present what ought to be said about it.'¹⁹

Up to this point, the Provisional Government was in

¹⁷Collins to King, 26 January 1922, D/T, S 1801/Q. PG Minutes, 30 January 1922, D/T, G 1/1.

¹⁸'Coalition Teetering Over New Irish Abyss', Sunday Express, 5 February 1922.

¹⁹Churchill to Curzon, 4 February 1922, IO, MSS Eur. F 112/223, ff. 95-96.



Northern Ireland in 1922
 Source: 'To Rescue Ireland', The Times,
 25 March 1922.

a stronger position than Craig and his lieutenants. This advantage began to shift when the partition issue became entangled in what amounted to a spate of state-sanctioned kidnappings of Unionists along the Irish frontier. From this point until the onset of the Irish Civil War, the boundary region was a scene of ongoing violence. Collins may have felt that he had good reason to back such operations, as they turned the attention of anti-Treaty elements of the IRA against a common enemy.²⁰ In the long run, however, this decision was self-defeating because it cost the Provisional Government much of its credibility in London. Churchill was right when he told Collins that a 'bloody fight' on the frontier would benefit only those 'who wish to see Ireland partitioned permanently'.²¹

Just as Churchill had predicted, the chain-reaction of events along the border had a 'disturbing effect' on Conservative MPs. Within the government itself, a group of Tory junior ministers decided 'to act together' to thwart any large-scale hand over of Ulster's territory to the South. 'The only way out', Lord Bayford wrote, 'seems to be to appoint as Chairman someone who is sure to decide as we want' though, he admitted, 'that seems a poor game.'²² Poor game or not, Chamberlain could ill-

²⁰Hopkinson, Green Against Green, p. 77-88.

²¹Churchill to Collins, 13 February 1922, CO 906/20.

²²'Attack on Irish Treaty', The Times, 15 February 1922. Bayford diary, 14 February 1922, p. 173.

afford to ignore this seething rebellion in his own ranks. Unless the Provisional Government took clear steps to release the kidnapped men and end the border disturbances, he warned Griffith, 'I will consider myself absolved from the Treaty'.²³ This was no idle threat.

'Legalising' the Provisional Government

In the spring of 1922, the struggle over Ireland's future was fought on two fronts in the British political arena. Publicly, the government and its opponents battled one another over the Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill. Privately, Craig was engaged in an all-out effort to re-write the financial provisions of the 1920 Act and, hence, the Treaty.

Aware that they did not have enough votes to kill the Free State Bill outright, Die-hards planned to introduce a series of amendments most of them directed at the Treaty's boundary clauses. If Churchill failed to give definite assurances on Northern Ireland's territorial integrity, as many as 150 Conservatives were ready to bolt from the government. On the other hand, if Parliament narrowly defined the Commission's remit, an open breach would be created with Collins and Griffith.²⁴ Either way, the aim was to mortally wound the Coalition and so bring about its collapse.

²³Conference minutes, 22/N/153, 9 February 1922, CAB 21/254.

²⁴'Attack on Irish Treaty', The Times, 15 February 1922. James to Charles Craig, 11 February 1922, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/1.

Churchill faced the Die-hard challenge head-on. He admitted that the Boundary Commission's award might affect Northern Ireland's existing frontiers; indeed, it might 'affect them prejudicially'. There was no point glossing over this fact. But what was the alternative? Short of 'tearing up the Treaty', Parliament had no power whatsoever to alter Article 12. Later, though, he dismissed the 'absurd supposition' that Northern Ireland would be reduced 'to its preponderatingly Orange areas'. Not only would this create 'a fatal and permanent obstacle' to Irish unity; if Ulster was so 'maltreated and mutilated', Churchill suggested, the government would be bound to protect Northern Ireland as a separate 'economic entity'.²⁵ By such gestures - now on one side, now on the other - Churchill steered the Irish Bill through the Commons to complete its passage on 8 March. A similar effort by Birkenhead ensured its passage in the House of Lords later that same month.²⁶

The financial balance

While the fight over the Treaty's boundary clauses took place in public, Craig was involved in an equally intense struggle to undo the financial arrangements which already were beginning to be felt by his government. There were three pressing issues: Craig was determined to roll back his government's imperial contribution, to

²⁵HC Deb, Vol. 150, Col. 1269-1271, 1279, 16 February 1922.

²⁶See, e.g., HL Deb, Vol. 49, Col. 901-912, 27 March 1922.

secure financing of the Special Constabulary, and to ensure the solvency of the Northern Ireland Unemployment Insurance Fund. Giving in to these demands, however, meant that Lloyd George and his colleagues would have to break their pledge to the Irish Treaty signatories that Northern Ireland's status would not be altered, for good or ill, if it opted out of the Free State.

Craig's immediate problem sprang from his demand for the transfer of executive power to the Belfast government in the autumn of 1921. In a word, his ministers did not have enough money to administer the departments which they now controlled. Further complicating matters, the British government was nearly two-thirds of the way through its 1921-22 fiscal year when the services were transferred. Two civil servants, R.G. Hawtrey, representing the Treasury, and Ernest Clark, representing Northern Ireland's Department of Finance, were told to devise an arrangement which would eliminate the deficit while still remaining 'within the four corners of the Government of Ireland Act'.²⁷

To square the circle, Craig accepted the Treasury's method for allocating revenue for the last third of the fiscal year; in return, he received an additional grant of £600,000. This arrangement conveniently covered a £530,000 shortfall in Ulster's unemployment fund and provided an additional cushion for last-minute

²⁷Hawtrey memorandum, 10 December 1921, T 163/4/10/G.256/08.

emergencies. Immediate funding for the Specials was taken care of by Lloyd George's suggestion that the Constables should be temporarily classified 'as a military force', so that this shifted the burden of paying for law and order onto imperial shoulders. According to Otto Niemeyer, the Treasury's controller of finance, the deal was also probably illegal. Certainly, it was not 'within the four corners of the 1920 Act' nor of the Treaty.²⁸

Civil servants both in and out of the Treasury were particularly uneasy about continued British subsidies for the Specials. A report to Churchill's Irish Committee recommended terminating British support of the force 'at the earliest date that is legal or possible'.²⁹

Elsewhere, Robert Horne, the chancellor of the exchequer, wrote that the government did not intend 'to let N.E. Ireland have Specials ad libitum'.³⁰

Even so, in early March the Cabinet agreed to a grant of £850,000 to underwrite the Specials through the first six months of fiscal year 1922-23. Knowing that such a move would likely lead to protests in the House of Commons, the Cabinet approved a plan - conceived by Horne - to hide the assistance in 'a general grant of money to

²⁸Ibid, and Niemeyer memorandum, 12 December 1921; and Niemeyer to Cuthbertson, 16 December 1921.

²⁹Ibid, 'Draft Report on the Special Constabulary', 17 January 1922.

³⁰Ibid, Horne to Niemeyer, 15 December 1921.

Ulster for unemployment and other services'.³¹ A few days later, Churchill's committee agreed that the Joint Exchequer Board should be asked to re-consider the amount of Ulster's imperial contribution for the next two years. At the same time, the committee also concluded that if it could be shown that the establishment of the Free State resulted in a higher cost of reserved services for Northern Ireland, the difference would be made up by the British Treasury.³²

Taken together, these measures disguised a fundamental re-ordering of Northern Ireland's financial relations with Great Britain. The complaint 'could reasonably be made', pointed out one member of Churchill's committee, that

Ulster was being bribed to remain disassociated from the South, whereas in the negotiations with the Southern Irish the British Government had always stated that if Ulster chose to disassociate herself from the South, she would have to bear her full share of the financial burdens of the United Kingdom.³³

Put another way, these decisions were a 'breach of faith' with Irish leaders.³⁴ As both Tom Jones and Lionel Curtis reminded the Cabinet, Arthur Griffith had accepted that Northern Ireland might remain outside the Free State. But, if so, its 'powers, privileges and

³¹C. 15(22), 6 March 1922, CAB 23/29.

³²P.G.I. 56(Revise), 7 March 1922, CAB 27/154. Blakett to Colwyn, 16 March 1922, T 163/6/8/G.256/042.

³³P.G.I. 16th Conclusions, 10 March 1922, CAB 27/153.

³⁴Jones to Lloyd George, 17 March 1922, LG F/26/1/17.

revenues were to be no greater and no less than they would have been' under the 1920 Act. Now, however, a military force was in the making whose ultimate purpose might be to thwart 'the most vital provisions of the Treaty.'³⁵ Despite the fact that Austen Chamberlain believed that Jones and Curtis were 'substantially right', their objections went unheeded.³⁶

Northern Ireland's Unemployment Insurance Fund

Although these developments went some way toward alleviating Craig's financial worries, they did not solve a potentially longer term problem. Few other regions of the British Isles suffered from the post-war economic depression as much as Northern Ireland.³⁷ Under the 1920 Act, however, unemployment relief was a 'transferred' service, for which the Belfast government was solely responsible - a fact that Treasury officials repeatedly reminded Craig and his ministers, not to mention their own political masters.³⁸

Again, Ulster's prime minister found himself in a

³⁵C.P. 3873, 18 March 1922, CO 739/4/15533.

³⁶Chamberlain to Churchill, 24 March 1922, WSC 22/12/66.

³⁷According to one historian, by the summer of 1922, 25 per cent of Northern Ireland's work force was unemployed. In the other regions of the United Kingdom most severely affected by the economic downturn, the unemployment rates were 21 per cent (Scotland) and 18 per cent (the Midlands and North-east England). See Rhodes James, British Revolution, p. 438.

³⁸Niemeyer memorandum, 12 December 1921, T 163/4/10/G.256/08. Niemeyer to Horne; and Blakett to Horne, 5 May and 12 June 1922, T 163/6/11/G.256/049.

dilemma largely of his own making. In March he publicly declared that where 'unemployment and benefits are concerned', Ulster's workers would receive the same assistance as their British counterparts. Making this guarantee was highly irresponsible, because Craig was again committing his government to expend money it did not have. He admitted as much in this same speech, pointing out that such programmes would be 'difficult to finance at the moment'.³⁹

But whereas the imperial government was ready to lend a hand when it came to financing the Specials, this time there was to be no bail out for Craig's government. It soon became obvious that Ulster's premier was getting round this refusal by using funds for the Special Constabulary to employ jobless Protestants. In May, he informed Horne and Churchill that he needed another £5 million for the Specials to carry 'us over the immediate few months'. At the same time, he asked for an additional £160,000 to cover an earlier shortfall in the unemployment budget, arguing that the deficit had occurred before his government took over responsibility for the fund.⁴⁰

Viewed from the Treasury, Craig's incessant demands simply proved that he wanted 'the best of both worlds'.⁴¹

³⁹NI HC Deb, Vol. 2, Col. 18-19, 14 March 1922.

⁴⁰Craig to Churchill; Niemeyer memorandum; and Craig to Horne, 17, 22 May, 5 June 1922, T 163/6/11/G.256/049.

⁴¹Ibid, Blakett to Horne, 12 June 1922.

In early June, Horne outlined for his Cabinet colleagues the extent to which the British Exchequer was propping up Craig's government. This support had 'already gone far beyond what was contemplated in the [1920] Act', and it was becoming 'increasingly difficult' to defend such grants in the House of Commons.⁴² But having fed the Belfast government's appetite, Horne and his colleagues were discovering that its needs were insatiable. At the end of May, the Committee of Imperial Defence approved a request allowing active military officers to be temporarily assigned to the Specials. The committee also approved the 'loan' of munitions and other supplies, including 23,000 rifles and nearly 300 machine guns.⁴³

On 19 July, Horne agreed to contribute another £2 million to the Specials, doing so 'on the definite understanding that it is all that I can grant for the financial year 1922/23.' While Craig readily accepted this condition, the deal provoked a storm of protest in Churchill's Irish Committee. However, its members had little choice but to accept the deal once they were told that 'any Prime Minister of Northern Ireland would resign if he were deprived of the "B" and "C" specials'.⁴⁴ Despite the condition imposed by Horne's 'final' offer, within two months Craig was back again. This time, he

⁴²C.P. 4201, 9 June 1922, CAB 24/137.

⁴³S.S. (I.C.) 5th Minutes, 22 May 1922, CAB 16/42/1.

⁴⁴Horne to Craig; Craig to Horne; and P.G.I. 24th Conclusions, all dated 19 July 1922, T 160/131/F.4855/1.

wanted another £200,000 for fiscal year 1922-23, and a British commitment to grant £1.35 million to the Specials for the following year.⁴⁵ It is true that the deteriorating situation in Ireland played its part in persuading Lloyd George and his colleagues that they must come to the aid of Ulster's government.⁴⁶ But that does not explain why the Coalition so readily gave in to Craig's demands. To do that, it is necessary to return to the world of British politics.

Conservative rebellion

In the early months of 1922, Lloyd George and his colleagues were, as one of them wrote, 'in a very awkward position'. Simply put, the government was running out of ideas and of support.⁴⁷ This dilemma was particularly acute for the government's Tory supporters. As Leo Amery pointed out to Chamberlain, there was not 'a single item in our present policy' which appealed to the 'instincts or traditions' of the Conservative Party. 'What shall we have to offer', Amery asked, 'beyond a vista of Conferences which may, or may not, bring us nearer to European peace?' As for Ireland, Amery felt that most Tories would concede that 'the Irish arrangement was inevitable, possibly even wise'. But, he went on, 'their main feeling is one of despondency and moral

⁴⁵Ibid, Craig to Churchill, 19 September 1922.

⁴⁶See, e.g., C. 27(22), 16 May 1922, CAB 23/30.

⁴⁷Montagu to Reading, 23 February 1922, IO MSS Eur. E. 238/4, No. 6. 'Electioneering', The Times, 2 February 1922.

unsettlement.'⁴⁸

In mid-January, a group of activists that included Carson, Lord and Lady Londonderry, Lord Salisbury, Ronald McNeill, and Sir Henry Wilson (though he was still chief of the imperial general staff) discussed the formation of 'a real Conservative Party'.⁴⁹ As one dissident put it, 'unless Mr Chamberlain's action in surrendering to Sinn Fein be repudiated' there seemed to him no reason for the party's continued existence. 'If it does not matter whether you are a Unionist or a Home Ruler', he asked, 'does anything matter at all'?⁵⁰ The trouble for the Die-hards was, as always, finding someone to lead the rebellion.⁵¹

With Bonar Law still holding back, Die-hard hopes turned to Arthur Balfour. Recently returned from his successful negotiations at the Washington Naval Conference, both pro- and anti-Coalitionists believed that Balfour still retained a good deal of influence within the party. Carson, who was certain that the former leader could be won over to the Die-hards, openly advocated a 'Conservative election headed by A.J.B.' If nothing else, another Die-hard wrote, Balfour's defection would give their movement the 'push off' needed to 'get

⁴⁸Amery to Chamberlain, 26 January 1922, AC 24/4/1.

⁴⁹Wilson diary, 14 January 1922, HHW 1/31/1.

⁵⁰Oliver to Salisbury, 15 March 1922, S(4) 100/89.

⁵¹Lady Carson's diary, 23 January 1922, D.1507/C/7.

rid of L.G.'⁵² For this reason alone, Lloyd George was just as determined to keep him in the Coalition.⁵³ The stumbling block was Balfour's notable, and disturbing, silence on Ireland.

To head off Balfour's defection, Birkenhead drafted one of the most controversial, not to say oft-quoted, pronouncements ever made by a Treaty negotiator on the agreement. In a personal letter, Birkenhead assured his elder colleague that, whatever anyone else might say, there was no possibility of Northern Ireland losing counties to the Free State. The Boundary Commission, 'not being presided over by a lunatic', would be aware of the limits of its jurisdiction and 'reach a rational conclusion.'⁵⁴ As will be shown in a later chapter, Birkenhead's justification was not nearly as conclusive as he led Balfour to believe. For the moment, though, he succeeded in his primary aim. 'If a "lead" from me is what people want', Balfour told Sir Edward Grigg the next day, 'they shall certainly have it'.⁵⁵

In a major address delivered on 7 March, Balfour gave a ringing endorsement not only to the Coalition but

⁵²Wilson diary, 1 March 1922, HHW 1/31/1-2.

⁵³Riddell diary, 28-29 January 1922, Intimate Diary, p. 351.

⁵⁴Birkenhead to Balfour [copy], 3 March 1922, PRONI, CAB9Z/8/1. The letter is reprinted in Appendix III.

⁵⁵Balfour to Grigg, 4 March 1922, AJB-S, GD 433/2/1, Reel 1.

also to its handling of Ireland.⁵⁶ Instead of boosting support for Lloyd George, however, Balfour's speech undermined his own credibility with many Tories who now saw him as hopelessly out of touch. After his glorious 'resurrection' at the Naval Conference, there were hopes that Balfour might again become a major political figure. But, wrote one disappointed admirer, these hopes were dashed by his 'shocking relapse in the city last week!'⁵⁷

Despite murmurings of discontent among Conservatives of all shades, Chamberlain throughout this period continually misjudged the mood of his party. Convinced of a 'growing movement of opinion' against the Die-hards,⁵⁸ he called a meeting of Conservative MPs in mid-March, where they were asked to endorse the leadership's 'determination to stand by the Prime Minister.' Instead, backbench Tories made it plain that they would do nothing that might cause a split with those who opposed the government 'on the ground of its Irish policy'. For Lloyd George, the resulting situation was 'worse than if the meeting had never been held.'⁵⁹

Emboldened by their success, the Die-hards went over to the attack. On 5 April, William Joynson-Hicks and Ronald McNeill laid down a parliamentary motion demanding

⁵⁶'"Coalition Best." Sir A. Balfour on Unity', The Times, 8 March 1922.

⁵⁷Tyrrell to Strachey, 17 March 1922, Strachey Papers, S/19/4/11.

⁵⁸Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 11 March 1922, AC 5/1/229.

⁵⁹'The Expiring Coalition', The Times, 15 March 1922.

to know 'whether in principle the Coalition is Liberal or Conservative.'⁶⁰ Much of the ensuing debate provided a foretaste of the charges that were to swirl round the government later in the year. Months before the storm burst over Lloyd George's sale of honours, his opponents rained down abuse on the government for promising to pursue 'one policy and one set of principles in regard to Ireland' only to lead Parliament in the opposite direction. This, said Viscount Wolmer, explained why the public had 'lost faith in the sincerity of the Coalition' and in politicians in general.⁶¹

Chamberlain, in his own words, turned on these tormentors 'like a nasty, vicious beast' and gave what some regarded as the best fighting speech of his career. The gamble worked, and the Die-hards' motion was soundly defeated by a vote of 288 to 95. Although justifiably proud of his victory, Chamberlain drew the wrong conclusions from this episode. Combined with a vote of support for Lloyd George's Genoa policy, held two days earlier, this turn of events led the Tory leader into a false sense of security. It would prove to be a costly mistake.⁶²

'Churchill's dilemma

The effect of the Conservative rebellion brought on

⁶⁰HC Deb, Vol. 152, Col. 2344-2357, 5 April 1922.

⁶¹Ibid, Col. 2375-2376.

⁶²Ibid, Col. 2365-2374, 2387-2390. Austen to Hilda Chamberlain, 18 April 1922, AC 5/1/233. Dutton, Chamberlain, p. 178. Annual Register: 1922, p. 44.

by Ireland was not solely a problem for Tory members of the government. Churchill at this time found himself increasingly out of step with Lloyd George in particular, but also with his Coalition Liberal colleagues.

Depending on the issue, complained Edwin Montagu, 'Winston jumps from the diehard to the Liberal camp as he works from Egypt or India to Ireland.'⁶³

There was every indication that Churchill would not follow Lloyd George out of office if he could help it.⁶⁴ But where was he to turn? The Conservatives - many of whom saw him as 'the friend of our enemies, and the enemy of our friends' - did not want him.⁶⁵ Having left the party in 1904, it was difficult to see how he could work his way back into its ranks. Nevertheless, Churchill at this time began to re-establish himself as a 'Tory Democrat'.⁶⁶ This transformation was bound to affect his outlook on any number of issues, none more so than Ireland.

Churchill's change of direction was evident during the debates on the Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill. While he maintained that 'fair play' must be the

⁶³H.A.L. Fisher diary, 17 January, 21 and 28 February 1922, MSS 18. Montagu to Reading, 23 February 1922, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/4, No. 6.

⁶⁴Sassoon to Lloyd George, 13 February 1922, LG F/45/1/8. Beaverbrook to Lloyd George, 13 March 1922, LG F/4/6/6.

⁶⁵'Duke's Angry Shriek', Irish Independent, 12 June 1922.

⁶⁶'I am what I have always been - a Tory Democrat', he later said. Riddell diary, 30 May 1923, [McEwen] p. 388.

watchwords in Britain's dealings with both Irish governments, he went on to say that 'though we are impartial we cannot be indifferent. Naturally, our hearts warm towards those in the North who are helping, and have helped so long, to keep the old flag flying.'⁶⁷

In unguarded moments, he went much further, as occurred at a dinner party in early March. 'My chat with Winston was most interesting', Lady Craig wrote in her diary. His assurance that no one in Lloyd George's Cabinet 'would stand more than rectification of boundaries' and that 'Ulster would come out top' was then repeated to Craig himself, so boisterously that Ulster's premier turned to Clementine Churchill for help. 'Take him home', Craig implored, 'before he incriminates himself further!'⁶⁸

Given the circumstances, one such incident might be dismissed. However, Churchill then repeated these assurances to Craig while they were in the middle of negotiations the following day.⁶⁹ As Churchill himself later put it to Tom Jones, it was important to him that he 'retain the confidence of the Ulster people'.⁷⁰ While he may have had sound reasons for feeling this way, Churchill's actions put a question mark over any claims that he was impartial in his dealings with the two Irish

⁶⁷HC Deb, Vol. 150, Col. 1281, 16 February 1922.

⁶⁸Lady Craig's diary, 9 March 1922, D.1415/B/38.

⁶⁹Ibid, 10 March 1922.

⁷⁰Jones diary, 7 June 1922, Vol. III, p. 210.

governments.

The road to civil war

Despite the massive assistance rendered to Craig's government, outrages occurred almost daily in the six counties, especially in Belfast. In an attempt to stem the violence, Churchill convinced the two Irish governments to meet at the Colonial Office at the end of March. The result was an 11-point agreement which became known as the second Craig-Collins Pact.⁷¹ Much of the accord dealt with the restoration of law and order in the six counties; but it also included a British promise of up to £500,000 to employ the jobless. Craig again pledged to 'use every effort to secure the reparation of the expelled workers' of 1920, economic conditions permitting. Clause 7 pledged the three governments to meet again after Parliament's ratification of the Free State Constitution, but before the end of the Ulster month, to ascertain '[w]hether means can be devised to secure the unity of Ireland' or, barring that, whether it was possible to settle this issue other 'than by recourse to the Boundary Commission'.⁷²

Although the Pact opened with a Churchillian flourish - 'PEACE is today declared' - the immediate result was more, not less, killing in the six counties. In his later report on the agreement, S.G. Tallents

⁷¹Summary of negotiations, 29-30 March 1922, D/T, S 1801/A.

⁷²Ibid.

surmised that though both Irish governments desired to make the Pact succeed, 'they were estranged by causes which were from the start ... beyond their control.'⁷³

It is probably closer to the truth to say that the two governments were committed to the agreement only in so far as it advanced their own interests.

In any case, with the violence continuing unabated, Collins agreed to a highly risky 'invasion' of the North by both pro- and anti-Treaty factions of the IRA. A series of attacks, mounted along the border between mid-May and early June, climaxed when pro-Treaty forces clashed with British troops in the towns of Belleek and Pettigo on the Fermanagh-Donegal border. Despite efforts to hide Provisional Government involvement, Craig's government soon had enough evidence linking Dublin to the border violence.⁷⁴ The result of the invasion, aside from its abject failure, was to blight Collins's credibility with the British and served to excuse the repressive actions taken by Craig's government, including the wholesale internment of Nationalist and Sinn Féin leaders in the North.

The fracturing between London and Dublin was further complicated by the fact that southern Ireland was well on the road to civil war. Challenges to the Provisional Government's authority were rampant, the most spectacular being the occupation of Ireland's legal centre, the Four

⁷³S.F.(B)-66, 6 July 1922, CO 739/16/33341.

⁷⁴Spender to Tallents, 29 June 1922, CO 906/23.

Courts, by members of the anti-Treaty IRA. In an effort to avoid disaster, Collins startled everyone when, on 20 May, he signed an electoral pact with de Valera. Both pro- and anti-Treaty wings of Sinn Féin were guaranteed a proportion of seats in the new Dáil Eireann to be elected in June, based on their equivalent strength in the previous assembly. In other words, the pro-Treaty faction would maintain a slight advantage.⁷⁵

Collins's move confirmed Churchill's worst fears that he was witnessing Ireland's 'social disintegration'. Chamberlain was equally apprehensive. On the eve of the Sinn Féin pact, he still believed that Collins and Griffith were 'playing straight'. Now, he spoke for most of his Cabinet colleagues when he said that though he continued to trust Griffith, he no longer believed that Collins was 'keeping faith with us'.⁷⁶

Collins was far from the only member of the Provisional Government who would have found that accusation hard to stomach. Among the Treaty's staunchest supporters in Ireland there was growing disenchantment and a feeling that they were being misled by the British. This was nowhere more true than when it came to the Ulster clauses, which London seemed to reinterpret in favour of Craig's government with each new pronouncement. The British 'would do nothing to put

⁷⁵Hopkinson, Green Against Green, p. 72-73, 97-101.

⁷⁶C. 27(22), 16 May 1922, CAB 23/30. Chamberlain to Long, 19 May 1922, AC 33/1/63. Conference minutes, 23 May 1922, CAB 21/208.

Belfast right', Collins complained to Tom Jones; 'even the P.M. was incredibly callous about the murder of Ulster Catholics.'⁷⁷

In Belfast, Craig used the Collins-de Valera agreement to justify repudiating his own second pact with the Provisional Government chairman. Nor would he hear any more foolishness about altering Northern Ireland's frontiers. 'What we have now we hold, and we hold against all combinations.'⁷⁸ 'The Boundary Commission', Craig told Churchill a few days later, 'has been at the root of all evil.'⁷⁹

Amid this turmoil, Collins and Griffith presented the Free State's proposed Constitution to the British Cabinet. In an effort to win over anti-Treatyites, they proposed a document which, in the words of one historian, 'would be short, simple, and easy to change as Ireland moved to complete freedom.'⁸⁰ In other words, it was a document that was bound to be wholly unacceptable to any British government which depended on the Conservative Party to stay in office. As Lloyd George bluntly put it, this was not a Dominion constitution, 'it was a

⁷⁷See, e.g., Mulcahy to Griffith, 24 March 1922, in M. Farrell, Arming the Protestants: The Formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, 1920-27 (London, 1983), p. 100. Jones diary, 30 May 1922, Vol. III, p. 203.

⁷⁸NI HC Deb, Vol. 2, Col. 598, 23 May 1922.

⁷⁹Craig to Churchill, 26 May 1922, CO 739/14/26434.

⁸⁰Curran, Irish Free State, p. 200.

Republic in disguise.'⁸¹

In fact, the two sides were back where they were before the Treaty was signed. Once again, the issues were partition on the one hand and allegiance to the crown on the other. As before, the government could expect greater support from the public if a break occurred over allegiance; on partition, Lloyd George pointed out, 'our case was weak.' If anything this was truer now than ever. As he reminded his colleagues, the fact was that most of those killed in the six counties were Catholics. 'No one had been punished, we had made no enquiry, we had armed 48,000 Protestants.' Craig's Specials, Lloyd George argued, were no different from Mussolini's Black Shirts - and just as ill-disciplined. As during the Treaty negotiations, it was imperative that they 'eliminate the Ulster issue and leave a clean issue of "Republic versus the British Empire".'⁸²

In the end, a complete breakdown over the proposed Constitution was settled by Griffith's answers to a series of questions which securely anchored the Free State within the British Commonwealth.⁸³ Collins, meanwhile, repudiated his Pact with de Valera two days before the Irish went to the polls on 16 June. When the

⁸¹According to Churchill, the document had a 'Bolshevik character'! See 'Irish Conference', and chronology of negotiations, 27 May 1922, CAB 21/257.

⁸²C. 30(22), 30 May 1922, CAB 23/30.

⁸³Lloyd George to Griffith, S.F.(B) 62, 1 June 1922, CAB 21/256(II).

votes were tallied, only thirty-six anti-Treaty candidates were victorious. The new Dáil Eireann would be composed of fifty-eight pro-government TDs, along with thirty-four members representing Labour and several other smaller parties all of whom also supported the Treaty.⁸⁴

Despite the outcome of the South's elections, these events had further eroded support for Lloyd George and his colleagues within the House of Commons. Opposition from the Die-hards was taken for granted. What was worrying was the evident restlessness of more moderate Tory MPs such as Sam Hoare. Though he still counted himself a 'friend' of the Treaty, Hoare and others like him were manifestly dissatisfied with the course of events. Leo Amery felt that in some ways the government was in a 'far worse mess' than if the Treaty had never been negotiated in the first place.⁸⁵

If these tribulations were not enough, the government was also being battered from other directions. By mid-May, it was clear that Lloyd George's gamble on the Genoa negotiations had failed; with it, went the last real hopes for his political survival. In June a wholly unexpected crisis erupted over the Coalition's sale of honours for the creation of a Lloyd George political

⁸⁴Annual Register: 1922, p. 63.

⁸⁵Wilson diary, 31 May 1922, HHW 1/31/1. HC Deb, Vol. 154, Col. 2158-2162, 31 May 1922. Amery diary, 31 May 1922, in L.S. Amery, The Leo Amery Diaries, Vol. I: 1896-1929, J. Barnes and D. Nicholson, ed. (London, 1980), p. 286.

fund.⁸⁶ On 21 June Henry Wilson spent the afternoon in the Commons watching fellow Die-hard John Gretton attack the government front bench. 'Austen was rather heckled about L.G.'s Honours List', Wilson wrote in his diary, 'and Gretton told me he was going to have a go at it again tomorrow. ... A lovely day.'⁸⁷

The next afternoon Wilson was shot to death on the front-step of his home in London by two members of the IRA.

Ireland's Civil War

Henry Wilson's assassination echoed round Westminster and produced a profound shock which soon turned to profound anger.⁸⁸ In Britain, his murder drew a veil over his activities in Northern Ireland, where he had acted as Craig's military adviser. Churchill soon forgot that only a few weeks earlier he had held the field marshal and de Valera to be equally culpable for the violence then raging in the six counties.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the assassination exposed Lloyd George and his colleagues, and Austen Chamberlain in particular, to scorching abuse.⁹⁰ Even Chamberlain's brother began to have doubts about the Treaty. The assassination, Neville

⁸⁶Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 339-340.

⁸⁷Wilson diary, 21 June 1922, HHW 1/31/2.

⁸⁸Bayford diary, 25 June 1922, p. 176-177.

⁸⁹Memorandum of meeting with Belfast businessmen, 2 June 1922, CO 906/25.

⁹⁰See, e.g., McNeill to Chamberlain [two letters], 23 June 1922, AC 24/4/19-20.

Chamberlain wrote, was 'enough to make anyone despair of Ireland and curse the Irish as a hopeless and impossible race.'⁹¹

On the same day that Wilson's body was laid to rest in St. Paul's Cathedral, the House of Commons assembled to discuss the Irish situation. MPs were so ill-tempered that Lloyd George was not at all sure beforehand if the Coalition would survive the debate.⁹² By most accounts, Churchill's speech saved the day. Having linked Wilson's assassins to the Irregular IRA contingent which occupied the Four Courts, Churchill demanded that the Provisional Government clear out this 'nest of anarchy and treason'; otherwise, His Majesty's Government would do the job for it.⁹³

However, the mood of the House was captured by Bonar Law. In effect, Amery wrote, the former Tory leader told Lloyd George and his colleagues 'that this was their last chance.' Though he had supported the Treaty in December, Bonar Law now declared that had he known then 'what the position would have been today' he would not have voted for it. This warning shot, made 'amid loud cheers', was the clearest sign yet that he was ready to lead a revolt

⁹¹Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 24 June 1922, NC 18/1/354.

⁹²Stevenson diary, 26 June 1922, p. 243.

⁹³H.A.L. Fisher diary, 26 June 1922, MSS 18. Amery diary, same date, p. 287-288. Annual Register: 1922, p. 64.

against his former colleagues.⁹⁴

The Coalition's ultimatum to the Provisional Government very nearly backfired. Another 'crack of the English whip', Cope warned, would do more harm than good. In any case, the Provisional Government had decided to attack the Four Courts before news of Churchill's speech was received. More important than the dire warnings issuing from London was the change in Collins's own mind. 'I think we'll have to fight these fellows', he is said to have told Richard Mulcahy. From that moment, there was no turning back.⁹⁵

For Churchill, at least, the attack on the Four Courts erased his suspicions about the Provisional Government and his doubts about the Treaty settlement. 'Now', he wrote to Collins on 7 July, 'all is changed.' Once the Free Staters established their authority throughout the South, 'as I do not doubt you will in a short time',

a new phase will begin far more hopeful than any we have hitherto experienced. In this phase the objective must be the unity of Ireland. How and when this can be achieved I cannot tell, but it is surely the goal towards which we must all look steadfastly.⁹⁶

In this same letter, it was necessary for Churchill

⁹⁴Ibid, Amery and Fisher diaries. HC Deb, Vol. 155, Col. 1744, 26 June 1922.

⁹⁵Curran, Free State, p. 229-232. Hopkinson, Green Against Green, p. 116-118. Cope to Curtis, 27 June 1922, LG F/10/3/8. Churchill to Cope, 1 July 1922, LG F/10/3/13(b).

⁹⁶Churchill to Collins, 7 July 1922, CO 739/6/36749.

to address himself to the latest dispute between North and South: Craig's proposal to abolish proportional representation in Northern Ireland's local elections. 'Minor irritations' such as these should not be allowed to 'lead us off track', Churchill counselled.⁹⁷ However, the abolition of PR was anything but a minor irritation to Collins. His fight against it would be his last major battle on behalf of Northern Nationalists and the last major Irish dispute for the Lloyd George Coalition.

Abolishing proportional representation

On 31 May Craig's government introduced a bill to repeal proportional representation for elections to all local government bodies in the six counties.⁹⁸ Alfred Cope suspected that Craig wanted to abolish PR before the next round of local elections, scheduled for January, because he feared the loss of Belfast city council to an alliance of Nationalist and Labour councillors. It is, indeed, revealing that the only member of the Ulster House of Commons to speak against abolition argued that the bill was aimed as much against Labour as it was against Nationalists or Republicans.⁹⁹

In addition, it is likely that Craig and his colleagues were looking for an opportune moment to rush the legislation through their Parliament before anyone in

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸NI HC Deb, Vol. 2, Col. 748, 31 May 1922.

⁹⁹Cope to Curtis, 9 September 1922, HO 45/13371/15. NI HC Deb, Vol. 2, Col. 845-851, 917, 26 June and 5 July 1922.

Dublin or London took notice. With the Provisional Government seeming to be on the verge of collapse, the early summer of 1922 afforded as good a chance as any. The 'South is so busy with its own affairs', Craig pointed out, 'that little attention will be paid to what happens in the North'.¹⁰⁰

If that was Craig's plan, he miscalculated. Even as the attack on the Four Courts was still in progress, Collins found time to send Churchill a stinging denunciation of the proposed statute. Its repercussions, Collins protested, would effectively eliminate the 'representation of Catholic and Nationalist interests' especially in counties Fermanagh and Tyrone and Derry City. He also pointedly reminded Churchill that while safeguards for Southern Unionists 'have been frequently demanded and readily granted by us', the rights of Northern Nationalists 'under the Craig regime are not protected in the slightest degree.'¹⁰¹

Using Craig's own words, Collins maintained that abolishing PR was part of a wider strategy to 'wipe out the Boundary Commission'. A glance at the bill's provisions shows what he meant. Besides restoring the winner-take-all system of elections, the proposed legislation required all local officials to swear an oath allegiance both to the king and to the Northern Ireland

¹⁰⁰Craig to Masterton-Smith, 22 July 1922, HO 45/13371/1.

¹⁰¹Collins to Churchill, I.T.C. 53, 28 June 1922, CAB 27/160.

government. To boost support for Ulster Unionist candidates, members of the Special Constabulary and their wives were to be allowed to vote in local elections even if they were not permanent residents.¹⁰² These measures struck at the heart of the case that Nationalists planned to make to the Boundary Commission. What better evidence of the 'wishes of the inhabitants' could there be than local councils which refused to recognise the Belfast Parliament?

As Alfred Cope reminded the Colonial Office, Irish acceptance of the Treaty 'was based on an understanding' that both London and Dublin would work for 'an early United Ireland'.¹⁰³ This assurance was repeated by Churchill himself in his 7 July letter to Collins and, yet again the following month. 'With Mr. Churchill's authority', Cope reported, 'I gave them hope of the North coming in on terms provided the P[rovisional]. G[overnment]. won through their present troubles and did not compromise' with the Republicans.¹⁰⁴

Craig's bill placed Churchill in an extremely awkward position. It did not help matters that the colonial secretary was 'no lover of the system' of PR, as he privately confessed.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Collins had a

¹⁰²Ibid. Richard Best memorandum, 6 July 1922, HO 45/13371/1(a).

¹⁰³Cope to Curtis, 21 August 1922, HO 45/13371/4.

¹⁰⁴Cope to Masterton-Smith, 10 August 1922, CO 906/31.

¹⁰⁵Churchill to Craig [not sent], 6[?] July 1922, CO 739/14/31545.

strong case. To get round the problem, at least for the moment, Churchill withheld the royal assent, explaining that it was necessary to examine the bill's ramifications.¹⁰⁶

At a meeting on 28 July Craig did not challenge Churchill's claim that the imperial government was within its rights to withhold the bill. Instead, he merely fell back on his favoured weapon of last resort, making it clear that if the bill was not allowed onto the Statute Book he would resign and take his whole government with him. The meeting ended with Churchill promising that the royal assent would be granted by 31 August, an assurance that Craig then passed along to his Cabinet.¹⁰⁷

Churchill's decision infuriated Collins. 'Do you not see, or have His Majesty's advisers not disclosed the true meaning of all this?' he asked. The abolition of PR was intended to accomplish one end - 'to paint the Counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh with a deep Orange tint in anticipation of the ... Boundary Commission'. So far as Collins was concerned, this was nothing less than 'an attempt to defeat the obligations of His Majesty's Government contained in the Treaty', and on that score alone Churchill could expect trouble from the Free

¹⁰⁶Spender to Tallents; Tallents to Spender, 13, 15 July 1922, HO 45/13371/1.

¹⁰⁷Masterton-Smith memorandum, 28 July 1922, HO 45/13371/2. Cabinet minutes, 9 August 1922, PRONI, CAB4/51/15.

State's leaders.¹⁰⁸

Instead, within a matter of days both Griffith and Collins were dead. On 12 August Griffith died suddenly from a cerebral haemorrhage, the result of years of overwork and the stresses and strains brought on by the Civil War. On 22 August Collins was killed during an ambush near his home in County Cork. The loss of these two men to the Nationalist cause was incalculable. Having played no part in the Treaty negotiations, William Cosgrave, the Provisional Government's new chairman was less likely to retaliate if the British acquiesced in Craig's wishes.

The fate of the PR Bill was finally decided at a meeting of British Treaty signatories on 7 September. Although Lloyd George conceded that the legislation was 'a breach of the spirit of the Treaty', the government was unwilling to force a showdown with Ulster's Cabinet. In a conciliatory gesture, Craig said that he would postpone county and rural district council elections; but on the main issue he stood firm. He would hear of no further delays on the bill itself. Nor would he hold up local urban elections scheduled for January.¹⁰⁹

The return of winner-take-all elections signalled the resurrection of Unionist hegemony in Ulster local government. As Craig promised, county council and rural district council elections were postponed until 1924, the excuse being that time was needed to re-draw electoral

¹⁰⁸Collins to Churchill, 9 August 1922, LG F/183/1/402.

¹⁰⁹S.F.(B) 32nd Conclusions, 7 September 1922, CAB 43/1.

districts. The following January, Nationalist disunity combined with the abolition of PR to return Londonderry to Unionist control, and the party re-asserted its dominance of Belfast city council.¹¹⁰

The battle over PR was a turning point in relations between London and Belfast.¹¹¹ As Curtis pointed out in the middle of the dispute, if the British refused to allow the PR Bill onto the Statute Book, Craig and his fellow ministers 'would have no option but to resign.' The ensuing general election in the six counties almost certainly would endorse their action, and the imperial government then would be at an impasse.¹¹² Practically speaking, there were only two courses of action: allow the Ulster Unionists to abolish PR, or return the six counties to direct rule from London. Fifty years later those were still the only alternatives when a Conservative government re-imposed direct rule.

The fall of the Coalition

It has been written that the collapse of the Lloyd George Coalition 'occurred quite suddenly and spectacularly'. In retrospect, so it would seem. But as Kenneth Morgan has also pointed out, the government's demise had little to do with the honour's scandal. Nor,

¹¹⁰Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 269-271.

¹¹¹Buckland, Factory of Grievances, p. 267-268.

¹¹²Curtis to Churchill, 1 September 1922, HO 45/13371/9.

in the end, would the Chanak crisis prove to be decisive.¹¹³

If anything, the Coalition's handling of the crisis in Turkey won it a measure of grudging respect from some of its most inveterate foes. 'The last thing the Goat did - the thing wh[ich] finally undid him - is in my opinion the most virtuous act of his recent years', wrote F.S. Oliver.¹¹⁴ Viscount Cave was like-minded. It was precisely because 'I could not agree with you about Ireland', Cave told Chamberlain, that he felt all the more bound to disassociate himself from other attacks which 'appear to me to be wholly unjustified.'¹¹⁵

The government's demise occurred when it did because of the decision to call a snap general election in the middle of the Chanak crisis. This in turn brought about the famous Carlton Club meeting of 19 October. Much has been written elsewhere about these proceedings - about which speakers were influential, and which were not; about which issues were uppermost in the minds of Tory MPs when it became time to vote for or against the Coalition.¹¹⁶ It is fair to say that Bonar Law's speech at the meeting was decisive, if only because he at last

¹¹³Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 346.

¹¹⁴Oliver to Selborne, 21 November 1922, Selborne Papers, MSS 87, ff. 83-84.

¹¹⁵Cave to Chamberlain, 15 October 1922, Cave Papers, Add. MSS 62,464, ff. 68.

¹¹⁶See, e.g., Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 209-212. Kinnear, in Fall of Lloyd George, p. 87, 120-134. Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 348-350. Ramsden, Balfour and Baldwin, p. 164-167. Cross, Hoare, p. 364, n. 61, disputes Kinnear's conclusions.

put himself forward as an alternative leader. This made it safe for middle-of-the-road MPs to turn against Chamberlain, who had 'revealed himself as an unrepentant and convinced Coalitionist'.¹¹⁷

Stanley Baldwin's speech was also influential. Lloyd George, he famously declared, was 'a dynamic force', and it was because of him that the Conservatives now found themselves in their current troubles. This same dynamic force had destroyed the once great Liberal Party, and, if the Coalition continued, the Conservative Party too would be 'smashed to atoms'.¹¹⁸ These words crystallised what those at the meeting most feared: by continuing to associate with Lloyd George and his methods, their leaders were forsaking Conservative principles and, in the end, would destroy the unity of their own party.

But when it came to pinning specific allegations to this general charge, no one mentioned the honours scandal. Only Chamberlain dwelt at length on the Chanak crisis. Only Bonar Law devoted much time to the threat posed by Labour. As Balfour pointed out, and as one Diehard had earlier admitted, when it came to the charge that Conservative principles had been abandoned, one issue stood out above all others, and that was Ireland.

The seething discontent about this issue was at the

¹¹⁷Amery diary, 19 October 1922, p. 300. 'A Chamberlain Apologia', The Times, 14 October 1922.

¹¹⁸'Unionist M.P.s' Decision. Mr Chamberlain Defeated', The Times, 20 October 1922.

bottom of the Conservative revolt.¹¹⁹ 'The extraordinary thing', Lord Derby observed some months before, was that the Coalition's critics could not 'point to any one thing, except perhaps the Irish matter, which the Government have done wrong'.¹²⁰ Edward Wood echoed this sentiment when he later drew a connection between 'distrust of the Prime Minister' and disaffection over Ireland. While most Conservatives had no desire to go to war again with the IRA, they none the less thought that their party 'existed to fight for a particular Irish policy'. Instead, they were forced to watch the 'apparently complete reversal of this policy' by their 'accredited spokesmen'. Was it any wonder, then, that the party was in 'a state of irritation and bewilderment'?¹²¹

The onset of Ireland's Civil War only served to reinforce the impression that the government's Irish policy had failed. In the South, Unionists became a favoured target of the Irregular IRA. Although Northern Ireland experienced a lull in violence following the attack on the Four Courts, by September 'the situation in

¹¹⁹David Close maintains that the Treaty was the Die-hards' 'main grievance' against the Lloyd George Coalition. See 'Conservatives and Coalition', p. 254.

¹²⁰Derby to Chamberlain, 22 March 1922, AC 33/1/51.

¹²¹'Thoughts on Some of the Present Discontents of the Conservative Party', Summer 1922, Halifax Papers, A4.410/9.

Ulster was unsatisfactory and becoming worse.'¹²² It is revealing that even when troops were desperately needed for service in Turkey at the height of the Chanak crisis, Churchill refused to transfer any military units from Ireland. Forces in Ulster, he said, 'could in no case be weakened.'¹²³

This is where Irish matters stood when the Carlton Club meeting took place. The Treaty had not answered the Irish Question. Instead,

... the endless continuance of civil strife in Ireland - where peace had been promised with such vain assurance - and the outbreak of a new crisis in Asia Minor - for which the Prime Minister appeared to be in some degree personally responsible - combined to vex the faithful supporters of the Cabinet'.¹²⁴

It was enough. When the votes at the Carlton Club meeting were counted, only 87 MPs stood by Chamberlain. The overwhelming number, 187, were ready to back Bonar Law.

'The irony of fate'

Lloyd George was nonchalant when news of the Carlton Club vote reached Downing Street. 'That's the end', were his only words, and he walked out to tender his resignation to the king.¹²⁵ As it happened, he was to

¹²²Spender to Tallents, 2 August 1922, CO 906/21. S.F.(B) 32nd Conclusions, 7 September 1922, CAB 43/1. Lady Spender's diary, 27 September 1922, D.1633/2/26.

¹²³Conference No. 147, 26 September 1922, CAB 23/39.

¹²⁴'The End of the Coalition', Quarterly Review, No. 474, January 1923, p. 202.

¹²⁵A.J. Sylvester, The Real Lloyd George (London, 1946), p. 99.

remain prime minister for another four days until Bonar Law secured the leadership of the Conservative Party. In the interim, one of Lloyd George's first acts was to assure Cosgrave that no action would be taken to 'compromise the Treaty' and that Britain was still pledged to ratifying the Free State Constitution by the 6 December deadline. The telegram was later given to the press, lest any of Bonar Law's Die-hard friends had other ideas.¹²⁶

By most accounts, Lloyd George was almost jocular at this twist of fate.¹²⁷ There were no sad partings. True, he had sustained a reversal. But this was only temporary. He would be back.

In fact, he never crossed the threshold of power again.

In less than a year, Lloyd George descended from what seemed to be an unassailable position to the abyss of utter defeat. As for his colleagues, Churchill, as he himself famously put it, was without an appendix, without an office and, soon, without a Parliamentary seat.¹²⁸ Chamberlain, Birkenhead, Balfour, Horne, and Worthington-Evans also found themselves cast into the wilderness. Of the lot, Conservatives were especially unforgiving toward

¹²⁶Lloyd George to Cosgrave, 19 October 1922, LG F/10/3/56. Jones diary, 21 October 1922, Vol. III, p. 217.

¹²⁷Riddell diary, 19 October 1922, [McEwen] p. 378-379. Scott diary, 23 October 1922, p. 429.

¹²⁸Churchill had to undergo an emergency appendectomy in the middle of the crisis. R. Rhodes James, Churchill: A Study in Failure, 1900-1939 (London, 1970), p. 147.

Birkenhead. He, 'far more than Lloyd George', was held responsible for the attempts to force the party into a general election after the Irish Treaty was signed and, again, that autumn. Birkenhead, according to George Younger, 'has been the evil genius of the piece all through.'¹²⁹

In the end, a number of factors combined to bring about the Coalition's downfall. As Chamberlain wrote some weeks after the event, no government could have held office 'for four such critical and difficult years' without inciting 'discontent and disappointment' among its followers. Nor was it at all surprising that these same adherents had grown uneasy with Lloyd George's leadership and his unsettling habit 'to startle and surprise the country.'

Here you have matter enough for widespread discontent and grumbling. Then comes the Irish settlement accepted by the great majority of the Party, but bitterly resented as a betrayal by a small section of it. Gradually around this section all the discontents crystallised and ... the feeling against a continuation of the Lloyd George premiership grew into a formidable force.¹³⁰

Churchill agreed. 'Much of the bitterness which suddenly exploded at the Carlton Club was due to the fury of the Die-Hards at the Irish Treaty', he wrote from his sick-bed. 'This was the deed they could not forgive and

¹²⁹Younger to Strachey, 20 November 1922, Strachey Papers, S/19/4/26.

¹³⁰Chamberlain to Lloyd, 7 December 1922, AC 18/1/35.

for which they were determined to exact vengeance.'¹³¹

Yet, by this time the Irish Treaty was not the same agreement that had been signed less than a year before, and for that Churchill was largely responsible. Under his guardianship, the Boundary Commission was postponed and the financial restrictions that were meant to serve as an inducement to unity made far less onerous. Consequently, the prospects for re-uniting the island were not what they had been before he took charge of Irish affairs.

But where, exactly, did Churchill stand on the question of Irish unity? Alfred Cope believed that Churchill's personal view was that 'the practical working of the Treaty would inevitably lead to a reunited Ireland'.¹³² Indeed, during the Treaty negotiations, Churchill advocated a policy that 'might well include the creation & recognition of an all-Ireland Parliament'. His only condition was that 'no physical force' should be employed against Ulster.¹³³

By the time of the 1922 general election, however, he had shifted ground. To retain the support of Tories in his constituency, Churchill announced that he would 'oppose all attempts to coerce Ulster' into joining the

¹³¹Churchill to Robertson, 27 October 1922, WSC 5/28(a)/20-30.

¹³²Cope to Masterton-Smith, 13 October 1922, CO 739/2/51232.

¹³³Churchill to Lloyd George, 9 November 1921, LG F/10/1/40 [emphasis added].

Irish Free State.¹³⁴ In effect, he was giving the Ulster Unionists an absolute veto over Irish re-unification. He would oppose efforts to bring economic pressure to bear on Craig's government, and he was now definitely committed to resisting any Boundary Commission award which might endanger Northern Ireland's separate existence. These were Churchill's new touchstones, and their consequences would be far-reaching if he ever become involved in Irish affairs again.

For the moment, however, those affairs had passed to other hands. Churchill took a certain pleasure in knowing that the final stages of the Irish settlement would be carried out by the very men who for 'so long fomented the quarrel' between Britain and Ireland and who had spent the past year 'abusing in the harshest terms the men who had made the peace.' It was, as he called it, 'the irony of fate'.¹³⁵

¹³⁴Oakley to Churchill; and Churchill to Oakley, 1-2 November 1922, WSC 5/28(a)/79-80 [emphasis added].

¹³⁵Churchill to Robertson, 27 October 1922, WSC 5/28(a)/20-30.

Chapter 4

The Legacy of Bonar Law

Before the war there were only two things which I really cared for as matters of conviction, - the rest was mainly a game. One was tariff reform; the other was fair play to Ulster, and I feel as strongly about it [now] as I did then.

- Andrew Bonar Law¹

If it had not been for Ireland it is likely that Andrew Bonar Law never would have become prime minister. In virtual retirement less than twelve months before taking office, he re-emerged only to intervene in the Treaty negotiations, smashing Lloyd George's plans to force Ulster Unionists into a single Irish state. Now he was in Lloyd George's place, having acquired from the Coalition what one contemporary journal called 'a heritage of mismanaged problems ... the most disquieting' of which was Ireland.²

Bonar Law was the first modern British prime minister not to appoint an Irish Chief Secretary to his Cabinet. And, as John Ramsden has written, he did not 'intend to have an Irish policy either.'³ But by doing nothing, Bonar Law in effect was doing something. That something was to change the dynamic embodied in the Treaty settlement. The centrepiece of Lloyd George's

¹Bonar Law to Croal, 12 November 1921, BL 107/1/83.

²'The End of the Coalition', Quarterly Review, No. 474, January 1923, p. 211-212.

³Ramsden, Balfour and Baldwin, p. 169.

Irish policy was to hold out to Nationalists the hope of eventual North-South re-unification. With the Tories in power, 'a definite change in political facts' took place.⁴ 'Henceforth', Paul Canning has noted, 'British policy was directed almost solely towards preserving the status quo in Ireland.' This change was 'more real than apparent', because to outsiders it seemed that Britain's Irish policy was allowed to drift throughout Bonar Law's ministry.⁵

For evidence of this drift critics needed to look no further than the Colonial Office and its new secretary, Victor Cavendish, 9th Duke of Devonshire.⁶ Of all the legacies left by the Lloyd George Coalition, the most 'complicated' was 'Winston Churchill's policy in Ireland.'⁷ But where Churchill was conspicuous in directing Colonial Office policy, nothing of the sort could be said of his successor. Craig was among those who noted the difference. Devonshire's activities, the Ulster premier later said, were for the most part 'confined to nodding and receiving notes on slips from

⁴Curtis to Cope, 20 October 1922, CO 739/7/52403.

⁵Canning, British Policy, p. 73, 74-85.

⁶Although responsibility for communicating with Ulster's government was transferred to the Home Office, the Colonial Office continued to be intimately involved in North-South relations. See C. 70(22), 11 December 1922, CAB 23/32.

⁷'The End of the Coalition', Quarterly Review, No. 474, January 1923, p. 212.

officials.'⁸

Of these officials, none was more important than Lionel Curtis. Active though he had been in shaping the Coalition's Irish policy, Curtis now assumed a crucial role in constructing a framework for Anglo-Irish relations. His importance was such that colleagues considered him 'the repository of tradition concerning the Treaty.'⁹ An unblushing imperialist, Curtis's primary objective was to anchor the Free State firmly within the British Commonwealth. Irish unity - and, it must be said, the rights of Northern Nationalists - were secondary concerns. Curtis argued that these issues could be resolved only after Dublin had shown Ulster Unionists that it could be trusted.¹⁰

These judgments are true, but only so far as they go. Even if Devonshire abdicated responsibility for Irish policy, it would be wrong to assume that the rest of the Cabinet, not least the prime minister, followed suit. Upon reflection, it is hardly likely that a man as committed to the Ulster Unionists as was Bonar Law would have passed up any opportunity to further their cause. The advent of Bonar Law marked a decided shift in British policy on two matters that were essential for ending Ireland's partition. The first of these was the Council

⁸Tallents to Anderson, 8 May 1924, HO 144/3915/7.

⁹Upcott to Piercy, 25 April 1923, Piercy Papers, 10/15.

¹⁰Lavin, Curtis, p. 197, 204-226. Canning, British Policy, p. 73-85.

of Ireland; the more important issue was Northern Ireland's financial relations with Great Britain.

The evidence that Bonar Law played such a decisive role is, admittedly, fragmentary, his interventions in Irish affairs not nearly as obvious as those of his flamboyant predecessor. Britain's new prime minister took the role of one who remains discreetly in the background. Nevertheless, Bonar Law marked off new parameters in Irish policy beyond which his successors could not, or would not, go.

Toward a new 'status quo'

The day after the Carlton Club vote brought an end to the Lloyd George Coalition, a group of leading Conservatives met to discuss policy now that the party was again on its own. According to Leo Amery, Bonar Law was 'anxious' to have their views on only two subjects: 'Ireland and fiscal policy.'¹¹ Because of the events that had brought him to power, Bonar Law decided that his new government must call a general election. But his desire to go to the country for a mandate immediately ran into a complication. Hemmed in by Lloyd George's public declaration that Britain would honour its commitment to ratify the Irish Constitution by the Treaty's December deadline, any election would have to be held immediately. Although at least one member of Bonar Law's government saw no reason for going to the polls, a general election it was decided there would be, and because of the Irish

¹¹Amery diary, 20 October 1922, p. 307.

commitment it would have to be held by mid-November at the latest.¹²

This decision caused no small amount of anxiety on both sides of the Irish frontier. 'Naturally', Kevin O'Higgins confided to Lady Hazel Lavery, 'our hearts are with the men who forged the settlement'.¹³ Like many others, the Provisional Government's leaders fully expected that Lloyd George soon would be back to lead the British nation. North of the border, Bonar Law's decision was viewed as being 'of the very gravest moment for Ulster, no matter how the fight goes.' In the six counties, partition was bound to be the main issue, the only issue, and one that was 'full of deadly peril'.¹⁴

Unionists were right to be anxious. Their Nationalist opponents meant to use the campaign 'to register another emphatic protest against Partition.' In outlining this strategy, Kevin O'Shiel, a legal adviser to the Provisional Government, pointed out that the Nationalists' only realistic chance of winning any seats was in the twin constituency of Fermanagh and Tyrone. By concentrating their energies on a constituency where voters elected two MPs, a win there would be 'an

¹²Amery diary, 19 October 1922, p. 300. Jones diary, 23 October 1922, Vol. I, p. 216.

¹³O'Higgins to Lavery, 27 October 1922, BL 114/1/20. How such a potentially embarrassing letter found its way into Conservative hands is unclear. A note accompanying the letter says that Devonshire 'has seen it with satisfaction'.

¹⁴'Gravest Moment for Ulster', Belfast Telegraph, 23 October 1922.

important victory in view of the Boundary Commission.'¹⁵

Although Eamon de Valera called for a boycott of the election, his appeal was largely ignored. The 1922 campaign proved to be one of those instances in which Northern Nationalists buried their differences and profited as a result. Two candidates were nominated to stand for the Fermanagh-Tyrone seats: the Irish Parliamentary Party MP T.J.S. Harbison, and the pro-Treaty Sinn Féin journalist Cahir Healy who, at the time, was one of several hundred Nationalists interned on the prison ship Argenta. When the votes were counted, both men decisively beat their Unionist opponents, registering majorities of over 6,000 apiece. Beyond rejecting the Unionist candidates, border Nationalists believed their votes had sent a warning shot across the bow of the new Conservative ship of state. 'The inhabitants had declared their wishes', said the chairman of Omagh Urban Council, 'and if Bonar Law did not accept them, then he must tear up the Treaty.' If he did the latter, his new government would face a 'fight for the liberty of all Ireland'.¹⁶

Although he had no intention of re-igniting the Anglo-Irish War, the notion of tearing up the Treaty must have appealed greatly to Bonar Law. Fate had played a wicked trick on the man who had taken his country to the

¹⁵O'Shiel to Collins, 26 October 1922, J.H. Collins Papers, D.921/2/3/1.

¹⁶'Tyrone-Fermanagh Election Result', Ulster Herald, 25 November 1922. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 262-263.

brink of civil war over Home Rule only a decade before. Now, he found himself responsible for shepherding through Parliament a Constitution giving the Irish greater independence than anyone had dreamed of in 1914 - and the sort of freedom that only two years before he himself had declared could not be given unless Britain was prepared to commit 'national suicide'.¹⁷

Bonar Law was deeply ambivalent about the Irish settlement. When, a few months after voting for the Treaty, he renounced even this qualified support, he did so making this 'vital' point:

I thought that those who signed the Treaty ... accepted the position that Ulster could never be brought in [to an all-Ireland government] until they were willing to be brought in. Everything that has happened since has shown that I was wrong.¹⁸

The new prime minister's suspicions of Ireland outside Ulster were deep-rooted. 'When I was young', he told one confidant, 'I used to travel frequently to Ireland.' Belfast was 'less different from Glasgow probably than Edinburgh is.' Not so, Dublin. There, a young Bonar Law found himself 'in obviously a foreign atmosphere', a conviction he held for the rest of his life. Among those who worked with him, Bonar Law's reputation for a 'granite-like resistance to any

¹⁷'Mr Bonar Law on Ireland', The Times, 1 December 1920. Also, see HC Deb, Vol. 127, Col. 1120-1133, 30 March 1920.

¹⁸HC Deb, Vol. 155, Col. 1744, 26 June 1922.

tampering with the rights of Ulster' was well-known.¹⁹ Many of his supporters shared these prejudices, and this explains why the new prime minister was anxious to maintain the Irish status quo - though one as he defined it.

Bonar Law inherited a Conservative Party badly shaken by the split between pro- and anti-Coalitionists. Even those who supported the Carlton Club vote doubted that there was support in the country for a 'pure Conservative Government' and that 'another form of Coalition' would be the most likely outcome of the next election.²⁰ This split also, in the main, marked off those who were proud that they had played a role in ending the Irish conflict from those who 'felt a sort of hurt that so old a sore could be healed.'²¹ Though they conceded that the time was 'not yet ripe', Bonar Law's Die-hard supporters fully expected that it soon would be necessary to re-impose British rule in Ireland.²² In such an atmosphere, it was hardly surprising when one of Bonar Law's Cabinet ministers gloomily predicted that the

¹⁹Bonar Law to Croal, 12 November 1921, BL 107/1/83. 'Bonar Law. His Chief Service to the Empire', Western Mail, 22 May 1923.

²⁰Peel to Reading, 27 July 1922, IO, Eur. E. 238/5, No. 16. Wood to Chamberlain, 'draft', ? October 1922, Halifax Papers, A.4.410/26/2.

²¹Coote, Elliot, p. 75. According to Lord Winterton, the Treaty 'caused heart-burnings in the Conservative Party.' See Orders of the Day (London, 1953), p. 105.

²²Gretton memorandum, 16 October 1922, S(4) 103/27-39.

new government might 'be only an affair of weeks'.²³

Instead, the Tories won a clear-cut victory in the 1922 election, surprising even themselves. Bonar Law now commanded a comfortable majority in the House of Commons and needed the support of no other party to maintain his position.²⁴

Throughout his term in office, however, Ireland continued to be a potential source for trouble. From the Die-hard wing of the party, Lords Cave and Salisbury were particularly 'obstinate' about the Treaty and were 'unwilling to realise that it had to be swallowed without change and the Constitution ditto.'²⁵ Others counselled that the 'Free State Government must be given a fair chance' and, eventually, even some Die-hards recognised that their room for manoeuvre in recasting Irish policy was limited. Salisbury, for one, was consoled by the fact that 'the men principally responsible [for the Treaty] are out of office, and we all want to forget and make friends.'²⁶

It was time to move on. Independence for the South was a done deal. The Treaty had been accepted by the

²³Salisbury to Selborne, 25 October 1922, Selborne Papers, MSS 7, ff. 146-147.

²⁴The Conservatives and their Unionist allies took 344 of the 615 seats in the Commons. See Annual Register: 1922, p. 120.

²⁵Jones diary, 16 November 1922, Vol. I, p. 223.

²⁶Griffith-Boscawen to Bonar Law, 25 October 1922, BL 110/1/1. Salisbury to Bonar Law, 22 October 1922, BL 111/29/37.

British people in the 1922 election, and Conservatives had campaigned on a promise to restore 'tranquillity' to the country. Once in office they could not very well turn around and create a situation that might bring on a new Anglo-Irish war.²⁷ In the end, Bonar Law's Cabinet ministers resigned themselves to the fact that they 'had no alternative' but to carry on with the Treaty. As Amery later wrote, 'there could only be loyal acceptance of the existing position.'²⁸ At this same meeting, the Cabinet also agreed that they would adhere to the Treaty 'not only in the letter but in the spirit'. As Bonar Law explained to Tom Jones, 'if the Treaty and Constitution must be put through it was better to do it handsomely than in any niggardly spirit.'²⁹

Yet this decision, however magnanimous Bonar Law may have thought it to be, was storing up future trouble for the Conservatives. It was all very well to promise to adhere to both the letter and the spirit of the Irish

²⁷Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 21 November 1922, AC 5/1/252.

²⁸C. 68(22), Appendix II, 22 November 1922, CAB 23/32. Amery, My Political Life, p. 241.

²⁹Ibid, CAB 23/32. Jones diary, 16 November 1922, Vol. I, p. 223. Also, see 'Extract from Mr Bonar Law's Election Address to his Constituents at Glasgow, October 27th, 1922', in Cmd. 2264: Irish Boundary Extracts from Parliamentary Debates, Command Papers, etc., Relevant to Questions Arising out of Article XII of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland, Dated 6th December 1921 (London, 1924), p. 51. That said, implementing the Treaty was a task which gave Bonar Law 'neither enthusiasm nor satisfaction.' See J.C.C. Davidson and R. Rhodes James, Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-37 (London, 1969), p. 138.

agreement. But what would the party's attitude be when, as had happened already and was bound to happen again, interpretations of the 'letter' and the 'spirit' differed in London and Dublin? Though willing to give Cosgrave's government its 'fair chance', Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen warned Bonar Law that the party would allow 'no interference with the rights and position of Ulster.'³⁰

'A stiffer attitude'

Whatever worries Bonar Law's supporters harboured about his Irish policy were nothing compared to the nightmare a Tory government posed for Irish Nationalists.³¹ Within days of the Carlton Club meeting, Provisional Government Chairman William Cosgrave travelled to London for a hastily arranged meeting with the new prime minister. Warned to 'anticipate a stiffer attitude', Cosgrave was worried that the Conservatives might engineer fundamental changes in the Treaty or delay Parliament's ratification of the Irish Constitution. So it was that when the two sides met, discussion centred on Bonar Law's attitude toward the Irish settlement in general. Cosgrave confined himself to a re-statement of his government's policy, which was 'the Treaty'. Upon it and it alone the new Free State 'meant to stand in the spirit and the letter'. And, Cosgrave continued, he 'looked to the British Government to do the same.'

³⁰Griffith-Boscawen to Bonar Law, 25 October 1922, BL 110/1/1.

³¹See, e.g., 'Our Dublin Letter', Ulster Herald, 4 November 1922.

Despite press speculation that the Treaty's Ulster clauses must have been one of the main topics of discussion, the subject never crossed anyone's lips. No one thought it politic to mention the Boundary Commission.³²

It was Bonar Law's fortune never to face the boundary issue directly, and for that he had Irish Republicans largely to thank. So long as the Civil War still raged in the South, it was impossible to raise the boundary issue. Kevin O'Shiel, newly appointed director of the North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, summed up Dublin's problem. 'What a ridiculous position we would cut', he wrote, 'both nationally and universally - were we to argue our claim at the Commission for population and territory when at our backs in our own jurisdiction is the perpetual racket of war'.³³

The Council of Ireland

Because of the vital need to establish its authority in the 26 counties, the Irish government had little time for problems north of the border. As Kevin O'Higgins told an audience some two years later, the Civil War was fought against 'men who had not cleared the blood from

³²Curtis to Cope, 20 October 1922, CO 739/7/52403. 'Meeting between Mr Bonar Law and the Irish Ministers', 24 October 1922, CO 739/7/54174. 'Free State Leader Mr Cosgrave Received by Mr Bonar Law', Morning Post, 25 October 1922.

³³O'Shiel to Cosgrave, 17-page memorandum, undated, Mulcahy Papers, p7/B/101. Ireland's president admitted as much to the Tories. See Cosgrave to Bonar Law, 16 May 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

their eyes'.

The Provisional Government was simply eight young men in the City Hall standing amidst the ruins of one administration with the foundations of another not yet laid, and with wild men screaming through the keyhole.³⁴

These circumstances, particularly after Collins's death, did not go unnoticed in London, and the benefits to Britain were soon made plain.

As well as ratifying the Irish Constitution, Bonar Law's government was committed to enacting further legislation which would address several disputes raised by the Treaty. Chief among the issues to be addressed in the Consequential Provisions Bill was the 'anomaly' of the Free State's role in the Council of Ireland.³⁵

The 1920 Act gave both Irish governments an equal say in matters handled by the Council on both sides of the border. But whereas the Treaty gagged Belfast on southern Irish affairs, Dublin retained its say in matters related to Northern Ireland. Craig wanted the Council abolished altogether, to be replaced by joint meetings of the Belfast and Dublin Cabinets. So long as Collins had been alive any such demand was 'deprecated' unless the Ulster Unionists were willing to make concessions aimed at re-unification.³⁶

³⁴T. de Vere White, Kevin O'Higgins (Tralee, Ireland, 1948 [1966 edition]), p. 83-84.

³⁵C.I.L. 3rd Meeting, 22 November 1922, CAB 27/157. HC Deb, Vol. 151, Col. 800, 3 March 1922.

³⁶Ibid, C.I.L. 3rd Meeting. Appendix II, Articles 12 and 13. Craig to Devonshire and Craig memorandum, 6 November 1922, CO 739/1/55311. Conference minutes, 29

Now, however, as a gesture of good-will Cosgrave's government offered to set aside the Council for up five years. During that time, the British would exercise the Council's powers in Northern Ireland, while the two Irish governments considered possible alternatives. If no agreement was reached at the end of five years, the Council could then be called into being.³⁷ This gesture was spurned by Craig, who wanted no time limit. Hugh Kennedy, the Provisional Government's legal adviser, rejected his demand, arguing that it would 'in effect wipe out the Council of Ireland altogether'.³⁸

At a Cabinet committee meeting called to discuss the dispute, Sir John Anderson pointed out that, strictly speaking, 'the Northern Government had no say in the matter'. That kind of advice, Lord Salisbury pointedly answered, failed to take account of the new political reality. The Conservatives were not about to override Craig's objections and 'put Ulster under the South', even when Curtis and other senior civil servants pointed out that they had no other choice short of repudiating the Treaty. In this instance, 'the bargaining power' entirely lay in the hands of the southern Irish. 'It was a mistake to think that these provisions were put into the Treaty by inadvertence', Anderson explained; 'on the

March 1922, CAB 43/5.

³⁷'Irish Free State (Consequential Provisions Bill)', Jones memorandum, 25 November 1922, BL 117/7/7. HC Deb, Vol. 159, Col. Col. 388-389, 423-433, 27 November 1922.

³⁸C.I.L. 3rd Meeting, 22 November 1922, CAB 27/157.

contrary, Mr. Griffith and Mr. Collins had attached great importance to them'. Sir James Masterton-Smith agreed. If 'Collins were now alive', he told the Conservatives, the Provisional Government's offer never would have been made without 'some substantial concession' from the Ulster Unionists. As far as Masterton-Smith was concerned, 'the Northern Government were getting something for nothing and would be ill-advised to refuse.'³⁹

So it was that the Council of Ireland was put into cold storage by the Consequential Provisions Act. Bonar Law and his colleagues were 'anxious' to avoid the issue and were happy to leave Dublin and Belfast to 'thresh the matter out' themselves over the next five years.⁴⁰ What is extraordinary is that a full eighteen months would elapse before the issue was raised in Dáil Eireann, and only then by accident. During a debate on a railways bill, Kennedy, by then Free State attorney-general, flabbergasted opposition TDs when he off-handedly mentioned the moratorium. Kennedy defended the agreement, claiming that to do otherwise would have given Northern Ireland a voice in Southern affairs.⁴¹ It is unclear whether he actually believed this explanation or whether he was attempting to avoid an embarrassing

³⁹Ibid. C.I.L. 4, 12 November 1922, CAB 27/157. Curtis to Devonshire, 17 November 1922, CO 739/8/56786.

⁴⁰HC Deb, Vol. 159, Col. 389, 27 November 1922.

⁴¹Dáil Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 1498-1503, 28 May 1924.

situation. Whatever the case, as the government's chief legal expert, he ought to have known that this was untrue.

Opposition leader Tom Johnson returned to the issue in mid-June, attacking the moratorium and pointing out that, in British eyes at least, this was a change or 'variation of the Treaty'.⁴² But more importantly, Johnson argued that the chances of ending partition were far greater through the Council than anything that might be achieved with the Boundary Commission. Once 'you have secured unification of control', Johnson told the Dáil, 'you have ensured ultimate unity'.⁴³

Yet, Johnson and other government critics were hardly innocent in this matter. Their failure to take notice of the moratorium when it was made public in November 1922 was staggeringly incompetent, and was surpassed only by the arrogance of Cosgrave's later rebuke. Opposition TDs, the Irish president said, could not take 'the ostrich line' and claim they had been kept in the dark about the Consequential Provisions Act. Its terms were fully reported in Irish newspapers during its passage through the British Parliament. This was true. Still, it begged the question of his own government's failure to inform the Dáil of legislation which, even he

⁴²HC Deb, Vol. 159, Col. 388, 27 November 1922. The phrase was used by William Ormsby-Gore, the under-secretary of state for the Colonies.

⁴³Dáil Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 2355, 2379, 13 June 1924.

admitted, 'greatly concerned us.'⁴⁴

Cosgrave backed away from Kennedy's assertion that the Council would have given the Ulster Unionists a say in Free State affairs. Instead, he argued that the Council was 'defective' and this necessitated the agreement. This explanation masked a larger concern which was the likely reason for Cosgrave's decision to forgo the Council. As one government supporter told the Dáil, a Council devised for two 'subordinate Parliaments could not possibly ... suit a Sovereign Parliament.'⁴⁵ In other words, fear that the Free State's independence might in some way be compromised overrode the desire for re-unification. Not for the last time, a Dublin government felt that staking out the Free State's separate identity was more important than seeking after Irish unity.

The financial trap

On 6 November Craig penned a letter to Devonshire, outlining the changes he expected his Conservative friends to make to the Irish settlement while they were in power. With the outcome of the 1922 general election still uncertain, but with a government in office which had no 'fear of hurting the susceptibilities of the Irish Provisional Government', Craig was determined to seize the moment. Abolition of the Council of Ireland was only

⁴⁴Ibid, Col. 2606-2608, 18 June 1924.

⁴⁵Ibid, Col. 2608, 18 June 1924; Col. 2829-2831, 20 June 1924.

one item on his agenda. Equally important, he wished to re-negotiate certain '[o]utstanding Financial questions'.⁴⁶

Northern Ireland, as one historian has pointed out, was created as a political unit 'not an economic one.' In financial or economic terms, the six-county state was a 'near disaster'.⁴⁷ Although based on the British model, the six-county state was neither large enough nor diverse enough to sustain the same level of services as could be found elsewhere in the United Kingdom.⁴⁸

Throughout the remaining months of the Lloyd George Coalition, the consequences of this situation had been held at bay by a series of emergency grants from the British Treasury. These 'temporary expedients', as Craig called them, were 'calculated to stave off the most pressing difficulties of the moment.' But they were in no sense a long term solution. Moreover, officials in Belfast chafed at the knowledge that as long as they worked under the restrictive conditions of the 1920 Act they 'must always appear in the character of a suppliant.'⁴⁹

This situation Craig now intended to rectify, using

⁴⁶Craig to Devonshire, 6 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1.

⁴⁷Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 245.

⁴⁸Churchill to Steel-Maitland, 13 March 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/4.

⁴⁹Craig to Devonshire, 6 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1. Clark to Piercy, 8 September 1923, Piercy Papers, 10/12.

as his pretext southern Ireland's establishment as a dominion. Ultimately, he demanded a complete reappraisal of his state's financial relationship with London, covering three issues: Northern Ireland's imperial contribution; the funding of its social services, particularly its unemployment insurance programme; and payment for its security force, the Ulster Special Constabulary.

This letter also marked the beginning of the decisive role Stanley Baldwin was to play in Irish affairs, beginning here in his role as Bonar Law's chancellor of the exchequer.

Baldwin's subordinates at the Treasury reacted to Craig's demands with undisguised irritation. His 'proposals would be incredible', Otto Niemeyer told Baldwin, 'if they were not in black and white'. In an accompanying memorandum, Niemeyer argued that Craig's letter 'proceeds on a wholly false basis' because ratification of the Irish Constitution in no way affected the operation of the 1920 Act in Northern Ireland. And, he added for good measure, Craig was proposing a fundamental change in the Act which 'is regarded by Ulster in other connections as inviolable'.⁵⁰

The Colwyn Committee

The day after Niemeyer submitted his memorandum, Craig met privately with Baldwin and Bonar Law. By the

⁵⁰Niemeyer to Baldwin and Niemeyer memorandum, both dated 20 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1.

time the three men left the room, they had agreed that 'all outstanding financial questions between the British Treasury and that of Northern Ireland ... should be submitted for arbitration.' Why Bonar Law agreed to this arrangement is unclear. It is likely that Craig persuaded him that unless there were changes in the financial relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, the Ulster government soon would be bankrupt. Whatever the reasons, Baldwin told Craig that, 'as far as possible', he wanted a 'clean cut'. He meant by that 'a settlement which will clear up the existing uncertainties and reduce to an absolute minimum' any possible future controversy between London and Belfast.⁵¹

This was the genesis of what was officially called the Northern Ireland Special Arbitration Committee, but was better known as the Colwyn Committee, named for its chairman, Frederick Henry, first Baron Colwyn. The committee was to determine if, in light of the establishment of the Irish Free State, 'any alteration is needed in the present scale of the contributions of Northern Ireland to the cost of Imperial Services'. Before its work was finished, the committee issued two reports. First, it recommended a series of changes to the imperial contribution required of Northern Ireland for fiscal years 1922-23 and 1923-24. A second report

⁵¹Baldwin to Craig, 22 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1.

dealt with how Belfast's imperial contribution should be determined in the future.⁵²

Along with Lord Colwyn, who also chaired the Joint Exchequer Board, the committee was made up of Sir Laming Worthington-Evans and Sir Josiah Stamp. Both Colwyn and Worthington-Evans had been proposed by Craig, the latter because he 'was mainly responsible' for the 1920 Act's financial provisions.⁵³ Stamp's appointment turned out to be equally advantageous for the Ulster Unionists. In a 1921 article written for the journal of the Royal Economic Society, Stamp anticipated many of the arguments that the Northern Ireland government would make to the committee. As one historian has noted, that Stamp should hold these same views proved to be 'most fortunate' for Craig's government.⁵⁴

Early in their deliberations, the Colwyn Committee was cautioned to do nothing that Dublin might interpret as adversely affecting the 'ultimate fusion' of Southern and Northern Ireland. In a letter to William Piercy, the committee's secretary, G.C. Upcott explained that Craig had demanded Dominion status for his province on learning of the Treaty's likely terms in November 1921. 'Since then', Upcott wrote, Northern Ireland 'has often tried in

⁵²Cmd. 2072: First Report of the Northern Ireland Special Arbitration Committee; 1924, xi, 341. Cmd. 2389: Final Report of the Northern Ireland Special Arbitration Committee; 1924-1925, xiv, 125.

⁵³Craig to Baldwin, 23 November 1922; and Baldwin to Craig, 27 November and 4 December 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1.

⁵⁴Follis, State Under Siege, p. 137.

one way or another to get herself put on an equality of status with the Free State'. The demands now being put before the committee by Belfast were merely another attempt to achieve this same end and should be rejected.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, the Ulster Unionists took the opposite view, arguing that 'should they consider it necessary' it was within the committee's power to suggest 'drastic alterations' to the 1920 Act.⁵⁶

According to a later Treasury memorandum, the first Colwyn Committee report 'gave substantial advantages to Ulster', reducing its contribution to the Imperial Exchequer from £6.74 million to £5.85 million for 1922-23, and from £5.8 million to £5 million for 1923-24. In addition, the committee awarded Craig's government £500,000 to supplement a previous British grant of £1.5 million to cover claims for malicious damages inflicted since January 1922; another £400,000 was awarded for the construction and maintenance of colleges and other public buildings. However, the committee went against the Unionists on two other claims. First, the unemployment relief grant embodied in the second Craig-Collins Pact was reduced from £500,000 to £300,000, although the Belfast authorities were given an unlimited amount of time to dispense the money. Nor would the committee back Craig's claim for a larger share of funds from a housing

⁵⁵'Note of a conversation with Mr. Upcott', 13 April 1923; Upcott to Piercy, 25 April 1923 and 12 October 1923, Piercy Papers, 10/15.

⁵⁶Follis, State Under Siege, p. 142.

grant for Irish ex-servicemen. Based on population, Northern Ireland had been awarded 28 per cent of £1.5 million allocated to house Irish war veterans; the remaining amount was awarded to the Free State for the same purpose. Craig wanted 40 per cent of the total, or the equivalent in the form of a separate grant to his government.⁵⁷

The Colwyn Committee's second report, presented in December 1924, accepted the substance of Northern Ireland's case. Niemeyer was vindicated in his earlier prediction that the imperial contribution would become 'a last charge' on Ulster's government, allowing it to 'deduct all that they are likely to spend locally from their revenue and give us only what is left.' Niemeyer was no less scathing after the report was issued, calling it 'an unsatisfactory document in every way.' In a note to Churchill, who was by then chancellor of the exchequer, he concluded that, 'instead of getting at any rate peace with penury in the future, I fear we shall have incessant disputes.'⁵⁸

Although some writers have blamed the final Colwyn award for snuffing out Northern Ireland's long-term economic and financial development, they admit that the

⁵⁷Snowden memorandum to MacDonald, 26 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/61. Cmd. 2072. Upcott memorandum to Snowden, 30 January 1924, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1.

⁵⁸Niemeyer memorandum, 20 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1. Niemeyer to Churchill, 25 March 1925, T 160/150/F.5814/2. Also, see Hawtrey memorandum, 27 May 1924, T 208/83.

report gave Ulster Unionists nearly everything they wanted and was, indeed, heartily welcomed in Belfast.⁵⁹ Craig was sanguine about the payments, predicting that in time the contribution would 'melt away altogether.'⁶⁰ Which is what happened. Between 1924 and 1931, Ulster's annual payments to the British Treasury tumbled from £4.5 million to £500,000. This latter contribution was virtually wiped when, also in 1931, an identical sum of £500,000 was given to Stormont by the British government. With it, the imperial contribution disappeared.⁶¹

Taken together, the Colwyn awards substantially altered Northern Ireland's financial relationship with the British government. The committee members may have felt there were good reasons for doing so; but their decisions breached the Irish Treaty and further entrenched partition.

No 'clean cut'

Not long after the Colwyn Committee began its work, Baldwin discovered that he was not going to get the 'clean cut' he thought he had agreed to with Craig. On the contrary, Ulster's leader wished to see the committee become a 'standing tribunal to which fresh claims may be referred.' Baldwin, in a letter written only days after he succeeded Bonar Law as prime minister, told Craig he

⁵⁹Follis, State Under Siege, p. 146, 152. Lawrence, Northern Ireland, p. 46-48. But see Pollock's speech, NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 451-452, 7 May 1925.

⁶⁰NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 468, 7 May 1925.

⁶¹Lawrence, Northern Ireland, p. 49, 53.

'could not possibly agree' to any such thing.⁶²

But Craig was not so easily deterred. As the Colwyn Committee was on the verge of submitting its first report, Piercy received a letter from Sir Ernest Clark, secretary to Northern Ireland's Department of Finance. Although the issue was not mentioned in Craig's 6 November letter to Devonshire, nor was it 'part of the case originally put forward' by the Belfast government, Clark's superiors now wanted the Colwyn panel to consider a claim of assistance for Northern Ireland's unemployment insurance fund.⁶³

Throughout 1923 Northern Ireland's economy continued to stagnate and showed no signs of improving. Conditions were such that, in September, Craig attempted to alter the first Colwyn report to hide its reduction of the Craig-Collins unemployment grant. With the help of Worthington-Evans, Ulster's premier hoped that the committee would combine the £300,000 unemployment grant with the £400,000 expenditure on public buildings, so as to hide the actual reduction from Northern Ireland's voters. 'It would get him over political difficulties', Worthington-Evans confided. The rest of the committee

⁶²Upcott memorandum Neville Chamberlain, 15 September 1923, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1. Baldwin to Craig, 28 May 1923, T 160/163/F.6282.

⁶³Clark to Piercy, 5 September 1923, Piercy Papers, 10/12.

rejected the idea, however, as 'impracticable'.⁶⁴ Nor were they willing to consider Northern Ireland's claims regarding unemployment insurance. Any such request, Clark was informed, could be referred to the committee only by the chancellor of the exchequer.⁶⁵

Craig took Piercy's advice just as Baldwin's first government was drawing to a close. Fearing the possibility of a Liberal or even Labour administration in the wake of the December 1923 general election, Craig sought to have the Colwyn Committee issue an immediate report on the future of Northern Ireland's imperial contribution. At the same time, he wanted the committee to re-consider imperial backing for his government's unemployment insurance fund.

'Your proposal', Neville Chamberlain told Craig, 'in the present political circumstances is, I fear, quite impossible.' Time would not allow the committee to issue its final report before a new government came into office. Nor, as chancellor of the exchequer, was Chamberlain willing to refer 'an entirely new claim' to the Colwyn Committee. Such a move would bind the next government to the panel's decision - which is precisely what Craig was after.

Even if the Conservatives' fall from power had not

⁶⁴Worthington-Evans to Piercy, 26 September 1923; and Piercy to Worthington-Evans, 3 October 1923, Piercy Papers, 10/14.

⁶⁵Piercy to Clark, 8 October 1923, Piercy Papers, 10/12.

been in the offing, Chamberlain doubted that he could back the Unionists' claims for support of their unemployment fund. Doing so, he reminded Craig, would involve 'a fundamental amendment' to the 1920 Act.⁶⁶ That should have been the end of the matter. But as officials at the Treasury were learning, the Unionists were more adept at saying 'no', than they were at taking it for answer.

Paying for the Specials

In his letter establishing the Colwyn Committee, Baldwin determined that there should be a 'sole exception' to the issues open to arbitration. This one matter, 'to be reserved for separate consideration', was also the most contentious dispute between the two governments: Britain's continued funding of the Ulster Special Constabulary.⁶⁷

Though conceived as a temporary force during the Anglo-Irish War, the 'A', 'B', and 'C-1' Special Constabulary still numbered roughly 42,000 at the end of 1922.⁶⁸ During the remaining months of the Coalition government, Craig was able to ensure continued imperial backing for the force simply by claiming that various Cabinet members had promised to 'see him through'. His ploy confounded Treasury officials - not least because it

⁶⁶Chamberlain to Craig, 3 January 1924, HO 45/13743/1.

⁶⁷Baldwin to Craig, 22 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1.

⁶⁸A. Hezlet, The 'B' Specials: A History of the Ulster Special Constabulary (London, 1972), p. 93.

was seldom challenged and, even then, the Ulster leader still got his way.⁶⁹

Craig seems to have thought that his claim on Treasury funds for the Specials would be immune from Bonar Law's 1922 election promise to reduce the government's budget. He was in for a shock. On 23 November, Craig urgently wrote to Baldwin concerning a matter that had to be taken care of 'as speedily as possible': namely, funding for the Specials for the next financial year, as well as an additional request for £200,000 needed for 'the current financial year, promised by Winston Churchill' while he was still colonial secretary. Citing the 'present burdens of the British taxpayer', Baldwin did not see how he could possibly promise any future aid for the Specials. As for the £200,000 request, he was 'informed that Winston Churchill made no [such] promise'.⁷⁰

This rebuke forced Craig to fall back to his position of last resort: he implicitly threatened to resign. 'I doubt if anyone could be found to carry on here unless they were assured that the present magnificent system of Special Constabulary was maintained at a sufficient strength', Craig told Baldwin. And the price tag for that 'sufficient strength' had just gone up. In this same letter, Craig explained that his home

⁶⁹Niemeyer to Horne, 5 May 1922, T 163/6/11/G.256/049.

⁷⁰Craig to Baldwin, 23 November 1922; Baldwin to Craig, 27 November 1922, T 160/150/F.5814/1.

minister and inspector-general had 'underestimated' the number of 'A' Specials needed to maintain order. Therefore, his government was now asking for £1.5 million for financial year 1923-24, instead of the £1.35 million initially requested.⁷¹

Once again, the Ulster Unionist position was saved by Bonar Law. On 4 December Baldwin informed Craig that after consulting with the British prime minister, Belfast's demand for an additional £200,000 would be granted after all. Even so, Baldwin felt bound to insist that Churchill had no authority to commit the British Treasury to such a promise. Nor, he pointedly added, 'do I think that he did in fact do so.' The matter of future budget requests was, for the moment, put to one side.⁷²

Officials at the Treasury warned that underwriting the Specials marked a serious departure not only from the spirit but also the letter of the 1920 Act. It also breached Article 11 of the Treaty. G.C. Upcott pointed out to Baldwin that with the South absorbed in a civil war, the Specials no longer could be regarded as an adjunct to the British Army. Their main function now consisted of maintaining internal order in the six counties and as 'a means of providing for unemployment

⁷¹Ibid, Craig to Baldwin, 28 November 1922.

⁷²Ibid, Baldwin to Craig, 4 December 1922. Baldwin agreed to the £1.5 million grant in February. See Niemeyer memorandum, 22 February 1923, WO 32/5330. In total, the Specials received £2.7 million from the British Treasury for financial year 1922-23. See Snowden memorandum to MacDonald, 26 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/61.

[sic] in Ulster'. If previous experience was anything to go by, Upcott continued, 'only direct financial pressure on Northern Ireland will secure substantial reductions in this expenditure.'⁷³

Lord Derby, Bonar Law's secretary of state for war, was also critical Craig's spendthrift habits when it came to the Specials. Nor was he confident about the relationship between the Specials and army units stationed in the North. In case of trouble, Derby confided to the home secretary, 'we might be badly let down by the Constabulary.' But, far from disbanding the Specials, Derby's solution was to absorb the force into the British military as a division in the Territorial Army.⁷⁴

Derby's proposal came about because the War Office was under intense pressure to reduce the number of army units throughout the empire. As many as sixteen battalions were stationed in Northern Ireland, a number Derby wanted reduced to five. As an incentive, he pointed out that if the money Belfast wanted for the Specials was used to raise a Territorial division, 'Craig could have something like 65,000 men for the same cost as he now has some 25,000 Constabulary.'⁷⁵

Aside from budgetary - never mind military -

⁷³Upcott memorandum to Baldwin, 6 February 1923, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1.

⁷⁴Derby to Bridgeman, 11 December 1922, WO 137/4/11-12.

⁷⁵Ibid. Derby to Bonar Law, 9 December 1922, BL 111/13/71.

considerations, there was a political aspect behind Derby's proposal. This aspect was laid out most baldly in a report calling for the 'C-1' Specials to 'provide the nucleus of an Ulster Territorial Division.' The two officers who wrote the report argued that the formation of such a unit was necessary because:

There exists in Northern Ireland amongst all classes a grave mistrust of the British Government. We do not mean particularly the present one, but rather of any Government which may be in power in Great Britain in the future. This mistrust will take years to remove, and ... can only be eradicated by bringing Northern Ireland more and more into the United Kingdom, and particularly as regards military matters.

Having said all that, the report's authors then laid down a series of exceptions for use of the Ulster Division, exceptions which would apply to no other Territorial unit. First, the division could not be removed from the province without the consent of Northern Ireland's government. Conversely, this same government would be empowered to mobilize the division for service in the province, 'irrespective of whether the remainder of the Territorial Army has been called out or not.'⁷⁶

While the War Office might fancy the idea of clothing the Specials with the authority of the British Army, others were appalled. Sir Charles Wickham, the Royal Ulster Constabulary's inspector-general, warned that the 'C-1' constables were 'a highly political body

⁷⁶'Report on the Organization of the Constabulary Forces in Northern Ireland' by Major General Sir Archibald A. Montgomery and Colonel H.H.S. Knox, 12 February 1923, WO 32/5330.

formed originally for the absorption of a dangerous independent Orange force'. Nor would this plan prevent conflict between the army and the Specials. Even if they were converted into a Territorial division, Wickham was certain that in any dispute between Belfast and London, the 'C-1s' would 'refuse orders from their Imperial officers' creating, as he put it, a 'difficult situation'.⁷⁷

The idea that he would be provided free of charge with a fully-equipped army division was beyond Craig's wildest dreams and, in the end, any possible realisation. Despite War Office support, the plan was allowed to hang fire through the summer and autumn of 1923. In early November, Craig attempted to resurrect the proposal, telling Derby that his government was now prepared to 'acquiesce' in the conversion of the 'C-1' Specials into a Territorial division. But Craig had been overtaken by events. Derby explained that the plan faced 'considerable legislative and financial difficulties' and, despite his own personal support, he could not promise 'anything definite in the present fluid state of politics.'⁷⁸

Craig, however, would not give up on the prospect of his own army division even when the Conservatives left office. In late January 1924, the new war secretary,

⁷⁷Tallents to Anderson, 27 August 1923, HO 144/3915/8.

⁷⁸Craig to Derby, 9 November 1923; Derby to Craig, 19 December 1923, WO 32/5309.

Stephen Walsh, received the first of a series of letters from Craig claiming that 'in accordance with the wishes' of his predecessor, the 'C-1' Specials had been retained to prepare for their formation as a Territorial division.

Craig was employing the same tactic that had worked so well in his dealings with the Treasury. But this time his bluff was called. Pleading that Walsh's refusal to honour Derby's 'request' would cause the Ulster government acute 'embarrassment', Craig tried to salvage the situation by using the denial to win yet further grants for the Specials. When even this ploy failed, he became aggressive. 'You are doubtless aware', Craig sternly reminded Walsh on 11 March,

that Northern Ireland, in contributing her quota to the Imperial Exchequer, is paying for her share of the National Debt and the Imperial expenditure on the Forces of the Crown. We have a claim, therefore, that Northern Ireland should be put on the same footing as other parts of the United Kingdom when it comes to the expenditure of these sums

Craig wrote these words all the while he was doing everything he could to reduce his government's imperial contribution.

Derby's suggestion finally was put to rest by Derby himself. After receiving copies of Walsh's correspondence with Craig, he denied committing the War Office to any plans for an Ulster Territorial Division. Derby's response could have served as a useful warning to anyone dealing with Sir James Craig. 'It just goes to show how careful one ought to be not to make any casual remark which can be construed into a definite statement

of policy', he ruefully admitted.⁷⁹

'A very dangerous topic'

By the time Derby penned those words, Bonar Law was dead. A victim of throat cancer, he resigned as prime minister on 20 May 1923 and did not live to see the end of the year. Shortly before Bonar Law's resignation, Cosgrave wrote to inform him of the 'collapse of armed resistance' and the end of the Irish Civil War. Unaware of Bonar Law's condition, the Free State president suggested that it would soon be time for their governments to make ready for the Boundary Commission.⁸⁰ Four days later Bonar Law stepped down as prime minister.

One last time the poisoned chalice had passed from his lips. Bonar Law could go to his grave, the uncompromising champion of Ulster. According to his biographer, Northern Ireland's existence was his legacy as much as, if not more than, Edward Carson's or James Craig's.⁸¹

What Bonar Law would have done about the boundary issue had his health not given way can be no more than a matter for speculation. One possible answer was given nearly a year after his death by former Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden. According to Borden, Bonar

⁷⁹Ibid, Craig to Walsh, 23 January 1924; Walsh to Craig, 25 February 1924; Craig to Walsh, 28 February 1924; Walsh to Craig, 6 March 1924; Craig to Walsh, 11 March 1924; Derby to Kenneth Lyon, 17 March 1924.

⁸⁰Cosgrave to Bonar Law, 16 May 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

⁸¹Blake, Unknown Prime Minister, p. 531.

Law was 'prepared to let Ireland go', meaning that he would have accepted the declaration of a republic in the South.⁸² If this is true, it is likely that Bonar Law would have gone along with such a declaration not so much as an acceptance of the will of the Irish people, but as a way of scuppering once and for all any chance of reconciliation and re-union between North and South. Moreover, by the time of his death, support for this trade-off was gaining ground in both Conservative and Unionist ranks.⁸³ Yet such a solution would have required a good deal of explanation. Under Bonar Law, it was a Tory article of faith that an Irish republic would be a direct threat to the future of the British Empire.

Bonar Law held his country's highest elected office for only 210 days. In that short time, Britain's Irish policy veered further away from the course that had been charted in December 1921. The Boundary Commission was indefinitely postponed; the Council of Ireland, too, was put on hold. Equally important, under Bonar Law the process of altering the Treaty's financial clauses was advanced so that these, too, would no longer pose a threat to Northern Ireland's existence. His feat has gone largely unrecognised, then or since, an unknown triumph for the 'Unknown Prime Minister'.

⁸²Borden to Beaverbrook, 9 October 1924, BBK C/51.

⁸³See e.g., 'Ireland, Rome, and the Republicans', Quarterly Review, No. 477, October 1923, p. 415. Churchill to Curtis, 8 September 1924, Curtis Papers, MSS 89, ff. 89-90.

Ever the pessimist, he himself seems not to have realized his accomplishment. A few weeks after leaving Downing Street, Bonar Law was paid a visit by the Cabinet's assistant secretary, Tom Jones. The dying man thought his successor was making a good start as prime minister. Nevertheless, he confided to Jones, 'the real trouble' for Stanley Baldwin 'would be over the Boundary Commission - it was a very dangerous topic.'⁸⁴

So it was. But the rest of the Treaty's Ulster clauses, the ones designed to bring about economic pressure on Northern Ireland, had largely been rendered impotent. This change marked a serious blow for the prospects of Irish unity, a change that might never have taken place but for the return of Bonar Law to politics.

⁸⁴Jones diary, 10 June 1923, Vol. III, p. 221.

Chapter 5

Mr Baldwin Takes Charge

The fact is that a big fight is coming on in Great Britain over the Protection issue and they are unable to think of anything else.

- Eoin MacNeill¹

As the Irish negotiations edged to their climax on the evening of 5 December 1921, at least one member of the British Cabinet was unmoved by the history being made round about him. 'It's rather a depressed SB this afternoon', Stanley Baldwin confided to a friend, 'for I have been done out of my dinner at Trinity (and a stay at the Lodge, if you please!)'.²

Unlike the man he was destined to succeed as prime minister, Baldwin had never shown much interest in Irish affairs. Those who knew him would not have been surprised that he found a reunion at his old college far more congenial than awaiting the outcome of the Irish negotiations, however dramatic that might be. By his own reckoning, Baldwin's feelings about Ireland were those of 'an ordinary rank-and-file member of the Unionist [i.e. Conservative] Party'.³ The description was apt. Like most Tories, Baldwin had little sympathy for the Nationalist cause and, like most Tories, what views he

¹MacNeill to O'Higgins, 2 November 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

²Baldwin to J.C.C. Davidson, 5 December 1921, Davidson Papers.

³S. Baldwin, 'Why I Support the Irish Agreement', Popular View, Vol. I, No. 9, January 1922, p. 3.

did have were coloured by a degree of anti-Catholic prejudice.⁴

As president of the Board of Trade in the Coalition government, Baldwin was bound to support the Irish Treaty. He spoke in favour of it in the House of Commons and wrote at least one article explaining 'Why I Support the Irish Agreement'.⁵ This support, however, was conditional. The Free State must remain a faithful member of the Commonwealth and, more importantly, Ulster's 'equal rights' within the United Kingdom must not be disturbed. 'Whether in years to come she thinks fit to enter a United Irish Parliament', he wrote in the Popular View, 'is her business and her business alone.' Baldwin was among those who saw the Treaty as a final settlement, a new status quo, and like most other 'rank and file' Conservatives he was more than happy to see the Irish problem disappear from Britain's political agenda.⁶ In that sense, Baldwin much more than Bonar Law reflected the true spirit of the Conservative Party after 1918.

Yet, however much they may have desired to put the Irish question behind themselves, post-war Conservatives could not walk away from Ireland, and this proved to be truer for Baldwin than for most. The history of the

⁴K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, Baldwin: A Biography (London, 1969), p. 67.

⁵HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 119-124, 14 December 1921.

⁶Baldwin 'went out of his way to identify with the rank and file' of the Tory Party, a point made in John Ramsden's discussion of the 'New Conservatism'. See Balfour and Baldwin, p. 207-215.

Conservative Party in the first years after the fall of Lloyd George is above all the story of men seeking first to reunite former Coalitionists with their Tory opponents, before going on to re-establish the party as the dominant player in British politics. In their hearts, most Conservatives were glad that the Coalition had produced the Irish Treaty, that it was 'impossible to put the clock back to 1920'.⁷ But because Ireland's most contentious issue - the relationship between North and South - had not been settled, this conflict was bound to re-emerge, thus threatening to upset the party's drive toward unity and electoral dominance.

For Baldwin in particular, the events that took place on the night of 5-6 December 1921 continued to shadow his career. As chancellor of the exchequer, he had already played an important role in altering the contours of that settlement, making it less likely that financial considerations would spur the two Irish governments toward unity. Now, as leader of his country, it was left to him to face, what his predecessor had called that 'very dangerous topic'.

'Indefinite postponement'

When Conservative MPs met to confirm Baldwin as their leader in May 1923, the most 'striking feature' of the gathering was the 'appeal for unity within the party'. Baldwin picked up on this theme in his

⁷'The End of the Coalition', Quarterly Review, No. 474, January 1923, p. 212. Also, see Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 127-128.

acceptance speech, appealing to his followers to 'avoid any discussions that may prevent or delay a final and a complete reunion' which, he hinted, might be brought about 'at no very distant date'.⁸

Despite these warm words and a 'now or never' appeal from his followers, Austen Chamberlain refused to have anything to do with the party he once led. From Paris, he issued a letter freeing his colleagues from 'any obligations arising out of our joint action in the Irish Treaty and last October' (i.e. the Carlton Club meeting) so that they could accept office in the new government.⁹ Chamberlain was under no illusions 'as to my unpopularity with the Die-hards', who now dominated the Tory inner circle. Much as Baldwin might wish to restore party unity, many in the Cabinet opposed Chamberlain's inclusion in the leadership, and they were even more vehemently hostile toward Birkenhead.¹⁰

Chamberlain's foes had not forgotten the part that he and Birkenhead had played in the Treaty negotiations. Above all, the two stood condemned for the settlement's Ulster clauses, which the Belfast News-Letter called 'as

⁸'Prime Minister as Leader', The Times, 29 May 1923.

⁹Worthington-Evans to Chamberlain, 22 May 1923; Chamberlain to Worthington-Evans, 24 May 1923; and Chamberlain to Birkenhead, 31 May 1923, AC 35/2/2, 6, and 18.

¹⁰Peel to Reading, 30 May 1923, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/6, No. 17.

gross a betrayal as it is possible to imagine.'¹¹ In November 1922, Chamberlain attempted to refute these allegations, telling delegates from the Ulster Unionist Council that he believed the Boundary Commission would make only minor readjustments to the Irish frontier. But he then went on to say that the current border was neither a 'logical or good boundary'. Worse, he admitted that the Coalition 'never affected to believe that the Act of 1920 could be permanent.'¹²

Chamberlain compounded his woes the following spring, when he involved himself in a very public exchange over allegations that a 'Ministerial undertaking' was given to Irish leaders guaranteeing that the Treaty would end partition.¹³ Although Chamberlain was absolved of any responsibility for the pledge, the timing of this incident could not have been worse. When, finally, he and Baldwin met, Chamberlain had little choice but to accept Baldwin's explanation that he had simply 'never thought of' including Austen in his new

¹¹'Mr. Chamberlain and Ulster', Belfast News-Letter, 2 November 1922.

¹²Ibid. Also, see 'Mr. Chamberlain and Ulster', The Times, 2 November 1922.

¹³'The Irish Revolution', 12 May 1923; 'Irish Settlement. Mr. A. Chamberlain on Partition', 18 May 1923; 'Irish Partition. The Alleged Promise', 25 May 1923; and 'Irish Boundary. The Alleged Secret Understanding', 12 September 1923, all in The Times. Also see, W. O'Brien, The Irish Revolution and How It Came About (Dublin, 1923), p. 441-445, which claims that the assurance was given by Churchill and Lloyd George.

government.¹⁴ In fact, Baldwin was dissembling, because he gave the idea a good deal of thought.

As a formality on Baldwin's assumption of the premiership, all members of the Cabinet tendered their resignations. As told to Neville Chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire offered to step down from the Colonial Office to make way for another appointee if that would help to restore party unity. 'Accordingly', Neville wrote in his diary, 'Baldwin had thought of offering the C.O. to Austen but had reflected that he would be prejudiced by his Irish record (!)'.¹⁵ Neville Chamberlain's story was confirmed a few days later by Lord Peel. Two issues stood in the way of Austen's return to the party's inner circle, Peel told India's viceroy. The lesser of the charges was that 'he had shown little friendliness' towards Bonar Law's government. The graver charge, the one that his colleagues still could not forgive, was that 'he had been one of the signatories of the Treaty with Ireland'.¹⁶

Much as Chamberlain wished to put Ireland behind

¹⁴Chamberlain memorandum, 27 May 1923, AC 35/2/11(b).

¹⁵Chamberlain diary, 1 June 1923, NC 2/21. The source for this story was Bonar Law. If Devonshire's offer was made in writing, Baldwin seems not to have kept it. But see the cryptic postscript in Devonshire to Baldwin, 23 May 1923, SB Vol. 42, ff. 46. According to Worthington-Evans, Baldwin told Robert Horne that he had intended to offer the Colonial Office to Chamberlain but changed his mind after learning 'that Conservative feeling was strongly against Austen' in both Cabinet and party circles. See memorandum, undated, W-E, MSS Eng. his., c. 894, ff. 32-42.

¹⁶Peel to Reading, 12 June 1923, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/6, No. 20.

him, the Die-hards were unwilling to forgive or to forget.¹⁷ In late June, Ronald McNeill, now a junior minister in Baldwin's government, used the first anniversary of Sir Henry Wilson's assassination to mount a savage attack on Coalition leaders. Lloyd George, 'jointly with Mr Austen Chamberlain, was the author' of the policy that led directly to Wilson's killing, McNeill told his audience. As well as attacking Chamberlain, the speech provoked a sharp reaction from Dublin which, for a time, Baldwin feared would cause a 'serious reaction' within the party.¹⁸

Even without these distractions, it was going to be impossible for Baldwin to ignore the Irish Question for long. Less than three weeks after he took over as prime minister, Cosgrave informed Britain's new leader that the Irish government soon would be ready to present its case to the Boundary Commission.¹⁹ The day after Cosgrave wrote, Tom Jones discussed the problem with Bonar Law, and the two agreed that it could cause Baldwin 'real

¹⁷Lord Crawford found it amusing, 'in a grim fashion', that while the Die-hards would not forgive Chamberlain for his role in the Irish Treaty, they were willing to accept the former Liberal Reginald McKenna as chancellor of the exchequer, even though he had been 'the bitterest opponent of Ulster'. See Crawford diary, 26 May 1923, p. 483-484.

¹⁸'Irish Chaos. Mr. R. McNeill's Reply to Mr. Lloyd George', Morning Post, 25 June 1923. Curtis to Masterton-Smith, 26 June 1923; and Cosgrave to Baldwin, 27 June 1923, CO 739/18/34181. Baldwin to Cosgrave, 2 July 1923; and ? to Curtis, 3 July 1923, SB Vol. 99, ff. 8-10. Incidents like this occurred throughout Baldwin's first government. See, e.g., Curtis to Jones [letter excerpt], 3 October 1923, Vol. III, p. 225.

¹⁹Cosgrave to Baldwin, 9 June 1923, CO 739/18/30127.

trouble'. In that case, it might be best to play for an 'indefinite postponement' of the entire issue.²⁰

Whether or not Jones passed on the advice, these two words became the alpha and omega of Baldwin's Irish policy for the next six months. Baldwin, like Bonar Law, avoided public discussion of the issue whenever he could and was evasive when he could not.²¹ The issue was quarantined in the Colonial Office by Devonshire and his subordinates. Never, during Baldwin's first government was the boundary question discussed in Cabinet.²²

The right 'psychological moment'

While avoiding the boundary question may have been an option for Baldwin, it was not for Cosgrave. No longer fettered by the diversion of civil war, Free State leaders faced increasing pressure to direct the same energy toward ending partition as they had devoted in their fight against the Irregulars of the IRA.²³ Such criticism was particularly galling when it came from Northern Nationalists who were themselves divided over how to achieve re-unification. In fact, Nationalists in the six counties were bitterly split into several

²⁰Jones diary, 10 June 1923, Vol. III, p. 221.

²¹See, e.g., Baldwin's exchange with Oswald Mosley in HC Deb, Vol. 167, Col. 1699-1700, 2 August 1923.

²²Although the Cabinet held several discussions on disputes with Dublin over compensation payments and land purchases, there was no discussion of the boundary issue between 30 May 1923 and 22 January 1924. See CAB 23/46.

²³'Boundary Commission - Memorandum', 11 July 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

factions. These divisions included not only pro- and anti-Treatyites. There was also the older rift between Sinn Féin and the Irish Parliamentary Party led by Joseph Devlin. This second division, in part, mirrored yet another split. On one side were those in the border counties who expected to be transferred to the Free State by the Boundary Commission. On the other were those Nationalists living in eastern Ulster, especially Belfast, who could expect no such 'rescue'. Their position would be made considerably worse if any boundary award did not end partition entirely but, instead, left them in an even more homogenous Protestant state.²⁴

This latter group, overwhelmingly Devlinite in its political allegiance, had been highly critical of Cosgrave's Northern policy throughout the Civil War. The corrosive effect of such criticism soon told on Free State supporters. One of these supporters was John Henry Collins, a Newry solicitor recently employed by the Free State's North-Eastern Boundary Bureau. Collins's primary job for the bureau was to gather evidence to present to the Boundary Commission; his other duty was to 'keep in touch' with Nationalist sentiment in his area.²⁵ As early as January 1923, Collins warned bureau director Kevin O'Shiel of growing scepticism 'about the honesty and bona-fides of your Government'. Although the Civil

²⁴See Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, for a detailed history of these divisions.

²⁵Ibid, p. 173, 259-260.

War had not yet been won, Collins pressed for the Boundary Commission's immediate establishment, to 'have the thing brought to a head'. As long as the panel worked 'honestly and quickly', he told O'Shiel, 'I cannot conceive of anything that will be of greater assistance to the Irish government'.²⁶

O'Shiel's response was one Collins may have reflected on bitterly in later years. The Northern Nationalists had to be 'patient', O'Shiel told Collins, and judge the Free State 'not by their fears of what they think it may do, but by the ultimate results of the issue.'²⁷ By early May, however, the situation was, if anything, worse. 'One thing I can tell you', Collins wrote to another bureau official,

and I cannot emphasise it enough - that the longer you leave these Counties in the position they are in without enforcing the Boundary Commission, the worse it is for the Irish Supporters here ... it is hard to convince them that the South has not abandoned them entirely.

It is time ... that something definite was stated from Dublin regarding the Commission.²⁸

Such advice was not taken kindly in the Irish capital. When a delegation of Northern Nationalists requested a meeting to press their demands, the minutes of the Executive Council, Ireland's Cabinet, noted that they brought with them a resolution 'breathing' a 'spirit

²⁶Collins to O'Shiel, 27 January 1923, J.H. Collins Papers, D.921/2/4/1.

²⁷O'Shiel to Collins, 30 January 1923, J.H. Collins Papers, D.921/2/4/2.

²⁸Collins to E.M. Stephens, 8 May 1923, J.H. Collins Papers, D.921/2/4/90.

of hostility to the Free State Government'. Eoin MacNeill, the minister of education, and O'Shiel were instructed to tell the delegates that the government was 'making active and unceasing preparations for the Commission' but that it would not act until the right 'psychological moment.' At the same time, the Nationalists were warned that their Southern allies would not 'allow themselves to be stampeded into any hasty action.'²⁹

The charge often levelled against the Free State's founding fathers is that the deaths of Griffith and Collins 'sanctified' the Treaty so that it became for them not a means to an end but an end in itself.³⁰ While true in one sense, this accusation paints an incomplete picture. Although the Civil War was over, the country was just beginning to reckon with its cost, and the Ulster question was not the only concern bearing down on Cosgrave and his colleagues.

The Free State was shattered physically, emotionally and, on a more immediate if prosaic level, financially. Detractors were quick to contrast conditions in the 'stable' North with those in the 'unstable' South. While Craig's government could boast a small budget surplus of £32,042, the Free State was saddled with a staggering

²⁹Executive Council Minutes, 14 May 1923, D/T, G 2/2, C.1/106.

³⁰Fanning, Independent Ireland, p. 42. According to Roy Foster, 'the dominant pre-occupation of the regime was self-definition against Britain'. See Modern Ireland, p. 516.

deficit of £26 million, the greater part of which, the Annual Register reported, 'was directly due to the losses entailed by the Republican campaign of destruction.' In 1923-24 alone, fully 37 per cent of the new country's revenue was spent on defence or compensation for personal injury or property damage resulting from the Civil War.³¹

This burden of debt would not begin to ease until the end of the decade. Until then it would be a continual source of weakness which the southern Irish could not ignore in their dealings with Britain. 'When the Free State was founded', Kevin O'Higgins's biographer noted, 'it was probably the only country in the world without a National Debt'. A year later, 'it was on the verge of bankruptcy.'³²

Given this situation, Cosgrave and his lieutenants hardly can be blamed for concentrating on the necessary, if mundane, duties of building a new state. Nor is it logical to claim that because the Free State's leaders focused their attention on implementing the Treaty settlement, they were willing to forsake their Northern brethren. One did not preclude the other, and there is no reason to doubt Cosgrave's sincerity when he said that Article 12 was 'just as vital as any other clause of the Treaty.'³³

³¹Annual Register: 1923, p. 151, 155. Fanning, Independent Ireland, p. 39.

³²White, O'Higgins, p. 151.

³³'President Cosgrave in Tirconail', Ulster Herald, 18 August 1923.

The dilemma facing Ireland's new leaders was more complicated than that. Much as they desired to end partition, the Free Staters also had to show that de Valera and the Republicans were wrong, that the Treaty gave Ireland real independence.³⁴ The problem was that whenever these two goals collided the Dublin government found that asserting Irish independence was far more likely to produce results than was making sacrifices for Irish unity.

Further complicating the Free State's Ulster policy was Bonar Law's victory in the 1922 general election. In a December memorandum, Kevin O'Shiel reminded the Executive Council that the 'object' of the Free State's Ulster policy, which was 'not the setting up of a Boundary Commission' but the larger goal of 'National Union'. With 'a strong Conservative government in power in Great Britain', O'Shiel pointed out, the Commission might further entrench partition, not end it.³⁵

Despite this concern, in early June the Executive Council met to consider the 'maximum' and 'minimum' territorial claims that the Free State could make to the Boundary Commission. Were the Commission to base its findings solely on the wishes of the inhabitants and to

³⁴At this time, e.g., the government became involved in a prolonged wrangle with London over its decision to issue its own passports and to establish an embassy in the United States. See G. MacMillan, 'British Subjects and Irish Citizens: The Passport Controversy, 1923-24', Eire-Ireland, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, p. 25-50.

³⁵Quoted in Lee, Ireland, p. 143-144.

the exclusion of 'every conceivable geographic and economic principle', Northern Ireland would be reduced to a rump consisting of nothing more than 'Co. Antrim, the extreme north east corner of Co. Derry, a portion of north and mid Armagh (excluding Armagh City) and north and mid Co. Down.'

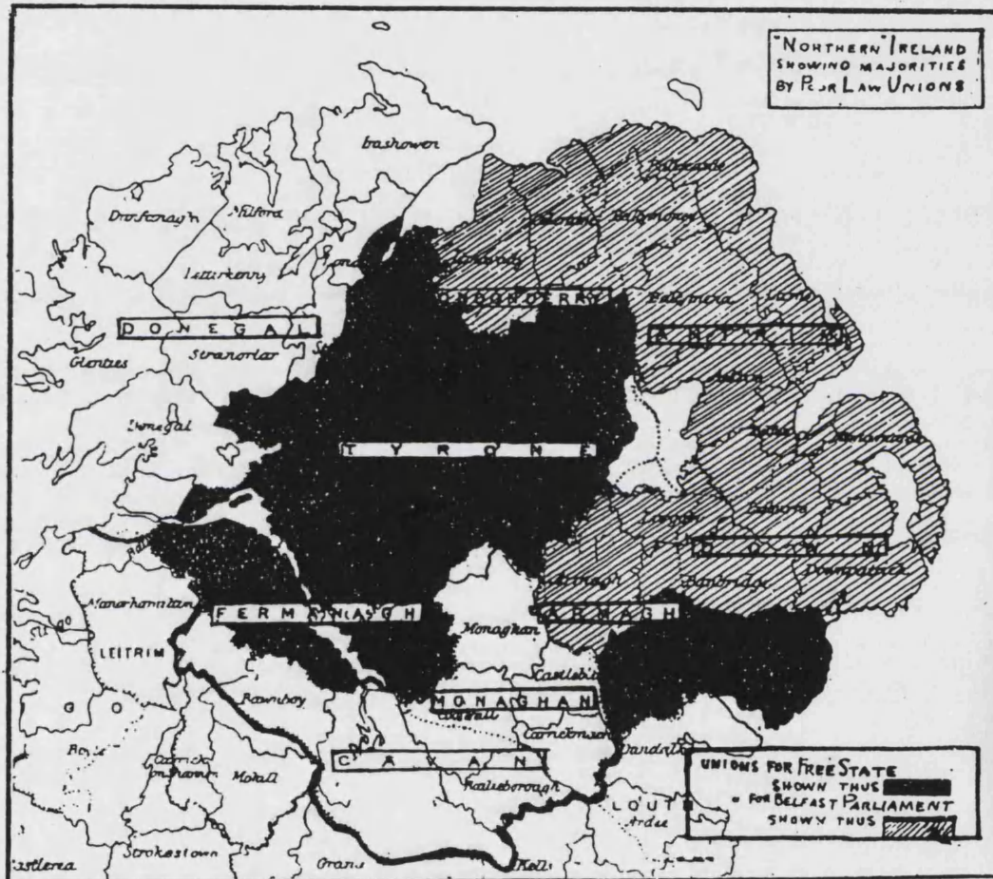
A more realistic claim, and the one O'Shiel felt was 'the best possible line' to take before the Commission, would still give the Free State all of Ireland 'except Co. Antrim, the extreme east portion of Co. Tyrone bordering Lough Neagh, the eastern half of Co. Derry, the northern portion of Co. Armagh and the northern portion of Co. Down.' This latter claim, O'Shiel told the Executive Council, 'should be regarded as the minimum claim of the Free State beyond which they could not recede.'³⁶

'Grave political disadvantages': the Irish tariff

The Boundary Commission was not the only vehicle by which the Dublin government hoped to convince Ulster Unionists of the folly of partition. In late February 1923, Cosgrave surprised the British by announcing the erection of a customs barrier to begin operations on 1 April.³⁷ The Free Staters seem to have thought that they could achieve two goals with this one act. Besides generating income for the struggling government, the

³⁶Executive Council Minutes, 5 June 1923, D/T, G 2/2, C.1/116. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 288-289.

³⁷Loughnane to Curtis, 23 February 1923, CO 739/20/11976.



Map of Free State claims to Northern Ireland territory, based on Poor Law Unions
 Source: North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, Handbook of the Ulster Question (Dublin, 1923), p. 52.

tariff would be an obvious demonstration of Irish independence. Second, imposing a tariff was in keeping with the strategy outlined by Collins if the Ulster Unionists refused to come into an all-Ireland government. The resulting economic war, Collins had promised one County Derry ally, would be 'in the nature of Tariffs far far more effective than the Boycott ever was.'³⁸

But of the two goals, it was clear that unity took second place. According to N.G. Loughnane, the Colonial Office's representative in Dublin, the Free Staters settled on their tariff policy 'without, apparently, having given the matter serious - or at least adequate - consideration.' Evidently, they believed that the British government was itself about to establish tariff barriers. The Irish set theirs up first, Hugh Kennedy told Loughnane, 'in order to demonstrate the Free State's independence of British control.' Timothy Healy, Ireland's governor general, dismissed this sort of thinking as 'madness'. By making Northern goods more expensive in the South, he predicted that 'in a few months time the Catholic population of Tyrone and Fermanagh will be given a financial interest in partition which ... will not tend to improve the Free State position if the Boundary Commission should be set up at an early date.' Cosgrave admitted that establishing the customs barrier was going to cause 'grave political disadvantages' in North-South relations; but, by then, it

³⁸Collins to Walsh, 7 February 1922, D/T, S 9241.

was too late to go back.³⁹

Dublin's leaders had demonstrated that the Irish Free State was indeed, sovereign - though at a cost. Less than a year after the decision to erect a customs barrier was announced, the Boundary Bureau's secretary pointed out that with the fiscal systems of Ireland's two parts diverging, 'new vested interests spring up', making re-unification 'daily more difficult.'⁴⁰

Elections, 1923: The Irish Free State

The need to demonstrate Ireland's independence was made urgent by the fact that the Free State Constitution required the government to call elections before the end of 1923. Unpopular in some quarters for their ruthless suppression of the Irregulars, and in others because the Irish economy was in a slump, Cosgrave and his colleagues felt that they had to play the national card to ward off de Valera and Sinn Féin. They could ill-afford to be vulnerable on the Ulster question, and this explains why Cosgrave began to press first Bonar Law and then Baldwin to call the Boundary Commission into being.⁴¹

Opinion in the Executive Council was sharply divided over how the boundary would develop as an election issue. Although they agreed that 'progress must have been made in the matter of the Boundary Commission before the

³⁹Loughnane to Curtis, 27 February 1923; Loughnane to Curtis, 28 February 1923; and Curtis to Loughnane, 24 February 1923, CO 739/20/11976.

⁴⁰Stephens to McGann, 18 January 1924, D/T, S 1801/D.

⁴¹Lee, Ireland, p. 94.

coming General Election', Free State leaders realised that they could not predict with any certainty how events would play out once set in motion.⁴² Provided that the British government did not respond too quickly to the Irish request, Cosgrave and his associates could go to the electorate without having to explain what they would do if, as expected, Craig's government formally refused to name its Commissioner. Others in the Dublin ministry feared just the opposite, that the British would generate 'extended delays at every stage', exposing the Free Staters to a charge of impotence. Still another faction believed that Craig's refusal could itself be turned to their advantage, if the government called on Irish voters to rally behind their 'efforts to compel the terms of the Treaty to be carried out.'⁴³

On 19 July Healy formally notified Devonshire that Eoin MacNeill had been chosen as the Free State's Boundary Commissioner.⁴⁴ The next day Cosgrave made the appointment public, telling Dáil Eireann that 'the opportune moment has arrived to give effect to the remaining provisions of Article 12'.⁴⁵ That did not

⁴²'Boundary Commission - Memorandum', 11 July 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Healy to Devonshire, 19 July 1923, Cmd. 2155: Correspondence Between His Majesty's Government and the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland Relating to Article 12 of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1924), No. 1.

⁴⁵Dáil Deb, Vol. 4, Col. 1223-1225, 20 July 1923.

mean, however, that he was looking for an immediate British response. Far from it. As Devonshire explained to Baldwin, 'We know that Mr Cosgrave does not want or expect that anything further should be done while the elections are in progress'.⁴⁶ In this, Baldwin and his colonial secretary were only too willing to co-operate.

In his 20 July letter to Baldwin, Devonshire proposed that after the Irish election Cosgrave and Craig should be invited to London to see if they could reach a mutual agreement on the boundary. Despite the willingness of both Irish leaders to meet with one another, the portents for a such a conference were not good. Cosgrave and Craig met at least twice during the Civil War and failed to see eye to eye on any matters of importance.⁴⁷ When Cosgrave raised the boundary question at one such meeting, Craig was stubbornly 'unreceptive' and would not even discuss the issue. The meeting fizzled out with the two men reduced to a pointless conversation about 'cricket and the weather.'⁴⁸ Craig later dismissed the incident, telling his Cabinet that although Cosgrave had raised the boundary question 'there was little discussion between them on the subject.'⁴⁹

Ulster's premier had, however, been thinking about the problem and had concluded that, unless Baldwin 'stuck

⁴⁶Devonshire to Baldwin, 20 July 1923, CO 739/18/36328.

⁴⁷Ibid. Hopkinson, Green Against Green, p. 252.

⁴⁸Curtis to Devonshire, 30 July 1923, CO 739/20/42192.

⁴⁹Cabinet Conclusions, 30 July 1923, PRONI, CAB4/84/12.

to the Treaty', the British would find themselves in 'a great difficulty.' But by honouring the agreement, Craig believed that his friends in London would then be faced with one of two alternatives. Either the imperial government could ask the Ulster Unionists to name their representative to the Boundary Commission (which they would refuse to do); or Baldwin could inform Cosgrave that he was willing to appoint a Boundary Commission chairman 'as soon as the Northern Government has appointed their representative.'

This was Craig's preferred option. It 'would lead naturally to the Free State approaching us about the appointment of our representative and the question generally' and, in time, to an 'amicable' settlement. He even suggested the problem might not even get that far. Once the Free State elections were out of the way, Craig felt that 'the whole agitation will very likely die down.'⁵⁰

On the face of it, such optimism was ill-founded. The Ulster Unionist press was quick to label MacNeill's Boundary Commission appointment an election 'stunt'. Craig himself publicly slammed the door on any accommodation with Dublin and again refused to appoint a Commissioner.⁵¹

South of the border, Cosgrave and his colleagues

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹'Irish Boundary "Crisis." Ulster Premier's Declaration', Manchester Guardian, 23 July 1923.

seemed to be no less determined. To audiences throughout the country they made expansive claims for what could be expected from a Boundary Commission award, claims that could not be justified even in the heat of an electoral campaign. The Free State's case 'was a good one', Ernest Blythe said in one speech, and the South was 'bound to be awarded a very considerable tract of territory.'

Cosgrave was even less reticent. 'If there are any people who think we are going to allow any clause of the Treaty to be inoperative, they are making a very grave mistake', he declared. What many voters failed to notice was that these pledges were conditional. As Blythe admitted to an audience at Clones, Free Staters could expect this promised award only if the Commission was led by 'a fair chairman' - and that was something the Dublin government could in no way guarantee.⁵²

Moreover, by this time Cosgrave had secretly committed himself to Devonshire's conference proposal even though this would effectively scrap the Boundary Commission. 'It will cost me a good deal of support among my followers', he told Curtis when the idea was put to him informally. But he believed that this 'is the way in which it ought to be settled.'⁵³

Publicly, however, the government's new political

⁵²'The Boundary Commission. After the Free State Election', 4 August 1923; and 'President Cosgrave in Tirconail', 18 August 1923, Ulster Herald.

⁵³Curtis to Jones [letter excerpt], 28 June 1923, Vol. III, p. 222.

party, Cumann na nGaedheal, was still committed to the Boundary Commission when the country went to the polls on 27 August. The results, according to one contemporary source, were a 'smashing defeat for the Republicans', given that Independent, Labour, and Farmer representatives, as well as Cumann na nGaedheal, all backed the Treaty settlement. But as a later analysis pointed out, the 'overall result' of the election was that Cosgrave now headed a minority government. Had it not been for de Valera's refusal to lead Sinn Féin's forty-four TDs into the Dáil, the Free State's founders would have been forced to form a coalition. Instead, they found themselves in a situation where they could take decisions 'characterised by a boldness rarely associated with minority governments.'⁵⁴ This was to have a telling impact when the boundary question reached its climax in 1925.

'Saving England's face'

On 22 September Devonshire formally invited Cosgrave to the proposed boundary conference with Baldwin and Craig.⁵⁵ Among Cosgrave's advisers, the invitation aroused deep misgivings. The North-Eastern Boundary Bureau's secretary, E.M. Stephens, pointed out that the Free State had little to gain and much to lose from such a meeting. The 'rights of the Free State on the Boundary

⁵⁴Annual Register: 1923, p. 156. O'Leary, Irish Elections, p. 21-22. Lee, Ireland, p. 94-95.

⁵⁵Devonshire to Healy, 22 September 1923, Cmd. 2155, No. 4.

question are secured', he observed, whereas 'the very fact of entering a conference suggests that they are going to be reduced.' At the same time, the conference might be used to 'let England slip out of her liabilities in the matter' and allow the British to 'escape the odium' of breaching the Treaty should Northern Ireland refuse to name its Boundary Commissioner. Stephens saw no reason for 'saving England's face'.⁵⁶

O'Shiel felt that if the Free State accepted Devonshire's invitation, conditions must be attached. Like Stephens, O'Shiel believed that any conference concerned solely with Article 12 was not in the Free State's interest. Both men urged the government not to have anything to do with the conference unless its goal was Irish unity. Barring that, the Free State should attend only if the British guaranteed that in the event of a breakdown they would 'enforce the Boundary clause by delivering to us the areas where our supporters are in a majority, whether the North consents or not.' Otherwise, O'Shiel forecast, the cry would go up among Northern Nationalists that they had been 'betrayed again'.

O'Shiel also suggested that Cosgrave could use the recent Irish election results to his advantage. The forty-four Sinn Féin TDs were a 'blessing in disguise, as they will enable us to ... drive a harder bargain than we could have done, say before the last Election.' Their

⁵⁶Stephens to O'Higgins, 25 September 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

mere presence, hovering at the entrance of Dáil Eireann, would allow Cosgrave to be uncompromising in his demands. 'We can blame everything on them and the British cannot say anything in reply', he wrote.⁵⁷

Nor were these the only advantages now at hand. In another show of independence, the Free State that autumn gained its own seat at the League of Nations. By making specific reference to the Boundary Commission when defining the state's frontiers in their League application, Irish representatives shifted the Ulster Question from the realm of British politics and potentially made it a cause for international concern.⁵⁸ 'We can no longer say, as we could formerly about the whole Irish question, that it is an internal matter', M.E. Antrobus pointed out after the Free State application was accepted. The Irish, Antrobus feared, might claim that they 'had cause for complaint against us, in that we have not carried out the Treaty by delaying to appoint the Boundary Commission.'⁵⁹

⁵⁷Ibid. O'Shiel to Cosgrave, 5 October 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

⁵⁸The link between the Free State's League application and the boundary issue was drawn by O'Shiel in 'Memo. Some Possible Dangers in the N.E. Situation', undated, D/T, S 1801/C. Also, see D. Harkness, The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-31 (London, 1969), p. 35-37. Lavin, Curtis, p. 213-215.

⁵⁹Antrobus to Curtis, 19 September 1923, CO 739/25/45749. According to Lee, Ireland, p. 144, as early as April, O'Shiel had advised the Executive Council to delay any moves on the boundary question until the Free State could appeal against an unsatisfactory decision either to the League or to the Imperial Conference.

As Curtis warned British League delegates Lord Robert Cecil and Edward Wood, such an appeal might occur if, as expected, Northern Ireland refused to appoint its Boundary Commissioner. A declaration by Baldwin's government that it could not enforce Article 12 might then provoke an Irish appeal for League intervention. The alternatives were just as unappealing. Baldwin could appoint Ulster's representative, or London itself could act on Belfast's behalf on the Commission. Either of these options, though, required additional legislation. 'Such a proposal', Curtis predicted, 'might seriously divide the Govt. supporters and even the Cabinet.'⁶⁰

Despite these advantages, Cosgrave failed to make any attempt to strengthen his hand. Without any conditions whatsoever, the Free State government accepted Devonshire's invitation, suggesting only that the conferees should address 'the present unsatisfactory position of Northern Ireland in relation to the rest of the country'.⁶¹ Cosgrave made no attempt to use the Sinn Féin threat nor did he even hint at a possible appeal to the League of Nations.

Why?

⁶⁰Curtis to Devonshire, 10 September 1923, CO 739/20/49361. Wood later claimed that the Free State's League application implied a 'narrower interpretation of the Boundary Commission's functions'. Even so, his 'devout hope' was that the issue should never be raised in the international forum. See Wood to Curtis, 9 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/61.

⁶¹Healy to Devonshire, 8 October 1923, No. 7; for Craig's acceptance, see Abercorn to Bridgeman, 13 October 1923, No. 8, both in Cmd. 2155.

Given political conditions in Britain, the Irish president may have felt that a hard-line stance would be counter-productive and that it was anyway better to play for time. As O'Shiel himself pointed out, a Conservative government was hardly likely to nominate a Boundary Commission chairman who would be sympathetic to Free State claims. This view was also shared by Tim Healy. The Free State's governor general informed Cosgrave and his colleagues that, according to a 'leading personage in political and journalistic circles in England', Bonar Law continued to back the Ulster cause even in retirement. '[A]s long as he wields his present influence', Healy warned, 'quarters that might otherwise be friendly will not be inclined to assist us openly.'⁶² Cosgrave possibly felt that it was better to be seen as co-operating with the British initiative when delay was, anyway, the best option.

A simpler explanation may be that Cosgrave said what he meant: that the boundary question ought to be settled between the two Irish governments with as little outside interference as possible. This would account for the fact that the Executive Council seems never to have seriously considered taking the issue to the League of Nations. Yet, either of these possibilities fails to account for a third factor. By late 1923 Cosgrave knew better than anyone that Craig was impervious to

⁶²'Boundary Commission - Memorandum', 11 July 1923, D/T, S 1801/C. Healy's likely source was Beaverbrook.

negotiation on this issue. In that case, a conference was going to be a waste of time. Perhaps Cosgrave hoped that by being reasonable he would garner British support at Craig's expense. But there is no direct evidence that he ever took this into consideration, leaving a question mark over his failure to make use of the Boundary Bureau's advice.

'A sedative to Irish nerves'

When the boundary conference was initially proposed, Curtis had hoped that it might be coupled with the Imperial Conference scheduled for October. The presence of other Dominion leaders in London, he thought, 'might help to produce an atmosphere more favourable to settlement.'⁶³ In fact, the gathering further delayed work on the boundary question. This was beginning to cause trouble for Cosgrave, for which he and his colleagues had only themselves to blame. Having promised swift action during the general election campaign, the Free State government fell silent on the issue as summer faded into autumn.⁶⁴ Finally, on 2 November Cosgrave announced that he had accepted Devonshire's invitation to a boundary conference but only after news of the proposal had been leaked to the press either in London or Belfast. The announcement sparked outraged protests among Northern Nationalists, despite an assurance from Dublin that they

⁶³Curtis to Loughnane, 22 October 1923, CO 739/17/50990.

⁶⁴Anderson to Tallents, 31 October 1923, CO 739/20/52770.

had nothing to fear. 'One thing is certain', a priest warned Ernest Blythe about the Free State pledge, 'your government will live or die on it.'⁶⁵

Events were about to take nearly as dramatic a turn.

On 25 October, Baldwin surprised nearly everyone by linking his party's fortunes to tariff reform. As it was, Devonshire had already informed Eoin MacNeill (who was in London to attend the Imperial Conference) that a meeting on the boundary question could not be held before January at the earliest. Now that Baldwin had staked his party's future on tariff reform, a further postponement was unavoidable. 'The fact is that a big political fight is coming on in Great Britain over the Protection issue', MacNeill told O'Higgins, 'and they are unable to think of anything else.'⁶⁶

Amid this increasingly fevered political atmosphere, Curtis told Loughnane that there was 'considerable likelihood of a general election within the next three months, if not the next three weeks'. That, however, was not necessarily a bad thing. Curtis and Sir James Masterton-Smith felt that the intervening lull would give civil servants time to review the boundary problem, 'to see what cards the British government will have in its

⁶⁵Executive Council secretary to MacNeill, 3 November 1923, D/T, S 1801/C. 'Boundary Commission: Index to Dates and Conferences', 1-19 November 1923, D/T, S 1801/P. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 293-294.

⁶⁶MacNeill to O'Higgins, 2 November 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

hands', and 'in what manner they can best be played.'⁶⁷

A meeting of those civil servants most intimately involved in Irish affairs was scheduled for 15 November and seems to have led to a 27-page memorandum written after the 1923 election.⁶⁸ This document is crucial, because it foreshadows subsequent British action on the boundary question, and also because it reveals a decided shift in 'official' thinking. Its writer could only justify the strategy being proposed if he could produce a new version of the genesis of Article 12.

According to this rendering of events, partition was the 'real crux' of the 1921 Treaty negotiations. A settlement based on a single Irish government was reached early on, only to be scuppered by Craig. In return for allowing Northern Ireland to opt out of an all-Irish Parliament, Lloyd George told the Sinn Féin delegates that they would be 'entitled to a revision' of the boundary. The Irish accepted solely because of Lloyd George's threat to 're-open hostilities within 72 hours.' Subsequent claims of a British guarantee that the Free State could expect the transfer of whole counties from

⁶⁷Curtis to Loughnane; and Curtis to Anderson, both 9 November 1923, CO 739/20/54021.

⁶⁸Curtis to Jones [letter excerpt], 10 November 1923, TJ Class Z. Those invited to the meeting were: Masterton-Smith, Curtis, Anderson, Tom Jones, Mark Sturgis, G.G. Whiskard, Loughnane, and Tallents. Another, smaller meeting may also have taken place. According to CO 783/4, the records of these meetings were destroyed. See, instead, 'Memorandum on the Boundary question', undated ['late December 1923?'], unsigned, TJ GG/2/2. All subsequent quotes in this section are from this memorandum unless otherwise indicated.

Northern Ireland were dismissed as a figment of Collins's imagination. Equally important, Article 12's wording was now turned on its head. When determining the boundary, economic and geographic conditions were no longer to be read as a qualification to the wishes of the inhabitants. Quite the reverse, they were now granted a status equal to - perhaps greater than - the desires of the border population.⁶⁹

At the same time, however, the memorandum's writer refused to countenance Ulster Unionist claims that they could stop the Boundary Commission simply by refusing to appoint a representative. Were that to happen, 'the face of England would be blackened for ever not only in Ireland but throughout the civilized world.' That said, allowing the Commission to go forward would be even more hazardous. 'It is difficult to picture an award', the writer maintained, 'which would not precipitate war between the North and South'. This possibility had to be taken into account as there now existed a 'large force of Specials equipped and armed by the British taxpayer', one of whose 'functions may be to resist the findings of the Boundary Commission.'

Postponement, yet again, seemed to be the only answer, though this time with a definite purpose in mind. To allay fears in both parts of Ireland, it was suggested that a Boundary Commission chairman ought to be appointed

⁶⁹This interpretation is refuted by any number of contemporaneous sources. See chapter 2 above.

immediately. This would show that while the British had 'no intention of being rushed over the boundary question neither have they any intention of playing fast and loose with the provisions of the Treaty.' Not least important, the chairman should be the sort of person who 'would act as a sedative to Irish nerves in North and South.'

Once appointed, the chairman could visit the Irish border, where he 'would have time to study the whole subject until he had fully grasped the issues at stake; and inevitably he would realize that on those issues depended the peace of Ireland.' Afterward, he could then put forward proposals acceptable to both governments, obviating the need to appoint the Commission's other two members.

Given the state of Irish politics, the proposals it was suggested that the chairman might make were barely credible. According to the writer, Loughnane actually seems to have believed that Cosgrave's government would accept a plan expanding Northern Ireland's territory to include County Donegal as this would lead to 'an immense improvement ... from the point of view of administrative convenience.' In return, Craig's government would be asked to provide 'certain safeguards to the Catholic minority'. These included restoring proportional representation and redrawing constituency boundaries for Parliamentary seats. It was also suggested that additional powers might be given to the Council of

Ireland.⁷⁰

Whatever its shortcomings, the recommendations in this document set the pace for Britain's Irish policy over the next year. The Boundary Commission was a threat, not least because of those tens of thousands of Specials armed and paid for by the British taxpayer. It would be better to bury the Boundary Commission which, according to this new official version of the past, was never meant to make any great changes anyway. As had occurred with the advent of Bonar Law in political circles, so now among British civil servants, the goal was no longer Irish unity nor, even, an equitable settlement. The goal now was to find a 'sedative to Irish nerves in North and South.'⁷¹

Elections, 1923: the United Kingdom

Unlike the hotly contested campaigns between Conservative, Liberal and Labour candidates in Great Britain, the election brought on by Baldwin's embrace of tariff reform was very much a one-party affair in

⁷⁰According to Wilfrid Spender, through an intermediary Cosgrave later proposed just such an expansion of the Ulster state. However, the offer was probably part of an overall plan to bring about reunification. Even if Cosgrave would have agreed to this expansion, it is unlikely that his government could have withstood opposition to the move. See Spender to Londonderry, 22 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/8/1.

⁷¹Curtis almost certainly penned the memorandum. Its content and style bear striking similarities to contemporaneous documents written by him. See, e.g., Curtis to Loughnane, 25 December 1923, CO 739/26/433; 'Appreciation of the Present Political Position in Ireland', 9 May 1924, CAB 21/281; and Curtis to Churchill, 19 August 1924, Curtis Papers, MSS 89, ff. 76-83.

Northern Ireland. Official Unionist candidates were challenged in only three constituencies. Of that number, they were opposed by Nationalist candidates in only one of them: again, the two-seat constituency of Fermanagh-Tyrone. And, as happened the year before, border Nationalists used the election as a referendum on partition, giving both T.J.S. Harbison and Cahir Healy convincing victories over their Unionist opponents. Viewed from London, the result inconveniently 'complicated' matters, showing once again that 'in Fermanagh and Tyrone there exists a substantial majority' favouring inclusion in the Free State.⁷² Unionists were no less annoyed by the Nationalist victory which, the Northern Whig acidly predicted, would be 'hailed as fresh proof that a large majority of the two counties are eager to break away from Ulster'.⁷³

In Britain, by contrast, no party won a clear-cut victory. Instead, the election held on 6 December resulted in a disaster which, Tom Jones recorded in his diary, 'S.B. never foresaw or imagined.' The number of Conservative MPs dropped from 345 to 258, a net loss of 87 seats. Although still the single largest party in the

⁷²Annual Register: 1923, p. 153. An Independent Unionist in North Belfast and a Labour candidate in West Belfast offered the only other opposition to the official Unionists. Both were defeated. 'Memorandum on the Boundary question', undated ['December 1923?'], unsigned, TJ GG/2/2.

⁷³Quoted in D. Kennedy, The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State, 1919-1949 (Belfast, 1988), p. 136.

House of Commons, Conservatives faced a combined Liberal-Labour opposition of 159 and 191 members respectively. Baldwin's gamble, far from winning a mandate for tariff reform, reunited the Liberal Party, a feat, Austen Chamberlain bitterly told one of his sisters, 'no Liberal could do'. The Liberals, in turn, were ready to place Labour 'in office, but not in power', and Baldwin suddenly faced the very real prospect of losing not only the leadership of his nation but that of his party as well.⁷⁴

Westminster Interlude

Much ink has been spilled trying to explain why Baldwin allowed himself to be manoeuvred into calling the 1923 election barely 11 months after Bonar Law had won a convincing mandate for the Conservative Party. This is not the place to carry on that debate. Nonetheless, as one Conservative historian has written, the election's 'consequences were to be of weighty significance' for years to come, a judgment that is as true for Ireland as it is for Britain.⁷⁵ For this reason, it is necessary to explore those consequences in order to see how, by changing Britain's political landscape, they affected the settling of Ireland's boundary question.

When the anti-Coalition Tories cast Lloyd George

⁷⁴Jones diary, 22 December 1923, Vol. I, p. 261. D. Butler and J. Freeman, British Political Facts: 1900-1967 (London, 1968), p. 142. Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 17 November 1923, AC 5/1/298. Taylor, English History, p. 210.

⁷⁵Rhodes James, British Revolution, p. 467.

into the political wilderness in 1922, they were motivated by more than a simple desire to get rid of an unpopular leader. At the Carlton Club meeting, Kenneth Morgan has written, the Conservative Party turned its back on 'high policy' for the 'more parochial but more reassuring world' of two-party politics. This was Labour's desire, as well, and all the more so after the 1923 election. Both Conservative and Labour party strategies, according to Maurice Cowling, 'were based on the assumption that the two-party system was natural and desirable'. The problem was that 'the Liberal Party refused to die.'⁷⁶

And, therein, for both Conservatives and Labour, lay the danger.

There is a tendency among some historians to judge the outcome of the 1923 election through the prism of the election that followed it less than a year later. Thus, it is said that the 'principal casualty was the Liberal Party', while Baldwin and the Conservatives actually came out of the 1923 debacle 'in a strong position.'⁷⁷ That was not the way matters looked at the time. Only after the dust had cleared did Baldwin realise that he had an opportunity to destroy the Liberals from the right, while MacDonalld saw that Labour now had the chance to stake its claim as the party of the left. Even then, it would not

⁷⁶Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 356. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 362. Taylor, English History, p. 195.

⁷⁷Rhodes James, British Revolution, p. 467. Ramsden, Balfour and Baldwin, p. 183.

have been safe to wager that the doom of the Liberals was a foregone conclusion.⁷⁸

That outcome was not possible so long as the three parties remained on roughly equal terms. This unstable situation also increased the chances for another coalition government, and in fact many at the time thought that this would be the outcome of the 1923 election. Both Labour and the Conservatives had to take into account the fact that a new coalition could be hatched from either side of the political spectrum - and that either of those outcomes could be achieved by one man: Lloyd George.

There is much evidence that at this time not only Lloyd George but other members of the old Coalition contemplated a re-grouping of their forces. Although these plans came to nothing, Birkenhead's attempt to put together an anti-Labour (some would say, anti-Baldwin) coalition in the wake of the 1923 election meant that Lloyd George's resurrection could not be written off as pure fantasy.⁷⁹

Baldwin later asserted that by staking his claim to protectionism he 'dished the Goat', thus thwarting any plans Lloyd George had to form a new coalition centred

⁷⁸Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 361, 419-420. Marquand, MacDonald, p. 312.

⁷⁹See, e.g., Churchill to Lloyd George, 8 November 1923, LG G/4/4/6. Horne to Lloyd George, 2 January 1924 [misdated 1923], LG G/10/6/1. Campbell, Lloyd George, p. 49-52. Also, see A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook (London, 1972), p. 217-220.

round this issue. While such an explanation may have been 'devised after the event', what is not open to dispute is that Baldwin had to put an end to any hopes of a revived Coalition once and for all if he was ever to re-unite the Conservative Party.⁸⁰

Asquith's decision to allow Labour to take office did much of Baldwin's job for him, for it left 'a painful impression on those members who still hankered after some form of coalition' between Conservatives and Liberals. Austen Chamberlain 'upbraided' Asquith for this decision when the House of Commons met in mid-January 1924, doing so, one contemporary noted, 'more in sorrow than in anger'. Baldwin, on the other hand, 'prophesied that the future would lie between Conservatism and Labour, to the exclusion of Liberalism.'⁸¹ Over the next ten months, the Tories would use every opportunity to remind voters that the Liberals were responsible for 'handing over power to a Socialist Government.'⁸² The task of destroying the Liberal Party was one for Baldwin to relish, fuelled, as it was, by his hatred of Lloyd George - a hatred one backbench MP remembered as 'quite

⁸⁰Taylor, English History, p. 207. But see Jones diary, 22 December 1923, Vol. I, p. 261. J.C.C. Davidson was equally certain that Baldwin's fear of Lloyd George precipitated the 1923 election. See Davidson and Rhodes James, Memoirs of a Conservative, p. 184-185.

⁸¹Annual Register: 1924, p. 7.

⁸²Peel to Reading, 3 and 21 January 1924, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/7, Nos. 1 and 4.

pathological'.⁸³

MacDonald's antipathy toward Lloyd George was not nearly as obsessive, never mind pathological. That said, the two disliked each other intensely. On the one hand, 'Lloyd George was a threat to MacDonald's personal ambition, his only rival as a charismatic popular leader'. On the other, MacDonald was the one man who could prevent Lloyd George from regaining his former glory as the 'national leader of the Left'. Nor was MacDonald, any more than Baldwin, in favour of coalition government. MacDonald's primary goal was to show that his party was fit to govern and that it could do so without a formal alliance with the Liberals. 'Coalitions are detestable', he was to tell the House of Commons. And, he added for good measure, 'dishonest'.⁸⁴

Like Baldwin and his colleagues, MacDonald and his fellow Labour leaders believed that their party's position would not be secure until the Liberals were destroyed once and for all. 'The real and significant issue before the country is Liberalism v. Labour',

⁸³Coote, Editorial, p. 100. According to Tom Jones, Baldwin's malice for Lloyd George amounted to an 'obsession'. See his diary entries for, 30 September and 25 November 1923, Vol. I, p. 243, 255. Also, see Campbell, Lloyd George, p. 3, 7, 41, 46-47. This ill-will was returned in full measure. Urged to back Baldwin's tariff plan, Lloyd George replied that if Baldwin 'had been one of the men who stood by me' he would do so. 'But Baldwin knifed me and I shall knife Baldwin.' See Amery, My Political Life, p. 281.

⁸⁴Campbell, Lloyd George, p. 86. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 354. Taylor, English History, p. 210. Marquand, MacDonald, p. 297-300, 311, 339.

Beatrice Webb wrote at the beginning of the 1923 election. Webb held Lloyd George personally responsible for 'reviving the old glamour of the great Liberal Party' which 'has suddenly blazed out again into a possible, some would say probable, Alternative Govt.' Were that to happen, 'Labour would be set back for a decade or more.'⁸⁵

On the morrow of the 1923 election, Webb's anxieties had, if anything, increased. Although she felt that Labour 'must accept rather than refuse office', she knew that it would do so without a mandate, for which it would later pay a price. 'The honest way out of the impasse', she wrote,

the course which would be approved by the majority of the British people, would be a Liberal-Conservative Coalition - [an] Asquith, Baldwin, Chamberlain, Lloyd George Cabinet, Free Trade and anti-socialist in home affairs and pacific in foreign policy. It is only the struggle for power between the leaders and parties that prevents this carrying out of the clearly expressed will of the people.⁸⁶

The manoeuvrings of Britain's party leaders in the wake of the election were watched with keen interest in Dublin. An analysis prepared by the North-Eastern Boundary Bureau in mid-December considered the four possible outcomes: a re-constructed Conservative government; a Labour government; a Liberal 'caretaker' government, allowed to take office with the support of one or both of the other parties; or the Conservative-

⁸⁵Webb diary, 19 November 1923, Vol. 37, 3987-3988.

⁸⁶Ibid, 12 December 1923, 3997-4002.

Liberal coalition which Beatrice Webb thought most voters wanted but which the bureau regarded as 'unlikely.'

The bureau felt that either a Labour or Liberal government 'would probably give the strongest support to our claims'. That said, if either such government attempted to force a boundary settlement on Craig the likely effect would be to 'consolidate the Conservatives in opposition.' In fact, the bureau fancifully suggested that 'pressure on the North from a Conservative government is best' as that would mean 'there can be no opposition in England' to a settlement of the boundary question.⁸⁷ However true that may have been, it was unrealistic to hope that Conservatives would ever force Craig to accept a settlement that he did not like. Even after MacDonald accepted the seals of office, the Free Staters would have to bear in mind the unstable condition of British politics. A minority Labour government, the bureau warned, meant the 'possibility of another strong Conservative government after the next election, which may come at any time.'⁸⁸

MacDonald intended to put off that day for as long as possible. But because the Liberals were at best an unreliable ally, he realised that 'it was essential to be on good terms with the Conservative leaders.'⁸⁹ Among

⁸⁷'North-Eastern Boundary Bureau', memorandum, 13 December 1923, D/T, S 1801/C.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 380.

other things, this meant that MacDonal dare not take any initiative on issues likely to provoke the Tory rank and file. Ireland, he need not have been told, was one such issue.

Time, also, figured in Baldwin's calculations. Once the soon-to-be-ex-prime minister rode out the storm following the 1923 defeat, John Ramsden writes that 'the next eight months saw very little discord' in Conservative ranks. In fact, Baldwin's hold on the party was not really secure until after the 1924 election.

'S.B. will remain leader', Neville Chamberlain told one his sisters, 'but whether he is the next P.M. of our party will depend on how he shapes in opposition.'⁹⁰

Well into May Baldwin still feared 'the cynical combination of the chief three forces of the Coalition' - Lloyd George, Churchill, and Birkenhead - and this was likely the chief reason for his controversial newspaper interview with The People.⁹¹ Although Baldwin disavowed much of what was said in the article, he had once again shown 'his habit of bursting out with some inconceivable folly'. For months to come the question continued to be asked in the Tory heartland: 'What is the Conservative

⁹⁰Ramsden, Balfour and Baldwin, p. 190. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 382-387, 392. Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 9 February 1924, NC 18/1/425. Also, see, Beaverbrook to Brisbane, 13 March 1924, BBK C/64. Cecil to Salisbury, 10 April 1924, Cecil Papers, MSS 51085, ff. 126.

⁹¹'Baldwin Turns and Rends His Critics', The People, 18 May 1924. 'Memorandum: Stanley Baldwin's Interview with "The People" reporter, May 18, 1924', AC 24/6/3.

Party going to do about Mr Baldwin?'⁹²

Only as 1924 wore on would it become fashionable to renounce Lloyd George and all his works, to view the idea of coalition government as, somehow, ignoble, and for the 'survivors of 1922' to look back with 'embarrassment' on their former associations.⁹³ Austen Chamberlain, ironically, seems to have realised this earlier than most. No more in sorrow, nor in anger, but as a cold-blooded politician, he told Sam Hoare that 'our business now is to smash the Liberal Party'. Past associations, past loyalties, past commitments, none of these things mattered any more. For Austen Chamberlain, 'the world of party was now the only loyalty that counted.'⁹⁴

Chamberlain's days as the prodigal son of Conservative politics were drawing to a close. Defeat finally gave Baldwin the opportunity to bring the Coalitionists 'back into the true fold'. Nevertheless, Chamberlain told one of his sisters, 'the old difficulties' remain. While most party leaders were now willing to receive Austen Chamberlain in 'full communion', others continued to hold him 'responsible for two of the worst acts of the Coalition - the Irish Treaty

⁹²Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 29 June 1924, AC 5/1/322. 'Life and Politics', The Nation, 24 May 1924.

⁹³Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 7, 357, 365.

⁹⁴Chamberlain to Hoare, 28 January 1924, Templewood Papers, V:1 (51). Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p. 363.

and the Indian policy.'⁹⁵ Like an albatross, the Irish settlement hung round Austen Chamberlain's neck and would do so for years to come.

Tory Die-hards were not alone in finding it hard to let go of the past. Others were equally reluctant to accept that they now stood on the threshold of a new political landscape, and this was true of Lloyd George most of all. Frustrated as Asquith's second-in-command in a re-united Liberal Party, he hankered for a revived Coalition. As Herbert Gladstone wrote of him in the summer of 1924:

Ll.G., himself, appeared to live in [a] constant ferment of activity as a Statesman, Politician, Orator, Newspaper Proprietor, and the holder of large financial resources. Disturbing rumours were prevalent of close interviews with Beaverbrook, Robert Horne, Churchill, and others. He seemed to be manoeuvring for position, but not with the Liberal Party alone. ...⁹⁶

Unlike Baldwin and MacDonald, Lloyd George was not interested in a period of calm. 'Still dynamic, creative, and ambitious', he 'was eager for combat and did not much care how things worked out so long as there was turmoil.'⁹⁷

⁹⁵Salisbury to Baldwin, 26 January 1924, SB Vol. 159, ff. 258-261. Austen to Hilda Chamberlain, 24 January 1924, AC 5/1/304. Salisbury to Robert Cecil, 28 January 1924, MSS 51085, ff. 116-117. Baldwin to Salisbury, 25 January 1924, 25 January 1924, S(4) 108/83-84.

⁹⁶'Narrative of the General Election 1924', Gladstone Papers, MSS 46,480/309.

⁹⁷Taylor, English History, p. 218. See Churchill to Balfour, 3 April 1924, AJB-S, GD 433/2/19, Reel 4, for Lloyd George's proposal for a 'future "Conservative and Liberal Union" Administration'.

With so much at stake, an issue as delicate as Ireland could create just the sort of 'ferment' that Lloyd George thrived on, and which both Labour and the Conservatives were determined to avoid at all costs. Before he left office, Baldwin tried making this clear to Craig when the latter defied appeals for the release of the imprisoned Cahir Healy, one of the two Nationalist MPs representing Fermanagh and Tyrone. 'I think I see your difficulties', Baldwin told the Northern Ireland premier in mid-January,

but I want you also to see some of mine. If we go into Opposition, as is now most probable, and I am still Leader of the Party, my hands will be full with our own problems over here. I do not want the Irish conflict revived in the House of Commons in any shape or form if it can justly be avoided.⁹⁸

The man about to succeed Baldwin could not have agreed more.

⁹⁸Baldwin to Craig, 19 December 1923; Craig to Baldwin, 27 December 1923; and Baldwin to Craig, 14[?] January 1924, SB Vol. 101, ff. 178-179, 183-186, and 197-198. Healy was released in late January, only to find himself banned from a quarter of his constituency, including his home town, Enniskillen. This order was finally lifted at MacDonald's insistence in mid-February. See Craig to MacDonald, 16 February, JRM, PRO 30/69/191. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 300-301.

Chapter 6

Labour's 'Troublesome Subject'

... We all ought to work to close a chapter in English and Irish history that is best forgotten.

- J.H. Thomas¹

James Ramsay MacDonald stepped into No. 10 Downing Street on a day 'for which English history afforded no precedent.' Great Britain would have a minority government - one not formed by the largest party in the House of Commons but, rather, by a party which most of the establishment viewed with disdain at best, or 'boundless alarm' at worst. No less than a revolution had taken place, 'a revolution in English politics as profound as that associated with the Reform Act of 1832.'²

Ireland has largely been written out of the history of this, Britain's first Labour government.³ It is a strange omission. Just because Ireland's quarrels did not fit in with the Labour Party's notion of class politics, that did not mean that the problem would disappear, a lesson that MacDonald and his colleagues

¹'No Coercion of Ulster', The Times, 5 May 1924.

²Annual Register: 1924, p. 1-2, 8.

³See, e.g., R.W. Lyman, The First Labour Government, 1924 (London, 1957), p. 193, 238. Possibly the only attempt to explore Labour's mixed emotions about Ireland is G. Bell's Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question (London, 1982). Bell, however, does not claim that his study is definitive and, on the contrary, hopes that 'others will correct and expand this work'.

learned many times over while in office. Yet, this oversight among historians is itself revealing, because in a very real sense it mirrors the ambivalent attitude that the party's early leaders felt about the Irish Question.

However much Labour opposed imperialism and colonialism, its support for Irish self-government in the years leading up to World War I was not to be taken as a given, a point which MacDonald himself made abundantly clear in 1905. Then-secretary of the Labour Representation Committee, MacDonald's distaste for the Irish cause was demonstrated by his tart reply to supporters who assumed that the LRC was a pro-Home Rule organisation.

'On what grounds?' he wanted to know.⁴

Whatever he had imbibed from socialism, Labour's first prime minister could never quite shake his Scottish Protestant's hostility toward the Church of Rome. MacDonald 'disliked Catholics', the historian of the Clydesiders has written, 'particularly Irish Catholics', a verdict given added weight by the Labour MP, Emanuel Shinwell. Anti-Catholicism, Shinwell remembered, was 'a factor in Ramsay MacDonald's attitude to the Irish question, and coloured his policy towards Bonar Law.'⁵

⁴Bell, Troublesome Business, p. 16-17.

⁵R.K. Middlemas, The Clydesiders: A Left Wing Struggle for Parliamentary Power (New York, 1968 [London, 1965]), p. 110. E. Shinwell, I've Lived Through It All (London, 1973), p. 53.

Nor were others in the Labour movement any more keen to support Irish self-determination. While the Fabians were, at best, 'unenthusiastic supporters' of Home Rule, the Independent Labour Party viewed Ireland as a diversion from the 'bread and butter issues' which were its main concern. It is notable that the Irish question was not even debated at the party's annual conferences until 1918.

This ambivalence continued through the Anglo-Irish War. Although the party's 1920 conference voted to support 'absolute freedom' for Ireland, even if that meant an Irish republic, its leaders were willing to go no further than to support Dominion status. At the same time, while Labour officially opposed partition, J.H. Thomas warned his colleagues that it was 'idle to deny there was an Ulster problem.' What party leaders really thought about the Irish Question was summed up by J.R. Clynes in 1919. Ireland, Clynes told the House of Commons, was a 'troublesome subject', and that was truer than ever now that Labour was about to take office.⁶

Labour's Irish Triumvirate

Labour's 'inarticulate' attitude about Irish affairs made it difficult for officials in Dublin to predict the course of its relations with the new government. While MacDonalld was reputed to be 'an honest politician', Kevin O'Shiel pointed out to the Executive Council that 'as far

⁶Bell, Troublesome Business, p. 7, 10, 38, 42-43, 56-57. HC Deb, Vol. 114, Col. 1505, 3 April 1919.

as we are concerned he is a dark horse.' Not so the new colonial secretary, J.H. Thomas, who 'has never shown himself to be conspicuously friendly to us'. According to O'Shiel, although he had voted for the Treaty Thomas made it plain that he supported the 'special treatment of "Ulster".'

According to Manchester Guardian editor C.P. Scott, Ireland was the reason for Thomas's appointment to the Colonial Office. When George V questioned the choice, MacDonald claimed to have told the king: 'Perhaps your Majesty forgets that Ireland now comes within the domain of the Colonial Office.' MacDonald confided to Scott that he needed someone with Thomas's negotiating skills to handle the Irish and that 'had been the ground for his selection.'

Thomas evoked strong reactions from those who met him. Described by Birkenhead as 'the cleverest politician' yet to emerge from Labour's ranks, he was also, Hazel Lavery observed, 'very vain'. In any event, his importance to Anglo-Irish relations over the next nine months would be second only to MacDonald's.

⁷'RE. North-Eastern Position', ? January 1924, D/T, S 1801/D. Thomas, however, denied that the 1920 Act 'meant that the six counties were to be left intact and free from all further consideration'. See HC Deb, Vol. 150, Col. 1445, 17 February 1922.

⁸Scott diary, 2-3 February 1924, MSS 50907, vii, p. 90-92.

⁹Lord Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities (London, 1924), p. 185. S. McCoole, Hazel: A Life of Lady Hazel Lavery, 1880-1935 (Dublin, 1996), p. 114.

The third member of Labour's government who would have to confront the boundary question was Arthur Henderson, the new home secretary. Henderson's biographer has described his performance in the 1924 government as 'undistinguished', and he seems to have played, at most, a supporting role to Thomas's lead in handling the boundary question. A vocal critic of the Coalition's early Irish policy, Henderson, like others in the Labour movement, was deeply ambivalent when the question turned to Ulster. Perhaps his most revealing remark on this subject was made during the Treaty debates. If any members of Parliament were Ulster's natural allies, Henderson told the House of Commons, it was 'those of us who are and have been so long officially connected with trade unions ... [which] have large numbers of members in the North of Ireland.'¹⁰

'A loss of prestige'

In his analysis of MacDonald's incoming government, Kevin O'Shiel predicted that the Free State could expect a fair deal from Labour on the boundary question if for no other reason than that in main parts of Britain the party depended on Irish votes.¹¹ In fact, this analysis

¹⁰C. Wrigley, Arthur Henderson (Cardiff, 1990), p. 144. Bell, Troublesome Business, p. 53, 65-68. HC Deb, Vol. 149, Col. 309, 16 December 1921. John Wheatley, the one Cabinet member who might have been sympathetic to the Free State was excluded by MacDonald from discussions of the boundary question whenever possible. See Canning, British Policy, p. 88-89.

¹¹'RE. North-Eastern Position', ? January 1924, D/T, S 1801/D.

missed the point. MacDonald and his lieutenants did not accept the seals of office to solve the Irish Question. Rather, they meant to use this time to disprove once and for all Churchill's allegation that Labour was 'unfit to govern'.¹² Whatever the merits of this strategy, it most certainly meant that there would no bold, new initiatives on Ireland. Quite the contrary. Inexperienced in government, Labour's ministers relied heavily on civil servants, and this was as true in Irish affairs as in other matters. Mindful, too, of the need to remain on good terms with the Conservatives, it is not surprising that Thomas and Henderson fell back on Devonshire's conference proposal as the starting point for their own Irish policy. 'The Boundary question', The Times noted after Labour took office, was 'the only surviving obstacle to ... good relations between the two states'. Now it was Labour's turn to see if it could find a way around this hurdle.¹³

But while there was no new thinking on this issue in London, a fundamental re-assessment of the boundary question was under way in Dublin. In mid-January, Cosgrave told the Executive Council that while reunification continued to be the government's ultimate

¹²Taylor, English History, p. 210. Marquand, MacDonald, p. 310-312. For Churchill's allegation, see 'Mr. Churchill on Russia', The Times, 16 February 1920.

¹³MacDonald diary, 3 February 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1753/1. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 380. Marquand, MacDonald, p. 307. Thomas to Healy; Henderson to Abercorn; and Abercorn to Henderson, all 24 January 1924; and Healy to Thomas, 29 January 1924, in Cmd. 2155, Nos. 9-12. 'Irish Boundary Conference', The Times, 1 February 1924.

goal, it was 'not a likely probability and appears so far off as to be out of the arena of practical politics for the present.' Instead, he believed that Craig, with British backing, would propose that the two Irish parliaments remain separate 'with a link of the two cabinets', whose joint meetings would act as a substitute for the Council of Ireland. Cosgrave was willing to consider this idea - but only if Dublin was seen to be the dominant partner. As the Irish president wrote when explaining how the joint Cabinets would function: 'We preside.'¹⁴

His prediction proved to be largely accurate. After two days of meetings in early February, the boundary conference adjourned so that the Irish governments could consider a seven-point plan put forward by Thomas. As Cosgrave thought, the British proposal revolved around the Council of Ireland with the two Irish Cabinets acting in its place for a provisional period of one year. Meanwhile, the Dáil and the Northern Ireland House of Commons would also hold joint sittings to enact legislation enabling the two Cabinets to function together. Crucially, no measure would become law unless it received a 'double majority', i.e. separate majorities would be required in both parliaments to enact legislation. During the provisional period, the Free State would stay its demand for the Boundary Commission. In return, Craig's government would delay its plans to

¹⁴See Cosgrave memorandum, 17 January 1924; and 'Conference on Boundary Commission', 28 January 1924, D/T, S 1801/D.

abolish proportional representation for county council and rural district council elections.¹⁵

Thomas's scheme pleased no one. 'The most fatal criticism of the proposals', O'Higgins wrote, 'is that the country would not touch them.'¹⁶ In Irish eyes, Thomas's proposal struck at the heart of the Free State's newly won sovereignty, whose importance the Colonial Office never seemed to understand. This attitude was summed up by Lionel Curtis following the Free State's admission to the League of Nations the previous September. 'Our friends' heads are, of course, pretty full at the moment', Curtis wrote. That would soon change once they realised that their position in the rest of the world counted for little 'apart from their position in the British Commonwealth of Nations.'¹⁷

But the Irish were discovering no such thing. Far from it. Having won international recognition, they were not about to allow the British to engage in a 'whittling down' of their status even if that was the price to be paid for ending partition. Gaining 'the political semblance of national union' was, one Free Stater wrote, 'a very big thing indeed but we shall have come down at

¹⁵Ibid, 'Outline of Proposals for Consideration', 2 February 1924.

¹⁶O'Higgins memorandum, ? February 1924, D/T, S 1801/E.

¹⁷Curtis to Antrobus, 25 September 1923, CO 739/25/45749.

least 50 degrees in our world status.'¹⁸ Thomas's proposal looked like an attempt to do exactly that. Accepting the plan, Cosgrave argued, meant 'a loss of prestige' while Craig's government was 'called upon to sacrifice nothing' so long as Northern Ireland continued to send MPs to Westminster. 'Is there not a great danger', Cosgrave asked, 'of such a plan tending in time to pull the whole of Ireland, through the North, more and more towards London?'¹⁹

From his perch in the Cabinet secretariat, Tom Jones had few illusions that the proposal would get the British out of their Boundary Commission pledge. The 'snag', Jones wrote, was Ulster's demand for 'fifty-fifty' representation in the joint Cabinet meetings, in effect giving the Unionists a veto over its deliberations.²⁰

Although Craig and Lord Londonderry reportedly favoured the proposal, it was given a stormy reception by their colleagues in the Northern Ireland Cabinet. Hugh Pollock heatedly denounced the scheme, calling it 'unthinkable'.²¹ In this instance, Pollock, not Craig, reflected grassroots Unionist feeling. While Craig was spending less and less time in Northern Ireland, his ministers were daily exposed to public opinion on the

¹⁸'Some Possible Dangers in the N.E. Situation', undated, D/T, S 1801/C.

¹⁹Cosgrave memorandum, ? February 1924, D/T, S 1801/E.

²⁰Jones diary, 2 February 1924, Vol. III, p. 225-226.

²¹Tallents to Anderson, 18 February 1924, HO 45/12296/1(b).

streets of Belfast and they were unwilling to antagonise rank and file Unionist opinion.²²

Unwanted and unloved, Thomas's scheme became an orphan like so many other British attempts, before and after, to reconcile the Irish. Despite Pollock's opposition, Tallents believed that Craig might have been able to convince his Cabinet to give the plan a chance, were it not for the fact that his health broke down. Due to re-assemble at the end of February, the Irish Conference had to be postponed when Craig fell ill with a debilitating attack of influenza. His doctor informed Wilfrid Spender that under no circumstances could Craig attend any more sittings of the conference before the end of March, and then only after an extended sea voyage to regain his health. While Craig's symptoms were real enough, the illness itself may have been psychosomatic or, at least, was made worse by his worries over the boundary dispute. In any case, the conference was now indefinitely put on hold.²³

'Spoiled children of politics'

This unexpected suspension left Cosgrave dangerously exposed to attack at home. Even some government supporters were forced to agree with the pro-Republican journal Eire that this latest delay proved that Article

²²Buckland, Factory of Grievances, p. 200.

²³Tallents to Anderson, 18 February 1924, HO 45/12296/1(b). Thomas to Cosgrave, 18 February 1924, CO 739/26/8213. Bryan Follis disputes the notion that Craig consciously used his illness to delay the boundary negotiations. See State Under Siege, p. 160.

12 had been a 'fraud' and a 'delusion' all along. 'It matters not whether it is a Labour, Liberal or Conservative government', Eire told its readers. The British had no intention of enforcing the boundary clause, and another round of meetings in London would be a 'farce'.²⁴

Cosgrave, albeit reluctantly, had come to the same conclusion. Although he realised that setting up the Commission would be 'the real beginning not the end of his boundary worries', he saw no point in another round of meetings. In an interview with N.G. Loughnane, the Irish president 'described the Ulster Protestants as the spoiled children of politics' who were 'quite incapable of making concessions'. Faced with high unemployment and the 'disquieting symptom' of demobilised Free State soldiers being won over by Sinn Féin, the government could ill-afford to alienate their supporters any further by not pressing the boundary issue. For the moment, Cosgrave felt that he could count on the army's continued loyalty. Although several leading officers were still 'confessed Republicans', Cosgrave assured Loughnane that they had shown 'no manifestations of disloyalty' with the Treaty settlement.²⁵

Days later the Free State Army mutinied.²⁶

²⁴'Mr. Thomas Breaks the Treaty', Eire, 8 March 1924.

²⁵Loughnane to Curtis, 4 March 1924, CO 739/26/10823.

²⁶The mutiny was sparked by the army's plans for large-scale demobilisation and by conflict between secret societies within its ranks. See J.P. Duggan, A History of

Although the army crisis really had nothing to do with the boundary question, its repercussions were soon felt north of the border. Acting in Craig's absence, Lord Londonderry immediately postponed planned reductions of the Special Constabulary. He defended the move, telling Henderson that the Free State Army was led by men 'who are notorious for their hostility to Northern Ireland'.²⁷

Neither did the Free State government's handling of the mutiny increase confidence in London. 'Having shown themselves weak in handling the mutiny', Jones unfairly concluded, 'the Free State Government are determined to show themselves strong on the Boundary issue.'²⁸ In fact, the hardening of attitudes in Dublin had little to do with troubles in the army, but reflected growing frustration in government circles over the continued postponement of the boundary conference.

The situation became acute once the Irish learned that Belfast now wanted to rule out another meeting of the conference before the end of April. Resumption had been delayed several times due to Craig's illness, despite the fact that the 2 February meeting had adjourned on the understanding that discussions would resume within twenty-eight days. Although the Free State

the Irish Army (Dublin, 1991), p. 129-137.

²⁷Londonderry to Henderson, 11 March and 26 March 1924, PREM 1/34.

²⁸Jones diary, 19 March 1924, Vol. III, p. 226.

had requested a resumption as early as mid-February, the Home Office did not formally contact Northern Ireland's governor general about the matter until 4 March.²⁹ Four days later, Tallents learned that Craig intended to go on a Mediterranean cruise from the middle of March to the middle of April. After his return the Unionists would not be ready to meet their British and Free State counterparts until the end of the month, as Craig would need 'a day or two in Northern Ireland after his voyage so as to sense the position before entering into Conference.'³⁰

For the Irish, this was one delay too many. On 15 March a strongly-worded letter from Healy asked that the British take whatever steps were necessary to set up the Boundary Commission. An accompanying memorandum rejected Thomas's February proposals as 'unworkable'.³¹

In an attempt to hold the conference together, a reluctant Tom Jones was dispatched to Dublin. Jones was to persuade the Free Staters 'to resume negotiations on Craig's return and make one more desperate effort at a solution which would further postpone [the] boundary issue.' His own choice of words is revealing. While the Dublin government's aim was to settle the boundary

²⁹Healy to Thomas, 16 February 1924; and Henderson to Abercorn, 4 March 1924, Cmd. 2155, Nos. 13 and 14.

³⁰Tallents to Anderson, 8 March 1924; and Abercorn to Henderson, 10 March 1924, in HO 45/12296/1(b).

³¹Thomas to Healy, 11 March 1924, Cmd. 2155, No. 17. Healy to Thomas, 15 March 1924, with Free State memorandum, undated, CO 739/26/12703.

problem, the object of their British counterparts still was to put off the final reckoning.³²

Jones succeeded, but only after narrowly averting Cosgrave's demand that the Boundary Commission should be established on 1 May if the conference failed to achieve a breakthrough. '[W]e must not think of failure', Jones urged, 'but rather of every means of making your next meeting a real step forward towards unity.' Thomas took this same line several days later. If they were to achieve the Treaty's 'real object' - an Ireland 'as united as Great Britain herself' - there had to be one more attempt at negotiations. Any steps taken to set up the Commission, he persuaded Cosgrave, were bound to leak to the press. The Unionists would then stage a walk-out and 'almost certainly bring the Conference to an immediate end.'³³

Financial pressure

One of the most puzzling facts about British efforts to solve the boundary dispute is that a way was never found to use their most effective weapon: i.e., financial pressure. This is all the more peculiar when it is recalled that the imperial government was continually short of funds and thus had an additional incentive to cut expenditure wherever possible. Nor can it be said

³²Jones diary, 27 March 1924, Vol. III, p. 227. Jones to Curtis, 30 March 1924, TJ GG/2/9.

³³Jones to Cosgrave; Cosgrave to Jones; Thomas to Cosgrave; and Cosgrave to Thomas, 1, 5, 10, and 15 April 1924, D/T, S 1801/F.

that civil servants failed to make their masters aware of the steady flow of sterling across the Irish Sea. Treasury officials in particular were determined to put an end to the 'perpetual demands from Northern Ireland'.³⁴

While the Conservatives hesitated to make use of this weapon, MacDonald came to office intending to wield it for all it was worth. The link between the boundary negotiations and Northern Ireland's dependence on the imperial exchequer was explicitly drawn by G.C. Upcott in a memorandum to the new chancellor of the exchequer, Philip Snowden, on 30 January. The British, Upcott pointed out, were in 'a position to put considerable pressure on Sir James Craig should they desire to do so'. This may have been the reason behind Snowden's refusal to allocate the £1 million that Neville Chamberlain had promised to recommend for the Special Constabulary in the 1924/25 budget.³⁵ Clearly, it was on MacDonald's mind when he discussed the Irish situation with C.P. Scott. The grant 'could be discontinued at any time', MacDonald intimated, if the Unionists 'showed an intractable spirit' in the boundary negotiations.³⁶

³⁴Upcott memorandum to Snowden, 30 January 1924, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1. Also, see Snowden memorandum to MacDonald, 26 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/61.

³⁵Ibid, Upcott memorandum. Snowden to Craig; Craig to Snowden and to MacDonald; and MacDonald to Craig, 18, 20, and 22 February 1924, CJ 1/2.

³⁶Scott diary, 2-3 February 1924, MSS 50907, vii, p. 89-92.

This is what Labour leaders had in mind when they met with Pollock on 11 April. At Thomas's instigation, Snowden played 'bad cop' to the colonial secretary's 'good cop' in order to win concessions on the boundary question.³⁷ Unfortunately for Thomas, Ulster's finance minister was singularly unimpressed with their performance, and the financial weapon broke in his hands.

In fact, Labour's colonial secretary was proving to be not at all successful when it came to Ireland. Yet, Thomas never lost faith in his own negotiating skills. Behind the scenes, he was willing to 'bring every possible pressure' to bear on Craig to solve the boundary question. 'He can have a b....y Dukedom if it will do the trick', Thomas said during one outburst.³⁸ What he never seemed to realise was that such temptations had no effect on Northern Ireland's prime minister. Nor, in the end, did the threat to bring financial pressure to bear on the Belfast government make any headway. That might have been different had Labour stayed in office; Snowden later claimed that he would have opposed 'any grant whatever' for the Specials.³⁹ As it happened, Labour was never put to the test.

'Under Craig's thumb': the conference collapses

Any hopes that the boundary conference would finally

³⁷Jones diary, 24 April 1924, Vol. III, p. 229-230. Follis, State Under Siege, p. 130.

³⁸Ibid, Jones diary.

³⁹HC Deb, Vol. 180, Col. 1681, 23 February 1925.

achieve a breakthrough were dashed almost as soon as discussions resumed on 24 April.

The talks began well enough. Cosgrave was willing to accept Craig's idea for a 'voluntary' body of experts representing both Irish governments to examine their claims. That was until he learned that the price of such a deal was Dublin's surrender of its right to the Boundary Commission if this group failed to reach an agreement. Even Curtis and Jones saw that Cosgrave could not possibly accept these terms and, on the 26th, the Free State formally asked the British government to bring the Boundary Commission into operation.⁴⁰

Curtis blamed Thomas for the breakdown. When it was clear that the talks were foundering after only one day, Jones suggested that MacDonald should be brought in to add the prestige of the prime minister's office. But, Thomas 'would not hear of it.'⁴¹ The colonial secretary was 'under Craig's thumb', Curtis believed, and 'as usual, it is Craig's word which carries most weight in Whitehall.' Curtis told Jones that he had been willing to stay on at the Colonial Office as long as he believed the 'Government here were making an honest effort to put the Treaty through.' But it was clear to him that both Thomas and Craig were playing a 'game of delay' which, in

⁴⁰Jones diary, 24 April 1924, Vol. III, p. 229-230. Lavin, Curtis, p. 221. Dáil Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 178-180, 25 April 1924. Healy to Thomas, 26 April 1924, Cmd. 2155, No. 27.

⁴¹Ibid, Jones diary.

the latter's case, was carried on in hopes that 'this Government may be succeeded by a Tory Government ere many months are past.'⁴²

Indeed, this was Craig's strategy from the beginning. The longer the Boundary Commission could be delayed, the less likely that it would ever be formed at all. Craig's official biographer admitted as much when he described the outcome of the April meeting. 'The Conference ended without a decision', St. John Ervine later wrote, 'which was, in effect, a decision in favour of Craig.'⁴³

Faced with the Ulster leader's intransigence, Jones believed that the Labour government ought to involve Baldwin, along with Asquith and Lloyd George, in the negotiations. 'Once Craig can be made to realise that he could not split the parties', Jones wrote, 'it would make an immense difference.' Yet again, Thomas blocked the way. Henderson warned that his colleague would oppose any such step 'which took away from his own importance in the matter.'⁴⁴

MacDonald became a major player in the boundary negotiations only when illness temporarily removed Thomas from the scene. Pre-occupied with foreign affairs, MacDonald had been happy to leave the Irish problem to

⁴²Ibid, 15 May 1924, p. 231-232.

⁴³St. John Ervine, Craigavon: Ulsterman (London, 1949), p. 490.

⁴⁴Jones diary, 8 May 1924, Vol. III, p. 230-231.

the Colonial Office. His initial contact with Cosgrave in February had, in any event, done nothing to dispel his prejudices about Ireland or its leaders. In his estimation, the Free State president was 'a weak man, but one who wd. fight hard if driven into a corner.'⁴⁵

Proposing one last-ditch round of negotiations, MacDonald invited Cosgrave and Craig to meet with him at the prime minister's country residence at Chequers. Already, his government had informed Dublin and Belfast that Northern Ireland's refusal to appoint its Commissioner took the problem beyond the realm of party politics. Constitutional issues were now involved: namely, was the province bound by a Treaty ratified by the Imperial Parliament? Unless the three men could reach an agreement, Belfast's refusal would have to be settled by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.⁴⁶

By this time, it was no longer certain that Cosgrave could attend any further meetings even if he wanted to. 'Open conferences', O'Higgins complained, 'have repeatedly failed and hold no promise of future success.' British officials were aware of this mounting opposition

⁴⁵Scott diary, 2-3 February 1924, MSS 50907, vii, p. 89-92.

⁴⁶MacDonald to Cosgrave and to Craig, 27 May 1924; and Cosgrave to MacDonald, 28 May 1924, Cmd. 2166: Further Correspondence Relating to Article 12 of the Articles of Agreement Between Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1924), Nos. 1-3. Thomas to Healy, 23 May 1924; and Henderson to Abercorn, 24 May 1924, Cmd. 2155, Nos. 32 and 33.

within the Executive Council.⁴⁷ Cosgrave appears to have decided to defy his Cabinet after receiving what he believed was an assurance from Thomas. Should a further round of meetings again end in stalemate, Free State High Commissioner James MacNeill was told that Craig had agreed to do all that was 'needful to facilitate the operation of Article XII'.⁴⁸

MacNeill's source for this extraordinary claim was, of all men, Alfred Cope. Even though he had left the Irish Office in 1922, Cope seems to have acted as an unofficial go-between for the Colonial Office sounding out the Irish on possible alternatives to the Boundary Commission such as 'joint administration' of Northern Ireland.⁴⁹ It is certain that both Thomas and Jones were behind his 13 May discussion with MacNeill. What is not clear is who, if anyone, authorised Cope to commit Ulster's leader to the pledge mentioned by MacNeill.⁵⁰

The Chequers conference of 31 May began as a two-way discussion because, wrote an annoyed Sir John Anderson, Cosgrave arrived 'about three hours late'.⁵¹ In his

⁴⁷O'Higgins to Cosgrave, 10 June 1924, D/T, S 1801/H. Jones diary, 13 May 1924, Vol. III, p. 231.

⁴⁸MacNeill to Cosgrave, 13 May 1924, D/T, S 1801/H.

⁴⁹See, e.g., FitzGerald to James MacNeill, 14 April 1924; and MacNeill to FitzGerald, 16 and 17 April 1924, DFA, G 10/1923.

⁵⁰Jones diary, 13 May 1924, Vol. III, p. 231.

⁵¹'Notes of a Conference Between the Prime Minister and Mr Cosgrave and Sir James Craig at Chequers on 31st May, 1924', HO 246/2. All subsequent quotes from the meeting are taken from this source.

absence, Craig confided to MacDonald that, 'notwithstanding all his previous utterances', he was prepared to appoint Northern Ireland's Boundary Commissioner - but at a price. Just as Thomas had sought to bring financial pressure to bear on the Unionists, Craig now turned the tables. A deal on the boundary could be had, he intimated, if Labour was willing to meet his financial demands.

In exchange for accepting the Boundary Commission and its award - which must be unanimous - Craig said that he must be assured that a series of issues dividing the two governments would be 'satisfactorily disposed of.' Top of his list was amalgamation of Britain's and Northern Ireland's unemployment insurance funds. Returning to the Boundary Commission later in the discussions, Craig promised to support the handover of any area 'provided the inhabitants clearly expressed their wish to go.' He would do so, however, only if 'provision' was made to re-settle anyone who did not wish to be transferred into a new jurisdiction. The financial implications of this demand were staggering. MacDonald chose to side-step them concentrating, instead, on Craig's insistence that any Commission award must have the backing of all three members. Such a concession, MacDonald pointed out, 'would be to give Northern Ireland a veto on any changes she did not like.'

The atmosphere of the meeting did not improve with Cosgrave's arrival, whose demeanor was 'polite but cold'.

Neither Irish leader thought much of MacDonald's suggestion that the soon-to-be-appointed Boundary Commission chairman might be asked to mediate a settlement. Pointing to the 'complicated pattern of the carpet' on the floor, Craig told MacDonald that he was underestimating just how tangled this problem really was.

MacDonald's next proposal seems to have been designed to shake his guests out of their complacency. Why not follow the precedent used after World War I to resolve the Polish-German dispute in Upper Silesia, he suggested. Such a plan could begin with a determination of the areas to be considered for transfer, followed by a plebiscite. If MacDonald meant to stir up the meeting, he succeeded. The idea left Craig 'obviously alarmed', Anderson wrote, especially 'at the prospect of large areas such as whole counties being even brought under examination in a preliminary way.'⁵²

MacDonald's suggestion prompted Craig's appeal to Cosgrave to 'give the go-by to Article 12' and settle the issue between them. That was impossible, the Free State president responded. No one in Dublin had the power to by-pass Article 12, his supporters would not stand for it - an odd thing to say in the circumstances. Cosgrave claimed that Nationalists were not laying claim to specific territory, explicitly mentioning Fermanagh and Tyrone. Rather, theirs was a 'demand for the "discovery"

⁵²In fact, the Silesian precedent figured prominently in the Boundary Commission's origins. See chapter 2 above.

of the facts', in other words, whether the people of the border wished to be in the Free State or under Belfast's jurisdiction. It was soon clear that Craig and Cosgrave disagreed on just about everything when it came to the boundary question. Where Cosgrave believed that Article 12 put the wishes of the local inhabitants above all other considerations, Craig was adamant that geographical and, even more, economic, factors should be given equal weight. The three sides were again at an impasse, and Cosgrave told his counterparts that it was politically impossible for him to be involved in any further discussions. Bitter recriminations 'that the Treaty was not "fool-proof" or that the Imperial Parliament could not make its recalcitrant province toe the line' were increasing and, once they took hold, his government would be overthrown in favour of de Valera's Republic. The stakes for Cosgrave were that high.

'A probable enemy'

Cosgrave's demand that London make the Ulster Unionists 'toe the line' was made at just that moment when British officials were questioning their power to do so. As one of his last acts before resigning from the Colonial Office, Lionel Curtis drafted an unofficial memorandum outlining the trouble that British forces would likely encounter once the Boundary Commission set to work. If the Commission decided that a plebiscite was necessary, 'the situation will become very difficult' as it was 'almost certain to meet with the armed resistance

of the Protestant majority throughout Northern Ireland', especially from the British-funded Special Constabulary.

If, on the other hand, the Commission restricted itself to minor border revisions, or if the North's refusal to appoint a representative prevented it from functioning, Curtis thought it likely that a republic would be declared in Dublin. In that case, the British would find themselves right back where they were before the Treaty was signed in 1921. 'The most merciful course' to follow should this happen, Curtis advised, would be a blockade of the 26 counties, until power could 'gravitate into the hands of the more reasonable propertied classes'.⁵³

Curtis's analysis raised disturbing implications for British security far beyond Ireland. Whichever way the Boundary Commission ruled, the War Office explained, relying on the army to implement its award meant the commitment of at least three divisions. 'The Empire will thus be deprived for an indefinite period of its only mobile reserve', a situation that would have dire consequences should a crisis erupt in Iraq or Egypt. Nor was the army as sanguine as Curtis about containing trouble in the South by means of a blockade. If it failed, 'no other course beyond the re-conquest of S. Ireland seems possible'. Plainly, the War Office wanted to have nothing to do with the Boundary Commission. Such

⁵³'Appreciation of the Present Political Position in Ireland', 9 May 1924, CAB 21/281.

a commitment would be 'unlimited, indefinite and fraught with serious dangers both for the army itself and for Imperial defence.'⁵⁴

In fact, there was reason to question the army's willingness to implement a Commission award that went against Northern Ireland's wishes. Only a decade had elapsed since the Curragh mutiny, and among officers there remained a well-spring of sympathy for the Ulster cause. This included the commander of British forces in the six counties, A.R. Cameron.

In a separate memorandum, prepared as part of a general defence review, Cameron maintained that any plan which addressed defence 'seriously' had to regard the 'Irish Free State with its armed forces as certainly a possible and really a probable enemy.' Although the earlier War Office analysis had dismissed the Special Constabulary as so partisan as to be 'useless' if there was a dispute over the boundary, Cameron took quite the opposite view, maintaining that their 'value in an emergency is clear'.⁵⁵

The following March Cameron was informed that the Army Council 'concurred' with this analysis. For the first time, perhaps, the War Office officially regarded a

⁵⁴Ibid, War Office 'Note on the Colonial Office Memorandum on Ireland', 11 June 1924.

⁵⁵Ibid. 'Home Defence Scheme - Northern Ireland', 4 July 1924, WO 32/5313. Not surprisingly, Craig agreed that the Irish boundary should be regarded as a potentially hostile frontier. See NI HC Deb, Vol. 4, Col. 715-716, 6 May 1924.

British dominion as a potential enemy. This fact later prompted Michael Farrell's sober observation that no matter how many times the Free Staters proved their fidelity to the Treaty settlement they would never be regarded as trustworthy by the British establishment.⁵⁶

More immediately, the adoption of Cameron's recommendations raised serious questions should any government attempt to carry out a Boundary Commission award that was opposed by Northern Ireland. When, in August, Craig's Cabinet suggested that the Specials should be mobilised to guard the boundary, Cameron endorsed the proposal despite Home Office reminders that border security was the British Army's sole responsibility. Cameron's response to this argument was telling. There was little his forces could do alone, he replied, considering the 'great preponderance of numbers of Constabulary over troops'.⁵⁷

This preponderance was also cited by Cameron when explaining 'the impossibility of the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] dealing with the situation direct from his Headquarters'. Although the Home Office had by this time accepted the necessity of using the Specials as an auxiliary to regular troops, Cameron turned this

⁵⁶Cubitt to Cameron, 12 March 1925, WO 32/5313/23A and 23B. Farrell, Arming the Protestants, p. 229. This mistrust was rife throughout Whitehall. See Canning, British Policy, p. 112-113.

⁵⁷Blackmore to Tallents, 11 August 1924; Maxwell to War Office, 18 August 1924; and Cameron to Creedy, 13 January 1925, WO 32/5313.

policy on its head. Instead of the army defending the frontier, his troops 'would naturally be employed to support the Constabulary' and only then would a military officer take charge. This stance reflected the desire of Craig's ministers to keep control of the Specials out of British hands. Incredibly, the War Office not only abdicated responsibility for border security but further agreed that 'command of the combined forces should only pass to the General Officer Commanding at the request of the Northern Government.'⁵⁸ No one, it seems, considered what the army would do if the Specials put up armed resistance to a Boundary Commission award ceding large tracts of Northern Ireland to the Free State.

Article 12's 'alleged ambiguity

At the end of April, Lord Birkenhead delivered a speech to the Liverpool Conservative Club, in which he declared that only minor re-adjustments to the Irish border could be expected from the Boundary Commission.⁵⁹ Although this was not the first time that Birkenhead had made such remarks, his speech hit a raw nerve in Dublin. On 6 May, Kevin O'Higgins hit back. Article 12 had been Craig's choice, not theirs, O'Higgins told his audience. While the Free State would not coerce 'that portion of North-East Ulster which is homogeneously Orange and

⁵⁸Ibid, Anderson to Creedy, 16 December 1924; Cameron to Creedy, 13 and 27 January 1925; 'Copy of Memorandum sent to Prime Minister Northern Ireland on 21st January 1925'; Cubitt to Cameron, 12 March 1925, [two letters].

⁵⁹See chapter 7 below for more on this speech.

Unionist', neither would it allow Craig's government to coerce those 'units which are predominantly Nationalist and desirous of being within the jurisdiction of our State.'⁶⁰

Behind the scenes, O'Higgins saw Birkenhead's speech as a warning. '[W]e cannot allow ... an alleged ambiguity in Article 12', he told Cosgrave, 'to be left to ... a Chairman appointed by the British Government.' O'Higgins wanted the matter settled at once. Did MacDonalld and Thomas agree with Birkenhead that the Boundary Commission was only empowered to make minor border re-adjustments? If there was any question between the two governments about Article 12, O'Higgins insisted, 'we must have the ambiguity cleared up before the Boundary Commission sits', possibly by arbitration.

Hugh Kennedy, the Free State's attorney-general, disagreed. Whatever Birkenhead claimed, none of the four British governments that had been in office since the signing of the Treaty had raised this issue, and there was no reason for the Irish to get 'tied up' by the conclusions of an arbitrator. Moreover, O'Higgins's strategy was 'based on the assumption that there is some ambiguity which we have always denied and cannot now admit.' Both governments had repeatedly said that it was up to the Commissioners themselves to set their terms of reference. Why stir up a controversy where none might

⁶⁰'Statement by Minister for Home Affairs, Howth, 6th May 1924', D/T, S 1801/R.

exist? If the issue arose, Eoin MacNeill could easily refer the matter to Dublin; then would be the time to settle any dispute.

Cosgrave also told O'Higgins that Curtis had answered Birkenhead's claim, pointing out that the British hardly were in a position to 'interpret an Article to which they were but one party of two.' O'Higgins agreed. But 'I go further', he wrote, 'what the British Government cannot do, the British nominee on the Boundary Commission ought not to be allowed to do.' Possibly, O'Higgins allowed, the two governments were at one on this question. But 'the tone of practically all the leading British newspapers' convinced him that the Irish were foolish to allow this issue to remain unresolved.⁶¹

O'Higgins had good reason to be alarmed. On 5 May Craig reported to his Cabinet that Thomas had confided to him that the Boundary Commission would restrict itself only to 'an adjustment of the actual boundary.'⁶² A week later, a similar story reached James MacNeill in London, and he immediately relayed the information directly to Cosgrave.⁶³ Yet Kennedy's view prevailed. Just as British politicians wished to avoid the boundary issue

⁶¹O'Higgins to Cosgrave; Kennedy to Cosgrave; and O'Higgins to Cosgrave, 7, 9, and 10 May 1924, D/T, S 1801/R. 'The Irish Boundary', The Times, 2 May 1924. 'The Irish Boundary. Meaning of Clause 12', Morning Post, 7 May 1924.

⁶²Cabinet Conclusions, 5 May 1924, PRONI, CAB4/112/12.

⁶³MacNeill to Cosgrave, 13 May 1924, D/T, S 1801/H.

generally, their Irish opposites similarly averted their eyes from this specific question hoping, it seems, that it might go away on its own.

Delay following delay

On 2 June, MacDonald formally notified Cosgrave and Craig that in the face of Belfast's continued defiance, it was unclear whether the Boundary Commission could function with only two members and, if not, whether London had the power to name Belfast's representative. These questions posed a constitutional dilemma and could only be answered by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.⁶⁴ Strangely, MacDonald's Cabinet did not ask, and the committee did not reach out to answer, the most important question: namely, was it within the power of Northern Ireland's subordinate Parliament to defy an agreement reached by the Imperial Parliament? Put another way: 'Have the King, Lords and Commons of Great Britain and the Six Counties any authority whatever in the Six Counties?'⁶⁵

To ensure the widest possible backing for the committee's decision, the Cabinet decided that two of the panel members should be from the dominions. While a Canadian judge was being sought, it had already been arranged for the chief justice of Australia to sit on the committee. But, given the distances that both men had to

⁶⁴MacDonald to Cosgrave and to Craig, both 2 June 1924, Cmd. 2166, Nos. 4 and 5.

⁶⁵'Viewpoints', Irish News, 23 June 1924. Also, see Dáil Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 2360-2361, 13 June 1924.

travel, it would be some time before a judgment could be expected. The interval should not be wasted. In his June letters to Cosgrave and Craig, MacDonald announced that the British were about to name the Boundary Commission chairman. To spare everyone from the 'difficulties by which we are all at present confronted', he again proposed that the chairman should be employed in one last attempt to reach 'an amicable settlement'.

If MacDonald thought this action would win any plaudits in Dublin he was mistaken. Even before his despatch reached the Irish capital, Healy informed Thomas that the Free State government now demanded that the Commission should be established immediately. In both this letter and one written the following day by Cosgrave, the Irish all but openly accused Labour of deliberately frustrating the intentions of Article 12. '[D]elay follows delay', Cosgrave bitterly complained and, to the Irish, the appeal to the Judicial Committee looked like a 'device' to 'shelve the whole matter.' This accusation was vigorously denied in separate letters from MacDonald and Thomas. In fact, the Irish were closer to the truth than they knew.⁶⁶

In his 6 June letter to Cosgrave, MacDonald pointed out that no formal request to appoint a Boundary Commissioner had been put to the Northern Ireland government until 29 April and that its formal refusal had

⁶⁶Healy to Thomas; Cosgrave to MacDonald; MacDonald to Cosgrave; and Thomas to Healy, 3, 4, 6, and 12 June 1924, Cmd. 2166, Nos. 6, 8, 11, and 12.

not been sent until 10 May. The British knew that Craig's government 'might' refuse to appoint its representative, it was true. But they did not know this for sure until mid-May and, MacDonald argued, 'we should get into difficulties if we try to deal with contingencies before they have actually arisen.' But as early as 2 April Thomas had informed the Cabinet that this contingency was 'almost certain'.⁶⁷ And, less than a week later the government's law officers reported that without a Northern Ireland representative, the Boundary Commission could not in their view legally function.⁶⁸

By contrast, in early May Ulster's government was already working on the assumption that the issue would be sent to the Privy Council and Craig was attempting to influence its decision. 'I fancy that he is taking steps, though I am not sure through what channel', Tallents reported, to secure an interpretation favouring the Unionists. If Craig succeeded and the Privy Council ruled out large-scale transfers of territory, the feeling in Belfast was that Cosgrave would 'take little further interest' in the boundary question. Were this to happen, Craig himself suggested that the Free Staters might then take advantage of the ensuing uproar to repudiate their financial obligations in Article 5 of the Treaty.⁶⁹

⁶⁷C. 24(24), 2 April 1924, CAB 23/47.

⁶⁸'Boundaries of Ulster. Opinion of the Lord Chancellor and Law Officers of the Crown', C.P. 242(24), 7 April 1924, TJ GG/2/20.

⁶⁹Tallents to Anderson, 8 May 1924, HO 144/3915/7.

Whatever Craig was getting up to behind the scenes, this latest development further strained relations between London and Dublin. Even if the best of intentions are attributed to British motives, the practical effect of not arranging for an early sitting of the Judicial Committee allowed the government to again put off the inevitable. Curtis, for one, was well aware that this would be the result. At the very least, he pointed out in early May, such a move would buy time.⁷⁰

The irritation made plain in Cosgrave's 4 June letter to MacDonald reflected the growing mistrust of Labour among Free State politicians. Following the breakdown of the Chequers conference, Cosgrave and his colleagues had to show their supporters that their patience was at long last about to bear fruit. This could best be demonstrated, Healy informed Thomas on 3 June, by putting the new chairman and MacNeill to work ascertaining the wishes of the inhabitants in the border counties.

Dublin's proposal, O'Higgins pointed out, was 'within the Treaty and is preparatory to its enforcement'. MacDonald's idea of using the chairman as an intermediary was 'preparatory to its evasion'. Worse, the idea was fast gaining ground in Ireland that the British had no intention of taking account of the wishes of border-county Nationalists, that doing so was 'not

⁷⁰'Appreciation of the Present Political Position in Ireland', 9 May 1924, CAB 21/281.

within the sphere of practical politics.'⁷¹

'A miserable farce'

In mid-June Cosgrave was forced to allow time for a Dáil debate on Britain's 'long series of evasions' regarding the Boundary Commission which had long since 'become a miserable long-drawn-out farce.' Opposition TDs pointed out that these delays had allowed Unionists to create 'acute difficulties' for Northern Nationalists 'which did not exist when the Treaty was signed in 1921.'⁷² Here, the source for complaint was Craig's continuing assault on proportional representation.

Although the Northern Ireland Parliament abolished PR for local elections in 1922, Craig had found it politic to postpone implementing the legislation for county council and rural district council elections until 1924. Unionist allies were told that the postponement was necessary to allow for the redrawing of electoral boundaries.⁷³ Redistricting, combined with the abolition of PR for municipal elections, had already deprived Northern Nationalists of their majorities on councils in Londonderry, Enniskillen, and Downpatrick.⁷⁴

⁷¹O'Higgins to Cosgrave, 10 June 1924, D/T, S 1801/H.

⁷²Dáil Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 2355, 2357, 2364, 2366, and 2630, 13 and 18 June 1924. It was during this debate that the government was also attacked for agreeing to suspend the Council of Ireland. See chapter 4 above.

⁷³'Local Elections in Northern Ireland', 22 April 1924, DO 35/893/1/x11/123.

⁷⁴See chapter 3 above. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 268-269.

That same outcome, about to be repeated at the county level, was directly linked to the boundary question. Those 'responsible in the Free State were fiddling', a rally of Tyrone Nationalists were told, while they faced 'a war of extermination'. At this same meeting a resolution was passed protesting not only 'the grossly scandalous gerrymandering' that had occurred but also against 'the delay in settling our claim to form part of the Irish Free State'.⁷⁵

These protests help to explain Cosgrave's repeated requests to the British government that they establish the Boundary Commission before the end of May. With Nationalists no longer in the majority on so many local government councils, the case for including the border counties in the Free State would be far harder to make. Unfortunately for Northern Nationalists, the weapon with which they chose to demonstrate their opposition both to the abolition of PR and to redistricting played into their opponents' hands. A Nationalist boycott of elections held on 1 June ensured Unionist victories. Significantly, the boycott did not have the backing of the North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, which correctly forecast that the move would back-fire.⁷⁶

At the same time, the boycott won no sympathy for the Nationalists in Whitehall. While it was admitted

⁷⁵'Tyrone Asks Fair Play', Freeman's Journal, 8 April 1924. 'The Gerrymander Scandal', Ulster Herald, 12 April 1924.

⁷⁶Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 302.

that the redistricting plans 'were most carefully thought out by the Unionists to secure them a majority', one Home Office official observed that the Nationalists had only themselves to blame for their dilemma. According to this official, Nationalist refusal to participate in hearings on the redistricting plans, or their 'purely destructive criticism' of those plans when they did attend such meetings, robbed their objection of 'much of its force'.⁷⁷

Meanwhile, Craig's government was busily creating, what a later generation would call, 'facts on the ground'.⁷⁸ As one TD predicted, these facts would make all the difference. Once the Unionists gained control of the county councils with the patronage that accompanied that control - and coupled these powers with the physical force of the Specials - they would have no problem in turning a large majority against them into a majority in their favour.⁷⁹

'The grave of reputations'

On 5 June MacDonald informed the House of Commons that his government was at last ready to name the chairman of the Irish Boundary Commission.⁸⁰ Richard Feetham, a native of Monmouthshire, had made his

⁷⁷'Local Elections in Northern Ireland', 22 April 1924, DO 35/893/1/x11/123.

⁷⁸The phrase is often used to describe Israel's settlements policy, especially in and around Jerusalem.

⁷⁹Dáil Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 2366, 13 June 1924.

⁸⁰HC Deb, Vol. 174, Col. 1469, 5 June 1924.

reputation as a barrister in South Africa where, only the year before, he was appointed to that country's Supreme Court. For his decision to go to South Africa in the first place, Feetham largely had one man to thank: Lionel Curtis. The two met while studying at Oxford and continued their association in South Africa, working in Alfred Milner's famous 'Kindergarten' of civil servants. Among other appointments, Feetham served as legal adviser to the Die-hard Tory leader, Lord Selborne, when the latter was Britain's high commissioner in Pretoria. Feetham and Curtis retained their links through the Round Table group and, ironically, Curtis had wanted his old friend to draft the final version of the Irish Treaty in 1921. 'Feetham's Irish hour' was not then. It had come now.⁸¹

Feetham, however, was not the first choice for this job. As early as September 1922, Curtis had suggested to Churchill that the ideal candidate would be former Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden.⁸² When approached about the chairmanship in May 1924, however, Borden was willing to accept only on condition that 'both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State will appoint

⁸¹Richard to Mary Feetham [his mother], 4 July 1924, RF MSS Afr. s. 1793, Box 6, File 1. Thomas to Selborne, 19 May 1924, Selborne Papers, MSS 84, ff. 165. Jones diary, 27 May 1924, Vol. III, p. 232. Lavin, Curtis, p. 14, 19, 192, 223. G. Hand, 'MacNeill and the Boundary Commission', in F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne, The Scholar Revolutionary: Eoin MacNeill, 1867-1945, and the Making of the New Ireland (Shannon, Ireland, 1973), p. 219-222.

⁸²Curtis to Churchill, 13 September 1922, CO 739/7/45885.

representatives and if I am assured that my acting is desired by both.' As he later confessed to Lord Beaverbrook, he 'was not sorry that the North persisted in its refusal', taking him off the hook.⁸³

Like Borden, Feetham's understanding of the Irish Question was rooted in an empire and Commonwealth framework.⁸⁴ Recent Irish historians have been decidedly reluctant to subject Feetham to harsh scrutiny. This may be an embarrassed reaction to the 'Feetham-cheat 'em!' abuse suffered by the chairman at the hands of Nationalist critics.⁸⁵ To be sure, there is no evidence that Feetham was vetted for his views on what he thought the Boundary Commission ought to achieve. But given his background and associations, there was no need. As Curtis later told Churchill, Feetham was selected

⁸³'Paraphrase Telegram, Governor General of Canada to Thomas', 7 May 1924, HO 45/12296/12. Borden to Beaverbrook, 9 October 1924, BBK C/51.

⁸⁴J.E. Kendle, 'The Round Table Movement and "Home Rule All Round"', The Historical Journal, Vol. 1, No. 3, Autumn 1993, p. 332-353.

⁸⁵Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 221-222. Hand, Report, p. x-xxi. According to Joseph Lee, Hand's 'dispassionate assessment of Feetham' retrieved 'the reputation of Irish scholarship'. See Ireland, p. 148, n. 411. While emphasising that Feetham was 'conscientious', Hand, p. x-xi, notes however that he was 'unimaginative' and his approach to the Commission 'was marked by a legalism and remoteness from political realities ... it is just possible that he was not the right kind of man' for the job. The abuse hurled at Feetham was, in any event, scurrilous. Both Labour's Thomas Johnson, and Farmers' Party chief Denis Gorey suggested that Feetham's career depended on pleasing his English 'master'. See Dáil Deb, Vol. 8, Col. 2505, 2558, 15 October 1924. For a dispassionate, though no less critical assessment of Feetham, see Gwynn, History of Partition, p. 231-232.

precisely because he was a man of 'conservative temperament' who could be counted on to reject the sort of 'preposterous and extravagant claims' being made by the Free State. 'Feetham', he assured Churchill, 'is a chairman exactly of the kind you contemplated.' Quite so. On hearing of Feetham's appointment, Curtis sent his old friend a cryptic, two-word telegram: 'England expects'.⁸⁶

MacDonald gave a similar assurance to Lady Londonderry. Any arbitrator, the British prime minister wrote, was bound to say that the Commission could do nothing more than make minor changes to the Irish border. 'I understand this is Feetham's view', MacDonald continued, though he admitted that his information was the product of 'mere gossip'.⁸⁷

Feetham's appointment did not mean that MacDonald had 'abandoned hope' that the two Irish Governments might yet reach a mutual settlement.⁸⁸ Soon after his arrival in London, Feetham was dispatched first to Dublin, then to Belfast and back to Dublin again for informal talks with the two Irish governments. Curtis was under no illusions about Feetham's task. Solving the

⁸⁶Curtis to Churchill, 19 August 1924, Curtis Papers, MSS 89, ff. 76-83. Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 220. Curtis's telegram was a reminder of Nelson's order to the fleet just before the Battle of Trafalgar: 'England expects every man to do his duty'.

⁸⁷MacDonald to Lady Londonderry, 5 August 1924, quoted in H.M. Hyde, The Londonderrys: A Family Portrait (London, 1979), p. 159-160.

⁸⁸HC Deb, Vol. 174, Col. 1259, 4 June 1924.

Irish problem, he pointed out to a mutual friend, had been 'the grave of reputations and also of old friendships'. But he was confident that Feetham would soon show the Irish, North and South, that he was 'a man who cannot be twiddled around anyone's finger.'⁸⁹

Feetham's discussions with Cosgrave and Craig achieved nothing. Although the Irish president ruled out another conference before the Boundary Commission set to work, Feetham nevertheless suggested such a meeting when he met with Craig on 3 July. The Northern Ireland prime minister was willing to consider another conference, though any proposal to transfer loyalists from the six counties 'on any large scale would not be tolerated'. Craig also danced around Free State demands for a plebiscite in the border areas, saying that 'he would not insult loyalists by asking their wishes, since he had no doubt what the replies would be.' Incensed over what he considered to be British 'bungling' of Feetham's visit (the government had failed to consult him beforehand), Craig told his Cabinet that during the interview he 'had brought home to Mr Feetham the gravity of the question which he was handling and the very grave dangers which would ensue from any mistakes.'⁹⁰

If anyone had reason to worry after Feetham's first

⁸⁹Curtis to Lady Selborne, 28 June 1924, Lady Selborne Papers, Eng. Lett. d. 430, ff. 52-54.

⁹⁰'Index to Dates and Conferences', 1-4 July 1924, D/T, S 1801/P. Cosgrave memorandum, 6 July 1924, D/T, S 1801/I. Cabinet Conclusions, 4 July 1924, PRONI, CAB4/117/5.

visit to Ireland, it should have been the Free Staters. During their second interview, the Boundary Commission chairman questioned Cosgrave on his government's attitude about transfers of territory from the Free State to the North. Cosgrave told Feetham that his government 'had never admitted the possibility of losing any of our territory.' Nevertheless, this possibility was clearly on Feetham's agenda.⁹¹

Before leaving Ireland, Feetham embarked on a four-day tour of the border so that he could familiarise himself with the area's 'economic and geographic considerations'. The press statement explaining his actions heartened Unionists. It was proof, reported one newspaper, that he had concluded that any changes proposed by the Commission 'must keep close to the border'.⁹²

⁹¹Ibid, Cosgrave memorandum.

⁹²'Index to Dates and Conferences', D/T, S 1801/P, 7-12 July 1924.

Chapter 7

Heading for Irish Rocks

... London is much excited over Ireland. Ulster and the Morning Post are on the war-path; L.G. feels that 'all's right with the world' again, and I am terribly gloomy. S.B. is either dishonest or he absolutely agrees with me, but has he the clearness of conviction and the force of will to impress the Ulstermen? It will be a miracle if we keep our ship off the rocks.

- Austen Chamberlain¹

Not long after his return from Dublin at the end of March, Tom Jones was 'startled' one morning to find the ex-prime minister of Great Britain standing in his office doorway. So unexpected a visit was 'very like' Stanley Baldwin. And so was Jones's reaction. Never one to miss an opportunity, he decided to tell the Conservative leader 'something of my visit to Ireland and the coming trouble on the Boundary Commission'. A crisis was just over the horizon, and Jones hoped that Baldwin might use his influence with Carson and Craig 'to bring Ulster into a more reasonable mood.'²

Despite Labour's difficulties with the Irish boundary, the Conservatives remained largely silent on the issue through the winter and spring of 1924. Even behind the scenes, party leaders avoided the issue as

¹Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 1 August 1924, AC 6/1/548.

²Jones diary, 9 April 1924, Vol. I, p. 275-276.

much as possible.³ But however much they tried steering their ship clear of Irish rocks, strong currents were pulling them in that direction. It was true that the Conservative ship was not the only one that might run aground. But though Labour was in office and the Liberals, especially Lloyd George, had Irish skeletons of their own, the potential for damage was greatest for the Tories.

For two of Austen Chamberlain's ex-Coalition partners the boundary dispute was particularly dangerous. One on the fringe of the Conservative Party, the other desperate to get back in, both Birkenhead and Churchill feared that the brewing trouble over Ulster would cause them 'considerable difficulty' if it again became a major political issue. Over the next two years they were to play increasingly prominent roles in creating the conditions that would contain the boundary question for the next half century. In the meantime, the stakes for themselves and for their party were high and the crisis, when it erupted, would be one of the most serious that the party ever faced.⁴

The return of Birkenhead and Churchill

Although the Tory high priests had been willing to 'kill the fatted calf' for Austen Chamberlain, there were

³For a rare exception, see Bernard to Chamberlain; and Chamberlain to Bernard, 18 and 25 February 1924, AC 35/4/7-8.

⁴Churchill to Birkenhead, 30 April 1924, Comp V, 1, p. 151-152.

no burnt offerings on Birkenhead's return to 'the true fold' after the 1923 election. His reinstatement in the Conservative leadership had been 'a more difficult proposition', only allowed because it was a case of 'Austen and F.E. or no Austen'. Party leaders hoped that once the two men were re-established in the Tory hierarchy, what Salisbury called the 'very honourable though perverted chivalry' which bound the two would disappear. They could be patient and in time rid themselves of Birkenhead - if his 'drunkenness and loose living' didn't do the job for them.⁵

The enmity which Conservatives felt for Birkenhead was nothing compared to the detestation reserved for Churchill. Though still a Liberal until Asquith allowed Labour to take office, rumours that Churchill was about to rejoin the Conservative Party had been circulating for over a year - a prospect that many stalwarts viewed 'without enthusiasm.'⁶ At the same time, Churchill's desperate efforts to regain a Parliamentary seat intensified feeling against him.

In such a climate, neither Birkenhead nor Churchill could afford to see an issue as divisive as the Irish Question re-emerge. Churchill, edging his way back into

⁵Salisbury to Baldwin, 26 January 1924, SB Vol. 159, f. 258-261. 'Memorandum of conversation with Mr Baldwin,' 4[?] February 1924, AJB-S, GD 433/2/19, Reel 4. Baldwin to Salisbury, 25 January 1924, S(4) 108/83-84. Chamberlain diary, 18 November 1923, NC 2/21. The Ulster Unionists, though, could not forgive or forget. See Lady Carson's diary, 7 and 9 February 1924, D.1507/C/8.

⁶Lady Spender's diary, 27 May 1923, D.1633/2/26.

the party of his father, was especially determined that 'this difficulty' should not become 'gravely embarrassing' to himself. It was imperative, he later told Lionel Curtis, to keep the boundary question out of Parliament. Once it became a domestic political issue, it could not 'fail to raise the question of the meaning to be attached to Article 12' - and for Churchill, that could be very embarrassing indeed.⁷

'Political dynamite'

An indication of the sort of trouble the boundary question could cause occurred when Birkenhead addressed the issue at the end of April. Speaking to the Liverpool Conservative Club, the former lord chancellor boldly defended his decision to sign the Irish Treaty. Article 12 was written in 'plain language', he insisted, and meant that only a minor border readjustment could be expected from the Commission's work. Ulster had nothing to fear and could appoint its representative and so save the country from the 'political dynamite' which its refusal might ignite.⁸

If Birkenhead thought that his speech would allay Ulster Unionist concerns, he was wrong. Craig was incandescent. 'How any Britisher, any man with the blood

⁷Winston to Clementine Churchill, 19 August 1924, CSC 2/17/13-15. Churchill to Curtis, 15 August 1924, WSC 2/570/18. According to John Ramsden, local Conservatives would not consider Churchill's candidacy in the in West Toxteth by-election that spring 'because of his past attitude to Ulster'. See Balfour and Baldwin, p. 192.

⁸'Ulster and the Boundary. Lord Birkenhead's Appeal', The Times, 1 May 1924.

of his forefathers in him, can contemplate such an outrageous action', he told the Ulster Association, 'passes my comprehension'.⁹ He was equally scathing when, during an hour and a half meeting that same day, he told the Shadow Cabinet that he 'got more time and interest from the present Government on the Ulster question than he did from his own associates' in the Tory Party. To smooth over matters, it was agreed that Birkenhead, along with Carson and Sir Douglas Hogg, would act as a 'special committee' to co-ordinate strategy between the Tories and Ulster Unionists. In return, the Conservatives made it clear that 'it was of vital importance' for Ulster Unionist MPs to 'be in constant attendance at Westminster' in case their votes were needed by Baldwin. Despite the agreement, hard feelings remained. All the Conservatives, Lady Carson wrote in her diary, 'except Lord Cave were rotten about Ulster.'¹⁰

At the same time, the Shadow Cabinet formed a separate committee to examine the legal implications arising out of Northern Ireland's refusal to appoint its Boundary Commissioner. The committee's report was far from reassuring. On the one hand, the committee's members - Birkenhead, Cave, and Hogg - agreed that the Commission could not function unless Ulster was represented on the panel. That said, once the Commission

⁹'Ulster's Resolve', The Times, 2 May 1924.

¹⁰L.C. Min. 1 (24), 1 May 1924, Cave Papers, Add. MSS 62,489, ff. 75-77. Cabinet Conclusions, 5 May 1924, PRONI, CAB4/112/12. Lady Carson's diary, 3 May 1924, D.1507/C/8.

was legally constituted, there was no certainty that it would limit itself to making minor changes to the Irish frontier. Quite the contrary, even a Boundary Commission award which transferred the whole of Fermanagh and Tyrone to the Free State 'could not be treated as bad in law or set aside by any Court.'¹¹

The upshot of these events was to make the Conservatives more wary than ever of the boundary question. Afterward, it was decided that 'as far as possible party leaders should avoid making any public pronouncement on the Irish question.' Whatever the merits of this decision, it stymied discussion of the issue within the party's higher counsels and meant that the Tories would not be 'prepared to meet any probable eventuality.' As spring gave way to summer, Conservatives pinned their hopes on the idea that Labour might somehow solve the boundary dispute, even though the dangers to the party were obvious should Ireland again erupt as an issue in British politics.¹²

'Beastly awkward': the Privy Council decision

For Austen Chamberlain, the summer of 1924 seemed to drag on forever. 'The session is slowly petering out', he wrote to his wife from the House of Commons at the end of July; 'everybody is bored and a holiday would be good

¹¹L.C. 10 (24), 5 May 1924, Cave Papers, Add. MSS 62,464, ff. 69-72.

¹²Robert Cecil to Salisbury, 9 May 1924, S(4) 109/44-47. L.C. Min. 2, 5 (24), 6, 28 May 1924, Cave Papers, Add. MSS, 62,489, ff. 78-79, 91-93.

for all.' Chamberlain was not the only MP longing to get away from London. Months of negotiations - with the Europeans on reparations, the Soviets on trade and, lately, with the Irish - had put MacDonal, and his colleagues, under a great strain. 'I am living in a perpetual succession of special Cabinet Meetings', one of them wrote, interrupted by 'sittings of the House ... called at short notice'. It was agreed that Parliament would adjourn after the first week in August and would not reconvene until the end of October. 'Only Ireland is menacing', Chamberlain confided to his wife. 'Will there never be an end to that bitter chapter?'¹³

The menace referred to by Chamberlain was the report of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The committee's decision was about to be issued and, Jones confided to his diary, it was 'beastly awkward'. Charles Craig, who was also apprised of its contents, quickly sent word to his brother, James. In effect, the committee closed off any avenue the government might take to call the Boundary Commission into being without the passage of additional legislation. There could be no Commission without a representative from Northern Ireland; the Crown, acting on the advice of its British ministers, could not force Northern Ireland's governor-general to appoint a representative; nor, as Article 12

¹³Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 29 July 1924, AC 6/1/543. MacDonal diary, 2 and 6 August 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1753/1. Olivier to Reading, 7 August 1924, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/7, No. 29.

was written, could the government in London make the appointment on its own. Jones dreaded the prospect of Parliament passing an Irish boundary bill. Were that to happen, he wrote, 'Cosgrave's opponents would say that if the British Parliament could alter the Treaty, so could the Irish Free State.'¹⁴

Finally, on 30 July MacDonalld heeded Jones's advice and invited other party leaders to discuss what had become a matter 'of serious Parliamentary importance.'¹⁵ Even before the invitations were sent, Jones was ordered to sound out Baldwin. What he got was a 'diehard reaction, more so than I ever remember having before from him.' Jones was surprised by Baldwin's attitude toward the Free Staters and shocked when his once and future master told him that it was 'difficult to forgive assassination and to forget their behaviour in the war.'¹⁶

Baldwin's reaction is easy to explain. Alarmed at the prospect of boundary legislation, he was, in effect, 'being asked to open up old wounds among his most loyal

¹⁴Jones diary, 31 July 1924, Vol. III, p. 233-234. Charles to James Craig, 30 July 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2. Cmd. 2214: Report of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, as Approved by Order of His Majesty in Council, of the 31st July, 1924, on the Questions Connected with the Irish Boundary Commission Referred to the Said Committee, (London, 1924).

¹⁵C. 45(24), 30 July 1924, CAB 23/48. Duff to Lloyd George, 30 July 1924, LG G/13/2/1. Besides Lloyd George, Asquith, Baldwin, Birkenhead, Austen Chamberlain, and Worthington-Evans were invited to the meeting.

¹⁶Jones diary, 29 July 1924, Vol. III, p. 233.

followers so that the Labour Party should be spared embarrassment.¹⁷ Thomas confirmed as much when he informed the other party leaders that the government intended to pass a one-clause bill allowing it to name Northern Ireland's Boundary Commissioner. Furthermore, unless the other leaders 'had some better suggestion to make', Labour expected cross-party support for the legislation so that it could be enacted as quickly as possible.¹⁸

The participants at the 30 July meeting were well aware that Labour's attempt to by-pass Craig's government would be thrown out by the House of Lords. In that case, Jones noted in his diary, 'Ireland will be back in our politics'. Baldwin, sensing the danger for himself and for his party, was 'for going very slow' before any final decision was made.¹⁹ He adamantly opposed the suggestion that the adjournment might be postponed to rush the legislation through Parliament, telling one confidante that he would do his 'utmost to stave that off.'²⁰

His nemesis, on the other hand, could not have been more pleased with this turn of events. Lloyd George was in his element, pledging Liberal support for the

¹⁷Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 269-270.

¹⁸C. 44(24), 30 July 1924, CAB 23/48. For evidence that Labour was expected to introduce such a bill, see Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 29 July 1924, AC 6/1/543.

¹⁹Jones diary, 31 July 1924, Vol. III, p. 234.

²⁰Baldwin to Joan Davidson, 30 July 1924, Davidson Papers.

government's bill and urging its immediate passage.

'L.G. is just bursting with new-born hope', Chamberlain told his wife, while 'S.B. sees himself confronted with disaster.' Both men knew that if Tory peers rejected the legislation, Labour and the Liberals could then go to the country on a platform of 'the Lords versus the People'. In any such election, Chamberlain predicted, the Conservatives would suffer a 'smashing defeat'.²¹ Other Tory leaders were equally pessimistic. Lord Derby thought that MacDonald would be 'rather glad' to see Parliament dissolved over the boundary question as Labour was 'in a peck of troubles' over a number of other issues.²²

In fact, MacDonald was no more anxious to fight an election on Ireland than was Baldwin. At this same time, he was immersed in two separate foreign policy issues: the struggle to resolve disputes over post-war reparations and efforts aimed at normalising relations with the Soviet Union. The MacDonald-led discussions to bring round both France and Germany to accept the Dawes Plan on reparations would not achieve success until mid-August. Meanwhile, the government's discussions with the Soviets were proving to be especially difficult.

²¹Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 31 July 1924, AC 6/1/546. Neville Chamberlain called Lloyd George's reaction 'downright unpatriotic'. See Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 3 August 1924, NC 18/1/446.

²²Derby to Rawlinson, 15 August 1924, quoted in R. Churchill, Lord Derby, 'King of Lancashire': The Official Life of Edward, Seventeenth Earl of Derby, 1865-1948 (London, 1959), p. 572-573.

The collapse of the Soviet negotiations, just as the crisis over the boundary bill erupted, was followed less than twenty-four hours later by the dramatic announcement that an agreement with Moscow had been reached after all. On the same day that the Irish bill was given its first reading in the House of Commons, MPs were stunned to learn that British and Soviet negotiators had concluded two treaties: a trade agreement, along with a general treaty which held out the promise of government-backed loan guarantees to Moscow. This astonishing turn of events, claimed the Tory press, was evidence of communist influence deep within the bowels of MacDonald's administration. If anyone still doubted the charge, the Cabinet then handed its critics yet further ammunition with which to bring down the government.²³

In late July, Britain's communist party newspaper, the Workers' Weekly, published an article calling on soldiers not to allow themselves to be used as strike-breakers. A warrant charging acting editor John Campbell with incitement to mutiny was duly issued only to be suddenly dropped after a confused series of exchanges involving MacDonald, other members of the Cabinet and Labour backbenchers.²⁴ As with the Soviet treaties, this sudden turnaround simply fuelled charges of a 'red menace' within the government.

²³Lyman, First Labour Government, p. 192-196.

²⁴Jones diary, 6 August 1924, Vol. I, p. 287. Marquand, MacDonald, p. 364-370.

From Labour's point of view, then, the atmosphere was hardly propitious for a general election even if they could make Ireland and the Lords the main issues. Anyway, no one in the party leadership really wanted to re-visit the Home Rule crisis. It was not their fight. Moreover, MacDonald had as much as reason as Baldwin for wanting to stop 'Lloyd George and his miserable minded following' from capitalizing on the boundary dispute. 'This is a thing to settle between friends', MacDonald told Lady Londonderry. They should not allow themselves to be dragged down into a squabble between 'dishonest politicians and hard mouthed bigots.'²⁵

Other Labour grandees felt that the party needed more time in office to prove itself and this alone was reason for avoiding an early election. 'All depends on whether the P.M. pulls off a satisfactory settlement with France', Beatrice Webb wrote. 'If he does, the Labour Government is in for another nine months - until the next budget'. But, she feared, if 'neither the Russian loan nor Irish boundary business "comes off" we may be turned out in November.'²⁶

On 2 August MacDonald, along with Thomas and Henderson, met with Cosgrave, Kennedy, Londonderry, and Pollock (Craig again being ill) to inform them of the government's plan of action. Privately, Cosgrave was

²⁵MacDonald to Lady Londonderry, 5 August 1924, quoted in Hyde, The Londonderrys, p. 159-160.

²⁶Webb diary, 21 July 1924, Vol. 38, 4096-4102. Also, see Gretton to Carson, 16 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

told that although the boundary legislation would be introduced on 6 August, it would not be passed until Parliament reconvened in late autumn.

That was two months too long, the Irish president replied. His government's ten-vote majority in Dáil Eireann did not account for some forty members who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance and, therefore, were denied their seats. Cosgrave believed that Thomas Johnson, the Dáil's Opposition leader, planned to argue that the Treaty had been broken by Britain's continued refusal to set up the Boundary Commission. That being so, the forty abstentionist TDs could take their seats without submitting to the Oath - and if that happened, the Irish Republic would become a fait accompli.

Despite this warning, MacDonald and his colleagues agreed that 'even this very serious risk was outweighed by the practical certainty that the Bill ... would be rejected by the House of Lords; [and] that a General Election might have to be undertaken under unfavourable conditions'. According to a Free State account of the meeting, MacDonald warned Londonderry and Pollock of the 'possibility of constitutional changes' if the North persisted in its refusal to appoint a Commissioner and the House of Lords threw out Labour's bill. The threat to abolish what powers remained in the Lords made no impression on either Unionist leader. Yet, even when faced with this stubborn reaction, MacDonald and Thomas still hoped that they might persuade the Ulstermen to

name a Commissioner on their own. They were certain that only this could save them from an election on the boundary dispute.²⁷

Inflaming passions

Any doubts that Ireland still had the power to inflame passions were dispelled when Thomas rose to speak in the Commons on 1 August. His announcement of the proposed boundary bill 'completely overshadowed' all other business. Now that the Irish spectre had reappeared in the House of Commons, its presence confirmed Baldwin's worst fears. 'The old feeling', H.A.L. Fisher recorded in his diary, was 'very intense'. Clearly, a large body of Conservative MPs were ready to fight the legislation without considering the political damage this might do to them in the country at large. 'Disaster is staring you in the face!' one MP cried out at the government; but his words might have served as a better warning to the Opposition front bench.²⁸

Five days later the boundary bill was given its first reading in the House of Commons. Unless Craig and his followers were prepared to appoint their own Boundary Commissioner, Thomas declared that there was no alternative but to pass a bill allowing the imperial government to do so for them. Pressed by Baldwin for a

²⁷C. 46(24), 4 August 1924, CAB 23/48. Free State memorandum on 2 August 1924 conference, undated, D/T, S 1801/J.

²⁸MacDonald to George V, 2 August 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/228. HC Deb, Vol. 176, Col. 2401-2406, 1 August 1924. H.A.L. Fisher diary, 2 August 1924, MSS 19.

go-slow approach on the one hand, and the Free State's demand that the legislation be enacted immediately, Thomas split the difference and announced that Parliament would reconvene on 30 September to complete the bill's passage.²⁹

What happened next 'produced one of the most interesting days of the Session.' Baldwin limited his remarks to the problems that would be entailed by Parliament's early recall. Sir John Simon, speaking for the Liberals, took a decidedly different course. Not only would his party back the boundary bill, Simon announced; it was also willing to extend Parliament's current sitting so that the measure could be enacted without delay. MacDonald called the speech a 'thinly disguised' attempt 'to inflame passion and political prejudice'. It did just that, provoking 'ominous cries' from Conservative and Unionist backbenchers and forcing the Speaker to intervene before the situation got completely out of hand.³⁰

For those who recalled the Home Rule crisis, the scene was all too familiar. The 'Prince of Darkness', one contemporary journal noted, was again 'active in his old hunting ground'. This was territory many MPs had hoped they would never have to re-visit. Yet they seemed

²⁹Ibid, Col. 2930-2932, 6 August 1924. Cosgrave to MacDonald, 3 August 1924, D/T, S 1801/J. C. 48(24), 6 August 1924, CAB 23/48.

³⁰Ibid, Col. 2934-2937. MacDonald to George V, 7 August 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/228. Annual Register: 1924, p. 86-88.

to be set on a course taking them precisely in that direction, with the added danger of a third general election in less than two years at the end of the road.³¹

The Conservatives' dilemma

Except for his brief intervention on the 6th, Baldwin maintained a disquieting silence during the opening days of the boundary crisis. That evening, however, he lashed out. Speaking at Hemel Hempstead, the Conservative leader argued that a pledge of honour was implicit in the 1920 Act, a pledge as binding as any of the promises explicitly made in the Treaty. His harshest criticism was reserved for the Liberals 'who were prepared, apparently, to throw the whole of this subject back into the political arena' and to 'plunge the country into a crisis of the gravest character imaginable'. For his part, Baldwin vowed that Conservative MPs would fight any legislation to 'alter the Treaty by changing the character' of the Boundary Commission - a pledge which was in fact more ambiguous than his listeners may have realised.³²

Baldwin was in a delicate position. Although the Die-hards were the most vocal section of his party when it came to Ireland, most Tories saw no reason why they should risk being dragged into electoral oblivion just because Craig was unwilling to compromise. After all,

³¹'The Devil and the Peace Treaties', The Nation, 9 August 1924.

³²'Mr Baldwin on Irish Crisis', The Times, 7 August 1924.

Lord Derby pointed out to Baldwin, Labour's bill was 'only compelling them to do what, legally, they are bound to do.'³³ Conservative leaders had to take account of these divisions; their national executive considered postponing the party's annual conference 'in view of the Political Situation which had arisen over the Irish Boundary question'.³⁴

Even if Baldwin could keep these rifts from breaking into the open, the party still might be torn apart. Hints coming from Belfast held out the tantalizing possibility that the Ulstermen might accept the boundary bill. But, as Baldwin explained to Edward Wood: 'The Lords are the crux'.³⁵ Tory members of the upper house were unwilling to 'incur the odium of letting the bill through' without public backing from the Belfast government.³⁶ This, Craig and his colleagues were unwilling to provide. In that case, the Lords would block Labour's bill, Conservatives in the Commons would feel bound to support them, and Labour - and Lloyd George and the Liberals - would have a golden opportunity to smash the party.

To be sure, not every Tory leader felt that they

³³Derby to Baldwin, 4 September 1924, SB Vol. 99, ff. 130-131.

³⁴Executive Committee minutes, 9 September 1924, NUA 4/1/4, ff. 101.

³⁵Baldwin to Wood, 6 September 1924, Halifax Papers, A4.410/14/1.

³⁶Salisbury to Baldwin, 25 August 1924, SB Vol. 99, ff. 122-125.

were in such dire straits. Leo Amery admitted that the Tories might 'have to face the possibility of the Goat trying to lead a raging campaign against Ulster in the hope of bringing about a Liberal Socialist combination and swamping us.' But, he assured Baldwin, 'It won't come off.' Even if MacDonald could be tempted into such an alliance with Lloyd George, most Labour MPs would not stand for it. Nor was Amery convinced that British voters would turn against the Tories for backing the House of Lords. The 'country, sick of Ireland, as it is, is just as likely to be cross with those who force on an election'.³⁷

Few of Amery's colleagues shared his optimism, however, and they did not include Baldwin. From the beginning, Austen Chamberlain felt that the party's 'only hope' would be for Baldwin to somehow persuade Craig to compromise. Otherwise, 'nothing but crushing disaster awaits us.' Ireland, Chamberlain told his wife, 'is indeed a fatal influence in British politics.'³⁸

Baldwin's visit to Belfast

A week after Parliament recessed, Baldwin reluctantly decided that must go to Belfast to impress upon Northern Ireland's Cabinet the gravity of the impending crisis. He was going against his better

³⁷Amery to Baldwin, 3 August 1924, SB Vol. 99, ff. 118-119.

³⁸Austen to Ivy Chamberlain, 31 July 1924, AC 6/1/546. Also, see Birkenhead to Churchill, 21 August 1924, WSC 2/570/48-49.

judgment, having earlier told Craig that he did not want to make the trip 'unless it is absolutely necessary'. Such a visit was bound to attract press speculation which 'might do harm'. Baldwin, though, was sure that the Labour government was about to fall. 'It is difficult to see how they can get over the Soviet treaty in early November', he confided to Joan Davidson. But before that could happen, there might still be 'a crash over Ireland', and to prevent such an accident he was willing to risk a visit to the six counties.³⁹

For the better part of Sunday, the 17th, Baldwin was involved in 'protracted discussions' with Craig and his colleagues. At the outset, their guest made it clear that there was little enthusiasm among Conservatives to do battle over the Irish boundary. Only two members of the Shadow Cabinet were inclined to pick a fight on the issue; the consensus, rather, was that 'it would be better to get the matter cleared up by this Government if Ulster would consent.'⁴⁰

Craig, on the other hand, wanted his British allies to fight Labour's bill just short of forcing a general election on the issue. '[B]ut I showed him the snag', Baldwin explained in separate letters to Lord Salisbury and Edward Wood. Such a strategy was bound to fail,

³⁹Baldwin to Joan Davidson, 14 August 1924, Davidson Papers. Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 270. As Baldwin suspected, his visit to Belfast did not remain secret for long. See 'Belfast's Farewell to Mr. Baldwin', Morning Post, 19 August 1924.

⁴⁰Craig to Carson, 18 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/5/1.

because 'the Lords will never assent' to the bill 'unless they have your assurance of agreement.' Once the peers rejected the legislation, Labour might immediately call an election and 'we may be in a grave difficulty.'⁴¹

Despite this warning, Craig refused to give any concrete assurance that the Ulster Unionists would help their Tory allies. At most, he was willing to consider acquiescing to the boundary bill 'under duress'. In exchange, Baldwin gave the Northern Ireland government what amounted to a veto over any Boundary Commission award it did not like. 'If the Comn. should give away counties', he told Edward Wood, 'then of course Ulster couldn't accept it and we should back her.' At any rate, Baldwin was confident that this scenario would not occur. Labour would 'nominate a proper representative' to be Northern Ireland's Commissioner, he wrote, and 'he and Feetham will do what is right.'⁴²

After his return from Belfast, Baldwin was 'inclined to think that the election will not be on Ireland'. And, he hinted to Joan Davidson, 'there are strong forces working to that end.'⁴³ Baldwin had good reason to be optimistic. After his visit to Northern Ireland, Craig suggested to Edward Carson that, perhaps, the time had

⁴¹Baldwin to Wood, 6 September 1924, Halifax Papers, A4.410/14/1. Baldwin to Salisbury, 2 September 1924, Salisbury Papers, S(4) 110/25.

⁴²Ibid, Baldwin to Wood.

⁴³Baldwin to Joan Davidson, 21 August 1924, Davidson Papers.

come confront the boundary problem, 'to face the music and have done with it.' Like Baldwin, Ulster's premier had concluded that it would be wise if the Unionists 'did not force a General Election' as it would be 'impossible to explain the intricacies of the Boundary question to audiences other than those which in any event would be likely to vote Conservative'. If Labour's bill was thrown out by the Lords, the election 'would be fought on whether the Commons or the hereditary peers were to prevail', and on that platform the Liberals and Labour would happily join forces. Ulster could expect 'little mercy' from a Lib-Lab government which might decide that they had 'a mandate to do what they liked.'"⁴⁴

Even if this nightmare scenario did not come to pass a Conservative victory, large or small, also posed a dilemma. Baldwin 'would be immediately faced with the problem of how to carry out the Treaty and this might possibly split the Conservative Party once more.' Aside from these considerations, Craig intimated that they had little to fear from MacDonald and Thomas. He was certain that Labour would nominate a 'safe person' to represent Northern Ireland on the Commission, who, with Feetham, could be trusted to 'override the Free State representative' if needs be.⁴⁵ None the less, Craig still refused to take the next step and make public his willingness to accept Labour's bill. Instead, because of

⁴⁴Craig to Carson, 18 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/5/1.

⁴⁵Ibid.

his continuing ill-health, Ulster's premier let matters stand and set off on another three-week sea cruise.⁴⁶

With Craig somewhere on the Baltic and Baldwin on holiday in France, matters were allowed to drift. An attempt by Salisbury to hammer out an agreement between the Unionists and Conservatives led nowhere. Salisbury was emphatic that only a 'public expression' by Craig would enable Tory peers to pass the boundary bill. Anything less, he pointed out to Lord Cave, 'would rob us of the last atom of credit which the Irish question has left us.'⁴⁷ Fearing a sell-out, however, the Ulster Unionists still refused to budge.

The Birkenhead letter

These were the circumstances that led to the publication of Birkenhead's famous letter to Arthur Balfour. Written to head off Balfour's defection from the Coalition in March 1922, the letter was intended to lay to rest his anxieties over the Irish Treaty.⁴⁸ When the boundary crisis broke two years later, the Shadow Cabinet was told that a deal 'would be much easier' if it could be shown 'beyond dispute' that the Treaty's signatories never envisioned anything more than minor readjustments to Ireland's frontier when they agreed to

⁴⁶Ervine, Craigavon, p. 491.

⁴⁷Salisbury to Baldwin, 25 August and 5 September 1924, SB Vol. 99, ff. 122-125 and 132-133. Salisbury to Cave, 2 September 1924, Cave Papers, Add. MSS 62,464, ff. 77-80.

⁴⁸See chapter 3 for the letter's origins. The text is reprinted in Appendix III.

Article 12. Winston Churchill believed that Birkenhead's letter was the answer to their prayers. The importance 'of such a document in the discussions to which we are now condemned', he pointed out to Balfour, could be decisive.⁴⁹

Churchill hoped that by producing this letter he would finally be absolved of his role in the Irish settlement, thus paving the way for his return to the Tory fold. With an election in the offing, he was particularly anxious to be adopted as the candidate for a safe Conservative seat which had yet to be found for him. In fact, party chairman Stanley Jackson had already approached a number of local Conservative associations about adopting Churchill; but, noted one party insider, 'they won't have him anywhere.'⁵⁰

That Ireland was a stumbling block to Churchill's ambitions was made clear in a letter from Sir Harry Goschen, chairman of the Epping Conservative Association. Goschen would recommend Churchill's candidature in the constituency - but only on condition that he give his explicit backing to the party, its leader, and its policies 'especially as regards Ireland'. The cost of the Epping seat was a pledge to back no change of the Irish boundary that did not have Northern Ireland's

⁴⁹L.C. Min. 6 (24), 30 July 1924, Cave Papers, Add. MSS 62,489, ff. 95-96. Churchill to Balfour, 7 August 1924, WSC 2/134/57.

⁵⁰Churchill to Jackson, 14 August 1924, WSC 2/134/69. Bayford diary, 29 July 1924, p. 216.

approval.

For Churchill, the price was worth paying.⁵¹

On 19 August Churchill triumphantly sent Craig a copy of Birkenhead's 1922 letter. Given its contents, he hoped the Ulster government might now see that they had nothing to fear from the Boundary Commission and might even appoint their representative, rendering Labour's bill - and its likely veto by the Lords - unnecessary. An autumn general election was all but certain, Churchill pointed out, and in the coming campaign 'we must not allow ourselves to be out-maneuvred ... when the forces of evil are so strong.'⁵²

Despite the importance Churchill attached to Birkenhead's letter, it did not make the open-and-shut case he claimed. A series of letters between Churchill and Birkenhead, and one from Birkenhead to Chamberlain, hint that Birkenhead harboured deep misgivings about the Coalition's handling of the boundary issue during the Treaty negotiations. Moreover, the version of Birkenhead's 1922 letter that Churchill now proposed to publish may have been materially altered.

Although Birkenhead readily agreed with Churchill's plans to give the letter to the press, he raised a disquieting question about its authenticity. According

⁵¹Goschen to Churchill; and Churchill to Goschen [two letters], 5, 11, and 28 August 1924, Comp V, 1, p. 172-175, 183-184.

⁵²Churchill to Craig, 19 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/8/1. Lady Carson's diary, 17 August 1924, D.1507/C/8.

to the published version, Birkenhead maintained that Collins's claim that the Boundary Commission would transfer whole counties to the Free State had 'no foundation whatever except in his overheated imagination.'⁵³ But, writing to Churchill on 20 August, Birkenhead pointed out that, in the original draft of his letter, he had 'qualified in it my reference to Michael Collins by a phrase which substantially ran "honest if hot-headed."' In other words, Collins's claim might have been made in a moment of hot-headed anger, and it might have been at odds with the British interpretation of Article 12. But admitting that the claim is an honest one contradicts the dismissive assertion that it was purely the product of Collins's imagination. These words were now missing and, Birkenhead continued: 'I cannot understand their omission from the letter as sent'.⁵⁴

Two days after he sent this letter to Churchill, Birkenhead wrote to Austen Chamberlain. This second letter paints a wholly unflattering picture of the conduct of the negotiations surrounding Article 12. 'The plain truth', he admitted, was that the Treaty never would have been signed had it not been for the promise of the Boundary Commission. The current crisis, Birkenhead observed, boiled down to the simple question of whether or not the imperial government had the right to act on

⁵³Appendix III.

⁵⁴Birkenhead to Churchill, 20 August 1924, WSC 2/570/38.

Northern Ireland's behalf to fulfil its Treaty obligation.

In my opinion we possess such a power. ... The Northern Government has in fact already so far recognised the Treaty as to avail itself of an option which only came into existence in virtue of the Treaty. In my judgment it is futile to reply that certain extremists in the South of Ireland, and many organs of the Press are making excessive and even absurd claims for the possession of Ulster territory. Every one of us knew that such claims had been made in the past and would be made in the future. We decided that they should be pronounced upon by a Commission. We decided upon the appropriate formula for reference to this Commission. Having satisfied ourselves that the words employed were only capable ... of the meaning which we placed upon them we assented to the addition of other words at the earnest entreaty of the Irish negotiators. We should not have agreed to the insertion of these words if we had not believed that they were powerless to affect the meaning of the article taken as a whole. ... In other words we agreed upon a reference to the Commission which many of us knew to be disputable but which we were certain could only be decided in one way. ...⁵⁵

Several conclusions can be made when this remarkable letter is read in conjunction with Birkenhead's 20 August note to Churchill. First, these letters contradict the assertion made in Birkenhead's 1922 letter, and elsewhere, that the extensive territorial claims made by the Free State were simply the product of one man's 'overheated imagination'. On the contrary, Birkenhead admits that the Irish Treaty delegates were led to believe that the Boundary Commission would substantially reduce Northern Ireland's territory. Thus, when Collins asserted these claims in early 1922, he may have been

⁵⁵Birkenhead to Chamberlain, 22 August 1924, WSC 2/570/50-56.

'hot-headed' but he was also 'honest' in making them.⁵⁶

Second, the letter to Chamberlain provides damning evidence to substantiate the charge that the Irish negotiators were deceived when they were told that the Boundary Commission would ensure Ireland's 'essential unity' - which was Arthur Griffith's price for accepting Dominion status. As Birkenhead later admitted in the House of Lords, the Treaty 'never could have been signed, it never would have been signed, without Article 12'. If this was so, his letter to Chamberlain substantiates the conclusion reached by John Campbell that the Irish were, indeed, 'cheated' when they signed the Treaty.⁵⁷

Third, and what may be most important, Birkenhead is explicit that after 6 December 1921 the 1920 Act was irrelevant when it came to determining Northern Ireland's frontier. It should be remembered that the first ten articles of the Treaty speak of Ireland as a whole. As Nicholas Mansergh has pointed out, the Treaty was between Great Britain and Ireland, not Southern Ireland or the 26 counties. Other historians tend to dismiss this point about the Treaty. One has called it an attempt 'to reconcile the reality of partition with the imagination

⁵⁶Appendix III. The opposite claim is made in Curtis to Churchill, 19 August 1924, Curtis Papers, MSS 89, ff. 76-83.

⁵⁷HL Deb, Vol. 62, Col. 1232, 9 December 1925. Campbell, F.E. Smith, p. 583-584.

of unification.'⁵⁸

But, on the contrary, Birkenhead made it plain that the Treaty and its ratifying legislation superseded the 1920 Act just as that legislation repealed the 1914 Home Rule Act before it. This admission undercuts one of the primary arguments in Birkenhead's earlier letter to Balfour. Article 12, Birkenhead had then claimed, 'contemplates the maintenance of Northern Ireland as an entity already existing' whose boundaries were 'defined by the Act of 1920'. On that basis, he argued, it was 'inconceivable' that the Boundary Commission had the power to make wholesale changes in a 'creature already constituted'.

But if Northern Ireland's Parliament gained the right to vote the six counties out of a single Irish state only through Article 12, the entity created by the 1920 Act was irrelevant, and so were its boundaries. If that was true, Birkenhead's assurances to Balfour were beside the point, meaning that the Boundary Commission was capable of making extensive changes to the size and shape of Northern Ireland.

Churchill was horrified by the implications of what Birkenhead had sent to Chamberlain. 'I hope you will not show the letter you have written to Austen to anyone else, or allow him to show it to anyone else', Churchill begged his friend. The defeat of Labour, he reminded

⁵⁸Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 193. Boyce, Ireland, 1828-1923, p. 103. Pakenham, Peace By Ordeal, p. 250-259. Fanning, Independent Ireland, p. 23.

Birkenhead, was their primary concern and they must keep clear of 'Irish cross currents.' Their best hope was to ensure the timely publication of the 1922 letter which, Churchill advised his friend, would 'do you good among the Die-hards and Ulstermen'.⁵⁹

On the Irish issue, at least, Churchill was clearly aligning himself with the Die-hard wing of the Conservative Party, working closely with Carson as well as Balfour. Much as he wished the Ulster Unionists would appoint their Boundary Commissioner, Churchill now told Birkenhead that he would 'not in any circumstances oppose them.' He was well aware that he still had 'a lot of prejudice to overcome' among rank and file Conservatives.⁶⁰ The Irish Treaty may not have been his greatest transgression in Tory minds, but because it was again a live issue it was causing the most problems, and he was anxious to avoid it when at all possible. 'Do not, I pray you, stress unnecessarily the Irish question in any speeches', he asked Robert Horne, prior to their joint appearance at a Conservative gathering scheduled for the end of August. 'It would only divide friends and unite enemies. The Russian issue is the one, and with good handling might well be decisive.'⁶¹

⁵⁹Churchill to Birkenhead, 19, 25, and 30 August 1924, WSC 2/570/65-66, 69-76, and 78-80.

⁶⁰Lady Carson's diary, 28-29 August 1924, D.1507/C/8. Churchill to Birkenhead, 25 August 1924, WSC 2/570/69-76. Coote to Churchill, 4 September 1924, WSC 2/134/117-118.

⁶¹Churchill to Horne, 30 August 1924, WSC 2/134/84-85.

Lloyd George comes to terms

Before Churchill could release Birkenhead's 1922 letter to the press, he had to be sure that it would not be disavowed by Lloyd George. As early as 19 August, Churchill had won a verbal commitment from the Welshman to endorse the contents of Birkenhead's letter. But he was careful to keep Lloyd George on board, lest his sometime friend, sometime rival be tempted by other considerations.⁶²

As it happened, Lloyd George had his own reasons for deciding that the Irish problem would not make such a good election issue after all. Although the two wings of the Liberal Party had reunited, there remained deep and bitter animosities. In August Edward Grey let it be known that he might lead a breakaway faction of the party and that he might raise the boundary issue to wound Lloyd George.⁶³ 'The truth' about the Treaty negotiations, Herbert Gladstone conceded, 'is shrouded in the grim vapours of the past', but that did mean that Lloyd George should be allowed to escape the 'onus' for the duplicitous tactics that he had practised with such reckless abandon.⁶⁴

⁶²Churchill to Birkenhead, 19 and 30 August 1924, WSC 2/570/65-66 and 78-80. Churchill to Balfour and Carson, 1 September 1924, AJB-S, GD 433/2/19, Reel 4.

⁶³Grey to Maclean; and Pamela Grey to Maclean, 12 and 25 August 1924, Maclean Papers, Dep. c. 467, ff. 94-95, 110-113.

⁶⁴Gladstone to Maclean, 14 August 1924, Maclean Papers, Dep. c. 467, ff. 96.

Certainly, the developing crisis was raising awkward questions about his handling of Ireland while at No. 10 Downing Street. The Daily Herald spoke for many when several months before it called the boundary dispute 'one of the damnable legacies of Lloyd Georgeism.'⁶⁵ Neville Chamberlain also suspected 'that L.L.G. did give Michael Collins reason to think he would get Fermanagh and Tyrone and at the same time allowed Craig to believe that no such transfer would take place.' A gleeful John St Loe Strachey was sure that 'before we reach the end we shall see L.G. hopelessly discredited.'⁶⁶

The Russian treaties, on the other hand, held no such dangers for Lloyd George and resurrected no embarrassing ghosts. On the contrary, by coming to a 'tacit arrangement' with the Conservatives, he hoped to position the Liberals so that they could recapture their place as the country's acceptable party of the left. At the same time, he deliberately withheld support from Asquithian Liberals so that the coming election could be used to purge the party. His leadership unchallenged, Lloyd George would then be free to reshape Liberalism in his own image. As one historian has put it: 'It might be said that Lloyd George decided to destroy the party in order to save it.' Finally, his endorsement of the

⁶⁵'Ulster Boundary Crisis. A Lloyd Georgeism Legacy', Daily Herald, 29 April 1924.

⁶⁶Gladstone to Maclean, 14 August 1924, Maclean Papers, Dep. c. 467, ff. 96. Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 3 August 1924, NC 18/1/446. Strachey to Carson, 12 September 1924, Strachey Papers, S/4/2/11.

Birkenhead letter also guaranteed his own safety in the forthcoming election, when he obtained a Conservative promise not to challenge him for his Caernarvon Boroughs seat.⁶⁷

By the time Liberal Party leaders gathered in mid-September to discuss strategy, Lloyd George was all for directing their fire at Labour's Soviet policy. Asquith demurred, saying that 'important as was the Russian Treaty, the first, and perhaps the only, thing with which the House would deal would be Ireland.' But Lloyd George was better informed, and he told his colleagues that 'he had heard that there were grounds for hope' that the Irish issue would be contained after all. The Conservatives, Lloyd George said, 'were not anxious to make it an electoral issue, and the House of Commons men were doing their best to prevent the Lords rejecting the Bill.'⁶⁸ That, of course, was Baldwin's hope. 'If we get over this fence', he wrote to Wood while on holiday in France, 'it looks as though the Soviet Treaty would be the next big event: and on that we can join issue gaily.'⁶⁹

⁶⁷Churchill to Balfour and Carson, 1 September 1924, AJB-S, GD 433/2/19, Reel 4. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 404-405. Campbell, Lloyd George, p. 87-89, 95-96, and 101-106.

⁶⁸'Narrative of the General Election 1924', Gladstone Papers, MSS. 46,480/310-311.

⁶⁹Baldwin to Wood, 6 September 1924, Halifax Papers, A4.410/14/1.

Publication of the Birkenhead letter

On 8 September, newspapers across Britain published Birkenhead's 1922 letter to Balfour. The Daily News summed up the reaction of most newspapers, calling the letter 'conclusive and irrefutable' proof that there had never been any intention to dismember Northern Ireland. The Daily Express went further, arguing that it would now be 'unthinkable' for the Boundary Commission or, more precisely, for Feetham, to interpret Article 12 broadly.⁷⁰

The Times magisterially observed that 'there has never, as a matter of fact, been any real doubt about the broad intentions of the Imperial Government'. Conveniently forgotten was the fact that less than a year before this same newspaper had reported that it was quite likely that Article 12 would result in a 'considerable modification of the present boundary.' In any event, The Times still felt it was 'unreasonable to expect Northern Ireland to stake everything upon the reputation of an individual', whatever Birkenhead's letter said.⁷¹ Nor was the press entirely unanimous in its verdict on the Birkenhead revelation. 'The letter is interesting', the

⁷⁰'Ulster's Right. The Proof', Daily News; and 'Boundaries Not Areas. Lord Birkenhead's Letter', Daily Express, both dated 8 September 1924.

⁷¹'Irish Boundary. Lord Birkenhead on Article 12' and 'New Light on the Irish Deadlock', The Times, 8 September 1924. 'The Ulster Boundary. An Embarrassing Situation', The Times, 11 September 1923.

Manchester Guardian commented, 'but it adds nothing new.'⁷²

These comments aside, Churchill was delighted with the letter's overall reception. 'Politics are, I hope, moving towards a crisis', he reported to Lord Rosebery two days later and for that reason it was 'essential that the Irish issue should be got out of the way.'⁷³ It was soon evident, however, that Birkenhead's letter was not changing minds. While Die-hards might be glad that its contents had been made public, this did not mean that they thought that Northern Ireland should now name its Boundary Commissioner. 'That step', one told Lord Salisbury, 'Ulster will not and cannot take.'⁷⁴ Nor had Birkenhead won any personal gratitude. If anything, the Belfast News-Letter told its readers, the letter was but one more example of the kinds of tricks Birkenhead had performed at the behest of his erstwhile master in the Coalition.⁷⁵

Lloyd George contradicts himself

Soon, the old master was himself in the thick of the controversy. On 10 September Lloyd George delivered what

⁷²'Lord Birkenhead's Letter', and 'Lord Birkenhead on Article 12', Manchester Guardian; and 'Ireland's Boundaries. Wishes of the Inhabitants the Kernel of Article 12', Daily News, all dated 8 September 1924. 'Events of the Week', The Nation, 13 September 1924.

⁷³Churchill to Rosebery, 10 September 1924, WSC 2/134/119-121.

⁷⁴R.S. Howe to Salisbury, 8 September 1924, S(4) 110/29-30.

⁷⁵'Birkenhead Letter. Irish Views', The Times, 9 September 1924.

was billed as an 'important speech' on both the Russian treaties and the boundary question. As promised, he fully endorsed Birkenhead's correspondence with Balfour. 'I stand by the letter itself, and all that it contains', he told an audience in Wales. Ulster had nothing to fear from the Commission. Nor could he believe that its chairman would 'come to wild and unreasonable decisions which would tear up the territory of Ulster, and leave it as a province with nothing but an unconsidered remnant of its land and population.'

But as was so often the case with Lloyd George, what he gave with one hand, he took back with the other. Although most attention focused on his endorsement, the speech was in fact a gigantic contradiction. During the Treaty negotiations, Lloyd George explained, both sides agreed

that the boundaries of the Six Counties did not accurately represent the real division between North and South. ... We then proposed that a Boundary Commission should be appointed with a view to arranging the fairest boundaries possible ... which would hand over to the Southern States [sic] the Catholic parishes which were anxious to join them, but which would, on the other hand, transfer to the North those Protestant parishes which are now in the Free State. ...⁷⁶

While this sounds inconsequential, an award based on the wishes of the population in parishes, or poor law unions, did not mean the exchange of pockets here and there along the border. Based on memoranda presented by Arthur

⁷⁶'Irish Boundary. Mr. Lloyd George's Position', and 'The Birkenhead Letter. Mr. Lloyd George's Support', The Times, 11 September 1924.

Griffith in 1921, along with evidence accumulated by the North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, it would mean that large portions of counties Tyrone, Fermanagh, and Armagh would go to the Free State, as well as Derry City, Strabane, and Newry - precisely what the Unionists feared.⁷⁷

Next, Lloyd George disposed of the argument that the economic and geographical qualifications mentioned in Article 12 were intended to be equal counter-weights to the wishes of the inhabitants. '[T]here are islands of Catholics surrounded by Protestants, and islands of Protestants in the South surrounded by Catholics', Lloyd George observed. 'It was therefore further proposed that the boundaries should be based not only on the wishes of the inhabitants, but on geographical and economic considerations.' Dealing a further blow to Birkenhead's letter, Lloyd George explained that these qualifications were taken 'out of recent treaties where similar difficulties had to be faced in Central Europe'. In other words, the 1878 Treaty of Berlin was irrelevant; the Versailles Treaty and the boundary commissions provided in it were the only international guides to consider.

Craig refuses to budge

Despite the widespread publicity given to Birkenhead's letter, Churchill's effort failed to impress the one person at whom it was aimed. On his return from the Baltic, Craig told a crush of reporters that the

⁷⁷See chapter 2.

letter made 'no difference whatever' to his views on the Boundary Commission.⁷⁸ This view was later confirmed when the Northern Ireland Cabinet met at Cleeve Court, Craig's English residence at Streatley-on-Thames. The Cabinet, Craig told Baldwin, felt 'bound to take every possible step to prevent the passage of the Bill revising the Treaty unless it is amended ... to apply merely to an adjustment of the Boundary.'

Any hopes Baldwin had for avoiding a vote on the Irish bill were dashed. Craig made it clear that his first allegiance was not to the British Empire, and certainly not to the Tories, as he felt 'entitled to look to any political party' to 'safeguard our rights and privileges under the Act of 1920.' Even so, Craig shamelessly urged Baldwin to use every means at his disposal as Conservative Party leader to amend the bill in Northern Ireland's favour. 'If there is any constitutional difficulty in getting such a clause inserted', Craig wrote, 'I should of course be glad if the Bill could be rejected'. If, on the other hand, Tory leaders were

convinced that I am merely asking them to provide against dangers which they consider to be purely imaginary and if they therefore feel unable to reject the amending Bill I rely upon you and them to give Ulster unqualified support later on should it prove that our fears are justified.⁷⁹

⁷⁸'Ireland. Sir James Craig's Return', The Times, 12 September 1924.

⁷⁹Craig to Baldwin, 17 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/1.

None of the warnings given by Baldwin, Salisbury, and other Conservatives seemed to have made the slightest impression on Northern Ireland's prime minister. Even an appeal from George V was met with an unyielding response. 'I shall have to maintain a firm attitude to the end', Craig told the king's private secretary, 'else there would be no limit to the claims of the Free State.'⁸⁰

Earlier, Lord Londonderry had confided to Salisbury that both he and Craig agreed that a general election fought over the House of Lords 'throwing out the Treaty would be disastrous.' Now, he was forced to admit that the Ulster Unionists were determined to defeat the bill, come what may. 'Our people are very headstrong', he ruefully admitted, 'and they can only think for themselves. They cannot take the long view of British politics which might be that an election on this point would not serve the interests of the Conservative Party.'⁸¹

Londonderry could have gone further. As far as Ulstermen were concerned, they had little reason to care about what happened to a good many Conservatives who, they believed, would as readily sell out Northern Ireland as any other group of English politicians. This mistrust was given an added boost when Eamon de Valera produced letters from Arthur Griffith written during the Treaty

⁸⁰Stamfordham to Craig; and Craig to Stamfordham, 17 and 20 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

⁸¹Londonderry to Salisbury, 8 and 18 September 1924, S(4) 110/32 and 43-44.

negotiations. At a speech in Cork on 14 September, de Valera quoted extensively from the letters to show that the Irish had accepted Article 12 only on the understanding that it would cede vast tracts of Northern Ireland to the Free State.⁸²

Griffith's letters caused no end of problems for ex-Coalition Tories. This revelation, one Unionist angrily told Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, 'hardly fits in with our ideas of what Ulster has been led to expect'.⁸³ Around any Conservative who took part in the Treaty negotiations, the suspicion still lingered that they had betrayed the cause before and might do so again. With so many of these same men in the party's front ranks, Unionists felt they had more reason than ever to be suspicious of the Tory leadership.

Baldwin's threat

The Unionists' decision to fight Labour's boundary bill meant that Baldwin was in exactly the same position he had been in when the crisis erupted in August. There was every danger that Conservative MPs might be swept up by an emotional impulse to fight Labour's bill and damn the consequences. The Die-hards, not surprisingly, were doing all they could to push the party in that direction. They believed the time had come 'to destroy the Socialist Government' in general, and their Irish bill in

⁸²'No Boundary for Mr De Valera', Morning Post, 15 September 1924.

⁸³Williamson to Worthington-Evans, ? September 1924, W-E, MSS Eng. hist., c.914, ff. 194.

particular, 'with the utmost determination.' John Gretton accused Baldwin of 'half-hearted' leadership, telling Carson there 'should be no talk of compromise or fear of facing a General Election.'⁸⁴

Yet even Gretton was forced to admit that much as the party hated Labour's bill, few if any Tory MPs or Parliamentary candidates actually wanted to fight the next election on Ireland and the Lords.⁸⁵ However much the Ulster cause could still pluck at the heartstrings of Tory regulars, its power to strike a chord among the British people at large had long since faded. Other Conservatives realised this. Edward Wood felt that the party would be flirting with disaster if it became associated for a second time with an Ulster revolt. Far from being one of the party's shining moments, Wood suspected that 'the British law-abiding temperament was more shocked than we always recognised by Carson's performance' during the 1912-1914 crisis. In the new, post-war politics, 'Ulster will lose sympathy if she appears to be following that line'. And, of course, so would the Conservative Party.⁸⁶

Tory moderates had an additional reason for wanting to avoid a fight over the boundary bill and to focus

⁸⁴Gretton to Carson, 16 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

⁸⁵Ibid. Gretton sought to minimize this point, noting that his canvass of current and prospective Tory MPs was 'quite limited'.

⁸⁶Wood to Baldwin, 10 September 1924, Halifax Papers, A4.410/14/1.

instead on the Russian treaties. As Churchill observed in a letter to Carson, no one could foretell the outcome of the next election, and there was every reason to believe that the results could be as close as the outcome of the 1923 race. This meant that the Conservatives might need the support of Lloyd George and the anti-Labour wing of the Liberal Party. The Tory leadership 'will have to come to some sort of terms with him', Churchill argued, 'if they are to turn the Socialists out.' That would be a lot less likely to happen if these same Liberals found themselves allied with Labour in a hard-fought battle over Ireland, only to be told that they were to switch sides to support the Conservatives against the Soviet agreements.⁸⁷

Austen Chamberlain also doubted that the Conservatives were strong enough to beat Labour on their own. Once he was convinced that a general election was inevitable, he wrote with foreboding, 'then the deluge!'⁸⁸ Like Churchill, Chamberlain felt that an understanding of some kind with the Lloyd George Liberals might be the price of power. His brother, Neville, however had reached a different conclusion. Even with

⁸⁷Churchill to Carson, 18 September 1924, WSC 2/570/118-119.

⁸⁸Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 5 October 1924, AC 5/1/334.

the Irish Question looking 'insoluble', he felt that the Tories should 'risk a General Election' on the issue, believing the party would still come out of the race 'with a very narrow majority.'⁸⁹

While the younger Chamberlain may have been willing to take such a gamble, a strategy such as the one he advocated would be extraordinarily risky for the party's leader. Baldwin had 'wrecked his party once', the Quarterly Review reminded its readers. Were he to risk an election on a conflict between the two houses of Parliament over Ireland he would 'wreck his party again, and this time more effectively than before.'⁹⁰ Running a political party aground once had been a mistake. Doing so a second time would look careless. Almost certainly, it would be fatal to Baldwin's political career. Small wonder, then, that the Conservative leader was still 'anxious' about Ireland when Leo Amery saw him on the 19th.⁹¹

A week later, the Shadow Cabinet met to decide once and for all what position the party should take on the Irish legislation. 'The general conclusion was that we ought not to let the Lords wreck the bill', Amery wrote in his diary, but that the Conservatives should attempt an amendment defining the Boundary Commission's scope.

⁸⁹Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 20 September 1924, NC 18/1/452.

⁹⁰'Ireland Today', Quarterly Review, October 1924, No. 484, p. 371.

⁹¹Amery diary, 19 September 1924, p. 386.

Given that the chances of such an amendment passing were slim, the Shadow Cabinet decided it would then fall back on a none-too-subtle threat. 'If over-ridden', Amery wrote, the Tories would warn Labour that they would 'resist any attempt to enforce against Ulster a decision based on what we regard as a false interpretation of the Treaty.'⁹²

That did not go far enough for the Die-hards, who were ready to fight the boundary bill 'whatever our front bench may decide'.⁹³ What the Die-hards failed to see was the sheer brazenness underlying the Shadow Cabinet's statement. In effect, the Conservatives were handing to themselves - and through them, the Ulster Unionists - the right to veto any Boundary Commission award they did not like.

⁹²Ibid, 25 September 1924, p. 387. Also, see annual party conference minutes, 2-3 October 1924, NUA 2/1/40.

⁹³Gretton to Craig, 27 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

Chapter 8

The Boundary Bill and its Aftermath

Is not the present debate in this House absolutely unreal? What are you thinking about? You are not thinking of the rights or wrongs of this question at all. You are really thinking about the General Election that is going to follow

- Lord Carson¹

In the third week of September Beatrice Webb decided that Ireland's boundary dispute would not bring down the first Labour government after all. 'The Irish question has disappeared', she wrote in her diary, 'all parties apparently having agreed to pass the Bill, and no sustained opposition being expected from the Lords.'² Lord Olivier was equally confident. If the Tory-dominated upper house refused to pass the Irish bill, 'there might be a dissolution'; but he doubted that would happen. He was even beginning to think that the government would survive the furore over its Soviet policy.³

This mood reflected an unwarranted complacency within Labour's hierarchy. None of the government's leaders principally responsible for Irish policy - MacDonald, Thomas, and Henderson - seem to have paid much attention to the boundary problem during Parliament's

¹HL Deb, Vol. 59, Col. 616, 8 October 1924.

²Webb diary, 20 September 1924, Vol. 38, 4111-4116.

³Olivier to Reading, 18 September 1924, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/7, No. 32.

two-month recess. MacDonald returned to his primary interests in foreign affairs; Thomas was in South Africa for much of August and September; and Henderson involved himself in arms reduction talks at the League of Nations.

Meanwhile, the government's critics turned their attention more and more to the Russian treaties, so much so that by mid-September this issue 'engaged the public attention almost equally' with the Irish boundary dispute. Although Craig still urged the Conservatives to put up a 'stiff fight' on the boundary bill, the Tories clearly had decided to concentrate their fire on Labour's Soviet policy. It was for this reason that the Russian treaties rather than the Irish bill became the issue on which 'the Government would have to fight for its life as soon as Parliament reassembled'. And, crucially, the Campbell case refused to go away.⁴

Nevertheless, MacDonald and his colleagues were wrong to think that they were safely out of the Irish bog. The saviour of Labour's boundary bill, when he came, would surprise everyone, including himself.

Craig bargains with Labour

'Chilled and wretched' with a cold, MacDonald returned to London on the night of 28 September, little better rested than when Parliament had gone into recess eight weeks before. With the House of Commons scheduled

⁴Marquand, MacDonald, p. 357-372. J.H. Thomas, My Story (London, 1937), p. 78-79. Wrigley, Henderson, p. 152-153. Annual Register: 1924, p. 95-96, 100. Craig to Gretton, 17 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

to reconvene in two days' time, and Thomas not yet returned from South Africa, it fell to MacDonald to introduce the second reading of the Irish bill. Beforehand, he was involved in two long discussions on the Boundary Commission: first, with Craig and, later, in Cabinet.

Why Craig made this last-minute approach to MacDonald is unclear. It is possible that the Ulster leader was attempting to play for time: Gretton had told him that from the Conservatives' point of view it was important that Parliament should not reconvene before the end of October.⁵ Alternatively, Craig may have been trying to win concessions from Labour now that the government was so clearly under pressure from other directions. As far as matters stood with the Conservatives, Craig had tried convincing Baldwin to fight the boundary bill with a series of 'strong' amendments which, though they stood no chance of passing, were meant to 'satisfy the people of Ulster' and their supporters in Britain.⁶ The Shadow Cabinet's decision on 25 September ruled this out, and Craig may have been looking to see if he could cut a deal with the government.

If that was the case, he played his hand badly. At the outset of their discussions, Craig informed MacDonald

⁵MacDonald diary, 29 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/17531/1. Gretton to Craig, 16 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

⁶Craig to Carson, 20 September 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/5/1.

that his position on the Boundary Commission was 'unchanged'. Even so, he had come to London to ask for three 'concessions' from the imperial government. First, he wanted the £1 million for the Special Constabulary which, he claimed, had been promised by the previous Conservative government. Next, he raised the question of amalgamating the British and Northern Irish unemployment insurance funds. Otherwise, he explained, 'Ulster would either have to reduce benefits or increase taxation.' Finally, Craig resurrected a proposal made at the Chequers conference in May that if the Boundary Commission's decision forced any Unionist to migrate, all relocation costs ought to be borne by the British government.

Supposing these points were conceded, MacDonald asked, would the Northern Ireland government accept the Boundary Commission's decision? Craig refused to give any concrete assurance, promising only that 'he would accept the decision if it were not too foolish.'

Unfortunately for Craig, the chancellor of the exchequer had just prepared a detailed summary of the extensive financial support that successive British governments had already given to Belfast. 'Since 1921', it began, 'the British Treasury has been subject to continual demands for money from Ulster'. To members of the Cabinet, who were given Snowden's report at the same time as they were told about Craig's conversation with

⁷C. 51(24), 29 September 1924, CAB 23/48.

MacDonald, the Ulster premier's demands simply looked like more of the same.⁸

On one point, however, Snowden was wrong. He dismissed Craig's proposal that the British Exchequer should underwrite any population transfer triggered by the Boundary Commission's award, writing that the idea 'has never been even informally mentioned to us'.⁹ But, on the contrary, MacDonald had already committed the government to Craig's idea - the cost of which no one could begin to foretell - without bothering to tell his chancellor of the exchequer. Craig attached great importance to this promise and it was one of a handful of factors that nearly persuaded him not to oppose Labour's Irish bill. The effects of any Boundary Commission award, he told Carson, would be 'greatly softened' because MacDonald had promised 'to generously compensate those Protestants who are now located in an area to be transferred to the South'.¹⁰

Craig's claim is supported by a Free State account of the 2 August meeting between MacDonald, Thomas, Cosgrave, and Londonderry. According to this version, however, MacDonald was willing to compensate any person whose home or business was transferred from one Irish jurisdiction to the other - not just Protestants who

⁸Ibid. Snowden memorandum to MacDonald, 26 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/61.

⁹Ibid, Snowden memorandum.

¹⁰Craig to Carson, 18 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/5/1.

would find themselves in the Free State.¹¹

At its 29 September meeting, the Cabinet did not discuss the proposal, and if MacDonald ever bothered to inform Snowden of the commitments he had made to the Irish there seems to be no record of it. Before reaching a final decision on how to handle their Irish bill, the Labour ministers were given yet one more bit of curious information. Less than a quarter of an hour before the Cabinet was due to meet, MacDonald was informed that if the government appointed Carson to the Boundary Commission, Craig 'would give a pledge that he would accept its findings.' MacDonald was suspicious - 'I smelt rats!' he confided to his diary - but he felt that the proposal could not be dismissed out of hand.¹²

Where this idea originated is a mystery. The Carsons believed that it came from MacDonald, though this clearly was not the case.¹³ At any rate, the list of suspects could not be confined to the government. For those who wanted to get the Irish dispute out of British politics, the thought of putting Carson on the Commission was seen to be a stroke of genius. This surely would allay fears in Belfast and, as Churchill put it, what 'might have been a stumbling block will now pass out of

¹¹Free State memorandum of 2nd August 1924 meeting, undated, D/T, S 1801/J.

¹²MacDonald diary, 29 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1753/1. The Cabinet minutes are typically vague, saying only that a 'particular name' was mentioned. See C. 51(24), 29 September 1924, CAB 23/48.

¹³Lady Carson's diary, 28 September 1924, D.1507/C/8.

the sphere of immediate action.'¹⁴

Instead, the proposal prompted a number of leading Ulster Unionists to attack the very man who had led them through the Home Rule crisis. Carson was blamed for 'losing' three of Ulster's nine counties during the partition settlement of 1920. Craig seems to have made no attempt to come to the defence of his old chief, and Carson eventually turned down his proposed appointment to the Boundary Commission after being told him that it would cause a 'crisis' in the six counties.¹⁵

Nor, in the end, was the British Cabinet willing to accede to any of Craig's demands. Whatever he had hoped to gain from his private talk with MacDonald was lost once Snowden's exposition was presented to the Cabinet. There would be no last minute 'bargain with Ulster'; neither would the Cabinet allow any further delays while it quibbled with Belfast over Carson's appointment to the Commission. The second reading of the government's amending bill would go ahead as planned.¹⁶

Passage of the boundary bill

'Not many years ago', MacDonald wrote to the king on 1 October, 'a debate on the Irish question would have provided a ready outlet for the superfluous energy which members had accumulated as a result of the holiday

¹⁴Churchill to Balfour, 2 October 1924, AJB-S, GD 433/2/19, Reel 4.

¹⁵Follis, State Under Siege, p. 162-163. Also, see Spender to Londonderry, 22 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/8/1.

¹⁶C. 51(24), 29 September 1924, CAB 23/48.

season. But', he continued, 'circumstances have changed.'¹⁷ Provided that the Conservatives could contain their extremists when it came to the Irish bill, it was clear that they meant to bring down the government on the Russian treaties. The difference between the two issues boiled down to a simple case of Parliamentary arithmetic. As the New Statesman pointed out, while the government could rely on Liberal support to see through its boundary legislation, no such help could be expected for its policy toward the Soviet Union.¹⁸

However, neither the Russian Treaties nor the Irish dispute was uppermost in the minds of MPs when they reconvened on 30 September. The 'explosion', when it occurred, was over the government's handling of the Campbell case, a prosecution, MacDonald sourly wrote in his diary, that had 'been foolishly entered upon but much more foolishly dropped'. Forced to watch as 'every political hypocrite' took the opportunity to denounce his government, MacDonald was compelled to schedule a debate on the incident before he could move onto the Irish bill. The outburst had one salutary effect. Having wasted so much of their 'superfluous energy' on the Campbell case, MPs had little left to expend on the boundary bill which, MacDonald told the king, was considered 'in a more sober and dispassionate manner' than might otherwise have been

¹⁷MacDonald to George V, 1 October 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/228.

¹⁸'Comments', New Statesman, 20 September 1924.

the case.¹⁹

MacDonald's distaste for the Irish legislation was obvious at the outset of his speech. 'I cannot say that I rise with any pleasure to move the Second Reading of this Bill', he told the House. Yet, neither could he as prime minister walk away from a solemn commitment. 'I shall be delighted if any hon. Member has got the ingenuity to find a way out of this difficulty, only it must be an honourable way out', a mere contrivance of words would not do. 'We are bound to make Article 12 work', MacDonald continued, reminding his listeners that the Treaty had been given all-party support from the beginning. That support could not now be abandoned. Without it, Ireland would again tear apart British politics and all that had been achieved 'will have been destroyed once and for all.'²⁰

Baldwin's reply was brief. Conservatives, he announced, would not oppose the bill's second reading. Instead, they would propose amendments during its committee stage, making it clear that the Commission was only meant 'to deal with the rectification of the Boundary'. But if these amendments were not accepted, what then? Then, Baldwin warned

... the responsibility for what is in the Bill must rest with the Government and with the Government alone; we can have no part in or

¹⁹MacDonald to George V, 1 October 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/228. MacDonald diary, 30 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1753/1.

²⁰HC Deb, Vol. 177, Col. 27, 37-40, 30 September 1924.

responsibility for it, and we shall have to consider then what our action will be at a later stage.²¹

Later that night, MacDonald confided to his diary that the boundary bill 'is to go all right', seeming to believe that its passage was now a mere formality.²² In fact, debate on the legislation was stormy and was marked by a number of bitter exchanges, so that 'the temper of the House remained on edge for the rest of the sitting.'²³ Determined to thwart a commitment they wished to see broken, the bill's opponents made any number of extraordinary assertions, which T.P. O'Connor rightly dismissed as a 'deluge of nonsense'.²⁴

Central to the Die-hard case was their argument that once the Boundary Commission's chairman had been appointed, the imperial government had done all that it was legally bound to do. From that moment, it was up to Northern Ireland to decide whether or not the Commission could function, and the British were under 'no obligation either of honour or of legality' to pursue the matter any further. Moreover, according to the Ulster Unionist Hugh O'Neill many MPs had earlier supported the Treaty only on the understanding that if Ulster did not like the

²¹Ibid, Col. 41-45.

²²MacDonald diary, 30 September 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1753/1.

²³Annual Register: 1924, p. 102.

²⁴HC Deb, Vol. 177, Col. 409, 2 October 1924.

agreement 'she need never appoint a Commissioner.'²⁵

Although this claim was later denounced as the 'greatest roguery', it was by no means the most damaging admission made by the bill's opponents. Not the least of these was Sir Laming Worthington-Evans's disclosure that he and his former Coalition partners had in fact deceived the Sinn Féin delegates during the Treaty negotiations. Or, as Worthington-Evans himself put it: '[I]t is not always possible in the middle of negotiations to say fully and entirely what you would like to say ... sometimes it is discreet to be silent.'²⁶

Elsewhere, Die-hard spokesmen actually conceded that if an award was based on the wishes of the inhabitants, 'we shall leave it in the power of the Commission to include in the Free State the whole of Tyrone, Fermanagh and a large portion of County Down.' This last remark drew another stinging rebuke from O'Connor. 'Am I', he bitterly asked the House of Commons, 'at this date to defend the principle that men must be free to choose their own government?'²⁷

The main contention of the bill's opponents was that, in Baldwin's words, Parliament had a 'double debt of honour'. Pledges had been made to Northern Ireland, as well as to the Free State, and these earlier

²⁵Ibid, Col. 52, 57, 67, 223, 30 September-1 October 1924. 'In Honour to Ulster', Morning Post, 17 September 1924.

²⁶Ibid, Col. 156, 391-393, 1-2 October 1924.

²⁷Ibid, Col. 365-367, 412, 2 October 1924.

commitments also had to be upheld.²⁸ But it was not the leader of the Opposition, nor any other Conservative for that matter, who espoused this view as straightforwardly as did Lord Grey. According to Grey, Parliament was being asked to choose between 'an honourable understanding with Ulster in 1920 ... [and] a definite engagement with the Free State'. Grey was for honouring the first commitment. 'I would rather face a demand from the Free State to be a Republic', he said, 'than see the understanding with Ulster broken.' Most peers heartily agreed.²⁹

While Grey's speech was 'cheered in the House', those outside were left 'dumbfounded'. As The Nation pointed out, to accept Grey's reasoning meant that 'the understanding [with Northern Ireland] should override the definite engagement [with the Free State], because it preceded it in point of time.' Did the noble Lord, asked the journal, 'give no weight to the superior status of a definite engagement, concluded in the form of a Treaty, and ratified, as the understanding never was, by Parliament?'³⁰

Coming from a former foreign secretary, Grey's claim was, indeed, strange - until the state of Liberal Party politics is recalled. As he had earlier intimated to

²⁸Ibid, Col. 43, 30 September 1924.

²⁹HL Deb, Vol. 59, Col. 550-553, 7 October 1924.

³⁰'The Scales of Lord Grey', The Nation, 11 October 1924.

Donald Maclean, Grey was prepared to use the boundary dispute as a defining issue with which he might separate himself from the rest of the Liberal leadership - and from Lloyd George in particular.³¹ His speech likely was an attempt to do just that.

Although Baldwin had implied that the Conservatives would propose a series of amendments to the boundary bill, their attempt to alter the legislation boiled down to a single proposed change. This would have limited the Boundary Commission's award to one not 'substantially altering the area of Northern Ireland as fixed by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920.'³² Despite Thomas's warning that the Conservative amendment could cost lives, lead to war, and 'shake the foundations of the Empire', observers were surprised when it was defeated by a comparatively slim margin of fifty votes.³³ Because the committee stage of the boundary bill ended earlier than expected, Thomas proposed that its third reading

³¹Grey to Maclean, 12 August 1924, Maclean Papers, Dep. c. 467, ff. 94-95.

³²HC Deb, Vol. 177, Col. 363, 2 October 1924. Two other amendments were proposed by Ulster Unionist MP D.D. Reid. The first would have forbidden the transfer of any territory between the two parts of Ireland 'without the consent of the Parliament to whom jurisdiction over that territory has been granted by the Imperial Parliament'. See Col. 50, 30 September 1924. His second amendment, that 'the expression "in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants" in that Article [i.e., Article 12] means the consent of the Parliament of the Irish Free State and of the Parliament of Northern Ireland' was ruled out of order. See Col. 423, 2 October 1924.

³³Ibid, Col. 386, 419-424, 2 October 1924. Annual Register: 1924, p. 103.

should be considered that night. So it was that, because Baldwin was not in London, it fell to Austen Chamberlain to explain why the Conservative Party was not prepared to carry on its fight against Labour's Irish bill. Although only the day before he had attacked the boundary legislation as 'one-sided', Chamberlain now conceded that its rejection 'at this stage of the proceedings' would be unwise. Instead, he appealed to Thomas to appoint to the Boundary Commission 'a man as Ulster itself might have chosen had it been willing to do' so. He also called on the government to compensate anyone displaced by the Commission's award.³⁴

Thomas willingly assured Chamberlain that his first concern would be met but refused to 'bind the Government' on the matter of compensation. With the boundary bill now assured of passage in the Commons, its highest hurdle was yet to come in the House of Lords. 'I do not know what the fate of this Bill may be', Thomas solemnly declared, but the government had no intention of seeing the measure passed in the lower house, only to have it defeated elsewhere. The boundary bill, unamended, must be enacted immediately. Labour would 'stand or fall by that position'.³⁵

Salisbury's 'safety valve'

Though it was never likely that the Conservatives

³⁴Ibid, Col. 169 and 465-467, 1-2 October 1924.

³⁵Ibid, Col. 468-474, 2 October 1924. The final vote was 251 to 99 in favour of the bill.

would succeed in amending the boundary bill in the House of Commons, party leaders waited until the last minute before deciding what they would do if the unamended legislation was sent to the House of Lords. Convinced that an election was now unavoidable, Austen Chamberlain believed that even the Unionists wanted to get this issue out of the way. 'My own conviction', he told one of his sisters, 'is that Ulster or at least the Ulster members, are glad to see the Boundary Bill through.' In that case, there was simply no reason for the party to risk a fight in Parliament's upper house. 'If the Lords are wise', he continued, 'they won't touch the Bill, but then they are not wise enough for that!'³⁶

It is not the least of ironies in this story that the saviour of the Irish boundary bill turned out to be a man who, in other circumstances, would have been one of its fiercest opponents. With no letter from Craig to absolve Tory peers of their commitment to Ulster, it fell to Lord Salisbury to extricate his colleagues in both Parliament and the Conservative Party from the corner into which they had painted themselves. He did not relish the task and, throughout, feared that he would pay a heavy price for performing this service.³⁷

During the Lords' debate, Salisbury made it clear that any attempt on their part to amend the boundary

³⁶Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 5 October 1924, AC 5/1/334.

³⁷Brumwell to Salisbury, 11 October 1924, S(4) 110/92.

legislation 'would amount to the rejection of the bill'. Once they did that, the matter would be out of their hands entirely and 'would be transferred from Parliament to the hustings'. That was 'the last thing' any friend of Ulster should want, as the average British voter had little interest in, and even less understanding of, Irish affairs. To link the Irish dispute with a debate on the powers of the House of Lords, Salisbury maintained, was simply foolish.³⁸

As an alternative to amending the government's bill, Salisbury proposed that the Lords should instead attach a non-binding resolution. This would make clear that the Boundary Commission was created only to facilitate 'a readjustment of the boundaries' and that in their opinion 'no other interpretation would be acceptable' - or could be enforced. His suggestion proved to be decisive. 'By the use of this safety-valve,' the Round Table explained to its readers, 'the Lords avoided the risk of bursting their own boiler'.³⁹

Even so, it was not certain that Salisbury's compromise would win through until the House heard from Lord Carson. Although he had decided to 'acquiesce' in the resolution, Carson proceeded to deliver a withering speech, one at least as bitter as his better-known attack on the Irish Treaty in December 1921. There was no point

³⁸HL Deb, Vol. 59, Col. 596-600, 8 October 1924.

³⁹Ibid, Col. 600-603. 'The Irish Boundary Question', Round Table, December 1924, No. 57, p. 39.

in opposing the boundary bill, Carson told the House, because even if the Tories held office they would propose similar legislation. 'And why? Because all the eminent men of the Conservative Party are up to their neck in the original Treaty', which had led to this crisis, in the first place. In fact, Carson admitted a grudging respect for the Labour government, for he doubted that Tory ministers 'would show the same amount of courage' in dealing with Ulster's grievances.

Most of all, Carson was outraged that the Unionists were being sacrificed at the altar of British politics. 'Is not the present debate in this House absolutely unreal?' he asked. 'You are not thinking of the rights or wrongs of this question at all. You are really thinking about the General Election that is going to follow upon another question.' Carson's grudging acceptance, combined with Lord Londonderry's endorsement, finally ensured the bill's passage, although thirty-eight peers still could not be reconciled.⁴⁰

Salisbury's compromise saved the boundary bill and ensured that Ireland would not be an issue in the upcoming election. Now, however, it was becoming a race against time to get the boundary bill onto the Statute Book before the government collapsed. For while the House of Lords was busy debating the Irish legislation, MacDonald's government was falling apart.

⁴⁰Ibid, Col. 615-616, 650-651, and 664.

The fall of Labour

'I have no inside news to tell you', Sidney Webb wrote to his wife on 2 October, 'but it is generally assumed that "our number is up"'. Like most of his colleagues, Webb expected to survive in office a few more weeks, if only because for both Tories and Liberals 'it would be unsatisfactory to defeat the Government before the Irish Bill is disposed of'.⁴¹ Throughout the first week of October, 'the air was full of impending crises' around Westminster. 'Nerves are on edge', MacDonald reported to the king, and 'even a bill which raises such grave issues as the Irish bill occupies only a secondary position in that it does not seem to contain the germs of a domestic crisis.'⁴² Soon, in fact, it would be hard to remember that the Irish boundary question had even been an issue in British politics.

Faced with a Conservative motion censuring the government's handling of the Campbell case, and a Liberal motion condemning the Russian treaties, Labour's first government was already teetering on 8 October. Matters were further complicated by a Liberal amendment to the Conservative motion which, instead of censuring the government, called for a Parliamentary select committee to investigate the Campbell affair. MacDonald announced that he would consider a vote for either the motion or

⁴¹Sidney to Beatrice Webb, 2 October 1924, Passfield Papers, 2/3/1/18/191-193.

⁴²MacDonald to George V, 3 October 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/228.

the amendment as a vote of no confidence in his government and, if defeated, he would immediately call a general election.

The debate then took what one contemporary called 'a dramatic turn'. It was obvious, Baldwin told the House, that MacDonald planned to defeat the Liberal amendment by relying on Conservative votes, only to then appeal to Liberal MPs to defeat the Conservative motion 'and so ride off in triumph.' Before he would allow that to happen, Baldwin announced that the Conservatives would vote for the Liberal amendment to their own motion, thus ensuring Labour's defeat. MacDonald was left with no choice and, early on the morning of 9 October, he asked George V to dissolve Parliament that very afternoon and call the third general election in two years.⁴³

MacDonald's 'extreme haste' in dissolving Parliament very nearly brought the boundary bill crashing down. Once the House of Lords accepted Salisbury's resolution, no one in the government thought that there would be any more trouble about Ireland. They did not count on Carson, who saw in this sudden turn of events a chance to kill off the Boundary Commission once and for all. At the bill's third reading on 9 October, Carson sought to insert a proviso that the boundary bill would come into operation only after it was confirmed by Northern Ireland's Parliament, as well as by Dáil Eireann. The effect of Carson's amendment, the Earl of Mayo noted,

⁴³Annual Register: 1924, p. 105-107.

'simply wrecks this bill' and, if passed, would put Ireland and the House of Lords squarely at the forefront of British politics. A contemporary account was certain that if Carson's amendment had been put to a vote it 'would no doubt have been carried'. Once again, Salisbury's intervention saved the day. Carson withdrew his proposed change with the not altogether convincing claim that it was made merely 'to emphasise my protest against the coercion of Ulster.' With that, Labour's contribution to settling the Irish Question went onto the Statute Book at 6 p.m., just hours ahead of Parliament's dissolution.⁴⁴

The Election of 1924

The election of 1924 was brought about because of 'a matter which the public understood but vaguely and in which it was little interested.'⁴⁵ But if the Campbell case was not explosive enough on its own, when combined with the controversy over the Russian treaties, it proved to be a potent mixture in the hands of Conservative propagandists. Very quickly the campaign degenerated into one dominated by charges of Bolshevik influence inside the Labour Party, while the Liberals were held responsible for allowing the 'red menace' ever to take office. The Irish boundary dispute had no place in such a campaign. In fact, it was no longer discernible on

⁴⁴HL Deb, Vol. 59, Col. 667-679, 9 October 1924. Annual Register: 1924, p. 108.

⁴⁵Annual Register: 1924, p. 109.

Britain's political landscape, which was where most politicians wanted Ireland to be. 'It was quite evident as soon as I got up to London', Churchill wrote to Balfour, 'that the Irish question was not going to be any trouble.'⁴⁶

The election, held on 29 October, gave the Tories a victory 'beyond their wildest expectations.' With no fewer than 413 members, Baldwin led a Commons majority of 211 against all other parties combined. He had won the greatest single-party victory in twentieth century British politics, dwarfing all other landslides by any measure.⁴⁷ In contrast, MacDonald saw Labour reduced from 191 to 151 members.

But it was the Liberal Party for whom the 1924 election was a catastrophe. The Liberals went into the campaign with 159 MPs. Afterward, the once proud party was reduced to only 40 seats in the House of Commons depleted 'beyond hope of recovery'. Lloyd George's opponents within the party later blamed him for their annihilation, claiming that he had planned all along to

⁴⁶Churchill to Balfour, 2 October 1924, AJB-S, GD 433/2/19, Reel 4.

⁴⁷Annual Register: 1924, p. 116-117. Only the Lloyd George Coalition scored a greater triumph, winning a 259-seat majority. The results of the century's other major victories were: 1906 - Liberal majority of 130; 1945 - Labour majority of 146; 1959 - Conservative majority of 100; 1966 - Labour majority of 97; 1983 - Conservative majority of 144; 1997 - Labour majority of 179. See Butler and Freeman, British Political Facts, p. 140-144. G. Foote, A Chronology of Post War British Politics (London, 1988), p. 4, 84, 123, and 243. 'The History Man', The Guardian, 3 May 1997.

use the election to purge them before refashioning Liberalism in his own image. Whether or not this is true, Lloyd George could not have foreseen the disaster which occurred, a disaster which was 'wholly unexpected' and which meant the 'practical disappearance ... of the Liberal Party from Parliamentary life.'⁴⁸

The defeat of the Northern Nationalists

It was not the Liberals, however, who suffered most as a result of the 1924 election. While the Irish boundary dispute played no role in British politics, in one corner of the United Kingdom it was not just the main issue, it was the only issue. The fall of Labour gave Nationalists another opportunity to use the ballot box to demonstrate their desire to join the Free State. For all practical purposes, the election would be a plebiscite, a 'test vote in the border counties' is the way one journal put it, which neither the British government nor the Boundary Commission could ignore.⁴⁹

No one counted on Eamon de Valera.

Twice before, during the general elections of 1922 and 1923, Nationalists had combined to elect T.J.S. Harbison and Cahir Healy to represent the two-member

⁴⁸Annual Register: 1924, p. 116-117. Olivier to Reading, 30 October 1924, IO, MSS Eur. F. 118/63(a), ff. 1-6. Campbell, Lloyd George, p. 101-106.

⁴⁹Annual Register: 1924, p. 145-147. 'Comments', New Statesman, 18 October 1924.

constituency for Fermanagh-Tyrone.⁵⁰ On both occasions, de Valera had held that anyone participating in any election held in the six counties - never mind actually standing as a candidate - was guilty of an act of treason against the Irish Republic. Now, he argued that contesting the Fermanagh-Tyrone seats was 'the only means available of making the wishes of the people clearly known'.⁵¹

There was, however, much more than that behind de Valera's volte face. Having decided that he must lead his followers out of the wilderness into which they had condemned themselves in the Civil War, de Valera was setting off on the long road back into constitutional politics. Less than two years later, it would lead him to split Sinn Féin to establish his own Republican party, Fianna Fáil. Meanwhile, the boundary issue played a key role in this strategy because, as he explained to his colleagues:

... The object of the Free State was to make it appear that we by our opposition [to the Treaty] had smashed the possibility of the North coming in. We will have to be very careful as to that. The Ulster problem will remain for us and it will be a very

⁵⁰Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 262-264, 297-302. On his release from internment, Healy joined Harbison at Westminster to fight the Nationalist cause. He also wrote a series of newspaper articles to put their case directly to the British people. See, e.g., 'Will the Free State Fall?', The People, 23 March 1924.

⁵¹'Comments', New Statesman, 18 October 1924. Lord Longford and T.P. O'Neill, Eamon de Valera (London, 1970), p. 238.

difficult problem.⁵²

It was at this time that de Valera began to nurture the myth that his opposition to the Treaty sprang wholly from a desire to prevent Ireland's partition. At public appearances, first at Ennis on 15 August and at Dundalk a week later, de Valera maintained that if he had been responsible for negotiating the Treaty, 'he would never have signed it until the boundary question was settled'. These speeches, one historian has written, vividly illustrated de Valera's propensity for 'deliberately twisting the truth'.⁵³

The price of de Valera's return to constitutional politics was paid by the Nationalists of Fermanagh and Tyrone. Although the joint constituency was considered a Nationalist stronghold when MacDonald called the 1924 election, de Valera had, by his action, 'willed otherwise'. The New Statesman called the move an act of unimaginable 'folly', placing Free State supporters in an impossible position. To avoid a three-cornered contest, Nationalist leaders reversed places with de Valera and called on their followers to abstain from the election, while demanding a plebiscite to show their desire for inclusion in the Free State. With Nationalist opinion bitterly divided, the only likely winners would be the

⁵²Minutes of meeting of Comhairle na dTeachtaí [Council of Deputies], 7 August 1924, reprinted in Gaughan, Stack, p. 335.

⁵³'Mr de Valera and Final Success' Morning Post, 25 August 1924. T.R. Dwyer, De Valera: The Man & the Myths (Swords, Ireland, 1992), p. 136.

Unionist candidates for the two seats. Nor would that be all. Were the Unionists to score such a victory, The Nation predicted, Craig's government would use the election 'as fresh proof of the homogeneity of "Ulster", and [it] may have a prejudicial effect on the Boundary Commission' - which, in the event, is exactly what happened. On election day, Northern Nationalists stayed away from polling stations in droves and, when the votes were counted, both Unionist candidates took the seats with overwhelming majorities.⁵⁴

Unionists could not believe their luck. '[W]e have actually gained in Tyrone and Fermanagh', a stunned Lady Craig wrote in her diary. She attributed the triumph directly to the split created by de Valera's decision and, 'coming at this time, when the Boundary question is so acute, it is of tremendous import and assistance, and enormously strengthens J.'s hand.'⁵⁵

Writing in her own diary that same day, Lady Carson was no less overjoyed. 'It's too thrilling', she wrote, and her husband could 'think of nothing else' once he had heard the news. With the taking of these two seats, the Conservative and Unionist victory of 1924 was complete. After the election, there could be no question but that

⁵⁴Annual Register, 1924, p. 146-147. 'Events of the Week', The Nation, 25 October 1924. 'Comments', New Statesman, 18 and 25 October 1924. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 263, 308-310, 439, n. 40.

⁵⁵Lady Craig's diary, 31 October 1924, D.1415/B/38/1-162. Because of Nationalist abstentions, the Fermanagh-Tyrone result was called a 'farce'. See 'Events of the Week', The Nation, 8 November 1924.

Fermanagh and Tyrone would remain in Unionist hands.

'Now', Lady Carson wrote, 'no one will dare touch those counties.'⁵⁶

'A fatal policy attended by disaster'

With the election of 1924 what Winston Churchill called 'two years of insensate faction' finally came to an end. The country turned a corner or, to be more precise, it at last returned to the security of the two-party politics it had known before 1914. The Lloyd George Coalition left in its wake three roughly equal parties each vying for a place in a system designed for only two major players. From either end of the political spectrum it was agreed that this could not continue indefinitely. 'The basic fact', one journal told its readers, was this: 'there is no room in this country for three parties'. By the end of 1924, most voters agreed. As the third campaign in just two years drew to a close, The Nation was not surprised that what seemed to be uppermost in everyone's mind was 'the desire to put an end to this plague of annual elections'.⁵⁷

Once Labour established itself as the party of the left, the contest boiled down to a bid over who would lead the country's anti-socialist forces. Even in 1924 it was by no means certain that Lloyd George and the Liberals were going to lose in this competition, nor that

⁵⁶Lady Carson's diary, 31 October 1924, D.1507/C/8.

⁵⁷Rhodes James, British Revolution, p. 477. Ramsden, Balfour and Baldwin, p. 199-202.

Baldwin and the Conservatives were going to emerge to dominate British politics. Austen Chamberlain was convinced that years would pass before his party would again hold office, and by then he would 'be too old to take up the burden of leadership'.⁵⁸ A number of factors working in the Conservatives' favour - not least, dissension within the Liberal Party's top echelon, and pure luck - were beyond their control. What was within Baldwin's power was his decision not to play the 'orange card' but rather, 'the red card of anti-socialism', and this proved to be decisive.⁵⁹

Baldwin was walking a tightrope when he decided that his party's interests would not be served by picking a fight over the Irish boundary. With so much hanging in the balance, he could not afford to alienate Tory Die-hards; but neither could he ignore the consequences that would accompany their demand of unquestioning support for the Ulster Unionists. These dangers were amply demonstrated during an exchange between J.H. Thomas and Lord Hugh Cecil, when the latter insisted that the government should threaten to use force against the Free State in the boundary dispute. Thomas agreed that the British people would actively oppose the establishment of an Irish republic or abolition of the Oath of Allegiance.

⁵⁸Austen to Ida Chamberlain, 10 March 1923 and 5 October 1924, AC 5/1/268 and 334. Also, see Spender to Maclean, 2 October 1924, Maclean Papers, Dep. c. 467, ff. 134-135. Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 419.

⁵⁹Ibid, Cowling, p. 411, and 419-421. Ramsden, Balfour and Baldwin, p. 199.

But, he continued, 'believe me when I say I don't believe you could hold one-half your present seats on the question of the boundary'.⁶⁰ Even if Thomas was exaggerating to make a point, his analysis was probably close to the truth. The point is that Baldwin also recognised this risk and he was unwilling to take it, even if his Die-hards were.

Instead, the Conservative leader opted for a less confrontational approach. The party allied with Unionists to wage a deft campaign, assiduously cultivating the popular press and promoting their point of view in the Irish dispute.⁶¹ By its own reckoning, during the 'acute stage of the boundary controversy' the Ulster Association, 'in addition to articles in the press', distributed over 300,000 pamphlets and over 20,000 bulletins 'stating the Ulster case'. The result, according to the association, was a 'considerable change which has taken place in public opinion regarding Ulster affairs'.⁶² Down the road, this swing in popular opinion could be used to the Conservatives' advantage if they had to face any trouble from Dublin on the boundary issue. More immediately, it left the Tories in the happy position where they were seen to be giving their utmost

⁶⁰Exchange written on the back of an envelope, dated 30 September 1924, Quickswood Papers, 33/12.

⁶¹See, e.g., Harmsworth to Baldwin, 28 August 1924, SB Vol. 159, ff. 209-210. Churchill to Carson, 8 September 1924, WSC 2/570/115.

⁶²Ulster Association to Salisbury, 19 March 1925, S(4) 112/119-120.

support to the Unionists but at no real risk to themselves. Thus, Baldwin was able to contain his Die-hards while, at the same time, sidelining the Irish threat. Once this was accomplished, the Conservatives were able to concentrate on the anti-communist scare, and they were the ones who rode off in triumph.

Still, it came very close to being otherwise.

In early August MacDonald predicted that in the Irish boundary dispute Baldwin and his colleagues faced 'a most critical decision on which the fortunes of their Party for the next few years may depend'. Later, he reported to George V that because the Conservatives had decided to direct all of their fire on the Campbell case, the Irish bill 'received an easier passage through its remaining stages than might have been anticipated in normal circumstances.'⁶³ These letters raise two intriguing, if ultimately unanswerable, questions: namely, if there had been no Campbell case, if there had been no Russian treaties, what then would have happened to Labour's boundary bill? More broadly, what would have been the course of British politics if Ireland and the power of the House of Lords had been the main issues of the 1924 election?

It is surely more than mere speculation to say that in both instances what might have been would have been very different from what actually occurred. Without the

⁶³MacDonald to George V, 2 August and 3 October 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/228.

diversion of the communist scare used so effectively by Baldwin and his lieutenants, it would have been impossible, as Edward Wood put it, to 'extricate us from the cul-de-sac' of Ireland.⁶⁴ The boundary bill almost certainly would have met furious Conservative resistance in the House of Commons and would likely have been shot down in flames in the Lords. That would have brought on the general election so feared by Baldwin, a campaign whose focus would have been on the power of the peers versus the power of the people, the very campaign in which Lloyd George would have thrived.

It is impossible to know how such an election would have turned out, but it seems hardly likely that the Conservatives would have emerged with the greatest landslide of the century. Defeat would have cast Baldwin into outer darkness, his career one of shortest and most curious of those who have reached the pinnacle of British politics. There would have been no 'Baldwin-MacDonald Regime' - as Churchill called it - to govern, or misgovern, Britain during the inter-war years.⁶⁵ Under Lloyd George, the Liberals might have been revitalized, and MacDonald's Labour Party might have won an outright Parliamentary majority, a goal that eluded him for the rest of his political life.

Instead, Baldwin was established as the dominating

⁶⁴Wood to Baldwin, 10 September 1924, Halifax Papers, A4.410/14/1.

⁶⁵Churchill, Gathering Storm, p. 21.

figure in British politics for the next thirteen years. More immediately, this meant that the new British government would take a very narrow view of what was to be achieved by the Ulster clauses of the Irish Treaty. Theirs would be the interpretation that counted, whatever the Boundary Commission itself might say. The final chapter of the Irish Question would be written by men who had opposed Article 12 from the beginning or, if they had been responsible for the Treaty, had long since learnt the price of going against Conservative opinion on this issue. They would not make that same mistake again.

But this boldness, this certainty of a firm policy on Ireland, was not the result of Tory commitments to the Ulster Unionists. What made it possible was the fundamental change that had taken place in British politics.

During the peers' debate on the boundary bill, Lord Londonderry wondered aloud if MacDonald and his colleagues had any real Irish policy to speak of, and decided that they did not:

I feel myself forced to the conclusion that the present Government, like the Coalition Government, is clinging to the slender hope that, by keeping the framework of the Treaty in being and by the avoidance of anything which might give offence to one or other of the parties concerned, a solution will be found in some indefinable way which will relieve them of their responsibilities and bring about a settlement in the process of time. That, in my judgment, is a fatal policy ... [and] ... can only be attended by disaster.⁶⁶

Although Londonderry's remarks were directed at MacDonald

⁶⁶HL Deb, Vol. 59, Col. 565, 7 October 1924.

and Lloyd George, his charge applied with equal - perhaps more - justice to Bonar Law and Baldwin. The unstable condition of British politics between the fall of Lloyd George and the 1924 election was bound to affect any attempt to settle the Irish Question. No party could afford to take on such a divisive issue. The risks were simply too great in such an uncertain political climate and that is why Jones's concept of 'indefinite postponement' was so attractive to all politicians, especially the Conservatives.⁶⁷ It is true to say that the Tories would have fought any large-scale boundary change whatever the outcome of the 1924 election. Craig, however, was not alone in fearing that even if the party won the election a fight over Ireland 'might possibly split the Conservative Party once more.'⁶⁸

What made the difference was the scale of the party's victory. Baldwin and his colleagues could confidently settle the Irish Question on their own terms because they could rely on a massive and united Parliamentary majority to back them. They need not reckon with the views of any other party on this issue. The Liberals counted for nothing, and Labour for not much more. No government, including the Coalition, had been in such a position since 1910.

Nevertheless, during its brief first term in office Labour played a crucial role in settling the boundary

⁶⁷Jones diary, 10 June 1923, Vol. III, p. 221.

⁶⁸Craig to Carson, 18 August 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/5/1.

dispute. That this role is seldom acknowledged may have much to do with the ambivalence Labour has felt about Ireland since the party's inception, an ambivalence personified by its first prime minister.

On the day that MacDonald tendered his resignation to the king, Lady Lavery wrote to tell him of the Free State government's gratitude for his 'courage and fairness in dealing with a problem that was not of your making.' Given MacDonald's feelings about the Irish, it is doubtful that he would have responded in kind. Between them there had never been any empathy nor understanding. As Lavery was forced to admit in this same letter, the Free Staters were 'conservative in their sentiments'. Their goals were not MacDonald's, and his goals were not theirs.⁶⁹

In any case, it no longer mattered. MacDonald's first, unhappy encounter with the Irish was at an end. He would next face them in the person of Eamon de Valera; but nearly eight years were to elapse in between - time enough for MacDonald to prepare himself for that supreme ordeal. He would never become entangled in the boundary question again.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Lavery to MacDonald, 4 November 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1433/73-74. 'I think', O'Higgins once told the Dáil, 'that we were probably the most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution'. See White, O'Higgins, p. 145. Also, see McCool, Lavery, p. 117.

⁷⁰Dwyer, Man and Myths, p. 165-169. Thomas delivered Labour's response to the boundary agreement the following year. See HC Deb, Vol. 189, Col. 321-326, 8 December 1925.

Ireland did not figure as a chief concern when MacDonald decided that Labour should take office. But of all the issues that he encountered during those tumultuous nine months, the Irish boundary dispute had proved to be the most intractable, the most impervious to compromise, and remained so to the very last hours of his first government. With evident relief, MacDonald turned his back on the Irish. Walking away from their bitter quarrel that night, he wrote in his diary: 'And tonight as I go into a new world, the dead come to me and in companionship I have spent an hour with them.'⁷¹

⁷¹MacDonald diary, 9 October 1924, JRM, PRO 30/69/1753/1.

Chapter 9

The Final Chapter

... It was a merit of the Treaty that it retained this Council of Ireland. It was an all-Ireland body, and with it disappears the last hope of unity in our time.

- Cahir Healy¹

Shortly after dawn on the morning of 9 December 1924, three 'rather apprehensive looking' men stepped from a train at a stop just north of the Irish frontier. Almost three years to the day after its conception, the Irish Boundary Commission was at long last ready to begin its work. 'We drove rapidly to Armagh', Stephen Tallents reported, where the Commissioners, their retinue of assistants, and 'their extensive luggage' were housed in the local judge's lodgings, 'without even a dog to watch them.' No one in the town seemed to notice, or care, about the Commission's arrival. 'When I came away at noon', Tallents wrote, 'Armagh still preserved its customary air of languid boredom.'²

Given the passions aroused by the Boundary Commission since its inception, its members must have been surprised that their arrival was met with such indifference. In fact, a shift of opinion was taking place. Among Free Staters bitter resignation had replaced earlier expectations that the Commission would

¹'Agreement Signed in London', Ulster Herald, 12 December 1925.

²Tallents to Maxwell, 9 December 1924, HO 267/179.

reunite their country. Having demanded the boundary panel for so long, Nationalists were beginning to realise that it might not produce the desired outcome. 'They have asked for their pound of flesh', one correspondent wrote to Lord Salisbury, 'and now apparently they do not like the prospect of receiving it.'³

This bitterness contrasted with the benign indifference and, in some cases, growing confidence, felt by leading border-county Unionists. 'I found the proposed visit to be regarded by them as more a matter of routine than I had expected', Tallents reported to the Home Office. One prominent County Fermanagh landowner (and future Northern Ireland prime minister), Sir Basil Brooke, told Tallents that he was not at all worried about the Commission's proposed tour, which he viewed 'with equanimity'.⁴

This was not the view from Belfast. Although Sir James Craig entertained hopes that the Commission might actually expand his domain to include Unionist East Donegal, he nonetheless set out to frustrate its work within his jurisdiction.⁵ On hearing of the proposed tour, Craig fired off a letter to Britain's new home secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, warning of 'considerable alarm' about the impending visit. Ulster's

³Dáil Deb, Vol. 8, Col. 2502-2568, 15 October 1924. Brumwell to Salisbury, 11 October 1924, S(4) 110/92.

⁴Tallents to Anderson, 28 November 1924, HO 45/12296/55(a).

⁵Cabinet Minutes, 22 October 1924, PRONI, CAB4/126/16.

premier found it particularly galling that Eoin MacNeill, a man he accused of taking part 'with Roger Casement and the German Government' in the Easter Rising of 1916, should be allowed to set foot in the six counties. For MacNeill 'to venture at any time into the heart of a loyalist population' would, Craig predicted, lead to trouble. If the Commissioners wanted to take evidence from anyone living in the border counties, Craig's advice was that the witnesses ought to be invited to London to give their testimony - at British expense. His friends in Baldwin's new government deemed the suggestion 'undesirable'.⁶

Such incidents were to characterise much of the Boundary Commission's work over the next year.⁷ Buoyed by the results of the 1924 election, Ulster Unionists had little to fear from the tribunal. While Craig might not always get his way, his supporters were safe in the knowledge that a Conservative government in London would not enforce any Boundary Commission award unless it had Belfast's blessing. 'We thought we knew what Conservative ministers meant by Article 12', the Irish high commissioner wrote in the wake of the 1924 election. But after what these same men had said during the fight over Labour's boundary bill, Free Staters could no longer

⁶Craig to Joynson-Hicks [two letters]; and Joynson-Hicks to Craig, 25, 26, and 28 November 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

⁷See, e.g., Tallents to Bourdillon, 2 December 1924, CAB 61/18. Spender to Tallents, 9 February 1925, HO 267/210.

justify that belief. Now, these same Tories filled the top ranks of Baldwin's new government; men who, according to James MacNeill, would refuse 'to be honourably bound by any decision which the Six County Government would likely resist.'⁸

Northern Nationalists, on the other hand, saw themselves as increasingly isolated. Despite solemn vows from Dublin that they were kith and kin, in a year's time Northern Nationalists would accuse Cosgrave's government of throwing them 'unceremoniously to the wolves'.⁹ There would be a good deal of truth in that accusation.

Baldwin's second government

Although some Tories might claim that the 1924 election was a vindication of the 'old "Die-Hard" movement', the Conservative landslide actually freed Baldwin from these supporters and allowed him to remake the party in his own image.¹⁰ This he proceeded to do, and the result was to have a profound impact on the settling of Ireland's boundary question. While old allies were rewarded for their loyalty, former Coalitionists were at the same time given prominent roles

⁸MacNeill to FitzGerald, 31 October 1924, D/T, S/1801 K.

⁹'"Callously Betrayed."', Ulster Herald, 12 December 1925.

¹⁰Gretton to Baldwin, 1 November 1924, SB Vol. 36, ff. 22-24. Tyrrell to Baldwin, same date, SB Vol. 42, ff. 226-227. According to Maurice Cowling, the election enabled Baldwin to 'command all the forces Lloyd George had tried to lead from 1920 onwards'. See Impact of Labour, p. 414-415.

in the government. Austen Chamberlain became foreign secretary; and Lord Birkenhead took over the India Office, much to the consternation of the Die-hards. 'It's all very exciting', Lady Carson wrote in her diary; 'some people have again started to grumble.'¹¹

But these rumblings were nothing compared to the uproar that followed Baldwin's decision to make Winston Churchill chancellor of the exchequer.¹² Though Churchill's appointment did not sit well with a number of Conservatives and Ulster Unionists, Craig immediately realised that it was a stroke of luck for his cause. The new chancellor of the exchequer was, in effect, on probation. 'It would be up to him to be loyal', Baldwin remarked to Tom Jones - 'if he is capable of loyalty.' In such a position, it is not surprising that Churchill, as Baldwin's biographers later wrote, 'was evidently prepared at this moment to go a long way to conciliate his new-found colleagues'.¹³

Given the behind-the-scenes role Churchill had played in the autumn boundary crisis along with his earlier support while at the Colonial Office, Craig surmised that the new chancellor was as anxious to re-establish his Unionist, as he was his Conservative, credentials. For while Baldwin might be willing to

¹¹Lady Carson diary, 6 November 1924, D.1507/C/8.

¹²Gilbert, Churchill: Vol. V, p. 58-62.

¹³Jones diary, 8 November 1924, Vol. I, p. 303. Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 290.

overlook the past, it rankled influential Conservatives that his Cabinet contained 'too many ministers identified with the Coalition's cowardly surrender to Sinn Fein ... in the so-called "Treaty"'.¹⁴ Churchill need not be told that he figured prominently on that list.

Craig wasted no time putting the new chancellor to the test. In a letter congratulating Churchill on his appointment to the Treasury, Ulster's leader let it be known that as soon as possible he wished to discuss 'a certain number of matters still outstanding' between the two governments. Although Churchill's response included a gentle reminder that the success of Baldwin's government depended on 'sound finance', Craig could be sure that 'I shall support you in essentials.'¹⁵

This exchange set off alarm bells at the Treasury, where officials saw themselves in an ongoing struggle to ward off Ulster Unionist raids on the British exchequer. The 'matters' that were on Craig's mind were the same three issues that had bedevilled relations between the Treasury and the Belfast government since 1921: funding of the Ulster Special Constabulary; amalgamation of the British and Ulster unemployment insurance funds; and, Craig's attempts to lower Northern Ireland's imperial contribution.¹⁶

¹⁴'Episodes of the Month', National Review, April 1925, p. 200.

¹⁵Craig to Churchill; and Churchill to Craig, 8 and 10 November 1924, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1.

¹⁶Ibid, Niemeyer to Churchill, 15 November 1924.

In the run-up to Churchill's meeting with Craig, Otto Niemeyer, along with two other senior Treasury officials, G.C. Upcott and P.J. Grigg, attempted to persuade the new chancellor to take a tough line with his guest. The trio concentrated on Craig's request for an additional £1 million grant for the Special Constabulary, a claim that he had been pressing on the Treasury since the fall of Baldwin's first government. Britain could give into Craig's demands, they argued, only at the cost of 'breaking the Treaty' since Belfast was supposed to be responsible for funding its security forces.

More immediately, the existence of the Specials had a direct bearing on the boundary question. For these reasons, Upcott and Grigg pointed out, Churchill's predecessor had resisted Craig's demand for the money. Niemeyer added that if Craig's government rejected the Boundary Commission's findings, it was altogether likely that it would use the British-funded force to prevent implementation of the award. Such a development, Niemeyer wrote with considerable understatement, would be 'very awkward'.¹⁷

Churchill was having none of this. 'The Free State have got Home Rule', he truculently responded, 'but since when has Great Britain lost the right to do what she chooses within her own borders.' Writing separately to Niemeyer, he staked out the Treasury's new position:

¹⁷Ibid, 'Claims of Northern Ireland', Upcott memorandum; and Niemeyer to Churchill, which includes a notes by Grigg and Churchill, 14 and 15 November 1924.

Nothing in the Treaty gives the Free State any right to complain of any measures wh. we may choose to take for maintaining the peace and security of Northern Ireland. It is our duty to sustain the Northern Govt. effectually either by subvention or by troops, or by both during the difficult period through wh. they are now passing - through no fault of their own. The fact that the boundary commission is sitting makes it all the more necessary that the Northern Govt. should be solidly supported¹⁸

For the moment, the three officials were more successful at convincing Churchill to resist Craig's appeals for re-consideration of the first Colwyn Committee award and his insistence that Northern Ireland's unemployment insurance fund should be linked to its British counterpart.¹⁹

But on the immediate issue, Churchill stood firm. 'I shall certainly agree to the Million grant at once', he wrote. Craig's paramilitary force was safe for the present and, perhaps, even longer. A future grant to the Specials should not be ruled out, Churchill informed Niemeyer, but would be decided upon once 'we see what the Boundary Commission award and what is the state of affairs thereafter.' [sic]²⁰

At their second meeting, Baldwin's new Cabinet not only approved the £1 million grant for the Specials; it also authorised an immediate advance of an additional £250,000 at the chancellor's discretion. More

¹⁸Ibid, Niemeyer to Churchill; and Churchill to Niemeyer, 15 November 1924.

¹⁹The new minister of labour was also opposed. See Steel-Maitland to Churchill, 19 November 1924, T 160/187/F.7136/2.

²⁰Churchill to Niemeyer, 15 November 1924, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1.

importantly, the Cabinet put Churchill back at the centre of Irish affairs. He, not the home secretary, was to be the 'medium of communication' with Craig on all financial questions.²¹ With this direct line into the Treasury, Craig could rest assured that his pleas for assistance would be heard by a chancellor who was anxious if not always able to help.

That said, the government's decision to fund the Specials was coolly received by the House of Commons. Critics pointed out that Parliament was expected to fund a paramilitary force whose exact numbers it did not even know - Churchill could only say that there were 'something like 35,000'. If these numbers were correct, one Liberal MP pointed out, Craig had at his command an armed force that was larger than the armies of Austria or Bulgaria. The most damaging allegation was made by Snowden, who told the House that the proposed grant was nothing but a round-about attempt by Craig, with Churchill's collusion, to help Northern Ireland's unemployed.²² Despite Parliament's evident distaste for underwriting the Specials, Baldwin's overwhelming majority ensured that Churchill got his way. According to one opposition MP, the chancellor of the exchequer obviously meant to 'redeem his past in the matter of

²¹C. 60(24), 19 November 1924, CAB 23/49.

²²HC Deb, Vol. 180, Col. 1651-1686, 23 February 1925.

Ireland.' Craig was delighted.²³

The Boundary Commission sets to work

At the same time that Baldwin was busy forming his new government, in another part of London the Boundary Commission was itself setting to work. With offices in the Strand at 6 Clement's Inn, Eoin MacNeill, the Free State's representative, and Richard Feetham, the Commission's chairman, were joined by Joseph R. Fisher, the man at long last appointed to represent Northern Ireland.²⁴

Fisher has been called the 'shadowy figure' of this story, a man whose views 'were not generally known outside his own circle.'²⁵ That is not really true. As a barrister and later as editor of the Northern Whig, Fisher had already played a prominent role in the Ulster Unionist cause. Earlier than most of those in the movement, he had advocated partition, not as a means of thwarting Home Rule, but as an end in itself.²⁶

²³Ibid, Col. 1673. Lady Craig diary, 23 February 1925, D.1415/B/38/1-162.

²⁴Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 232.

²⁵Hand, Report, p. xi. Gwynn, History of Partition, p. 232.

²⁶Buckland, Documentary History, Nos. 152, 199, 229. Gwynn, History of Partition, p. 229-230. In one of many articles promoting the Unionist cause, Fisher compared the Ulster counties that wished to remain a part of the United Kingdom with the counties of Virginia which opposed that state's secession during the American Civil War. The comparison is revealing as these counties were themselves partitioned to form the state of West Virginia. See J.R. Fisher, 'The "Unreasonableness" of Ulster', Nineteenth Century, May 1918, p. 1088-1091.

After the signing of the 'Midnight Treaty', as he called it, Fisher argued that if there must be a Boundary Commission, it should not be hindered by 'ancient county boundaries'.²⁷ Implicitly, he suggested that the Boundary Commission might be used to copper-fasten partition for all time by restructuring Northern Ireland's frontier. In a private letter to Craig, he explained what he meant. 'Ulster can never be complete without Donegal', he wrote, and with 'North Monaghan in Ulster and South Armagh out', the Belfast government 'would take in a fair share of the people we want and leave out those we don't want.' As has been noted elsewhere, Fisher, far from being opposed to a substantial revision of the Irish border, was all for it - 'albeit in one direction.'²⁸

Fisher's selection as Northern Ireland's Boundary Commissioner is something of a mystery, and there is debate over whether or not Craig was allowed to do behind the scenes what he refused to do in public.²⁹ The best evidence of a link between Ulster's premier and Ulster's Boundary Commissioner comes from Fisher himself. When informing Wilfrid Spender that he was taking 'this most

²⁷'Irish Boundaries. The "Principal Act"', The Times, 4 February 1924.

²⁸Ervine, Craigavon, p. 481-482. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 267. Craig also favoured the incorporation of Donegal into his state. See '"The Proper Border"', Irish Independent, 27 March 1925.

²⁹Bryan Follis, e.g., maintains that Craig took no part in Fisher's appointment. See State Under Siege, p. 164.

thankless job', Fisher proposed setting up a back channel of communication so that the Belfast government could provide 'the necessary statistical, economic, and topographical information' he would need to counter Free State claims.³⁰ It is barely credible that information only passed one way in these communications, and that any information provided by Fisher would have been withheld from Craig.³¹

The advantage of a secret line of communication became even more important after the Commission's first meeting. All three members agreed to a strict code of secrecy; they would neither 'consult any of the Governments concerned as to the work of the Commission' nor would any member discuss his work with 'any individual without first consulting his colleagues.'³² Feetham observed this agreement; so did MacNeill, much to the chagrin of his colleagues in Dublin.³³ Fisher did not. Over the following year, he wrote a series of

³⁰Fisher to Spender, 12 October 1924, PRONI, CAB9Z/3/2.

³¹Canning, British Policy, p. 105. Craig maintained that he knew 'nothing whatever' of the Commission's deliberations. See NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 1118, 7 September 1925. Also, see Follis, State Under Siege, p. 173, 180.

³²Commission Minutes No. 1, 6 November 1924, CAB 61/1.

³³MacNeill later explained that in his view he 'was not purely and simply the representative of a government nor was I an advocate for a particular point of view'. See Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, Col. 796, 24 November 1925. His 'vow of silence was particularly exasperating to the Free State government'. See White, O'Higgins, p. 207. Ironically, the British Cabinet took it for granted that MacNeill kept his colleagues informed of the Commission's deliberations. See I.A.(25)-1st Minutes, 23 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

letters to the wife of a Sir David Reid, a prominent Ulster Unionist MP, divulging details of the Commission's work. Again, it is barely credible that this sort of information would not have been passed on to Craig and his colleagues.³⁴

Although he was not a member of the Boundary Commission as such, F.B. Bourdillon, the tribunal's secretary, played a key role in its deliberations. Having served as a member of the commission that determined the German-Polish border in Upper Silesia, Bourdillon came to the attention of Lionel Curtis after writing a highly critical article of the Free State's case as put forward in the Boundary Bureau's Handbook of the Ulster Question. Curtis was so impressed that he ordered copies of the article for all senior civil servants responsible for British policy on the boundary dispute.³⁵ It is likely that on the basis of this work, Bourdillon was asked to become secretary to the Commission sometime in early 1924.³⁶ That his views had any influence on the Commission, or more particularly on the Commission's chairman, cannot be proved. But it is noteworthy that Bourdillon's interpretation of Article 12

³⁴Ervine, Craigavon, p. 498-500. Nor was Lady Reid the only recipient of such correspondence. See Fisher to Carson, 18 October 1925, Carson Papers, D.1507/A/44/52.

³⁵Bourdillon to Curtis; Bourdillon article; Curtis to Whiskard; and Curtis to Bourdillon, 28 November, 7, 13, and 19 December 1923, CO 739/25/60802.

³⁶Bourdillon to Curtis, 25 January 1924, CO 739/27/13299.

bears a striking resemblance to the one later outlined by Feetham.³⁷

Irish Nationalist fears that Feetham did not share their ideas about the Boundary Commission's mandate were confirmed before the end of 1924.³⁸ The Commission's December tour of the border counties, the one that began in Armagh, was billed as a preliminary excursion, to allow the panel to 'acquaint' itself with the region. No evidence was taken and there were no formal sittings; those would occur at a later date.³⁹ Before the panel left Londonderry, however, Feetham stunned Free State supporters by announcing that the Commission had no power to call a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants.⁴⁰ In the wake of this pronouncement, E.M. Stephens reported that many Nationalists were now unwilling to give evidence to the tribunal if they lived in 'areas which have very little hope of coming into the Free State'. There was, in fact, a growing belief among Northern Nationalists that the Commission was 'unwilling, or unable, to carry out its work.'⁴¹

³⁷Hand, Report, 'Chairman's Memorandum', p. 32-68.

³⁸O'Doherty to Collins, 19 August 1924, J.H. Collins Papers, D.921/2/4/20. Also, see Dáil Deb, Vol. 8, Col. 2424-2426, 2431-2439, 7 July 1924.

³⁹'The Irish Commission. Tour of the Border Next Week', Manchester Guardian, 8 December 1924.

⁴⁰'Index to Dates and Conferences', 22 December 1924, D/T, S 1801/P.

⁴¹Stephens to O'Higgins, 21 January 1925, D/T, S 1801/J.

Why MacNeill did not protest against Feetham's statement is unclear. As a Free State minister, he was well aware of the Executive Council's insistence that as a 'first step' the Boundary Commission should hold plebiscites in the Poor Law Unions of each of Northern Ireland's border counties.⁴² Nor was this the first blow that Feetham had delivered to the Nationalist case. In the run-up to its December visit, the Commission heard evidence from a Free State legal panel headed by Attorney-General John O'Byrne. Over the course of two days O'Byrne and his colleagues contended that 'the onus is not on us to prove how much of Northern Ireland should be in the Free State, but on Northern Ireland to show how much of it should remain out of the Free State.'⁴³

Feetham made it plain during these sessions that he did not share this view.⁴⁴ As he later wrote, to accept Dublin's arguments meant that the Boundary Commission would 'be entitled to abolish Northern Ireland altogether and include the whole of its area within the territory of the Irish Free State.' Whatever the Commission's award might be, it must enable Northern Ireland, as well as the

⁴²C.2/128, 5 September 1924, D/T, G 2/3. O'Higgins memorandum, 3 September 1924, D/T, S 1801/J.

⁴³'The Irish Boundary. Free State's View of Article 12', Manchester Guardian, 8 December 1924. Also, see 'Statement by the Irish Free Government', 20 November 1924, D/T, S 1801/L.

⁴⁴Hand, Report, Appendix I, p. 8-9 and, especially, Feetham's exchange with Serjeant Hanna, p. 16-21.

Free State, to 'retain its own identity'.⁴⁵ Here, he was emphatic:

The term "Northern Ireland" as used in Article XII, clearly means not some vague indefinite area in the north of Ireland, but the Northern Ireland established and defined by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, and it is the boundary between this "Northern Ireland" and "the rest of Ireland" which is to be "determined," or ... redetermined.⁴⁶

Without saying so, Feetham had accepted the Unionists' main point: namely, that the 1920 Act took precedence over the Treaty. Even worse for the Dublin government, according to Feetham's interpretation of Article 12, the Free State could expect to lose as well as gain territory from the Commission's award.⁴⁷

How Feetham reached these sweeping conclusions has never been explained. They suggest, however, the influence of Lionel Curtis, an influence easiest to identify in the decision not to hold plebiscites. Shortly before leaving the Colonial Office, Curtis reiterated his opposition to a vote in the border counties in a memorandum that found its way into Feetham's hands. A whole host of problems would arise from such a request, including the need for enabling legislation to allow the vote to take place. It should be pointed out to Feetham, Curtis suggested, 'that it is, for obvious reasons, extremely inadvisable to bring the

⁴⁵Hand, Report, 'Chairman's Memorandum', p. 34, 49.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 37.

⁴⁷Ibid, p. 36-37. For Fisher's comments, see 'Irish Boundaries. The "Principal Act"', The Times, 4 February 1924.

proceedings of the Commission into the arena of Parliamentary discussion if it can possibly be avoided.'⁴⁸

Heeding his friend's advice, Feetham proceeded to do just that. A large part of the testimony delivered by the Free State's legal experts was taken up by questions about how the Boundary Commission should ascertain the 'wishes of the inhabitants', with Feetham steadily chipping away at the Irish position. Might there not, he wondered, be other ways to glean the same information, say by looking at election results, census returns (which included statistics on religious affiliation), or by asking 'what the representative people of districts say'?⁴⁹

O'Byrne rejected the first two suggestions, arguing that they could give nothing more than a 'rough indication' of the person's political preference. As for Feetham's last idea, the Irish attorney-general pointed out that it was the Commission's duty to consult the wishes of all the people, not merely the region's leading citizens. In any case, such an idea would have been wholly unacceptable to Northern Nationalists given recent election results.

These exchanges revealed yet another blow to the Free State's case. Throughout, O'Byrne had argued that

⁴⁸'Plebiscites', Curtis memorandum, 18 September 1924, Feetham Papers, 7/2, ff. 1.

⁴⁹Hand, Report, Appendix I, p. 22-41.

the Boundary Commission should consider conditions as they were when the Treaty was signed - not as they might now find them. Feetham hinted that he took a dim view of this position. Here, the years of delay most clearly took their toll on the Free State's case. As Feetham later wrote, partition had given rise to 'certain vested ... interests ... during the four years which have now elapsed since it [the Treaty] first took effect.' These interests, he judged, 'should not be lightly interfered with.'⁵⁰ Here again, Curtis's influence seems to have been at work for, as Free State officials were aware, he held the same view.⁵¹

In less than two months the Boundary Commission had travelled a long way down the road toward its final conclusions. In every respect, Feetham made it clear that the main elements of the Free State's case - that the Commission was empowered to make sweeping territorial changes, based on conditions as they were in 1921; that it had a right, if not a duty, to call a plebiscite in the border region; and that it had no mandate to transfer territory from the South to the North - were ones he did not share. Seven months before, O'Higgins warned Cosgrave of just such a possibility if the two governments did not reach an understanding on the meaning of Article 12. His advice was ignored, not least because

⁵⁰Hand, Report, Appendix I, p. 27-31; 'Chairman's memorandum', p. 54.

⁵¹Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 220.

Curtis had assured the Free State president that the British government could not be the sole interpreter of an article of the Treaty. Instead, as O'Higgins had predicted, the Irish effectively handed that power to the British-appointed chairman.⁵² The competition over the interpretation of Article 12 was the crucial match; by failing to face the issue head-on, Cosgrave and his colleagues scored the deciding own goal.

And the Commission had not even heard its first witness.

'Not an inch': Northern Ireland's 1925 election

Despite the Commission's importance to the future of Northern Ireland, Craig and his Cabinet adopted an official policy of non-cooperation with the tribunal.⁵³ Unofficially, they enlisted the Ulster Unionist Council to act in the government's place with Herbert Dixon, chief whip of the Ulster Unionist Parliamentary Party, co-ordinating operations. Dixon was ideally placed for the job. As parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Finance, he reported directly to the Cabinet where, 'albeit unofficially', he could at the same time report on the boundary issue. Thus, in private Craig and his colleagues could direct Unionist strategy while in public they maintained a policy of non-cooperation. As Spender later explained, this left Craig 'free to take action' if

⁵²O'Higgins to Cosgrave, 7 and 10 May 1924, D/T, S 1801/R.

⁵³Spender to Bourdillon, 13 November 1924, in Hand, Report, p. 7.

the tribunal produced an award not to his liking. As with the Treaty, Craig could then say that his government had not been consulted and thus was not bound by the report.⁵⁴

On 3 March the Boundary Commission returned to Armagh, at long last ready to take evidence from the people of the border counties. Within days its work was overshadowed when Craig suddenly dissolved Northern Ireland's Parliament and called an election on the boundary question. He freely admitted that he had deliberately called the election, scheduled for 3 April, 'while the Commission is sitting in [our] midst'. Feetham might be hesitant about taking a vote; Ulster's premier was not - albeit on his terms. The result, Craig confidently predicted, would demonstrate Northern Ireland's continued and overwhelming support for partition to everyone, not least to the Commission.⁵⁵

It is likely that Craig hoped his sudden move would allow him to play on continuing Nationalist divisions as had occurred during the 1924 election.⁵⁶ In an effort to avoid another such debacle, a convention of Devlinites and pro-Treaty Sinn Féiners nominated eleven candidates

⁵⁴Follis, State Under Siege, p. 166-167. Also, see Craig's remarks in NI HC Deb, Vol. 5, Col. 19-20, 10 March 1925. Unionists who agreed to testify also made it clear that they 'did not bind themselves in any way to accept the findings of the Commission'. See 'The Boundary Commission. Strabane Council Takes Action', Tyrone Constitution, 20 March 1925.

⁵⁵NI HC Deb, Vol. 5, Col. 19, 10 March 1925.

⁵⁶Kennedy, Widening Gulf, p. 137.

to stand in the Northern Ireland election.⁵⁷ Despite the effort to create a united front, Eamon de Valera announced that his party, too, would put forward candidates. In the event, the Republicans were all but marginalised; as Cahir Healy acidly noted, 'for the Nationalists in the north-east, it is not a question of Free State versus Republic; unfortunately they had neither'.⁵⁸

In the run-up to the election, Craig's allies in the British press were confident that the results would prove once and for all that Northerners had no wish to be 'cast into the outer darkness' of the Irish Free State.⁵⁹ That, indeed, is how Craig interpreted the results. Article 12, he told Northern Ireland's newly elected House of Commons, had charged the Boundary Commission to determine the Irish border in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants. Very well. The Commission now had their answer 'supplied by the people themselves'. April's election, he declared, proved that residents of the border counties had 'no desire to break their connection' with Belfast.⁶⁰

In fact, Nationalists stood their ground in most of the border counties. In two constituencies, Fermanagh-

⁵⁷Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 317-321.

⁵⁸Ibid, p. 320. Press statement, 20 March 1925, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

⁵⁹'Episodes of the Month', National Review, April 1925, p. 201.

⁶⁰NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 24-25, 15 April 1925.

Tyrone and Londonderry, Nationalist candidates polled the most first preference votes. In Armagh and Fermanagh-Tyrone, the final results were evenly split between Unionists and anti-partition candidates who took an equal number of seats in both constituencies. Unionists edged out Nationalists in Londonderry, taking three seats to two, a result that might have been reversed but for the presence of an anti-Treaty Sinn Féin candidate on the ballot. Of the border counties, only in Down were the Unionists overwhelmingly triumphant, taking six of the eight seats. And there all of the candidates ran unopposed, including both Craig and de Valera.⁶¹ As one contemporary journal noted, whatever Craig might tell his supporters, the election 'showed that on the partition issue things remained very much as they were in 1920.'⁶²

Elsewhere, Craig's party was sharply rebuffed. The Unionists' campaign slogan - 'Not an inch!' - rang hollow for working-class Protestants held in the grip of the economic depression.⁶³ Craig recognised these growing fissures within Unionist ranks. According to the New Statesman in fact, he called the snap election to get a jump on his opponents before they could organise as an alternative to the official Unionist Party.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, official Unionists held on to only half of

⁶¹Follis, State Under Siege, Appendix 2, p. 198-200.

⁶²Annual Register: 1925, p. 134.

⁶³Farrell, Arming the Protestants, p. 239-241.

⁶⁴'Comments', The New Statesman, 11 April 1925.

Belfast's sixteen seats, while overall they were reduced from forty to thirty-two seats in the new Parliament. Thanks to proportional representation, ten Nationalists were elected to the assembly, along with four Independent Unionists, two anti-Treaty Sinn Féin candidates, and one tenant farmers' representative.⁶⁵

Of these groups, the election of all three Labour candidates has been judged the 'most striking result' of the 1925 election, not least because it 'steeled' Craig in his determination to 'abolish PR once and for all.' Proportional representation served to accentuate differences within the Unionist community, and the party's leadership feared that the 1925 election might herald the beginning of the end of the Unionist alliance.⁶⁶ Without the sectarian threat, the allegiance of Protestant working-class voters to the Unionist Party could not be taken for granted, which is what observers at the time predicted would happen once partition was taken out of Irish politics.⁶⁷

Northern Ireland's Labour Party was not in any sense 'anti-partitionist'. But as party leader Sam Kyle later explained, what mattered to his followers was 'housing, wages, unemployment insurance, national health insurance, old-age pensions, [and] education.' Comparatively

⁶⁵Follis, State Under Siege, Appendix 2, p. 198-200.

⁶⁶Farrell, Orange State, p. 103-104. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 321.

⁶⁷'Events of the Week', The Nation, 11 April 1925.

speaking, the boundary was not 'a matter of very much importance'.⁶⁸ The point here is, by the time elections were next held for Northern Ireland's Parliament, PR was abolished with telling results. In the 1929 election, only one Labour MP managed to hold onto his seat. Craig had learned his lesson well. Sectarian politics kept him in power and he would resort to it to the end.⁶⁹

At the same time, Craig recognised that sectarian politics had its limits, and that his government had to appear more responsive to rank and file Unionist concerns. During a tour at the height of the 1925 campaign, he vowed that so long as he was prime minister the 'B' Specials would not be disbanded. As well as reassuring Unionists over the boundary dispute, his promise appealed to the mass of Protestants who were associated most closely with this branch of the Constabulary.⁷⁰ Behind the scenes, meanwhile, Craig redoubled his efforts to persuade London to amalgamate the Ulster and British unemployment insurance funds.

Solving Northern Ireland's financial crisis

However much Unionists might claim that Ulster was 'not financially dependent upon Great Britain', its drain on the British Treasury was impossible to ignore by 1925.

⁶⁸NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 1115-1116, 7 September 1925.

⁶⁹Morgan, Labour and Partition, p. 323. P. Buckland, James Craig: Lord Craigavon (Dublin, 1980), p. 97. Laffan, Partition of Ireland, p. 107-108.

⁷⁰'"The Proper Border"', Irish Independent, 27 March 1925.

It was 'obvious', one journal reported, 'that the Government of Northern Ireland is really living on the charity of England, and giving very little but trouble in return'.⁷¹

Northern Ireland's economic problems were deep-seated and reached to the creation of the state itself. As far as possible the Ulster Unionists had modelled their six-county state after its British parent. But as Churchill noted, when it came to the provision of social services this model could properly function only if it was based on a 'sufficiently large area and large numbers of trades'.⁷² Even in the best of times, this could not be said of Northern Ireland. Hence, it was unrealistic to expect that social services provided in the six counties would ever be on a par with those offered elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Nor could they be, if Craig and his colleagues were to stay within the bounds of the Colwyn awards.⁷³ In its second report, delivered in December 1924, the Colwyn panel held that the imperial contribution should be determined only after Northern Ireland's government had paid for 'actual and necessary expenditure'. However, Belfast could not count any government service as

⁷¹See, e.g., 'Imperial Ulster', undated, DFA, Box 4, 37/D, which also contains other pamphlets presenting the Unionist case for partition. 'Events of the Week', The Nation, 4 April 1925.

⁷²Churchill to Steel-Maitland, 13 March 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/4.

⁷³See chapter 4.

'necessary' if it did not exist in the rest of the United Kingdom, or if the service provided was of 'a higher average standard than exists in Great Britain'. On this second point, it further held that this 'average standard' rule would be broken if Ulster officials did not take into account Northern Ireland's lower cost of living. Because of this difference in the cost of living, disparities between social services provided in the two parts of the United Kingdom were bound to occur.⁷⁴

Given the choice between staying within the bounds of the Colwyn rules or mollifying working-class Protestants, Craig and his colleagues decided to break the rules. As Ulster's Minister of Labour John Andrews warned Hugh Pollock, 'the political future of Northern Ireland [would] be seriously endangered' if rank and file Unionists ever concluded that they were not receiving the same benefits as their British counterparts.⁷⁵ While these disaffected Unionists had no desire to join the Free State, once they became disillusioned with Belfast rule they might combine with Nationalists to support re-integration into the United Kingdom. That would put Unionists back where they were before 1920 - forever at the mercy of British governments which might one day do a deal with Dublin over their heads.

⁷⁴Cmd. 2389, p. 4. Lawrence, Northern Ireland, p. 43-48.

⁷⁵Andrews to Pollock, 21 June 1924, quoted in Follis, State Under Siege, p. 147.

The only way out, Craig and his colleagues decided, was re-integration with Britain's social services beginning with unemployment insurance. Yet, even here there was a price to be paid. In effect, the Northern Ireland government had decided to destroy the 1920 Government of Ireland Act in order to save it. As Sir John Anderson pointed out to a colleague in the British Ministry of Labour, amalgamation was 'an admission that the scheme of devolution provided for in that Act is unworkable.'⁷⁶

Re-amalgamation

On becoming chancellor of the exchequer, Churchill had resisted pleas to bail out Northern Ireland's unemployment insurance fund, reasoning that the province's reduced imperial contribution made any additional help unnecessary.⁷⁷ The Treasury was not alone in opposing amalgamation of the unemployment funds. Although Craig might have expected the support of Cabinet Die-hards, Joynson-Hicks scolded the Unionists for wanting 'to be relieved of the consequences of self-government in so far as those consequences may be to their disadvantage.' Worse, this request was not intended to cover a special emergency. Rather, it was 'a claim for continuous assistance' and if used to bail out the unemployment insurance programme could be applied to

⁷⁶Anderson to Wilson, 17 December 1924, HO 45/13743/6.

⁷⁷Churchill to Niemeyer, 15 November 1924, T 160/131/F.4855/02/1.

any of the other services for which the Belfast government had been made responsible.⁷⁸

Craig, it seems, forced matters by making amalgamation an issue in the Northern Ireland elections.⁷⁹ Writing to Churchill the day after he dissolved Parliament, he maintained that his supporters 'never would have consented to accept self-government' in 1920 had there been any suggestion but that 'living in Ulster was to be on a parallel with Great Britain'. For added emphasis, he resorted to his tried and true threat of resignation if these 'very definite pledges' were not carried through.⁸⁰ Whatever caused the shift, in late March Baldwin's Cabinet reversed itself and decided that 'on the grounds of equity' Britain should directly assist Northern Ireland in its 'difficulties' with the unemployment insurance fund.⁸¹

The problem was how. In the Cabinet committee set up to examine the issue, both Churchill and Lord Cave, the committee's chairman, swung behind Craig's plea for re-amalgamation.⁸² Otherwise, Churchill later explained to Tom Jones, Ulster's voters might begin to question the

⁷⁸C.P. 53(25), 2 February 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/3.

⁷⁹C.P. 167(25), 17 March 1925, CAB 27/279.

⁸⁰Craig to Churchill, 11 March 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/4.

⁸¹C. 17(25), 20 March 1925, CAB 23/49.

⁸²Churchill to Steel-Maitland, 13 March 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/4. 'Ulster Unemployment Insurance', 25 May 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/2.

wisdom of partition thus putting 'Ulster at the mercy of the Free State.'⁸³

Steel-Maitland, however, still opposed the idea precisely because it meant 'a complete reversion to the position prior to the Government of Ireland Act'.⁸⁴ Even if the Free Staters did not object, the government might face a revolt from its own backbenchers who, despite economic hardship throughout Britain, were being told that prudence required continuing reductions in government spending. Yet, here was Baldwin's Cabinet toying with an open-ended commitment far greater than the annual grants for Ulster's Special Constabulary which had caused so much resentment when Parliament last debated that issue in February.⁸⁵

The issue was again raised in Cabinet at the end of May, when a sub-committee of civil servants under the chairmanship of Sir John Anderson was appointed to examine the practical problems of amalgamation. For the first time, apparently, the Cabinet was warned that what they were doing was a 'departure from the spirit, if not the terms, of the [Irish] Treaty'. But 'the Cabinet did not accept this view'.⁸⁶ One member was not so coy. In

⁸³Jones diary, 17 May 1925, Vol. I, p. 316.

⁸⁴C.P. 167(25), 17 March 1925, CAB 27/279.

⁸⁵'Ulster Unemployment Insurance'; and Niemeyer to Bowers, both dated 25 May 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/2.

⁸⁶C. 27(25), 28 May 1925, CAB 23/50. This last remark was struck from the minutes and replaced by a far more ambiguous explanation: '... the Cabinet did not feel that the consideration of this aspect of the matter would be

arguing for amalgamation, Churchill conceded that such a scheme involved a 'substantial modification' of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act; he even accepted that once word of the plan was made public it 'would be resented by the Irish Free State'. But this would be a good thing, he declared, if it gave the southern Irish 'an object lesson in the value of the British connection.'⁸⁷

In mid-July, however, Anderson's sub-committee decided that full amalgamation of the two unemployment funds was impossible without raising 'difficult questions as to the constitutional relationships between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State'. The problem was that the Treaty prevented any British government from extending the powers of Northern Ireland as this 'would be a blow to the cause of reuniting the country and a clear violation of the spirit of the Treaty'. By the same token, Dublin could object that any 'diminution' of the powers and responsibilities of Northern Ireland's government was also a violation of the Treaty if it led to 'the ultimate re-inclusion of Northern Ireland in the political system of Great Britain'. Anderson and his colleagues could not be sure if Cosgrave's government would make such a claim, but they deemed it 'in the highest degree undesirable' that 'the issue should ever be raised.'⁸⁸

prejudiced by the proposed investigation'.

⁸⁷N.I.U. (25) - 2nd, 26 May 1925, CAB 27/279.

⁸⁸N.I.U. (25) 4, 15 July 1925, CAB 27/279.

Instead, the sub-committee proposed a complicated 're-insurance scheme', and this became the basis of the 1926 Unemployment Insurance Agreement. To stay within the letter, if not the spirit, of the Irish Treaty the British and Ulster unemployment insurance funds remained technically separate. To guarantee that the benefits offered by both funds would be the same, the Northern Ireland government agreed to contribute a yearly 'equalization payment' to its own unemployment fund. If, after this payment was made, the Ulster fund was still short of the amount needed to offer benefits equal to those given to British workers, the Treasury in London would provide up to three-fourths of the additional amount needed. In addition, Craig's government had to accept sole responsibility for paying off the deficit already incurred by the Northern Ireland fund - £3.6 million, a staggering sum when it is realised that the Ulster government's entire budget amounted to just over £5 million.⁸⁹

Not surprisingly, the Ulster Unionists were less than happy with this arrangement. The charges involved 'a much heavier depletion of our finances than can be contemplated', Spender told Anderson, and meant that in other areas of social spending standards in Northern Ireland would be 'debased by comparison with Great

⁸⁹Cmd. 2588: Unemployment Insurance (Northern Ireland Agreement): Memorandum Explaining Financial Resolution (London, 1926), xxii, 115, p. 3-4. Lawrence, Northern Ireland, p. 50-52.

Britain.'⁹⁰ But in the circumstances, this was the best they were going to get. Although the re-insurance scheme was approved by the British Cabinet on 7 August, Baldwin was in no hurry to put the matter before the House of Commons where it was 'certain to be most controversial.'⁹¹ Elaborate measures were taken to 'shorten Parliamentary discussion' of the proposed legislation, and it was not until the following March that the agreement became law.⁹² In the interim, Baldwin and his colleagues had plenty of other Irish problems to keep them occupied.

The Boundary Commission hearings

While Craig was busy re-negotiating Northern Ireland's financial relations with the British government, the Boundary Commission had been taking evidence in the border counties. Beginning again in Armagh, the Commission held its first hearing on 3 March; its last sitting took place in Omagh, County Tyrone on 2 July.⁹³ To expedite the hearings, those giving evidence were cross-examined by the Commissioners themselves. The Commission also decided to bar newspaper coverage of its sessions and, instead, issued statements 'from time to

⁹⁰Spender to Anderson, ? July 1925, HO 267/174.

⁹¹C. 44(25), 7 August 1925, CAB 23/50. Upcott to Newsam, 19 November 1925, HO 45/13743/22.

⁹²'Northern Ireland Unemployment Insurance', Upcott memorandum, 28 October 1925, T 160/187/F.7136/5. C. 51(25), same date, CAB 23/51.

⁹³For the panel's itinerary, see 'Index to Dates and Conferences', D/T, S 1801/P.

time'. The consequences of this last decision were far-reaching, once it was learned that the Commission did not propose to say publicly how it was interpreting the powers given to it by Article 12. In an atmosphere thick with rumour it proved to be the Commission's undoing.⁹⁴

There are several accounts of the Boundary Commission's hearings and only a brief summary is necessary here.⁹⁵ Initially, things seemed to go well for the Northern Nationalists. Their witnesses in County Down, for example, were 'splendidly organised', so that by the end of the hearings E.M. Stephens was confident that Newry 'had been won for the Free State.'⁹⁶ In fact, Stephens had earlier reported to Dublin, 'hopes of the Free State supporters were rising'. He also found it encouraging that prominent Unionists such as Sir Basil Brooke had come round to accepting the fact that the Commission's award 'would be binding, and would probably be upheld by the British Government'.⁹⁷

By the time the Commission finished taking evidence

⁹⁴Hand, Report, p. 14-15. Commission Minutes No. 1, 6 November 1924, CAB 61/1. Bourdillon to O'Hegarty, 2 February 1925, D/T, S 1801/L. 'The Boundary Commission. Armagh City's Claim for Transfer', Tyrone Constitution, 13 March 1925.

⁹⁵See, e.g., Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 236-246. Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 316-317, 322-328.

⁹⁶Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 237. At the same time, though, Feetham observed that the present border of 'Carlingford Lough might be regarded as a good natural boundary', not a good sign for the Nationalists.

⁹⁷Stephens to O'Higgins, 19 February 1925, D/T, S 1801/L.

in Londonderry, Stephens was far less confident.

'[J]udging by the nature of the questions asked', he felt that 'the chairman was adopting a view adverse to the Nationalist claim.' In one exchange, Feetham suggested that transferring Derry to the Free State would be a 'serious surgical operation', clearly implying that he was reluctant 'to make any change' in the status quo. On the other hand, Stephens reported that Londonderry's Unionists 'were becoming very anxious as to the fate of the city'.⁹⁸

They need not have worried. By mid-summer, Fisher was able to report to Lady Reid: 'All is going smoothly, and the more extravagant claims have been practically wiped out. It will now be a matter of border townlands for the most part, and no great mischief will be done if it is worked out on "fair give and take" lines'.⁹⁹

While Fisher's reports were being read with relief in Belfast, neither Dublin nor London had any real idea of what was going on. Like the Ulster Unionists, Baldwin's government had declined to give evidence to the Commission and had kept contact with the tribunal to a minimum.¹⁰⁰ While Free State ministers at least received regular reports from the Boundary Bureau, their British opposites seem to have known next to nothing about the

⁹⁸Stephens to O'Higgins, 22 May 1925, D/T, S 1801/M.

⁹⁹Ervine, Craigavon, p. 499-500.

¹⁰⁰Waterhouse to Bourdillon, 18 November 1924, in Hand, Report, p. 6.

developing situation.

That changed in early June when the Commission suggested to both governments that a 'reasonable interval' should take place between the announcement of their award and its actual implementation.¹⁰¹ In the event, the Commission's suggestion was immediately quashed by Dublin. So far as the Free Staters were concerned, once the award was announced, this new demarcation would become 'automatically the boundary between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland'. Bourdillon was then informed that Baldwin's government concurred with this view.¹⁰²

But in raising the issue the Commission forced both governments to realise that an administrative nightmare loomed ahead. This set in motion a series of meetings between Free State and British officials to discuss implementation of the award.¹⁰³ Although designed to cover purely 'technical details', Craig's government refused to have anything to do with these discussions. At the same time, Northern Ireland's attorney-general informed the Belfast Parliament that no Boundary Commission award could be implemented until it was

¹⁰¹Bourdillon to O'Hegarty, 8 June 1925, CAB 61/17. Bourdillon to Hankey, same date, CO 537/1072. 'Irish Boundary Commission: Memorandum', same date, D/T, S 1801/N.

¹⁰²O'Hegarty to Bourdillon, 27 July 1925, CAB 61/17. Hankey to Bourdillon, 29 July 1925, D/T, S 1801/N.

¹⁰³See, e.g., Amery to Timothy Healy, 19 June 1925, CO 537/1072. Minutes of a meeting held at the Dominions Office, 28 July 1925, HO 45/12296/75(b).

sanctioned by the Imperial Parliament in London.¹⁰⁴

Craig and his colleagues obviously hoped that the Conservative majority in the House of Commons would be their last line of defence should the Commission surprise them with a large territorial transfer.

Fears that the Ulster Unionists might indeed be in for a nasty surprise intensified when, in late August, the Sunday Express reported that the Commission would hand over 'considerable territory' to the Free State.¹⁰⁵ The article sparked two months of fevered, and often contradictory, speculation in newspapers on both sides of the Irish Sea.¹⁰⁶ One newspaper reported that leave had been cancelled for all Free State soldiers; another said that the British Army had established an outpost deep within County Fermanagh, indicating that a large part of the county was about to be ceded to the Free State. Donegal Nationalists were warned that a part of their county was about to be handed over to Northern Ireland. Unionists were told that South Armagh and parts of South Down were to be transferred to the Free State. Appeals were made for another conference of the two Irish governments. Ministers in Belfast warned that 'not one inch of Northern territory would be transferred ...

¹⁰⁴Buckland to Tallents; and Tallents to Buckland [two letters], 20, 21, 22 July 1925, HO 267/214.

¹⁰⁵'New Border Puzzles in Ireland', Sunday Express, 23 August 1925.

¹⁰⁶For a running account of these reports, see 'Index to Dates and Conferences', August-October 1925, D/T, S 1801/P.

without the sanction of the people of Ulster.'

Throughout, the prime minister of Northern Ireland maintained a stony silence.¹⁰⁷

Craig's refusal, either in public or in private, to 'commit himself in any way', left his friends in London in a 'politically impossible' position. Both Amery and Joynson-Hicks were inclined to give Craig prior notice of the Boundary Commission's award. Otherwise, the government would be open to charges from its own supporters that they had treated their Ulster friends as cavalierly as had Lloyd George during the Treaty negotiations. Their senior advisers, however, pointed out that speed was essential if the award was to be implemented with a minimum of trouble. For this reason, they adamantly opposed giving Belfast any prior notice as details of the award would 'certainly leak out' once in Craig's hands.¹⁰⁸

Tom Jones also spotted the danger. 'Once you begin to discuss', he warned Baldwin, 'you are in the Irish bog again.'¹⁰⁹ Jones felt that the Boundary Commission's award should be implemented as soon as it was issued, and he pressed Baldwin to use his 'personal courage' to force this view on the Cabinet. But he failed. 'I could not

¹⁰⁷Ibid, 27 August, 1, 14, 21, 22 September 1925. NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 1117-1118, 7 September 1925.

¹⁰⁸C.P. 445(25), 26 October 1925, CAB 24/175. Amery diary, 22 October 1925, p. 424,.

¹⁰⁹Jones to Baldwin [memorandum excerpt], 28 October 1925, Vol. III, p. 236.

do right off what you wanted about Ireland', the prime minister told his assistant secretary. 'The moment the subject was mentioned at the Cabinet they all got excited; Salisbury and Jix were bursting their buttons with eagerness to talk'. The Cabinet meeting became fractious as its members were 'plunged into the regular Irish atmosphere'. Everyone was 'talking excitedly and most of them irrelevantly.'¹¹⁰ To soothe nerves, Baldwin offered to see the Boundary Commission chairman on his own and soon after put out feelers for a private meeting. But Feetham, mindful of the agreement with his colleagues not to discuss their deliberations with anyone else, could not be drawn. In any event, by the time Baldwin informed the Cabinet that no meeting had taken place, events had already taken a dramatic, and very public, turn.¹¹¹

Feetham's memorandum on Article 12

After its last hearing in County Tyrone in early July, the Boundary Commission continued its work in near total isolation for the better part of four months. Only a two-day hearing with Free State lawyers in late August interrupted their labours.¹¹² Shortly afterward, on 11 September, Feetham circulated a memorandum to his fellow

¹¹⁰Ibid, 29[?] October 1925, p. 236. 'Jix' was a nickname for Joynson-Hicks. Amery diary, 28 October 1925, p. 424.

¹¹¹Waterhouse to Baldwin, 31 October 1925, SB Vol. 99, ff. 235-237. C. 52(25), 11 November 1925, CAB 23/51.

¹¹²Hand, Report, p. 13-14; and Appendix IV, p. 55-72.

Commissioners outlining his interpretation of Article 12. On this foundation, the Boundary Commission's report would stand.¹¹³

From Article 12's 'maddeningly few words', Feetham drew a 'wealth of meaning'.¹¹⁴ As he had hinted to Free State lawyers the previous December, the Commission's chairman would not consider wholesale changes of the border, nor would he countenance a transfer of territory where there was 'no sufficient reason' for doing so.¹¹⁵

Under the criteria laid down by Feetham, providing a sufficient reason would be no small task. First, the South African judge threw out the idea that the Commission's main task was to draw a boundary 'in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants'. These wishes were a 'primary consideration', but they were not 'paramount'. A 'substantial majority' must desire change, a term he vaguely defined, and which became vaguer still when he added that the greater the change demanded 'the higher the percentage of inhabitants ... should be required to justify it.' Even then, the Commission had a 'duty' to 'overrule' those wishes if they might cause 'economic or geographic inconvenience'.¹¹⁶

¹¹³Ibid, 'Chairman's memorandum', p. 32-68. Also, see Chapter III, p. 25-32, of the report.

¹¹⁴Ibid, p. xiii.

¹¹⁵Ibid, 'Chairman's memorandum', p. 52.

¹¹⁶Ibid, p. 49, 52-55.

Feetham reiterated his opposition to the holding of plebiscites, arguing that as the word did not appear in Article 12 'it was not the intention of the parties to the Treaty that the Commission should ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants in that manner.' Instead, the Commission should rely on the returns of the 1911 Census, assuming that Protestants would desire to live in Northern Ireland, while Roman Catholics would desire to live in the Free State. He then rejected applying these figures to whole counties or poor law unions and, instead, opted for 'the smallest area' which could be regarded separately in any given place.¹¹⁷ Finally, he held that the Commission was fully within its rights to transfer portions of the Free State to Northern Ireland, as well as the other way round.¹¹⁸

In effect, Feetham claimed that the Commission had been handed a blank cheque, allowing it to do pretty much as it pleased, even if this meant that the criteria used to determine the boundary in one area contradicted the reasons used to determine it in another. Or, as Feetham himself wrote, it was 'impossible I think to lay down any precise rule as to the requirements which must be fulfilled in the case of individual areas'.¹¹⁹

The sight of this memorandum ought to have shaken MacNeill to his bones. If this was to be the basis for

¹¹⁷Ibid, p. 59-60, 61-64.

¹¹⁸Ibid, p. 36-37, 40.

¹¹⁹Ibid, p. 51.

the Commission's findings, it was obvious that the award would be disastrous for the Free State. Surely, MacNeill did not need to be, as he later put it, 'a better politician ... , if you like a better strategist' to see that.¹²⁰ If ever there was a time for him to signal to Feetham and Fisher that he could not possibly be a party to a report based on these assumptions, this would have been the time to do so.

Given the course of later events, MacNeill's action, or inaction, bears consideration. According to the Free State's Commissioner, there were 'profound differences ... between the chairman and myself as to the fundamental principles upon which an award ought to proceed'. MacNeill claimed that early on he realised that Feetham had 'imported' a new 'dominant condition' into the Commission's mandate: namely, that Northern Ireland must be preserved as a separate political entity even if this meant that the tribunal must 'override the wishes of the inhabitants.' Nor was there 'consistent application' of the Commission's principles. Feetham had made it possible 'in one part of our award, for us to make economic considerations dominant and, in another place, to make the wishes of the inhabitants dominant.'¹²¹

Nevertheless, there is scant evidence that MacNeill

¹²⁰Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, Col. 802, 24 November 1925.

¹²¹Ibid, Col. 799-801. MacNeill returned to this complaint throughout his 24 November speech.

raised these objections with either of his colleagues.¹²² When the crisis later forced him to resign not only from the tribunal but from Cosgrave's government as well, MacNeill blamed his inaction on the fact that he was, in effect, a part-time Commissioner. Throughout the tribunal's deliberations, he had continued to work as the Free State's minister of education. Juggling these twin roles, he maintained, made it impossible for him to see what was happening until it was too late. 'The details came before us in a very gradual and a very piecemeal manner'. Only over time did he come to the 'conclusion that when those parts of the award were put together ... it would not be possible for me to defend them'.¹²³

This defence is hard to square with the fact that MacNeill had to know where Feetham was headed once he read the September memorandum. When Feetham submitted these views to his colleagues, he specifically 'stated that he did not wish to invite written replies'. MacNeill, however, did respond - but not with a wide-ranging critique like the one in his 24 November speech. Instead, he only questioned the Commission's right to transfer territory from the Free State to Northern Ireland (and concluded that it could not).¹²⁴

A vital opportunity was lost. Because MacNeill raised no serious objections to Feetham's memorandum, the

¹²²Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 248.

¹²³Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, 24 November 1925, Col. 802-803.

¹²⁴Hand, Report, p. 32.

Boundary Commission chairman, and Fisher too, assumed that their Free State colleague accepted these guidelines. Given that MacNeill did not resign from the Commission until 20 November, both men were justified in later telling the press that his decision 'came as a complete surprise'.¹²⁵ In any event, during a series of meetings held in mid-October, the three men gave final shape to their award.¹²⁶ In sum, 31,319 people and 183,290 acres were transferred to the Free State; 7,594 people and 49,242 acres were transferred to Northern Ireland. Dublin gained more people and territory - 23,725 people, and 134,048 acres - than Belfast. The boundary itself was shortened by 51 miles.¹²⁷

Fisher was elated. 'I am well satisfied with the result', he wrote to Carson the following day, which would

not shift a stone or a tile of your enduring work for Ulster. It will remain a solid and close-knit unit with five counties intact and the sixth somewhat trimmed on the outer edge ...

No centre of even secondary importance goes over, and with Derry, Strabane, Enniskillen, Newtownbutler, Keady and Newry in safe keeping your handiwork will endure.

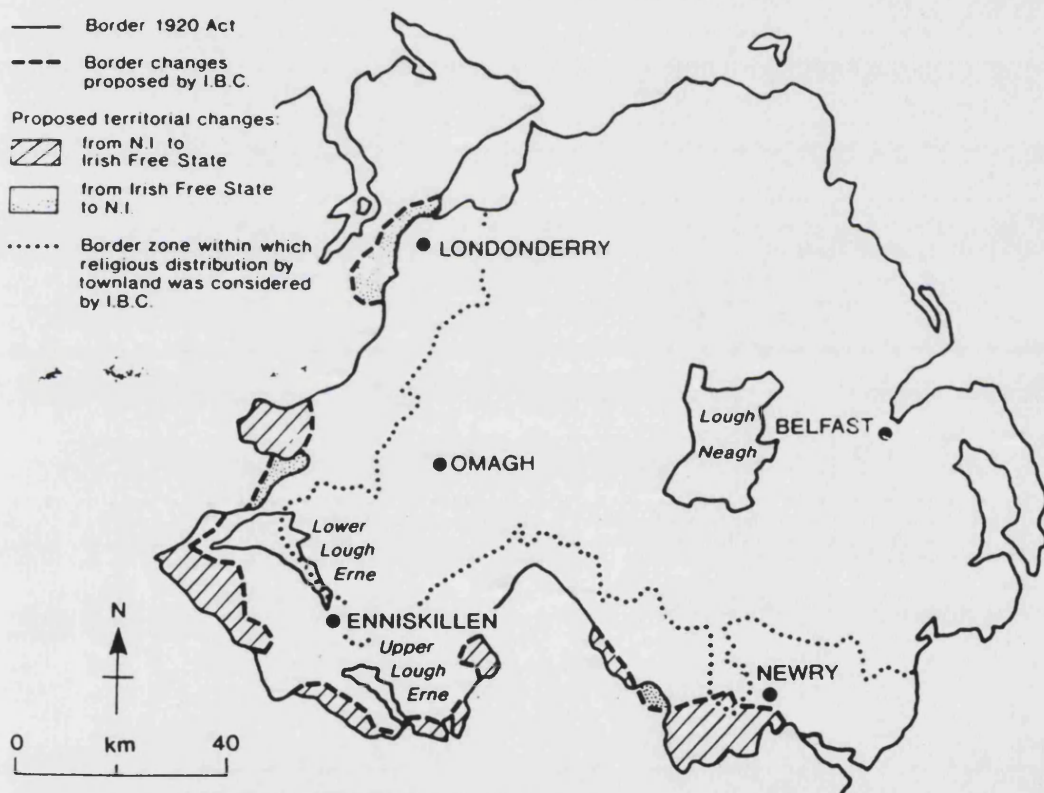
If anybody had suggested twelve months ago that we could have kept so much I would have laughed at him

On the balance the number of Protestants in

¹²⁵MacNeill quoted their statement in Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, Col. 797-798, 24 November 1925.

¹²⁶Ibid. Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 248. Commission Minutes, Nos. 20-24, 13-17 October 1925, CAB 61/1, though, provide no details.

¹²⁷C. 55(25), 30 November 1925, CAB 23/51. Hand, Report, Appendix V, p. 73-109.



Proposed Boundary Commission award

Source: J. Neville, H. Douglas, and P.A. Compton,
 'The Northern Ireland-Irish Republic Boundary',
Espace, Populations, and Sociétés, No. 2, 1992, p. 217.

Ulster has been increased - the number of R.C's materially decreased: - which will put an end to certain political difficulties in Tyrone and Fermanagh. ...¹²⁸

In this same letter, Fisher told Carson that another six weeks would elapse before the Boundary Commission's award would be ready for publication. He also let slip that he had told at least one other person about the report. Fisher had been indiscreet, and it was to cost him and Feetham their triumph.

The Morning Post report

On 6 November Bourdillon informed Hankey that the Boundary Commission soon would be ready to issue its report and that the imperial and Irish governments should waste no time in making arrangements to put the award into effect.¹²⁹ Before these private arrangements could get off the ground, both governments were rocked by the Morning Post's dramatic publication of a forecast of the Commission's award. The tone of the article is best demonstrated by its comparison of Unionist gains in County Donegal, which would be 'of great commercial assistance', to Free State gains in County Armagh which, at best, was 'wild and very beautiful country'. In other words, the Ulster Unionists had lost nothing of value. Armagh's 'principal towns ... including the much discussed Newry' would remain under Belfast's

¹²⁸Fisher to Carson, 18 October 1925, Carson Papers, D.1507/A/44/52.

¹²⁹Bourdillon to Hankey, 6 November 1925, HO 45/12296/88.

jurisdiction. But what was striking about this report was the precision of the map that accompanied it.¹³⁰

Without warning, this single newspaper report had put 'the fat in the fire'.¹³¹

It is all but certain that Fisher was the source for the Post report.¹³² What is not in doubt is that the article left Cosgrave's government dangerously exposed.

'[N]ot since partition was introduced', commented one pro-government newspaper, 'has feeling run so high.'

Although Boundary Bureau representatives did their best to play down the forecast, J.H. Collins reported that Free State supporters in the North 'were very angry.'¹³³

On Thursday, the 19th, MacNeill returned to London and, the following afternoon, stunned Feetham and Fisher by resigning from the Commission. How MacNeill came to this decision is not entirely clear. It seems that he, along with other members of the Irish Cabinet, thought that this would make it impossible for the Boundary Commission to issue its award and thus the Free Staters

¹³⁰The article is reproduced in J.H. Andrews, 'The "Morning Post" Line', Irish Geography, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1960, p. 99-106.

¹³¹'Episodes of the Month', National Journal, January 1926, p. 675. Baldwin later blamed the report for having 'precipitated a crisis'. See 'Irish Bill. Debate in the Commons', The Times, 9 December 1925.

¹³²Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 236.

¹³³Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 254. Collins to Stephens, 13 November 1925, J.H. Collins Papers, D.921/2/4/121.

would steer clear of disaster.¹³⁴ Instead, Bourdillon informed the Free State government that as far as the two remaining Commissioners were concerned, MacNeill's resignation was not 'valid or effectual'. More worrisome, from Dublin's standpoint, the Commission had 'continued its labours' and would soon 'be in a position to deliver the Award.'¹³⁵

This is the likely reason for Cosgrave's hastily-arranged meeting with Baldwin on the 26th. At a conference which also included Chamberlain, Joynson-Hicks, Amery, and Tom Jones, the Free State's president warned of dangers, including 'a danger of bloodshed', if the Commission's award was implemented. It was obvious, Chamberlain later observed, that Cosgrave, though 'anxious for peace', did not 'know how to deal with the situation'. At the very least, he faced an imminent revolt within his own party. If de Valera took Sinn Féin's abstentionist TDs into Dáil Eireann, Cosgrave would find himself 'in a tight corner.' Worse, though the Free State president may not have known it, elements within the Irish Army had decided that they would resist any transfer of Free State territory to the North.¹³⁶

¹³⁴Hand, 'MacNeill', p. 254-259. Commission Minutes No. 28, 20 November 1925, CAB 61/1.

¹³⁵Ibid, Commission Minutes, No. 35, 28 November 1925. Bourdillon to O'Hegarty [two letters], 24 November 1925, CAB 61/17.

¹³⁶I.A. (25)-3rd Minutes, 26 November 1925, CAB 27/295. Jones diary, 25 [sic] November 1925, Vol. III, p. 237. Farrell, Arming the Protestants, p. 247, 357, n. 47.

Despite what was obviously a serious situation, Cosgrave's suggestion that 'the Boundary Commission should not issue their award either now or at any time' was coldly rebuffed. Austen Chamberlain, in particular, gave vent to his feelings. 'I took great risks' for the Treaty he told Cosgrave, far understating the price he had paid. Less candidly, he claimed that the Tories had been prepared to 'impose' the Commission's award on Craig's government 'whatever it might be'. If Cosgrave was looking for a way out of a dilemma created by his own demands, he would have to turn to Craig for a solution, Chamberlain told him. '[W]e cannot offer it.'¹³⁷

Baldwin was equally unyielding. All three governments wanted peace, he pointed out. But the Free Staters had to remember that they had forced the British to impose the Boundary Commission on their Northern Irish allies. Then, Baldwin went in for the kill. 'If this unhappy disclosure had not been made [i.e., The Morning Post forecast], and had the report been favourable to you, you would have expected us to impose it on Ulster.'

'Yes', Cosgrave replied.

'It might have been such as to lead to Civil War', Baldwin observed. Now, however, the southern Irish expected the Boundary Commission's award to be quashed simply because it gave them less than they expected. No, no this was not good enough. 'We cannot compel Ulster in

¹³⁷CA/H/48-1st Minutes, 26 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

any direction', Baldwin told Cosgrave.¹³⁸ The British government could not 'deprive Ulster of the benefit of a decision by the Commission because it proved more favourable to Ulster than the Free State had expected.'¹³⁹ The best that the British prime minister was willing to promise was that he would ask Craig to meet with Cosgrave that afternoon. Perhaps a deal could be worked out between the two Irish leaders.

Birkenhead, for one, was not 'sanguine' about the prospects for such a meeting. 'It seems to me', he wrote that morning, 'that the differences which sunder Moslems from Hindus are not as bitter or as unbridgeable as those which divide Orangemen from the rest of Ireland.'¹⁴⁰

The crisis widens

As the boundary crisis edged to its climax Craig, at some point in mid-November, decided that the moment had arrived for him to become directly involved in the boundary negotiations. As he told his wife: 'All that matters in regard to Ulster's future is at stake, (financial), and I well know that if I left here, decisions would be come to behind my back, as on the famous occasion of the Treaty'. That, he vowed, would not happen again.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹I.A. (25)-3rd Minutes, 26 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁴⁰Birkenhead to Reading, 26 November 1925, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/8, No. 17.

¹⁴¹Lady Craig's diary, 23 November 1925, D.1415/B/38.

This might have been the beginning of what Craig saw as a golden opportunity to get rid of more problems than just the Boundary Commission.¹⁴² Earlier in the month, he had intimated to Joynson-Hicks that he might be prepared to accept the Commission's award. The offer was only good, though, if financial compensation was provided for any Unionist whose home or business was transferred out of Northern Ireland, and if the imperial government was willing to meet his funding demands for the Specials.¹⁴³

Craig later detailed what he had in mind. First, he wanted Northern Ireland's imperial contribution suspended for the next two years followed by a further re-adjustment of future payments. Next, he suggested creating a tribunal (to be chaired by Fisher, interestingly) to adjudicate claims for financial 'compensation to Protestants' arising out of the Commission's award or for damages caused by its implementation. No such compensation would be offered to inhabitants transferred to the North against their will nor for any damages caused in areas transferred to the Free State. Craig estimated that the compensation package would cost £4 million - roughly equal, conveniently, to Northern Ireland's imperial contribution

¹⁴²Sir John Anderson believed this was what Craig was up to. See notes from a meeting of civil servants, ? November 1925, CO 537/1104/545043.

¹⁴³Joynson-Hicks to Baldwin, with memorandum, 4 November 1924, SB Vol. 99, ff. 238-241.

for the next two years. Separately, he called for abolition of the Council of Ireland.¹⁴⁴

These 'claims are outrageous', Churchill told his Cabinet colleagues. As it was, the Treasury had already promised Ulster £650,000 for its unemployment fund, along with another £500,000 for the Special Constabulary.

'This last vote will be extremely unpopular in the House of Commons', Churchill pointed out, 'and I shall have to face a storm of abuse on account of it.' Craig's continuing demands, of which this 'astonishing document' was just the latest, could not go on. Perhaps, the chancellor of the exchequer suggested, it was time to 'undeceive' Northern Ireland's prime minister.¹⁴⁵

The dispute came to a head on the 26th, at a meeting of the Cabinet committee formed in the wake of the Morning Post report.¹⁴⁶ Churchill poured cold water on Craig's proposals, suggesting instead that there were really only two solutions to the developing crisis. The lesser of the two was that the Commission's award should be implemented. It was not 'injurious to Ulster' and the Free Staters had no grounds for setting it aside. The other alternative, 'which would be preferable if it were

¹⁴⁴I.A. (25)2 and 5, 16 and 23 November 1925, CAB 27/295. Churchill memorandum with proposed letter to Craig, 26 November 1925, WSC 22/55/21-22.

¹⁴⁵Ibid, Churchill memorandum.

¹⁴⁶The committee, chaired by Austen Chamberlain, included Churchill, Joynson-Hicks, Amery, Lords Salisbury and Birkenhead, Worthington-Evans, and Sir Douglas Hogg. See C. 52(25), 11 November 1925, CAB 23/51.

practicable', was this: 'leave the Boundary question as it was for a term of say 25 years'. In the interim, the two Irish governments could 'endeavour to build up either in the[ir] Senate[s] or on the Council of Ireland some plan for joint action between the North and South where common interests were affected.'¹⁴⁷

Craig would have nothing to do with this idea. More than that, he now declared that it would be 'impossible' for him to meet with Cosgrave on the boundary question, until the committee addressed his claims for compensation and suspension of the imperial contribution.

At this point, it seemed that tempers would flare. Churchill was incandescent, telling the committee that these demands 'clearly showed that the real aim was a general easement of Ulster finance.' He was no more willing to do that 'than he would be prepared to give up the financial advantages of Article 5 of the Treaty, though', he caustically added, 'he had no doubt that he would be invited to do' just that. Baldwin, who was sitting in on the meeting, at this point intervened. He, too, urged Craig to meet with Cosgrave. If, in the end, a financial concession would smooth the way to an agreement, Baldwin promised that he would shoulder responsibility for it. Only then did Ulster's leader agree to meet with his Free State counterpart.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷I.A. (25)-3rd Minutes, 26 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁴⁸Ibid. Craig's demands were 'put in a form well calculated to upset Winston'. See Amery diary, 26 November 1925, p. 428.

In the event, their encounter solved nothing. Cosgrave had hoped that in return for leaving the boundary in place, Craig might be persuaded to release a number of Nationalists being held captive by the North. Craig offered to release only thirty IRA prisoners held since 1922, leaving Cosgrave with no other choice but to return to Dublin to lay this offer before the Executive Council.¹⁴⁹ There, it was given short shrift by O'Higgins. As he later told Craig and Baldwin, the offer would have caused the Irish government 'to fall at once'.¹⁵⁰ That being the case, O'Higgins was dispatched to London to see what he might work out. Craig, meanwhile, was growing ever more confident. 'It is a delicate, tedious, and nervy job', he told his wife. But 'I have a feeling in my bones that the present boundary will be allowed to stand ... if I can bring off "Not an Inch", I will be very pleased.' He predicted one more thing. Article 5, that part of the Treaty dealing with the Free State's debt to the British Treasury, would be 'washed out' too.¹⁵¹

The significance of Article 5

Although Article 5 never sparked the same passions as Article 12, its potential consequences were nearly as significant. The two clauses were similar in that, like

¹⁴⁹Farrell, Arming the Protestants, p. 248. Amery diary, 26 November 1925, p. 428.

¹⁵⁰I.A. (25) 7, 29 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁵¹Lady Craig's diary, 27 November 1925, D.1415/B/38.

Article 12, an independent tribunal was to determine the Free State's share of Britain's public debt after taking into account claims that Ireland had been over-taxed since the Act of Union. Ulster Unionists saw this as yet another attempt to coerce them into an all-Ireland government, because while their imperial contribution was to be fixed the South's was open to negotiation.¹⁵² Craig scored one of his first successes against the Treaty when he won a commitment from the Coalition to lower Northern Ireland's imperial contribution should the Irish claims prove to be successful.¹⁵³

Early on, both governments agreed to delay negotiations on Article 5 until the boundary question was settled. Free State officials argued that it was impossible to determine their financial liabilities so long as the extent of their jurisdiction over the island of Ireland was unresolved.¹⁵⁴ However, periodic press complaints about Dublin's failure to come to the 'relief of the long-suffering British taxpayer' ensured that the issue never entirely went away.¹⁵⁵

Because of such complaints, perhaps, in April 1925 members of Baldwin's second government began to press for

¹⁵²Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 192-193, 198-199.

¹⁵³P.G.I. 48, undated [? January 1922], CAB 27/154.

¹⁵⁴See Churchill's statement to this effect in CA/H/48-2nd Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁵⁵See, e.g., 'Boundaries in Ireland', The Times, 8 May 1924. 'Ireland Today', Quarterly Review, No. 484, October 1924, p. 362.

a resolution of the claims by Article 5.¹⁵⁶ Shortly thereafter, an outline of the British case was sent to Dublin, but at the end of November the Treasury was still waiting for a brief of the Irish counter-claims.¹⁵⁷ By then, Cosgrave and his colleagues had every reason to be skittish about facing this issue. With the Boundary Commission crisis breaking over their heads, de Valera was broadening his attack on the Free State government. If anyone was still foolish enough to believe in the Treaty, he declared in one interview, they would be finally disillusioned when 'that other commission provided for in the "Treaty" - the Financial Commission - is set up and comes to deliver its award.'¹⁵⁸

This is where matters stood when O'Higgins, along with Free State Commerce Minister Patrick McGilligan and Attorney-General John O'Byrne, arrived at Chequers on the weekend of 28-29 November. From the outset, Baldwin made it clear that only three options were on the table: accept the Boundary Commission's report; accept the existing boundary; or attempt another boundary conference with Craig, though no one seemed enthusiastic about that idea. Personally, Baldwin confided to his guests, he could not 'see how even an angel could devise a boundary

¹⁵⁶R. Fanning, The Irish Department of Finance: 1922-58 (Dublin, 1978), p. 157.

¹⁵⁷Niemeyer memorandum to Churchill, 30 November 1925, T 176/15.

¹⁵⁸De Valera interview, 24 November 1925, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

which would be agreed'.¹⁵⁹

O'Higgins replied that the Boundary Commission's award was unacceptable in any shape or form. As far as the Free Staters were concerned, the tribunal had taken the line of 'least resistance', influenced not by the wishes of the inhabitants but by 'the truculent utterances' of Craig's Cabinet. Newry was 'the acid test'. Any award leaving this Nationalist-dominated town within Belfast's jurisdiction was not worth having. Moreover, Britain had allowed the Commissioners to be 'terrorised' by the Specials and for that reason it might be time to take the boundary question to the League of Nations.¹⁶⁰ Nor, O'Higgins told the British prime minister, could the Free State government accept the offer Cosgrave had taken back to Dublin on Thursday. It was simple fantasy to suggest that the Irish president should tell Dáil Eireann, 'We are very sorry but the old line shall stand and in return Sir James Craig will give up 24 prisoners.' The moment that happened, McGilligan added, Cosgrave and his colleagues would 'disappear politically'.¹⁶¹

It fell to Tom Jones to suggest a way out. During their Saturday discussions, O'Higgins repeatedly raised the plight of Northern Nationalists, arguing that the abolition of proportional representation and electoral

¹⁵⁹I.A. (25)-6, 28 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁶⁰I.A. (25)-7, 29 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁶¹I.A. (25)-6, 28 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

redistricting had made them 'politically impotent' while they were 'kept down by an army of Special Constables paid and maintained by the British Government.' If, Jones asked, the boundary was left untouched but, at the same time, the situation for Northern Nationalists was alleviated, could the Free Staters then 'ride the storm?'

O'Higgins believed they might. Such a settlement would benefit Nationalists living far from the border who never had any hope of 'rescue' by the Boundary Commission's award in any case. Their satisfaction 'would be some set-off against the disappointment of people who had been hoping that the award would get them out' of Northern Ireland.¹⁶² At no time during the Saturday talks was Article 5 an issue.

Most of this ground was gone over again when, on Sunday, Craig joined the discussions. Though he accepted the Free Staters' analysis of the boundary dispute, Ulster's leader would give no ground on demands that Belfast get rid of the Specials, re-institute PR, and reapportion its electoral districts. O'Higgins later quoted Craig as saying that 'he could not re-enact what he had repealed, nor repeal what he had enacted.'¹⁶³

Only then did Article 5 emerge as a major element in the negotiations. According to Craig, the article came up during an after-lunch conversation between himself and the Free State vice president. As Baldwin later told the

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³CA/H/48-2nd Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

Cabinet, Craig was 'satisfied that what was at the bottom of the whole difficulty was Article 5 of the Irish Treaty ... and if that could be waived altogether the Free State might ride the storm and stand on the present boundary.'¹⁶⁴ This was shading the truth, because the Free Staters would have much preferred concessions for the Northern Nationalists. Only when it was plain that Craig was unwilling to budge on this issue did the southern Irish turn to Article 5 as a 'safety valve' to channel outrage over the impending deal.¹⁶⁵

The idea of such a trade-off was not new.¹⁶⁶ What may have made it attractive now was Craig's reputed offer to help the Free Staters against the British. While he was unwilling to 'surrender an inch of Northern territory', Craig promised 'to help you all I can to get as much as you can out of these fellows.'¹⁶⁷ The result, according to Birkenhead, was 'a greater degree of cordiality between Southern and Northern Ireland than has ever existed', as the two Irish sides happily joined together 'in the task of plundering us.'¹⁶⁸ However, Craig's backing came at a price: the Free Staters also

¹⁶⁴C. 55(25), 30 November 1925, CAB 23/51.

¹⁶⁵CA/H/48-2nd Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁶⁶See, e.g., 'Irish Boundary Commission. Free State and the Treaty', Morning Post, 14 September 1923.

¹⁶⁷Ervine, Craigavon, p. 502. O'Byrne was the source for this story.

¹⁶⁸Birkenhead to Reading, 3 December 1925, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/8, No. 18.

had to accept the abolition of the Council of Ireland.¹⁶⁹

Whatever hopes remained for the Northern Nationalists began to fade once Cosgrave joined the negotiations on 1 December. Craig's promise to 'sift ... to the bottom' of any Nationalist complaints of maltreatment was, in the end, all that the Free Staters got for their Northern allies. O'Higgins again pressed for the restoration of proportional representation and was again rebuffed. 'I can't stick PR', Craig told him. 'Does not seem to be British. Too Continental.' Astonishingly, Cosgrave agreed, saying that he, too, would like to get rid of proportional representation in the Free State.¹⁷⁰

Even more astounding, Craig's willingness to discuss steps to make joint Free State-Northern Irish Cabinet meetings a formal part of the agreement was lost because Cosgrave 'foresaw great difficulties' with the idea. It has been said that the Irish president disliked the proposal because it would have been 'tantamount to recognition of the legitimacy of the Northern government.' But that is no explanation at all, because the Free Staters had recognized the Ulster government's equal status by entering into these negotiations.¹⁷¹ So it was that yet another opportunity to bring about what

¹⁶⁹Jones diary, 29 November 1925, Vol. III, p. 242.

¹⁷⁰Ibid, 1 December 1925, p. 243-244.

¹⁷¹Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 238. Wall, 'Partition', p. 89.

Churchill now called 'unity in Ireland' was allowed to slip away.¹⁷²

The grievances of Northern Nationalists were disposed of once and for all the next day, when Cosgrave accepted that Craig could not 'deliver the goods' on improving conditions for Northern Nationalists and, as Churchill put it, the 'only question remaining to be discussed was that of finance.'¹⁷³

Although Baldwin's government was just as anxious as the Free State to bury the Boundary Commission report, its concessions on Article 5 'were not so readily forthcoming as is generally supposed'.¹⁷⁴ There was notable opposition to the idea when it was initially raised at a Cabinet meeting on 30 November. At most, Baldwin's colleagues were willing to agree to a moratorium on the Free State's assumption of its share of the imperial debt until 1933, when Britain's repayment of war loans to the United States was due to increase.¹⁷⁵

At this same meeting, it was decided that Churchill,

¹⁷²CA/H/48-4th Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295. Not surprisingly, Craig began to back away from the idea when Churchill spoke of it in these terms.

¹⁷³CA/H/48-5th Minutes, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁷⁴Birkenhead to Reading, 3 December 1925, IO, MSS Eur. E. 238/8, No. 18.

¹⁷⁵C. 55(25), 30 November 1925, CAB 23/51. The American connection was pointed out to the Free Staters. Churchill may have hoped that the Irish would use their influence in Washington so that the United States might become 'less rigid' on the war debts issue. If so, he hinted, none too subtly, the British would be 'in a position to deal more generously' with the Free State. See CA/H/48-3rd Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

Birkenhead, and Salisbury should be delegated to handle the discussions on Article 5. Initially, both Churchill and Salisbury were inclined to take a 'fairly stiff stand' on the matter, and this was the line the chancellor of the exchequer pursued when discussions resumed the next day.¹⁷⁶ The British could not simply waive Article 5, Churchill told the Free Staters, not least because it would lead to demands 'to reduce or abolish the Northern Irish contribution', as well.¹⁷⁷

What seemed to turn matters round was the strong impression made by Cosgrave when outlining his country's economic plight. In such circumstances, Birkenhead thought it was senseless to pursue payments which the Dublin government 'could not possibly hope to discharge.'¹⁷⁸ If, as he argued at a meeting of British officials, they now had the chance 'to round the corner' on the Irish Question, the financial sacrifices involved in such an agreement would be well worth it.¹⁷⁹ Despite objections from Salisbury, Birkenhead brought Churchill and, eventually, the entire Cabinet to the same conclusion. By the end of an urgently held meeting, Baldwin's associates agreed 'by a large majority' to the framework of the 1925 settlement.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶I.A. (25) 9, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁷⁷CA/H/48-2nd Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁷⁸CA/H/48-6th Minutes, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁷⁹I.A. (25) 9, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁸⁰C. 56(25), 2 December 1925, CAB 23/51.

In essence, the agreement covered four points:

First, the boundary between the two parts of Ireland was to remain unchanged. Second, the cases of republican prisoners held by Northern Ireland would be reviewed by British officials and their decisions would be accepted by Craig. Third, the Council of Ireland was abolished and its powers relating to Northern Ireland were transferred to Belfast. Instead, both governments agreed to meet 'as and when necessary' to work together on matters of common interest. The British Cabinet was also told that Craig and the Free Staters had reached a 'personal understanding' that would lead to 'more friendly co-operation' but, interestingly, 'this could not be put in writing.'¹⁸¹

Solving the financial question proved to be somewhat less straightforward, until Cosgrave mooted a proposal to Churchill which proved to be the breakthrough on this issue.¹⁸² Article 5 was dropped. In its place, the Free State agreed to repay the British government for compensation payments that it had made for malicious property damage incurred during the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921. In addition, the Dublin government promised to increase by 10 per cent its payments for malicious property damage which were incurred within its

¹⁸¹Ibid. For the text of the agreement, see C.P. 511(25), 4 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁸²CA/H/48-6th Minutes, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

jurisdiction during the Irish Civil War of 1922-1923.¹⁸³ As O'Higgins explained, this arrangement was preferable because it enabled the Free Staters 'to say that they were prepared to shoulder their own burdens arising out of the disturbances in Ireland.'¹⁸⁴

By early evening, the deal was done. Cosgrave, obviously relieved, told Churchill that the settlement would 'promote goodwill between North and South' and 'would go far to cement the friendship' of Irish and British peoples. O'Higgins added that the Dublin government would use its influence to 'induce the Nationalist members in Ulster to take their place in the Northern Parliament.'¹⁸⁵ The following day O'Higgins made one last attempt to include in the agreement a clause promising Anglo-Irish co-operation should the two parts of Ireland ever wish to unite politically. Such a statement, he thought, would 'have a sentimental and political value.' Churchill was leery. Such a statement, he told the Irish, might lead to the 'possible opposition of eminent Ministers' in the British Cabinet. Cosgrave also agreed that this difficult point 'should not be pressed.'¹⁸⁶

There remained, however, the Boundary Commission itself. Technically, no one could stop the Commission

¹⁸³C. 56 (25), 2 December 1925, CAB 23/51.

¹⁸⁴CA/H/48-7th Minutes, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁸⁵Ibid.

¹⁸⁶CA/H/48-8th Minutes, 3 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

from issuing its report, and Feetham was particularly keen to see the award published as the 'good faith of the tribunal was at stake'.¹⁸⁷ It took a meeting with Baldwin, Churchill, Cosgrave, and Craig to persuade him to give up. Churchill admitted that the two Commissioners were being asked to make 'a great sacrifice'. They should know however, that due to their 'secret labours' this 'miracle of peace had come about.' Perhaps as 'an historical document', their report 'might some day appear.' But not now.¹⁸⁸

Against such formidable opposition, the Boundary Commission's chairman could not stand. As a consolation, Feetham was to be granted a personal audience with George V. Baldwin also promised that a statement outlining the Commission's interpretation of its mandate could be published - but only after the 1925 agreement 'became an accomplished fact.'¹⁸⁹

At 7.50 p.m., the leaders of the three governments met one last time to sign the new boundary agreement. There followed a dinner, hastily arranged by Churchill and Amery, before the Free Staters had to leave to catch the 8.45 train from Euston. At one point earlier in the evening, Cosgrave turned to Craig and said, 'One of us no doubt will hear from the other?' In fact, they never met

¹⁸⁷C.P. 503(25), 3 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Ibid. Feetham to Mary Feetham, 16 December 1925, Feetham Papers, 6/1, ff. 61-63.

again.¹⁹⁰

Later that same evening, in a House of Commons swelled to its 'utmost capacity', Baldwin was cheered triumphantly as he entered to report the terms of the agreement.¹⁹¹ Almost immediately, the negotiations were compared with that other great diplomatic triumph of the day, the Locarno treaties. 'To the "midnight Treaty", hastily negotiated in 1921', The Times commented, 'the new agreement stands as the Treaty of Locarno to the Treaty of Versailles, a proof of the growth of appeasement and conciliation.'¹⁹² Arthur Balfour cast a more cynical eye over the settlement. For 'all their talk about the horrors of leaving a Roman Catholic population in the North and a Protestant population in the south', he observed, the two Irish governments found it more convenient to leave the border unchanged after all. The entire crisis, he told his sister, had been 'exquisitely comic'.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰Ibid. CA/H/48-10th Minutes, 3 December 1925, CAB 27/295. Amery diary, 2-3 December 1925, p. 429. Ervine, Craigavon, p. 508.

¹⁹¹'Irish Peace. A Threefold Agreement', The Times, 4 December 1925.

¹⁹²'The Irish Agreement', The Times, 5 December 1925. The Locarno treaties, named for the Swiss town in which they were signed, were a series of agreements aimed at stabilising Europe in the aftermath of World War I. The most important of these treaties provided for an Anglo-Italian guarantee of the borders of France, Belgium, and Germany. See Dutton, Chamberlain, p. 230-258.

¹⁹³A.J. to Alice Balfour, 4 December 1925, AJB-S, GD 433/2/76, Reel 8.

The parliamentary debates

Late on the afternoon of 8 December, MPs gathered at Westminster to ratify the Irish agreement. The 'general tone' of the Commons debate, wrote one reporter, was in the main 'quiet and peaceful' and stood 'in striking contrast to the fiery animosity of 1913, and also to the mournful apathy of 1920'. Northern Ireland's MPs were there 'in force'. But Lloyd George was absent. So was Ramsay MacDonald.¹⁹⁴

Baldwin set the mood. The work of the Boundary Commission had not been in vain; simply put, it had proved to be 'beyond the power of mortal man' to devise a new arrangement. Ireland's border was 'an accident of history', he admitted, but accident it would stay. As for the Commission's report, it would be kept under lock and key. Only when the Irish boundary aroused 'about as much excitement in Ireland as Offa's Dyke or Hadrian's Wall' aroused in Britain would it see the light of day.¹⁹⁵

Few words were spoken against the pact, and these focused mainly on the agreement to waive Article 5. J.H. Thomas's single contribution to the debate was that 'Irishmen, North and South, only agree when they are

¹⁹⁴ 'Irish Bill. Debate in the Commons', The Times, 9 December 1925.

¹⁹⁵ HC Deb, Vol. 189, Col. 309-321, 8 December 1925. This last remark was a reference to two ancient boundaries, the first dividing England from Wales, the second England from Scotland.

getting something from England.'¹⁹⁶ Another MP, Rosslyn Mitchell, attacked the government itself. Recalling the 'havoc, the tragedies, the misery, the woe and want' that Conservatives had wrought by playing politics with the Irish Question, Mitchell said that Baldwin should have offered the agreement as an act of penance on behalf of his party.¹⁹⁷

These 'sour and malignant reflections', Churchill told the Commons, did not befit the hour. It was, rather, time to look forward to a new day in Anglo-Irish relations. The agreement was ratified that same evening.¹⁹⁸

Although Northern Ireland's Parliament was not required to approve the December pact, a debate was held on Craig's return to Belfast. Ulster's MPs were not as uncritical of the boundary agreement as is sometimes supposed. Aside from disappointment that East Donegal would not be transferred into Northern Ireland, Craig also had to announce the end of Britain's subsidy for the Special Constabulary.¹⁹⁹ While the part-time 'B' Specials would be retained, the full-time 'A' and voluntary 'C-1' Specials would be abolished completely. This, said one MP, was 'the great drawback' of the

¹⁹⁶Ibid, Col. 321-326.

¹⁹⁷Ibid, Col. 330-331.

¹⁹⁸Ibid, Col. 356-363. The agreement was ratified by the House of Lords the next day. See HL Deb, Vol. 62, Col. 1271, 9 December 1925.

¹⁹⁹Ervine, Craigavon, p. 505.

agreement.

It was 'a matter of unspeakable regret to have to part with these men', Craig agreed, but they had no choice and were lucky for the settlement they had got. An additional £1.2 million would be contributed by the Treasury towards demobilisation of the force; at the same time, the British were forgiving a £700,000 loan for equipment. There was no hiding the fact that, given the ongoing depression, prospects for the Specials would be bleak. The most Craig could offer was a hope that businessmen in the province would recognise their 'moral responsibilities' to the disbanded Constables. Barring that, he suggested that the former Specials might consider emigrating to the British dominions.²⁰⁰

Ulster's premier tried to sugar this bitter pill by making a general announcement about the Unemployment Re-insurance Scheme which had been negotiated the previous July. But the effect was spoiled because Craig could not divulge any details about the plan (the legislation had still not been introduced in the British Parliament) and because what he did say was, at best, ungracious. The imperial government, he told Ulster's assembly, had 'arranged to bear - I will not say a satisfactory share - because I am very hard to satisfy, but at all events a generous share of the burden which has been thrust upon

²⁰⁰NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, 1858-1860, 1872-1873, 9 December 1925.

us'. Hardly a ringing endorsement.²⁰¹ In any case, MPs were more interested in knowing why Craig had not pressed for a reduction or abolition of Northern Ireland's imperial contribution. It hardly seemed fair, Labour's Sam Kyle pointed out, that while their contribution remained in place, the Free State was totally absolved of its share of the British debt.²⁰²

'This barren question': the Dáil debate

Whatever criticism Craig faced in Belfast was nothing compared to the storm that awaited Cosgrave and his colleagues when they returned to Dublin. Demands for a referendum on the settlement were avoided only when Cosgrave declared that passage of the agreement was necessary to preserve public safety. Under the Free State's Constitution, this precluded such a vote from taking place.²⁰³

According to one contemporary estimate, those who opposed the agreement could expect to muster no more than sixty-six votes in the Dáil - and that included the abstentionist TDs from Sinn Féin. At least seventy-four TDs were expected to back the government. But it was also noted that Cosgrave 'would not be satisfied with anything less than a two-thirds majority'. Failing that, 'a general election may become inevitable.'²⁰⁴

²⁰¹Ibid, Col. 1860-1862.

²⁰²Ibid, Col. 1865-1869.

²⁰³Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 238.

²⁰⁴'Irish Republican Activity', The Times, 9 December

In other words, for the boundary agreement to be approved much depended on the course de Valera chose to take. A statement issued by the Sinn Féin leader assailed what he called this 'meditated crime', made worse because the Free Staters had 'sold our countrymen for the meanest of all considerations - a money consideration.'²⁰⁵ However, there were considerations that de Valera himself thought worth bargaining over. Prior to the agreement, he suggested that the Boundary Commission's award might be worth trading - not for Article 5, but for those hated elements of the Treaty: the oath and the crown.²⁰⁶ De Valera, then, had his own price when it came to selling out the Northern Nationalists.

Because the abstentionist TDs did not enter Dáil Eireann even at this crucial moment, the American consul in Dublin reported that debate on the 1925 agreement lacked 'the edge of final conviction'.²⁰⁷ De Valera's official biographers later maintained that it would not have mattered if the abstentionist TDs had participated or not. In the Dáil's crucial vote on 10 December, the government won by a majority of 71 votes to 20.²⁰⁸ The

1925.

²⁰⁵'Speech at Dublin', 6 December 1925, F.L.K., de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

²⁰⁶Bowman, De Valera, p. 91.

²⁰⁷Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 238.

²⁰⁸Longford and O'Neill, Eamon de Valera, p. 241. Annual Register: 1925, p. 141.

addition of Sinn Féin's forty-seven votes, however, would have taken the opposition to within a whisker of defeating the government. Given that William Magennis and a handful of other Cumann na nGaedheal TDs had already defected from the party, is it mere fancy to suppose that the dramatic entry of de Valera and his followers might have swayed other, former colleagues to join them in fighting the agreement?

The suggestion cannot be dismissed out of hand. Even if it meant taking the oath, Austin Stack, that bitterest of abstentionists, 'was inclined to favour the idea ... if our going in would defeat the proposal.' Would it not, he asked de Valera, 'be the end of the Free State?' And what better issue on which to defeat their opponents 'than Irish territorial integrity?'²⁰⁹

Instead, Sinn Féin's leader opted for a policy of wilful impotence. On 7 December, de Valera and thirty-eight other Republican TDs held a joint meeting with Magennis, Labour's Tom Johnson and other members of the Dáil opposed to the settlement. Cahir Healy, T.J. Harbison and several Northern Irish priests also attended. Although 'strong pressure' was brought to bear on the Republicans, they steadfastly refused to take the fight into the Dáil itself. As Cosgrave had earlier predicted, this proved to be the Free Staters 'one

²⁰⁹Stack to de Valera, 4 December 1925, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 1521.

safeguard - de Valera's lack of political foresight.'²¹⁰

No matter what Sinn Féin's president might say, Ireland's unity meant less to him than party unity. 'For a united Ireland', de Valera had declared at the height of the boundary crisis, he and his followers 'would have been willing to go very far'²¹¹ - but not that far, it seems, if it meant crossing the threshold of Leinster House.

Once Sinn Féin's entry into Dáil Eireann was no longer an issue, it was all over bar the shouting. According to one contemporary account, the Dáil's debate on the boundary agreement was 'equalled in intensity of feeling only by the historic Treaty debate of 1921'.²¹² But even as the old arguments were being resurrected, Cosgrave summed up the feelings of many TDs when he declared that it was time 'to put this barren question of the boundary behind us once and for all'. Those who opposed the settlement were, in the end, brought up against one unalterable fact: they had no alternative.²¹³

What saved Cosgrave and his colleagues, at least for the moment, was sheer weariness. The people, declared one TD, 'are sick of these political and border questions. Should we not get back to business ... when

²¹⁰ 'Irish Republican Activity', The Times, 9 December 1925. Jones diary, 25 November 1925, Vol. III, p. 237.

²¹¹ 'Speech at Dublin', 6 December 1925, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 347.

²¹² 'Executive's Hopes Exceeded', Irish Times, 12 December 1925.

²¹³ Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, Col. 1306, 1314, 7 December 1925.

we are faced with problems of unemployment and bad trade in the country? In face of these matters, is it really not time to get back to our ordinary work?'²¹⁴

'A last word'

On 18 December Richard Feetham boarded R.M.S. Saxon to begin the long journey back to South Africa. That same day his justification of the Boundary Commission's work was published in newspapers throughout the British Isles. The Times called his defence 'a dignified and impressive answer' to the months of abuse hurled at the Boundary Commission and at its chairman in particular. Although the Commission's report was suppressed, the newspaper was glad that Feetham had been given the 'solace' of having 'a last word' in this chapter of Irish history.²¹⁵

Feetham's wounded pride had, indeed, been soothed. Writing to his sister while on board ship, he noted triumphantly, 'I did get a little say in the end.'²¹⁶ Not everyone, though, was as charitable about Feetham's 'elaborate summary', or about the tribunal he had led. 'Peace', the Morning Post told its readers, 'can best be promoted now by forgetting that the Boundary Commission

²¹⁴Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, Col. 1964, 15 December 1925.

²¹⁵'Irish Boundary. Commissioners on Their Task'; and 'The Boundary Commission - A Last Word', The Times, 18 December 1925.

²¹⁶Richard to Mary Feetham, 22 December 1925, Feetham Papers, 6/1, ff. 63a-63d.

ever existed.'²¹⁷

If Feetham felt let down by the collapse of the Boundary Commission, that was as nothing compared to the feelings of Northern Nationalists. 'Not a thought was given to the denial of our civil rights', a group of their representatives protested. 'Not a word about our political prisoners, our educational difficulties, or our social disabilities' was in the agreement. What Cosgrave and O'Higgins had signed in London, Cahir Healy later said, was 'a betrayal' of every promise made to the Ulster Nationalists since 1921. He was bitter most of all at the loss of the Council of Ireland, believing that with it 'the last hope of unity' in his lifetime had disappeared.²¹⁸

The loss of the Council of Ireland has been called 'an unmitigated disaster' for Northern Nationalists.²¹⁹ But even if Craig had not raised the issue, the British probably would have, as they were also anxious to be rid of the forum.²²⁰ At the same time, it would be wrong to dismiss the promise of joint Irish Cabinet meetings as an empty gesture. When recommending the settlement to their respective parliaments, all three leaders plainly

²¹⁷ 'Mr. Justice Feetham's Apologia', Morning Post, 18 December 1925.

²¹⁸ "Callously Betrayed" and 'Agreement Signed in London. Present Boundary Line to Remain', Ulster Herald, 12 December 1925.

²¹⁹ Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, p. 332.

²²⁰ 'Irish Boundary', Whiskard memorandum, 26 November 1925, CO 537/1106/54045.

expected that the conferences would be a part of Ireland's political landscape.²²¹ Others agreed. Sam Kyle, for instance, hoped that the meetings would lead to 'reciprocal arrangements' to promote employment, while The Times told readers that 'any impulse to partition was more than counterbalanced by the new provisions as to mutual consultations'.²²² Perhaps most tellingly, Northern Ireland's Ministry of Finance worked on the assumption that the conferences would take place.²²³

What was lacking was both the will and the machinery to make this part of the agreement work. Once the crisis was over, there was little incentive in Dublin, and even less in Belfast, to build on the idea, while there were a good many reasons for walking away from it. Cosgrave saw nothing attractive in an arrangement that might infringe Irish sovereignty, while Craig found it easier to placate extremists by turning down even ceremonial invitations to visit the Free State capital.²²⁴ Even if these hurdles could have been overcome, the mutual suspicion and jealousy between both sides might have been insurmountable. The meetings were supposed to take place

²²¹NI HC Deb, Vol. 6, Col. 1863, 9 December 1925. HC Deb, Vol. 189, Col. 318-319, 8 December 1925. Dáil Deb, Vol. 13, Col. 1313, 7 December 1925.

²²²Ibid, NI HC Deb, Col. 1865-1866. 'Irish Bill. Debate in the Commons', The Times, 9 December 1925.

²²³Quekett to Martin-Jones, 15 March 1926, HO 45/12341/2.

²²⁴Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, p. 487. Fanning, Independent Ireland, p. 92. Mansergh, Unresolved Question, p. 238.

'as and when necessary', fine words so long as Belfast and Dublin agreed on what constituted a matter for joint action. But what if they differed?

What is harder to defend is that the Free Staters allowed the focus of the talks to shift entirely from the effects of partition to the question of Article 5. After the shock of the Boundary Commission report, Cosgrave apparently convinced himself that the Irish would receive similar treatment from the tribunal charged with apportioning Ireland's share of Britain's debt, leaving the Free State crippled by years of payments to the imperial Treasury. To be sure, until the very end Churchill was adamant that the British would not waive Article 5.²²⁵ Yet, the Free Staters had a rough and ready answer to these demands. Simply put, one Irish civil servant wrote in September, 'we have no contribution to give them'.²²⁶ Even Balfour, a man hardly known for his Irish sympathies, recognised that conditions in the Free State were such that 'she could not pay her debts to us' even if Cosgrave and his colleagues wanted to.²²⁷

After the deal was done, it was admitted that the British Treasury could have expected little more than a

²²⁵CA/H/48-2nd and 5th Minutes, 1-2 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

²²⁶John Fitzgerald to Joseph Brennan, 8 September 1925, quoted in Fanning, Irish Department of Finance, p. 163.

²²⁷A.J. to Alice Balfour, 4 December 1925, AJB-S, GD 433/2/76, Reel 8.

'derisory proportion' of anything the Irish might have owed the Treasury.²²⁸ Under the terms of the 1925 agreement, however, Dublin was obliged to pay a set sum of money. Article 5, one Cabinet minister said, 'was like having a sham pearl necklace and being offered a £5 note for it. Naturally we handed over the necklace and took the money.'²²⁹

This, too, was Craig's view. As he told Baldwin during the negotiations: 'You'll never get a bob under clause 5'.²³⁰ In giving such advice, of course, Ulster's leader was working toward his own ends. Once negotiations began to concentrate on Article 5, attention shifted away from the boundary issue and from the plight of Northern Nationalists. For if they and, to a lesser extent, the Free Staters were the big losers in the 1925 agreement, then Ulster Unionists - and especially Craig - were its biggest winners. Craig was certainly pleased with what he had got, knowing that he had given nothing in return. He told his wife that 'in his wildest dreams he had never expected to be able to keep Ulster completely intact, without some give and take'.²³¹

For that he had Churchill to thank. Craig knew as much, telling Churchill that he had 'done the right thing

²²⁸'The Irish Agreement', The Times, 5 December 1925.

²²⁹'The Premier's View', Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 5 December 1925.

²³⁰Jones diary, 29 November 1925, Vol. III, p. 242.

²³¹Lady Craig's diary, 3 December 1925, D.1415/B/38.

in a big way'.²³² Others agreed that the talks had hinged on the chancellor of the exchequer. 'Winston really did all the work', Amery wrote. Tom Jones's assessment was much the same. 'Chamberlain was important at the early and Churchill at the later meetings', he confided in his diary. 'Birkenhead' was 'always big and helpful', Amery and Joynson-Hicks less so.²³³

Salisbury's contribution was almost wholly negative. On at least one occasion, he bolted from the talks rather than be a party to the decisions being reached.²³⁴

By solving the boundary dispute, Churchill may have saved the Conservative Party from another Irish disaster. Ever since Bonar Law's acceptance of the Treaty on becoming prime minister in 1922, successive Conservative governments had been torn between their legal obligations to carry out the settlement and their 'moral obligation' to the Ulster Unionists.²³⁵ These conflicting responsibilities could be ignored so long as the British were able to delay facing up to the boundary question. But when that was no longer possible, doubts over whether

²³²I.A. (25) 11, 3 December 1925, CAB 27/295.

²³³Amery diary, 2-3 December 1925, p. 429. Jones diary, 3 December 1925, Vol. III, p. 245. P.J. Grigg praised Birkenhead's 'balanced and cool judgment'. See Prejudice and Judgment (London, 1948), p. 209.

²³⁴CA/H/48-6th Minutes, 2 December 1925, CAB 27/295. Also, see Ervine, Craigavon, p. 503. Nevertheless, Salisbury was angry that he was not asked to sign the final agreement. See Baldwin to Salisbury, 3 December 1925, S(4) 115/92.

²³⁵Amery was particularly sensitive about this issue. See I.A. (25) 3, 18 November 1925, CAB 27/295.

the Tories would implement the Boundary Commission's award actually made matters worse. Unionists came to believe that if they protested 'loudly enough' no Conservative government would dare face them down. This impression, one civil servant warned, made it certain that the Unionists would 'not merely protest against, but [would] resist' changes to the boundary - with the Specials to back them up.²³⁶

In that case, Lord Beaverbrook outlined what might have happened next: '... the British government would have had to enforce the new boundary against violent Ulster resistance; and 90% of the English Conservatives would have backed Ulster against their own leaders.' Once Fermanagh and Tyrone were handed over to the Free State, Beaverbrook wrote, Baldwin's second 'ministry would have fallen.'²³⁷

However much this was wishful thinking on Beaverbrook's part, the danger was real enough. Speaking in the House of Lords on 9 December, Birkenhead admitted that everyone who had signed the Treaty of 1921 knew 'that in Article 12 there lurked the elements of dynamite.'²³⁸ For over four years this bomb, in the form

²³⁶'Irish Boundary Commission', Whiskard memorandum, ? November 1925, CO 537/1096/50285. British officials considered disarming the Specials prior to the Commission's report, only to discover that they were powerless to do so. See Tallents to Buckland, 10 October 1925, HO 45/12296/80(a).

²³⁷Beaverbrook to Brisbane, 30 November 1925, BBK C/64.

²³⁸HL Deb, Vol. 62, Col. 1232, 9 December 1925.

of the Boundary Commission's award, had threatened to go off in their midst wreaking havoc in British affairs. At long last, the bomb had been defused. As Churchill said after the 1925 agreement was signed, the boundary question 'which has always hung over us', which baffled governments since before the Great War, 'this boundary question is absolutely settled.'²³⁹ The passions and bitterness that Ireland had aroused in the bosom of British politics were gone. Forever.

But Baldwin was taking no chances. The papers on the boundary negotiations were bundled together and put in the care of the ever trustworthy Tom Jones. Before shelving the Irish Question away, for all time he hoped, Jones scrawled a warning to himself and to anyone else who might be tempted to re-open this Pandora's box: 'S.B asked me to keep these papers from his sight', Jones wrote - 'and from everybody else's.'²⁴⁰

²³⁹ 'Irish Peace. A Threefold Agreement', The Times, 4 December 1925.

²⁴⁰ 'Boundary Commission', ? December 1925, TJ GG/4/1.

Conclusion

'The Harvest Gathered In'

We must not expect too much. ... But neither, I think, need we expect to see too little. There very probably are members here in this chamber now who will live in a new Parliament to see the harvest gathered in and who will find at the side of Britain a free and united Ireland.

- Winston Churchill¹

The boundary agreement of 1925 finally answered the Irish Question which had dominated British politics since Gladstone's embrace of Home Rule forty years before.

This was plain to Stanley Baldwin. A few weeks later, he reported that the House of Commons was now able 'to spend many hours discussing Irish affairs in an atmosphere of calm and moderation'. The change, he told George V, 'is a pleasant contrast compared with former times.'²

Even so, it would be no more true to say that Baldwin had 'conjured' the Irish Question out of existence than that Lloyd George had done.³ A changed political scene, rather, allowed the one to succeed where the other had failed. With the election of 1924, Baldwin emerged as the first prime minister since 1910 to command an overwhelming, and loyal, parliamentary majority, something that never could have been said of Lloyd George.

¹HC Deb, Vol. 189, Col. 363, 8 December 1925.

²Baldwin to George V, 23 February 1926, SB Vol. 61, ff. 498-503.

³Taylor, English History, p. 161.

The Irish Question was able to dominate British public life for so long because the country's politics had fractured. This was true not only of the left in British politics, of the struggle between Labour and Liberals and, in the latter case, between the supporters of Asquith and Lloyd George. Until the 1924 election, the cleavage in the Conservative Party was no less a threat to its long-term survival. As Maurice Cowling pointed out, had the Tories split into two parties at the 1922 election, 'almost anything might have happened'.⁴ The difference between 1920 and 1925 was that British politics was again firmly moored to a two-party structure. Only a government with a massive Parliamentary majority of the sort led by Baldwin after 1924 would be impervious to the passions aroused by the Irish Question. This explains his triumph.

No longer was there any question of a revolt within Tory ranks, as had been the case under Austen Chamberlain's stewardship. Once it was clear that Baldwin's government would give its wholehearted support to Craig, the Die-hards were satisfied. Former Coalition Tories, meanwhile, were not about to challenge this consensus. Baldwin was careful to involve all of the party's factions in the last stage of the boundary negotiations - former Coalitionists (Churchill and Birkenhead), Die-hards (Salisbury and Joynson-Hicks), as well as his own allies (Amery) - so that all would be

⁴Cowling, Impact of Labour, p. 419-420.

implicated in the final deal.

At the same time, the government faced no real opposition in or out of Parliament. Labour was ambivalent about Ireland's problems, and after 1924 it did not much matter where the Liberals stood on this question. As for the Free State, even after taking account of the difficulties, not to say dangers, faced by Cosgrave and his colleagues, their often 'indifferent' attitude to the boundary is remarkable.⁵ It, at any rate, stands in marked contrast to the actions of Griffith and Collins, the only two Sinn Féin leaders who prized Ireland's unity as much as its independence. What advantages their successors did possess (e.g., the Council of Ireland) were traded for nothing in return. O'Higgins realised that the boundary crisis left Cosgrave's government 'politically bankrupt'. No longer could they pretend that the Treaty would lead to the thirty-two county state that seemed to be so close in 1921. This disappointment was profound and its consequences would begin to be felt only with time.⁶

Settling the Irish Question had no less an influence on the course of British politics. Lloyd George's handling of Ireland was instrumental in bringing about his own downfall. Many Conservatives, and not just the Die-hards, felt that their long-held suspicions of him

⁵Watt to Spender, 13 April 1923, PRONI, CAB9B/182.

⁶CA/H/48-2nd Minutes, 1 December 1925, CAB 27/295. Fanning, Independent Ireland, p. 91.

were borne out by his negotiations with Sinn Féin. These suspicions served to estrange Coalition Tories, who remained loyal to Lloyd George, from the rest of the party. It took the unexpected defeat of 1923 to convince most Conservatives that unity was essential, thus allowing Baldwin to invite the Chamberlainites back into the party fold. Even then, Ireland was still capable of arousing the bitterest Tory passions, as was all too evident during the summer and autumn of 1924.

At the same time, the 1924 boundary crisis had a direct impact on Labour's first government by forcing the Cabinet to recall Parliament earlier than planned. Although a delay might not have altered the final outcome, it could have allowed MacDonald and his colleagues to better handle the eruption over the Campbell case than they did. Certainly, they could not have handled it any worse. As was shown earlier, the Irish dispute did not figure as an issue in the general election campaign of 1924. But guaranteeing that it played no such role was essential if the Tories were to destroy the Liberal Party once and for all. Only by doing so were they able to achieve their sweeping victory, the outcome of which confirmed that Baldwin would be the dominant politician of the inter-war years, and that the Conservatives and Labour would be the main players in Britain's two-party political system.

So far as the conduct of Irish affairs was concerned, the boundary dispute taught British

politicians, especially those in the Conservative Party, that to delve into those affairs was to play with fire. 'Ireland is a country of surprises', a young Anthony Eden told the House of Commons in 1925. If British men and women wished to bring about Irish unity, the best service they could render 'in the light of history, is to keep silent on this subject.'⁷ To a generation of politicians who came of age during the inter-war years, and who saw what bitter passions the Irish Question so easily aroused, this sounded like exceptionally good advice. They stuck to it, and so did their successors.

When at long last both British and Irish governments found that they could no longer ignore the problems created by partition, they returned to the old answers with a consistent and almost unflinching regularity. The abortive Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 resurrected the Council of Ireland which, like its predecessor, never met. Briefly, Margaret Thatcher even toyed with creating a new Boundary Commission.⁸ Redrawing the Irish frontier was also proposed by Oswald Mosley, still active half a century after he first denounced Lloyd George's Irish policies in the House of Commons.⁹ The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 included provision for joint meetings of the Dublin and Belfast Cabinets which were discussed in 1925 but never put into practice.

⁷HC Deb, Vol. 189, Col. 344, 8 December 1925.

⁸Douglas Hurd to the author, 11 November 1998.

⁹Skidelsky, Mosley, p. 519.

In the wake of the 1925 agreement, Craig could be justifiably proud of his triumph. 'This time', one historian has written, 'the Unionists got all that they wanted'.¹⁰ Of the many players involved in this story, he alone held to the same position throughout and won through in the end. Those parts of the Treaty, and of the 1920 Act, that were meant to fetter his government and to make partition a long-term impossibility were eradicated one by one. Like the Boundary Commission award, the protections guaranteed by proportional representation were swept to one side. The Council of Ireland was abolished.

Most importantly, Craig secured his state financially. After the boundary agreement was reached, he admitted that the province's financial difficulties had posed just as serious a threat to Northern Ireland's existence as the Boundary Commission itself.¹¹ His victory in the battle over parity in social service provision was particularly significant. The British subsidy further differentiated the six counties from the rest of Ireland and thus consolidated partition.

In the end, however, the settlement fashioned between 1920 and 1925 did not resolve the Irish Question so much as sweep the problem to one side. Left unreconciled within the six-county state was 'an

¹⁰Wall, 'Partition', p. 89. But see Follis, State Under Siege, p. 181.

¹¹NI HC Deb, Vol. 7, Col. 17, 9 March 1926.

uncomfortably large Catholic minority'. This minority was not small enough to be absorbed into Northern Ireland's larger community, nor was it large enough to force the Belfast government to deal with it on equal terms. The Boundary Commission's inability to address this issue only made matters worse, leaving behind 'deep scars on the landscape and in the human mind'.¹²

Nor, ultimately, did the settlement give long-term security to Unionists, especially those living in the border counties. One result of the violence that erupted in Northern Ireland after 1969 has been a large-scale demographic shift in the province. By 1995 the Roman Catholic population west of the River Bann had increased by 25 per cent, while Protestants fled to strongholds along the east coast. As a result, by the end of the century many of the areas argued over in front of the Boundary Commission were incontestably Roman Catholic, if not Nationalist, in their make-up.¹³ This was also true of south Armagh, an area which had elected Michael Collins as its first MP to the Northern Ireland Parliament and which remained 'fiercely nationalist' to

¹²Neville, Douglas, and Compton, 'Northern Ireland - Irish Republic Boundary', p. 218.

¹³'Canute of North Down?', The Guardian, 13 June 1995. According to the 1991 census, Catholics made up a majority in such local government districts as Londonderry (73 per cent), Strabane (64 per cent), Omagh (67 per cent), Dungannon (58 per cent), Newry and Mourne (77 per cent), Down (60 per cent), and all of County Fermanagh (57 per cent). In contrast, Protestants made up a majority in such east coast local government districts as Larne (76 per cent), Carrickfergus (92 per cent), and North Down (90 per cent).

the end of the century. Had this area, known to the British military as 'bandit country', been ceded to the Free State in 1925, as many as 200 lives might have been spared during the violence that re-ignited in the late 1960s.¹⁴

But that was down the road.

For most of the twentieth century, the boundary described by Lady Spender in 1923 has survived, a monument to political struggles in both Ireland and Britain from that earlier time. Perhaps the last word on the boundary dispute should be given to Robert Barton, the colleague-turned-foe of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins. Imprisoned in Mountjoy Gaol during the Civil War, Barton heard a rumour that British law advisers were about to declare Article 12 invalid. As one of the Treaty's negotiators, Barton understood better than most that if Article 12 could be undermined so too could the rest of the agreement's Ulster clauses. 'Poor A.G. would turn in his grave', Barton wrote of Griffith. 'He looked upon the Boundary Commission as the grave of Carsonism.'¹⁵

¹⁴B. Cathcart, 'It All Began With a Line on a Map', Independent on Sunday Magazine, 22 May 1994.

¹⁵Barton to 'Adj. General', 24 February 1923, FLK, de Valera Papers, File No. 1296.

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The material below was compiled from biographies, monographs and from successive volumes of

British Political Facts, 1900-67
A Dictionary of Irish History
The Dictionary of National Biography
Who Was Who

ADDISON, Christopher (19 June 1869 - 11 December 1951). English politician. Born: Hogsthorpe, Lincolnshire. Education: Trinity College, Harrogate; St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London. Doctor and distinguished lecturer of anatomy. Political career: MP (Liberal), Hoxton, 1910-22; MP (Labour) for Swindon Division, 1929-31, and in 1934-35; Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, 1914-15; Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-16; Minister of Munitions, 1916-17; Minister of Reconstruction, 1917-19; President of the Local Government Board, 1919; Minister of Health, 1919-1921; Minister without Portfolio, 1921.

AMERY, Leopold Stennett (22 Nov. 1873 - 16 Sept. 1955). British politician. Born: Gorakhpur, India. Education: Harrow; Balliol College, Oxford. Journalist with The Times; barrister, Inner Temple, 1902; served in World War I, 1914-16. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Sparkbrook Division of Birmingham, 1911-45; Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet and Imperial War Cabinet, 1917; staff member of the War Council at Versailles and of the Secretary of State for War, 1917-18; Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies, 1919-21; Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, 1921-22; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1922-24; Colonial Secretary, 1924-29; Dominions Secretary, 1925-29; Secretary of State for India and Burma, 1940-45.

ANDERSON, Sir John (8 July 1882 - 4 Jan. 1958). British civil servant and politician. Born: Midlothian, Scotland. Education: George Watson's College, Edinburgh; Edinburgh and Leipzig universities. Entered the Colonial Office, 1905; Secretary, North Nigeria Lands Committee, 1909; Secretary, West African Currency Committee, 1911; Principal Clerk in the office of Insurance Commissioners, 1912; Secretary to Insurance Commissioners, 1913; Secretary, Ministry of Shipping, 1917-19; additional Secretary to Local Government Board, 1919; Second

Secretary, Ministry of Health, 1919; Chairman of Board of Inland Revenue, 1919-22; Joint Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1920; Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, 1922-32; Governor of Bengal, 1932-1937. Political career: MP (Independent National) for Scottish Universities, 1938-50; Lord Privy Seal, 1938-39; Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, 1939-40; Lord President of the Council, 1940-43; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1943-45. Created 1st Viscount Waverley, 1952.

ANDREWS, John Miller (17 July 1871 - 5 Aug. 1956). Ulster businessman and politician. Born: County Down. Education: Belfast Academical Institute. Political career: member of Down County Council, 1917-37; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Unionist) for County Down, 1921-29, and Mid-Down and Down, 1929-53; Minister of Labour, 1921-1937; Minister of Finance, 1937-40; Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, 1940-43.

ANTROBUS, Maurice Edward (20 July 1895 - 23 Sept. 1985). British civil servant. Education: Winchester; Trinity College, Cambridge. Assistant Principal, Colonial Office, 1920; Private Secretary to the Governor of Ceylon, 1927-30; Principal Dominions Office, 1930; Political Secretary, Office of UK High Commissioner in Union of South Africa, 1935-39; Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office, 1939; Principal Secretary, Office of UK Representative to Eire, 1939-41; Official Secretary, Office of UK High Commissioner in Commonwealth of Australia, 1941-44; Official Secretary, Office of UK High Commissioner in New Zealand, 1944-45; Assistant Secretary, Commonwealth Relations Office, 1945; retired 1955.

ARCHDALE, Edward Mervyn (26 Jan. 1853 - 2 Nov. 1943). Ulster politician. Education: Naval School, Portsmouth. Entered Royal Navy, 1866; Lieutenant, 1875; retired, 1880. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for North Fermanagh, 1898-1903 and 1916-21; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Unionist) for Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1921-29; for Enniskillen Division, 1929-37; Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, 1921-25; Minister of Agriculture, 1925-33.

ASQUITH, Herbert Henry (12 Sept. 1852 - 15 Feb. 1928). British politician. Born: Yorkshire. Education: City of London School; Balliol College, Oxford. Political career: MP (Liberal) for East Fife, 1886-1918; for Paisley, 1920-24; supported Gladstone in the first Home Rule crisis; Home Secretary, 1892-94; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1905-8; succeeded Henry Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Party in 1908; introduced the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912, precipitating the Home Rule Crisis of 1912-14; replaced by Lloyd George as Prime Minister, 1916; lost his seat in

the 1918 general election; returned to Parliament two years later but was again defeated in the November 1924 general election. Created 1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith, 1925.

BALDWIN, Stanley (3 Aug. 1867 - 14 Dec. 1947). British politician. Education: Harrow; Trinity College, Cambridge. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Bewdley Division of Worcestershire, 1908-1937; Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1917-21; President of the Board of Trade, 1921-22; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1922-1923; Prime Minister 1923-24, 1924-29 and 1935-37; Lord Privy Seal, 1932-34; Lord President of the Council, 1931-35. Created 1st Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, 1937.

BALFOUR, Arthur James (25 July 1848 - 19 March 1930). British politician. Born: East Lothian, Scotland; nephew of the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. Education: Eton; Trinity College, Cambridge. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Hertford, 1874-85; for Eastern Division of Manchester, 1885-1906; for City of London, 1906-22; Private Secretary to the Marquess of Salisbury, 1878-80; assisted Lords Salisbury and Beaconsfield at Congress of Berlin, 1878; Privy Councillor, 1885; President of Local Government Board, 1885-86; Secretary for Scotland; Vice-President of Committee of Council on Education for Scotland, 1886-87; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1887-91; Leader of the House of Commons and First Lord of the Treasury, 1891-92; Opposition Leader, 1892-95; First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons 1895-1906; Prime Minister, 1902-5; Opposition Leader 1906-11; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1915-16; Foreign Secretary, 1916-19; Lord President of the Council, 1919-22 and 1925-29; head of the British Mission to America, 1917; led British Mission to Washington Conference, 1921-22. Created 1st Earl of Balfour, 1922.

BARTON, Robert Childers (? 1881 - 10 Aug. 1975). Irish politician. Born: County Wicklow; cousin of Erskine Childers. Education: Rugby; Christ Church, Oxford. Served with British forces in World War I. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for West Wicklow, 1918-22; for Counties Kildare and Wicklow, 1921-23; Minister of Agriculture, 1919-21; Chairman of Wicklow County Council, 1920; Secretary for Economic Affairs, 1921-22; delegate to the Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; voted against the Treaty; joined Irregular forces; captured and imprisoned; retired from politics at the end of the Civil War.

BATES, Richard Dawson (23 Nov. 1876 - 10 June 1949). Ulster politician. Born: Belfast. Qualified as a solicitor. Political career: Vice-President of the Ulster Unionist Council; founder member of the Ulster

Volunteer Force, 1913; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Unionist) for East Belfast and Victoria Division, 1921-29 and 1929-43; Minister for Home Affairs, 1921-43.

BAYFORD, 1st Baron, Robert Arthur Sanders (20 June 1867 - 24 Feb. 1940). British politician. Education: Harrow; Balliol College, Oxford. Barrister, Inner Temple, 1891; Lt.-Colonel, Royal North Devon Hussars, 1911-17; served in Gallipoli, Egypt, and Palestine. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Bridgwater Division, Somerset, 1910-1923; for Wells Division of Somerset, 1924-29; Treasurer of the Household, 1918-19; Junior Lord of the Treasury, 1919; Under-Secretary for War, 1921-22; Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1922-24. Created 1st Baron Bayford of Stoke Trister, 1929.

BEAVERBROOK, 1st Baron, William Maxwell Aitken (25 May 1879 - 9 June 1964). British newspaper owner and politician. Born: Ontario, Canada. Education: Public (Board) School, Newcastle, New Brunswick. Acquired political influence through ownership of newspapers, including the Daily Express and Sunday Express. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Ashton-under-Lyne, 1910-16; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Information, 1918; Minister for Aircraft Production, 1940-41; Minister of State, 1941; Minister of Supply, 1941-42; Lord Privy Seal, 1943-45.

BIRKENHEAD, 1st Earl of, Frederick Edwin Smith (12 July 1872 - 30 Sept. 1930). British politician. Born: Birkenhead. Education: Birkenhead School; Wadham College, Oxford. Barrister. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Walton Division, Liverpool, 1906-19; principal assistant to Sir Edward Carson during the pre-war Home Rule Crisis, earning the nickname 'Galloper Smith'; served with the Indian Corps in France, 1914; Solicitor-General, 1915; Attorney-General, 1915-19; Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, 1919-22; took part in Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; Secretary of State for India, 1924-28. Created 1st Earl of Birkenhead, 1922.

BLACKMORE, Sir Charles Henry (? 1880 - 13 May 1967). Northern Irish civil servant. Formerly Private Secretary to Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Pensions, and Financial Secretary, Admiralty; Secretary to the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland; also Secretary to the Cabinet of Northern Ireland and Clerk of Privy Council of Northern Ireland, 1925-39.

BLYTHE, Ernest (13 April 1889 - 23 Feb. 1975). Irish politician. Born: County Antrim. Education: National School. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for North Monaghan, 1918-21; for County Monaghan, 1921-33; Provisional Government Minister for Trade and Commerce, 1921-22; Irish Free State Minister for Local Government,

1922-23; Minister of Finance, 1923-32; Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, 1927-32; Vice-President of the Executive Council, 1927-32. Member of Seanad Eireann, 1934-36.

BONAR LAW, Andrew (16 Sept. 1858 - 30 Oct. 1923). British politician. Born: New Brunswick, Canada; returned to Scotland after his mother's death where he was raised by relatives. Education: Gilbertfield School, Hamilton and Glasgow High School. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Blackfriars and Hutcheson Division of Glasgow, 1900-6; for Dulwich, 1906-10; for Bootle, 1910-18; for Glasgow Central, 1918-23; Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1902; supported Joseph Chamberlain's campaign for tariff reform and Imperial Preference; elected Conservative Party leader, 1911; vehement opponent of the Third Home Rule Bill, 1912-14; Colonial Secretary, 1915-16; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1916-19; Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, 1919-21; resigned, March 1921; Prime Minister, 1922-23; resigned after he was diagnosed with inoperable throat cancer.

BOURDILLON, Francis Bernard (3 March 1883 - 9 June 1970). British academic. Education: Charterhouse; Balliol College, Oxford. Lecturer in German, University College, Reading, 1908-1914; Modern Languages Lecturer, Balliol College, Oxford, 1913-16; Naval Intelligence Division, 1916-19; assisted the British delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference, 1919; member of the Upper Silesian Commission 1920-22; Secretary to the Irish Boundary Commission, 1924-25; Secretary of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1926-29; worked for the Foreign Office Research Department, 1943-49.

BRIDGEMAN, William Clive (31 Dec. 1864 - 14 Aug. 1935). British politician. Education: Eton; Trinity College, Cambridge. Assistant Private Secretary to Lord Knutsford, Colonial Secretary, 1889-92. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Oswestry Division, Shropshire, 1906-29; Junior Opposition Whip, 1911; a Lord Commissioner of the Treasury, 1915-16; Assistant Director of the War Trade Department, 1916; Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour, 1916; Parliamentary Secretary, Board of Trade, 1919-20; Secretary of Mines, 1920-22; Home Secretary, 1922-24; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1924-29. Created 1st Viscount Bridgeman, 1929.

BROOKE, Basil Stanlake (9 June 1888 - 18 Aug. 1973). Ulster politician. Born: County Fermanagh. Education: Winchester; Sandhurst. Served in World War I, 1914-19; active in the creation of Ulster Special Constabulary, 1920. Political career: MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Unionist) for Lisnaskea Division, 1929-63; Minister of Agriculture, 1933-41; Minister of Commerce, 1941-45; Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, 1943-63. Created 1st

Viscount Brookeborough of Colebrooke, 1952.

CAMERON, General Sir Archibald Rice (28 Aug. 1870 - 18 June 1944). British soldier. Commissioned in the Black Watch, 1890; Captain, 1899; Adjutant, 1900-4; Major, 1908; Lt.-Colonel., 1915; Bt.-Colonel, 1916; Maj.-General, 1921; Lt.-General, 1931; General, 1936; Military Secretary to Governor, Cape of Good Hope, 1904-7; served in the Boer War, 1899-1902; World War I, 1914-17; Director of Staff Duties, War Office, 1925-27; General Officer, Commanding, 4th Division, 1927-31; General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Scottish Command, 1933-37; Governor of Edinburgh Castle, 1936-37.

CARSON, Sir Edward Henry (9 Feb. 1854 - 22 Oct. 1935). Irish politician. Education: Portarlinton School; Trinity College, Dublin. Barrister. Queen's Counsel, Irish Bar, 1889, and English Bar, 1894. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Dublin University, 1892-1918; for Duncairn Division, Belfast, 1918-21; Solicitor-General for Ireland, 1892; Solicitor-General, 1900-6; Ulster Unionist leader, 1911-21; Attorney-General, 1915; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1917; Member of the War Cabinet without Portfolio, 1917-18; Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, 1921-29. Created Baron Carson of Duncairn (life peerage), 1921.

CAVE, George (23 Feb. 1856 - 29 March 1928). British politician. Born: London. Education: St. John's College, Oxford. Barrister, 1880. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Kingston Division of Surrey, 1906-18; Solicitor-General, 1915-16; Home Secretary, 1916-19; Lord Chancellor, 1922-24 and 1924-28. Created Viscount Cave of Richmond, Surrey, 1918.

CECIL, Lord Edgar Algernon Robert (14 Sept. 1864 - 24 Nov. 1958). British politician. Brother of the 4th Marquess of Salisbury and Lord Hugh Cecil. Education: Eton; University College, Oxford. Private secretary to his father, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. Called to the Bar, 1887. Political career: MP (Conservative) for East Marylebone, 1906-10; (Independent Conservative) for Hitchin Division, Hertfordshire, 1911-23; Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1915-16; Minister of Blockade, 1916-18; Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1918; Lord Privy Seal, 1923-24; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1924-27. Created 1st Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, 1923.

CECIL, Lord Hugh Richard Heathcote (14 Oct. 1869 - 10 Dec. 1956). British politician. Brother of the 4th Marquess of Salisbury and Lord Robert Cecil of Chelwood. Education: Eton; University College, Oxford. Private Secretary to his father, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. Lieutenant, Royal Flying Corps, 1915. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Greenwich, 1895-1906; for Oxford

University, 1910-37. Created 1st Baron Quickswood, 1941.

CHAMBERLAIN, Arthur Neville (18 March 1869 - 9 Nov. 1940). British politician. Born: Birmingham; second son of Joseph Chamberlain; half-brother of Austen Chamberlain. Education: Rugby; Mason College, Birmingham. Political career: Birmingham City Council, 1911; Lord Mayor of Birmingham, 1915-16; Director-General of National Service and member of the War Cabinet, 1916-17; MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Ladywood Division of Birmingham, 1918-1929; for Edgbaston Division, 1929-40; Postmaster-General, 1922-23; Paymaster-General, 1923; Minister of Health, 1923, 1924-29, and 1931; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1923-24 and 1931-37; Chairman of the Conservative Party, 1930-31; Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury, 1937-1940; Lord President of the Council, 1940.

CHAMBERLAIN, Sir Joseph Austen (16 Oct. 1863 - 16 March 1937). British politician. Born: Birmingham; eldest son of Joseph Chamberlain; half-brother of Neville Chamberlain. Education: Rugby; Trinity College, Cambridge. Political career: MP (Liberal-, later Conservative-Unionist) for East Worcestershire, 1892-1914; for West Birmingham, 1914-37; Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1895-1900; Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1900-2; Postmaster-General, 1902-3; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1903-5; Secretary of State for India, 1915-17; resigned, 1917; Minister without Portfolio and member of the War Cabinet, 1918-19; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1919-21; Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, 1921-22; leader of the Conservative Party, 1921-22; took part in the Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; Foreign Secretary, 1924-1929; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1931.

CHARTRES, John Smith (5 Oct. 1862 - 14 May 1927). Irish political activist. Born: Birkenhead, England, the son of Irish parents. Education: Wellington College, Berkshire; London University. Admitted to the English Bar, 1908; reference librarian, The Times, 1904-14; economics correspondent, Daily Graphic, 1914-15. Joined the Ministry of Munitions, first as a secretarial assistant in the Intelligence and Record branch, 1915-18, later as Section Director, Labour Intelligence and Statistics Section, 1918. Transferred to the Ministry of Labour, serving as Principal Officer of the Secretariat and General Branch, London, 1918-19; again transferred to the ministry's Irish Department, 1920. Converted to Irish republican cause after meeting Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins; arms purchaser for the IRA in Germany, 1921; appointed joint chief secretary to the Irish Treaty delegation with Erskine Childers, 1921; supported the Treaty; Provisional Government publicity agent in Germany and France, 1921-22; transferred to the Free State's Department of Industry and Commerce, 1922-27.

CHILDERS, Robert Erskine (25 June 1870 - 24 Nov. 1922). Irish Republican politician. Born: London, reared in County Wicklow; cousin of Robert Barton. Education: Haileybury; Trinity College, Cambridge. Clerk of the House of Commons, 1894-1910; served in the British Army in the Boer War and wounded in action, 1899; published best-selling novel, The Riddle in the Sands, 1903; converted to the Home Rule cause, 1908; smuggled arms for Irish Volunteers aboard his yacht, July 1914; served in the Royal Navy Air Services, 1914-19; member of the secretariat of the Irish Convention, 1917-18; converted to republicanism, 1919. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin), Kildare-Wicklow, 1918-22; editor of the Irish Bulletin and Director of Publicity; one of two chief secretaries to the Irish Treaty delegation, 1921; opposed the agreement and joined anti-Treaty IRA; arrested by Provisional Government troops, court-martialled and executed for possession of a revolver.

CHURCHILL, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer (30 Nov. 1874 - 24 Jan. 1965). British politician, soldier, and writer. Born: Blenheim Palace, England. Education: Harrow; Sandhurst. Entered the Army, 1895; served in India and the Sudan; correspondent for the Morning Post in the Boer War, 1899-1900; captured but escaped; joined South African Light Horse; served in World War I as Lt. Colonel, 1916-17. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Oldham, 1900-4; (Liberal) for Oldham, 1904-6; for Northwest Manchester, 1906-8; for Dundee, 1908-18; (Coalition Liberal) for Dundee, 1918-22; (Constitutionalist, then Conservative) for Epping Division of Essex, 1924-45; for Woodford, 1945-64; Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, 1906-8; President of the Board of Trade, 1908-10; Home Secretary, 1910-11; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1911-15; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1915; Minister of Munitions, 1917; Secretary of State for War and Air, 1919-21; Colonial Secretary, 1921-22; took part in Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1924-29; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1939-40; Prime Minister and Defence Minister, 1940-45; Opposition Leader, 1945-51; Prime Minister, 1951-55; Defence Minister, 1951-52.

CLARK, Sir Ernest (13 April 1864 - 26 August 1951). Northern Irish civil servant. Education: privately; King's College, London. Barrister, 1894. Assistant Secretary, Inland Revenue, 1919; Secretary, Royal Commission on Income Tax, 1919-20; Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland, 1920-21; Secretary, Treasury of Northern Ireland, 1921-25; member of the Australian Economic Mission, 1928-29; member of the Joint Exchequer Board of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1930; Governor of Tasmania, 1933-45.

COLLINS, John Henry (3 March 1880 - 12 January 1952). Northern Irish solicitor and nationalist. Born:

County Down. Education: Christian Brothers School, Newry. Solicitor, 1910; senior partner, Collins & Collins; legal adviser to North-East Boundary Bureau for County Down. Political career: MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Nationalist) for South Down, 1929-33.

COLLINS, Michael (16 Oct. 1890 - 22 Aug. 1922). Irish soldier and politician. Education: Lissvaird and Clonakilty National Schools. Emigrated to London where he worked as a bank clerk; joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1909; returned to Ireland to take part in the Easter Rising; interned at Frognoch Prison, Wales, 1916. On his release, Collins set about reorganising the republican movement as Secretary of the Irish National Aid and Irish Volunteer Dependents' Fund, and as Adjutant General of the Irish Volunteers. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for South Cork, 1918-22; MP (Sinn Féin), Northern Ireland Parliament, for County Armagh, 1921-22; Minister of Home Affairs, 1919; Minister of Finance, 1919-21; organised the National Loan; President of the Supreme Council of the IRB, 1919-22; IRA Director of Organisation and of Intelligence, 1919-21; Acting President of Dáil Eireann, 1920; delegate to the Irish Treaty negotiations; led pro-Treaty side in Dáil debates; Chairman of the Provisional Government, 1922; resigned as chairman to become commander-in-chief of the Free State Army, July 1922; killed in action.

COLWYN, 1st Baron, Frederick Henry Smith (24 Jan. 1859 - 26 Jan. 1946). British rubber and cotton manufacturer. Director of Martin's Bank, Ltd. Served on various government committees, notably the Northern Ireland Special Arbitration Committee, which he chaired. Created 1st Baron Colwyn, 1917.

COPE, Sir Alfred William (14 Jan. 1877 - 13 May 1954). British civil servant. Born: London. Entered government service as a boy clerk; joined the detective branch, Customs and Excise, 1896; Second Secretary, Ministry of Pensions, 1919-20, where his administrative skills brought him to the attention of Lloyd George; Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland and Clerk of the Irish Privy Council, 1920-22. Retired from the civil service to become General Secretary, National Liberal Organisation, 1922-24.

COSGRAVE, William Thomas (5 June 1880 - 16 Nov. 1965). Irish politician. Born: Dublin. Education: Christian Brothers Schools. Joined the Irish Volunteers; took part in the Easter Rising, 1916. Political career: member of Dublin Corporation, 1909-22; Alderman, 1920; MP (Sinn Féin) for Kilkenny City, 1917-18; MP/TD for Kilkenny North, 1918-22; (Sinn Féin, later Cumann na nGaedheal) for Counties Carlow and Kilkenny, 1922-27; for Cork, 1927-44; Minister for Local Government, 1919-22; supported the Treaty; member, and later Chairman of the

Provisional Government, 1922; President of Dáil Éireann, September-December 1922; first President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, 1922-32; while President, held portfolio of Minister of Finance, 1922-23, and Minister of Defence, 1924; founded Cumann na nGaedheal Party, 1923; founder-member and joint vice president of Fine Gael Party, 1933; Fine Gael president, 1935-44.

CRAIG, Charles Curtis (19 Feb. 1869 - 28 Jan. 1960). Ulster politician. Brother of Sir James Craig. Education: Clifton College. Served in World War I with the Ulster Division; wounded and taken prisoner, 1916. Political career: MP (Unionist) for South Antrim, 1903-22; for County Antrim, 1922-29; Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions, 1923-24.

CRAIG, Sir James (8 Jan. 1871 - 24 Nov. 1940). Ulster Unionist politician. Born: Strandstown, Belfast. Education: private and Merchiston Castle, Edinburgh. Left school at 17 to work as a stockbroker in Belfast and London. Opened his own stock-brokerage firm and was a founder-member of the Belfast Stock Exchange, 1892; served in the Boer War, 1899-1902; quarter-master general of the 36th (Ulster) Division, World War I, 1914-15. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for East County Down Division, 1906-18; for Mid-Down, 1918-21; Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Pensions, 1919-20; Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, 1920-21, where he worked closely with Walter Long. Craig was Sir Edward Carson's principal lieutenant during the pre-war Home Rule Crisis and was a leading figure in the Ulster Unionist Council and the Orange Order. Succeeded Carson as leader of the Ulster Unionists, Feb. 1921, and became Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister, June 1921, positions he held for the rest of his life. Created 1st Viscount Craigavon, 1927.

CURTIS, Lionel George (7 March 1872 - 24 Nov. 1955). British civil servant. Education: Haileybury; New College, Oxford. Called to the Bar; served in the Boer War; member of Lord Milner's 'Kindergarten' of civil servants; Town Clerk of Johannesburg; Assistant Colonial Secretary to the Transvaal for Local Government; member of the Transvaal Legislative Council; British Secretary to the Irish Treaty Conference, 1921; Colonial Office Adviser on Irish Affairs, 1921-24.

CURZON, George Nathaniel (11 Jan. 1859 - 20 March 1925). British politician. Born: Derbyshire, England. Education: Eton; Balliol College, Oxford. Political career: MP (Conservative) for the Southport Division of Lancashire, 1886-98; Under-Secretary of State for India, 1891-92; Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1892-98; Viceroy of India, 1898-1905; Lord Privy Seal, 1915-16; President of the Air Board, 1916; Lord President

of the Council and member of the War Cabinet, 1916-19; Leader of the House of Lords, 1916-24; Foreign Secretary, 1919-24; broke with the Coalition and joined the Bonar Law government; Lord President of the Council, 1924-25. Created Earl, 1911, later Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 1921.

DAVIDSON, Frances Joan (29 May 1894 - 25 Nov. 1985). British politician. Born: London; wife of J.C.C. Davidson and confidante of Stanley Baldwin. Education: Kensington High School and in Germany. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Hemel Hempsted Division of Hertfordshire, 1937-1959. Created Baroness Northchurch (life peerage), 1963.

DAVIDSON, John Colin Campbell (23 Feb. 1889 - 11 Dec. 1970). British politician. Born: Aberdeen, Scotland. Education: Westminster; Pembroke College, Cambridge. Called to the Bar, 1913. Private Secretary to the Colonial Secretary (Lord Crewe), 1910; to Lord Harcourt, 1910-15; and to Andrew Bonar Law, 1915-16; Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of House of Commons, 1916-20. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Hemel Hempstead Division of Hertfordshire, 1920-1923, and 1924-37; Parliamentary Private Secretary to Bonar Law, 1920-21, to Stanley Baldwin, 1921-22, and to Bonar Law again, 1922-23; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1923-24; Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, 1924-27; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1931-37. Conservative Party Chairman, 1927-30. Confidant of Bonar Law and Baldwin. Created 1st Viscount Davidson of Little Gaddesden, 1937.

DERBY, 17th Earl of, Edward George Villiers Stanley (4 April 1865 - 4 Feb. 1948). British politician. Born: London. Education: Wellington College. Lieutenant, Grenadier Guards, 1885-95; Aide-de-camp to the Governor-General of Canada, 1889-91; served in the Boer War 1899-1901. Political career: MP (Conservative) for West Houghton Division of Lancashire, 1892-1906; a Lord of the Treasury, 1895-1900; Financial Secretary to the War Office, 1900-3; Postmaster-General, 1903-05; Director-General of Recruiting, 1915-16; Under-Secretary for War, 1916; Secretary of State for War, 1916-18 and 1922-24; Ambassador to France, 1918-20.

DE VALERA, Eamon (14 Oct. 1882 - 29 Aug. 1975). Irish politician. Born: New York; reared in County Limerick. Education: Christian Brothers School, County Cork; Blackrock College; University College Dublin. Joined the Gaelic League and, later, the Irish Volunteers; commandant of the 3rd Brigade during the Easter Rising, 1916; captured and imprisoned, 1916-17. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin, later Fianna Fáil) for East Clare, 1917-59; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament,

(Sinn Féin) for County Down, 1921-25 and 1925-29; Sinn Féin President, 1917-26, and head of the Irish Volunteers, 1917-22; imprisoned, 1918, but escaped the following year; elected President of Dáil Eireann, 1919; toured the United States of America, 1919-20; elected 'President of the Irish Republic' by the Dáil, Aug. 1921; opposed the Treaty and resigned as President to joined the anti-Treaty IRA, 1922; imprisoned, 1923-24; founder-president of Fianna Fáil, 1926; formed coalition government with Irish Labour Party, 1932; Free State President and later Taoiseach of Eire, 1932-48, 1951-54, and 1957-59; drafted new Irish Constitution, 1937; President of the Republic of Ireland, 1959-73.

DEVLIN, Joseph (13 Feb. 1871 - 18 Jan. 1934). Northern Irish politician. Born: Belfast. Education: Christian Brothers School, Belfast. Journalist, the Irish News, 1891-93. Political career: MP (Nationalist) for Kilkenny North, 1902-6; for West Belfast, 1906-18; for Falls Division of Belfast, 1918-22; for Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1929-34; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Nationalist) for County Antrim and West Belfast, 1921-25; West Belfast, 1925-29; and Belfast Central, 1929-34.

DEVONSHIRE, 9th Duke of, Victor Christian William Cavendish (31 May 1868 - 6 May 1938). British politician. Education: Eton; Trinity College, Cambridge. Political career: MP (Liberal-Unionist) for Derbyshire West, 1891-1908; Treasurer of His Majesty's Household, 1900-3; Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1903-5; a Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1915-16; Governor-General of Canada, 1916-21; Colonial Secretary, 1922-24.

DUFFY, George Gavan (21 Oct. 1882 - 10 June 1951). Irish politician and lawyer. Education: French schools and Stonyhurst. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin), South Dublin, 1918-23; Sinn Féin representative at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919; envoy to Italy, 1920; delegate, Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; reluctantly recommended Treaty to Dáil Eireann; Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1922; resigned from the Dáil, 1923; High Court judge, 1936; President of the High Court, 1946.

DUGGAN, Eamon (? 1874 - 6 June 1936). Irish politician. Born: County Meath. Education: Dublin schools. Qualified as a solicitor, 1914. Joined the Irish Volunteers; took part in the Easter Rising, 1916; interned, 1916-17; Director of Intelligence, Irish Volunteers, 1918. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for South Meath, 1918-22; TD for Counties Louth and Meath, 1921-23; (Cumann na nGaedheal) for County Meath, 1923-33; captured and again interned, 1920-21; delegate, Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; supported the Treaty; Provisional Government Home Affairs Minister, 1922; Minister without Portfolio, 1922-23; Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Executive Council and

to the Ministry of Defence, 1927-32; member of Seanad Éireann, 1933-36.

DUGGAN, George Chester (? - 15 June 1969). Northern Irish civil servant. Education: The High School, Dublin; Trinity College, Dublin. Entered the civil service, 1908; Admiralty, 1908-10 and 1914-16; Ministry of Shipping, 1917-19; Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle, 1910-14 and 1919-21; Assistant Secretary, Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance, 1922-25; Principal Assistant Secretary, Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance, 1925.

FEETHAM, Richard (22 Nov. 1874 - 5 Nov. 1965). South African jurist. Born: Monmouthshire, Wales. Education: Marlborough; New College, Oxford. Called to the Bar, 1899. Emigrated to South Africa. Deputy Town Clerk, Johannesburg, 1902; Town Clerk, 1903-05; Advocate of the Supreme Court, Transvaal; member the Transvaal Legislative Council, 1907-10; Legal Adviser to the British High Commissioner to South Africa (Lord Selborne), 1907; Member for Parktown in Legislative Assembly, Union of South Africa, 1915-23; Justice of the Supreme Court of South Africa, 1923-30; Chairman of the Irish Boundary Commission, 1924-25; Chairman of the Local Government Commission, Kenya Colony, 1926; Adviser to Shanghai Municipal Council, 1930-31; Judge-President of Natal Provincial Division, 1931-39; later Chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; opposed apartheid.

FISHER, Herbert Albert Laurens (21 March 1865 - 18 April 1940). British politician and historian. Born: London. Education: Winchester; New College, Oxford. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Hallam Division of Sheffield, 1916-18; (National Liberal) for English Universities, 1918-26; President of the Board of Education, 1916-22; British delegate to the League of Nations Assembly, 1920-22.

FISHER, Joseph R. (? 1855 - 26 Oct. 1939). Ulster journalist. Born: County Down. Education: Royal Belfast Academical Institute; Queen's University, Belfast. Foreign editor, the Daily Chronicle, 1881; assistant editor, The Standard, 1883-91; editor and managing editor of the Northern Whig, 1891-1913; Northern Ireland's representative on the Boundary Commission, 1924-25.

FISHER, Sir Norman Fenwick Warren (22 Sept. 1879 - 25 Sept. 1948). British civil servant. Born: London. Education: Winchester; Hertford College, Oxford. Clerk, Secretaries Office of the Board of Inland Revenue, 1903; Private Secretary to the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, 1908; Special Commissioner of Income Tax, 1910; seconded to the National Health Insurance Commission, 1912-13; Deputy Chairman, 1914-18, and Chairman, 1918-19,

of the Board of Inland Revenue; Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service, 1919-39; Regional Commissioner for the north-western civil defence region, 1939-40; Special Commissioner for London, 1940-42.

FITZGERALD, Desmond (? 1889 - 9 April 1947). Irish politician. Participated in Easter Rising, 1916. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for Pembroke Division, Dublin, 1918-22; Dáil Eireann Director of Publicity and editor of The Irish Bulletin; Provisional Government Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sept.-Dec. 1922; Irish Free State Minister of External Affairs, 1922-27; Minister of Defence, 1927-32; member of Seanad Eireann, 1938-47.

FREESTON, Sir Leslie Brian (11 Aug. 1892 - 16 July 1958). British civil servant. Education: Willaston School; New College, Oxford. Served in World War I, 1914-19. Joined the Colonial Office, 1919; Secretary, Colonial Development Advisory Committee, 1929-31; Secretary, East African Governors' Conference, 1936; Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office, 1938; Chief Secretary, Tanganyika, 1939-43; Governor, Leeward Islands, 1944-48; Governor of Fiji, and High Commissioner to the Western Pacific, 1948-52; Secretary-General, South Pacific Commission, 1951-54.

FRENCH, John Denton Pinkstone (28 Sept. 1852 - 22 May 1925). British soldier. Born: Ripple, Kent. Education: Eastman's Naval Academy, Portsmouth; left the Navy to join the Suffolk Artillery Militia, 1870; served in the Sudan, 1884-85, and in the Boer War, 1899-1902; Inspector-General of the Forces, 1907-11; Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1911-14; Field-Marshal, 1913; Commander-in-Chief, British Expeditionary Force, 1914-15; created Viscount French of Ypres and of High Lake, Jan. 1916; Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, 1916-18; Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, May 1918 - April 1921; created Earl of Ypres, 1922.

GREENWOOD, Sir Hamar (7 Feb. 1870 - 10 Sept. 1948). British politician. Born: Ontario, Canada. Education: Public School, Whitby, Canada. Served in World War I, 1914-16. Political career: MP (Liberal) for York, 1906-10; for Sunderland, 1910-22; (Conservative) for East Walthamstow, 1924-29; Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 1919; Secretary for Overseas Trade, 1919-20; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1920-22. Created 1st Baron Greenwood of Holbourne, 1937.

GREER, Sir Francis Nugent (24 Feb. 1869 - 6 Feb. 1925). British civil servant. Education: Trinity College, Dublin. Called to the Bar: Ireland, 1893; England, 1912. Parliamentary Draftsman, Irish Office, 1908-23; Parliamentary Counsel to the Treasury, 1923-25.

GREY, Sir Edward (25 April 1862 - 7 Sept. 1933). British politician and diplomat. Education: Winchester; Balliol College, Oxford. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Berwick-on-Tweed, 1885-1916; Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1892-95; Foreign Secretary, 1905-16; Temporary Ambassador to the USA, 1919. Created 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, 1916.

GRIFFITH, ARTHUR (31 March 1871 - 12 Aug. 1922). Irish politician and journalist. Born: Dublin. Education: Christian Brothers School, Dublin. Apprentice printer. A founder-member of the Celtic Literary Society, Griffith also belonged to the Gaelic League and, for a time, was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Left Ireland for South Africa, where he supported the Boer cause in the South African War; returned to Ireland to edit the United Irishman; published The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland, advocating a dual monarchy for Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, 1904; founded Sinn Féin, 1907; opposed the Third Home Rule Bill, 1912-14; joined the Irish Volunteers, 1913; imprisoned, 1916-17; stood aside to allow Eamon de Valera to become Sinn Féin president, 1917. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for East Cavan, 1917-22; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Sinn Féin) for Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1921-22; Minister of Home Affairs and Acting President of Dáil Eireann, 1919-20; re-arrested, Dec. 1920 - July 1921; accompanied de Valera to first Anglo-Irish talks, July 1921; led Irish delegation in Treaty negotiations, 1921; elected President of Dáil Eireann, Jan. 1922.

GRIGG, Edward William Macleay (8 Sept. 1879 - 1 Dec. 1955). British politician and political adviser. Education: Winchester; New College, Oxford. Joined the editorial staff of The Times, 1903; served in World War I; military secretary to the Prince of Wales, 1919; private secretary to Lloyd George, 1921-22; Governor, Kenya Colony, 1925-31. Political career: MP (National Liberal) for Oldham, 1922-25; (National Conservative) for Altrincham, 1933-45; Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Information, 1939-40; Financial Secretary, War Office, 1940; Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for War, 1940-42; Minister Resident in the Middle East, 1944-45. Created 1st Baron Altrincham, 1945.

GRIGG, Sir Percy James (16 Dec. 1890 - 5 May 1964). British civil servant. Born: Exmouth, England. Education: Bournemouth School; St. John's College, Cambridge. Joined the Treasury, 1913; Principal Private Secretary to successive Chancellors of the Exchequer, 1921-30; Chairman, Board of Customs and Excise, 1930; Chairman, Board of Inland Revenue, 1930-34; Finance Member of Government of India, 1934-39; Permanent Under-Secretary of State, for War, 1939-42. Political career:

MP (National) for East Cardiff, 1942-45; Secretary of State for War, 1942-45.

HAWTREY, Sir Ralph George (23 Nov. 1879 - 21 March 1975). British civil servant. Education: Eton; Trinity College, Cambridge. Entered the Admiralty civil service, 1903; Treasury, 1904-45; Director of Financial Enquiries, 1919-45.

HEALY, Cahir (2 Dec. 1877 - 8 Feb. 1970). Northern Irish politician. Born: County Donegal. Political career: MP (Sinn Féin) for Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1922-24; (Nationalist) for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, 1924-31 and 1950-55; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Nationalist) for Fermanagh and Tyrone, 1925-65. Interned, 1922-24 and 1941-42.

HEALY, Timothy Michael (17 May 1855 - 26 March 1931). Irish politician. Born: County Cork; uncle of Kevin O'Higgins. Education: Christian Brothers School, Fermoy. Emigrated to England; parliamentary correspondent for The Nation, 1878-80; called to the Irish Bar, 1884. Political career: MP (Nationalist), Wexford, 1880-83; South Londonderry, 1885-86; North Longford, 1886-92; North Louth, 1892-1910; and North-East Cork, 1910-18; played a leading role in toppling Charles Stewart Parnell and splitting the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-91; rejoined the IPP, 1900; sympathized with Sinn Féin and stood down in 1918 general election; selected as first Governor-General of the Irish Free State, 1922-28.

HENDERSON, Arthur (13 Sept. 1863 - 20 Oct. 1935). British trade union leader and politician. Born: Glasgow. Political career: MP (Labour) for Barnard Castle Division, Durham, 1903-18; Widnes, 1919-22; for Newcastle, 1923; for Burnley, 1924-31; for Clay Cross Division, 1933-35; chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party 1908-10 and 1914-17; Labour Party Chief Whip, 1914, 1921-24, and 1925-27; Paymaster-General and government labour adviser, 1916; Minister without Portfolio and member of the War Cabinet, 1916-17; member of the British Mission to Russia, 1917; Home Secretary in the first Labour Government, 1924; Foreign Secretary, 1929-31; President of the World Disarmament Conference, 1932-33.

HEWART, Gordon (7 Jan. 1870 - 5 May 1943). British politician and jurist. Born: Bury, England. Education: Manchester Grammar School; University College, Oxford. Called to the Bar, Inner Temple, 1902. Political career: MP (Conservative) for East Leicester, 1913-22; Solicitor-General, 1916-19; Attorney-General, 1919-22; attended Versailles Peace Conference, 1919; took part in the Irish Treaty negotiations, 1921; Lord Chief Justice of England, 1922-40. Created 1st Viscount Hewart of Bury in County Lancaster, 1940.

HOARE, Sir Samuel John Gurney (24 Feb. 1880 - 7 May 1959). British politician. Born: London. Education: Harrow; New College, Oxford. Assistant Private Secretary to the Colonial Secretary, 1905. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Chelsea, 1910-44; Secretary of State for Air, 1922-24 and 1924-29, with a seat in the Cabinet, 1923-24 and 1924-29; Conservative Party Treasurer, 1930-31; Secretary of State for India, 1931-35; Foreign Secretary, 1935; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1936-37; Home Secretary, 1937-39; Lord Privy Seal, 1939-40; Secretary of State for Air, 1940; Ambassador to Spain on Special Mission, 1940-44. Created 1st Viscount Templewood, 1944.

HORNE, Sir Robert Stevenson (28 Feb. 1871 - 3 Sept. 1940). Born: Stirlingshire, Scotland. Education: George Watson's College, Edinburgh; University of Glasgow. Called to the Scottish Bar, 1896. Assistant Inspector-General of Transportation, 1917; Director of Department of Materials and Priority, Admiralty, 1917; Director of Admiralty Labour Department, 1918; Third Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1918. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) Hillhead Division of Glasgow, 1918-37; Minister of Labour, 1919-20; President of the Board of Trade, 1920-21; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1921-22. Created 1st Viscount Horne of Slamannan, 1937.

JONES, Thomas (27 Sept. 1870 - 15 Oct. 1955). British civil servant. Born: Monmouthshire, Wales. Education: Pengam County School; University College, Aberystwyth; Glasgow University. Career: Barrington Lecturer in Ireland, 1904-5; Assistant to Professor of Political Economy and Lecturer in Economics, Glasgow University; Special Investigator, Poor Law Commission, 1906-9; Professor of Economics, Queen's University, Belfast, 1909-10; Secretary Welsh National Campaign against Tuberculosis, 1910-11; Secretary, National Health Insurance Commissioners (Wales), 1912-16; Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, 1916-30. Secretary, later chairman of the Pilgrim Trust, 1930-45.

JOHNSON, Thomas (? 1872- 17 Jan. 1963). Irish trade unionist and politician. Born: Liverpool; left school at the age of 12; immigrated to Ireland, 1892; founder-member of the Irish Labour Party, 1912; Vice-Chairman of the party's executive, 1912-23; agreed to the Labour Party's abstention from the general election of 1918 to avoid splitting Nationalist vote; co-authored the Democratic Programme adopted by the first Dáil Eireann. Political career: TD (Labour) for County Dublin, 1922-28; Opposition Leader, 1922-27; resigned as Labour Party Secretary, 1928; represented Labour in Seanad Eireann, 1928-36; founder-member of the Labour Court, 1946.

JOYNSON-HICKS, Sir William (23 June 1865 - 8 June 1932). British politician. Born: Canonbury, England;

known as 'Jix'. Trained as a solicitor. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Manchester North-West, 1908-10; for Brentford, 1911-18; for Twickenham, 1918-29. Parliamentary Secretary to the Overseas Trade Department, 1922-23; Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1923-24; Health Secretary, 1923; Home Secretary, 1924-29. Created Viscount Brentford of Newick in Sussex, 1929.

KENNEDY, Hugh (11 July 1879 - 12 Dec. 1936). Irish jurist. Born: Dublin. Education: private; University College, Dublin; Royal University of Ireland. Called to the Irish Bar, 1902. Member of the committee which drafted the Irish Free State Constitution, 1922; Law Officer of the Irish Provisional Government, 1922; Attorney-General, 1922-24. Political career: TD (Cumann na nGaedheal) for Dublin City South, 1923-1924; member of the Free State delegation to the League of Nations, 1923.

LASKI, Harold J. (30 June 1893 - 24 March 1950). British academic and political philosopher. Born: Manchester. Education: Manchester Grammar School; New College, Oxford. Professor of Political Science; assisted in framing the Irish Treaty's Oath of Allegiance.

LAVERY, Lady Hazel (14 March 1880 - 3 Jan. 1935). Born: Chicago, Illinois. Society hostess and confidante of British and Irish politicians. Married Irish artist Sir John Lavery, 1910.

LIDDELL, Sir Frederick Francis (7 June 1865 - 19 March 1950). British civil servant. Born: Oxford. Education: Eton; Christ Church Oxford. Private Secretary to Lord Stanmore, Governor of Ceylon, 1888-90; Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, 1891-1906; called to the Bar, 1894; 1st Parliamentary Counsel, 1917-1928; Counsel to the Speaker, 1928-43.

LLOYD GEORGE, David (17 Jan. 1863 - 26 March 1945). British politician. Born: Manchester; reared in Llanystumdwy, Wales. Education: Llanystumdwy Church School and privately. Solicitor. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Caernarvon Boroughs, 1890-1931; (Independent Liberal) for Caernarvon Boroughs, 1931-45; President of the Board of Trade, 1905-8; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1908-15; Minister of Munitions, 1915-16; unsuccessfully attempted to broker an Irish settlement, 1916; Secretary of State for War, 1916; Prime Minister, 1916-22. Created 1st Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor, 1945.

LONDONDERRY, 7th Marquess of, Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart (13 May 1878 - 11 Feb, 1949). Ulster politician. Cousin of Winston Churchill. Education: Eton; Sandhurst. Served in World War I, 1914-15. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Maidstone, 1906-15; Under-Secretary for Air, 1920-1921;

First Commissioner of Works, 1928-29 and 1931; Secretary of State for Air, 1931-35; Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords, 1935. Political career, Northern Ireland: (Unionist) Minister of Education and Leader of the Senate, 1921-26.

LONG, Walter Hume (13 July 1854 - 26 Sept. 1924). British politician. Born: Bath. Education: Harrow; Christ Church, Oxford (did not take a degree). Political career: MP (Conservative), North Wiltshire, 1880-85; for East Wiltshire, 1885-92; for the Derby Division of Liverpool, 1893-1900; for the Southern Division of Bristol, 1900-06; for South County Dublin, 1906-10; for the Strand Division of London, 1910-18; for St. George's, 1918-21; Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board, 1886-1905; President of the Board of Agriculture, 1895-1900; Chief Secretary of Ireland, March 1905; Irish Unionist leader, 1906-11; founded the Union Defence League to oppose Home Rule, 1907; unsuccessfully stood for the Conservative Party leadership, 1911; opposed Third Home Rule Bill, 1912-14; President of the Local Government Board, 1915-16; Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1916-19; opposed Lloyd George's Irish settlement, 1916; chaired Irish Situation Committee, 1918; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1919-21; chaired committee charged with framing the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, 1919-20. Created 1st Viscount Long of Wraxall, 1921.

LOUGHNANE, Norman Gerald (4 April 1883 - 19 March 1955). British civil servant. Education: London University. Career: Barrister; Colonial Office representative in the Irish Free State, 1923-24; member of the Financial Commission of Enquiry, Mauritius, 1931; member of the British Food Mission in North America, 1943.

MACDONALD, James Ramsay (12 Oct. 1866 - 9 Nov. 1937). British politician. Born: Morayshire, Scotland. Education: Board School. Secretary, Labour Representation Committee, 1900-12; chairman of the Independent Labour Party, 1906-9; Labour Party leader, 1911-14. Political career: MP (Labour) for Leicester, 1906-18; for Aberavon Division of Glamorganshire, 1922-29; for Seaham Division, County Durham, 1929-31; (National Labour) for Seaham Division, County Durham, 1931-35; for Scottish Universities, 1936-37; Labour Party and Opposition Leader, 1922-24; first Labour Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, 1924; Prime Minister, 1929-35; split the Labour Party with the formation of the National Government, 1931; Lord President of the Council, 1935-37.

MACLEAN, Donald (? 1864 - 15 June 1932). British politician. Born: Tiree. Solicitor. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Bath, 1906-10; for counties Peebles and

Selkirk, 1910-18; for counties Peebles and Midlothian, 1918-22; represented Northern Division of Cornwall, 1929-31; Deputy Chairman of Committees, 1911-18; knighted, 1917; led anti-Coalition Liberal MPs following the 1918 general election, until Asquith's return in 1920; joined the National Government as President of the Board of Education, 1931.

MACMAHON, James (20 April 1865 - 1 May 1954). Irish civil servant. Born: Belfast. Education: Christian Brothers School, Armagh; St. Patrick's College, Armagh; Blackrock College, County Dublin. Career: Assistant Secretary, Irish Post Office, 1913; Secretary to the Post Office of Ireland, 1916; Under-secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, 1918-1922.

MACNEILL, Eoin [John] (15 May 1867 - 15 Oct. 1945). Irish politician and historian. Born: County Antrim; brother of James MacNeill. Education: St Malachy's College, Belfast. Founder-member and first vice president of the Gaelic League, 1893; appointed first Professor of Early and Medieval Irish History, University College Dublin, 1908; supported Third Home Rule Bill, 1912-14; founder-member and Chief of Staff of the Irish Volunteers, 1913-16; imprisoned, 1916-17. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin, later Cumann na nGaedheal) for Derry and the National University of Ireland, 1918-27; MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Sinn Féin) for Derry, 1921-25; Minister of Finance, 1919; Minister for Industries, 1919-21; supported the Treaty; Minister without Portfolio in the Provisional Government, 1922; Minister of Education, 1922-25; led Irish delegation at the League of Nations, 1923; Free State representative to the Boundary Commission, 1923-25; resignation from the Commission and from the government effectively ending his political career. Headed the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1927; first president of Irish Historical Studies, 1936.

MACNEILL, James (27 March 1869 - 12 Dec. 1938). Irish diplomat. Born: County Antrim; brother of Eoin MacNeill. Education: Belvedere School; Blackrock College, Dublin; Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Entered the Indian Civil Service, 1890; immigration investigator to the West Indies and Fiji; Chairman of Dublin County Council, 1922; member of the committee which drafted the Irish Free State Constitution, 1922; Free State High Commissioner, 1922-28; Free State Governor-General, 1928-32.

MACREADY, General Sir Cecil Frederick Nevil (7 May 1862 - 9 Jan. 1946). British soldier. Born: Aberdeen, Scotland. Education: Marlborough; Cheltenham. Commissioned, 1881; served in the Boer War, 1900; promoted to general, 1918; Commission of the Metropolitan Police, 1919-20; General Officer Commanding of British

forces in Ireland, 1920-22; retired from active service, 1923.

MASTERTON-SMITH, Sir James (24 Aug. 1878 - 4 May 1938). British civil servant. Education: Harrow (Scholar); Hertford College, Oxford (Scholar). Entered Home Civil Service, Admiralty, 1901; Private Secretary to Second Sea Lord, 1904-8, to the Permanent Secretary, 1908-10, and to successive First Lords of the Admiralty, 1910-17; Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Munitions, 1917-1919; Assistant Secretary (Additional), War Office and Air Ministry, 1919-20 ; Joint Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour, 1920-21; Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1921-24.

MAXWELL, Sir Alexander (9 March 1880 - 1 July 1963). British civil servant. Born: Plymouth, England. Education: Plymouth College; Christ Church, Oxford. Joined the Home Office, 1904; Assistant Secretary, 1924; Chairman of the Prison Commission of England and Wales, 1928-32; Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, 1932-38 ;Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, 1938-48.

McGILLIGAN, Patrick (? 1889 - 15 Nov. 1979). Irish politician. Born: County Londonderry. Education: St. Columb's College, Derry City; Clongowes Wood College, Dublin; University College, Dublin. Called to the Bar, 1921, and to the Inner Bar, 1946. Political career: secretary to Kevin O'Higgins, 1919-23; TD (Cumann na nGaedheal, later Fine Gael), National University, 1923-37; Dublin North-West, 1937-48; and Dublin Central, 1948-51; Minister for Industry and Commerce, 1924-32; member of the Free State delegation that agreed the tripartite agreement ending the Boundary Commission crisis, Dec. 1925; Minister of External Affairs, 1927-32; Minister for Finance, 1948-51, and Attorney General, 1954-57.

MONTAGU, Edwin Samuel (6 Feb. 1879 - 15 Nov. 1924). British politician. Education: City of London School; Trinity College, Cambridge. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Chesterton, 1906-18; (Coalition Liberal) for Cambridgeshire, 1918-22; Parliamentary Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1906-08; Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, India Office, 1910-14; Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1914-1915 and again in 1916; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1915; Minister of Munitions and member of the War Committee, 1916; Secretary of State for India, 1917-22.

MOSLEY, Oswald Ernald (16 Nov. 1896 - 3 Dec. 1980). British politician. Son-in-law of Lord Curzon. Education: Winchester; Sandhurst. Served in World War I. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Harrow Division of Middlesex, 1918-22; (Independent) for Harrow Division of Middlesex, 1922-24; (Labour) for Harrow

Division of Middlesex, 1924; for Smethwick, 1926-31; Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster, 1929-30. Founded British Union of Fascists 1932.

MULCAHY, General Richard James (10 May 1886 - 16 Dec. 1971). Irish soldier and politician. Born: Waterford. Education: Christian Brothers School, Thurles. Joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood and, in 1913, the Irish Volunteers; took part in the Easter Rising, 1916; imprisoned, 1916-17; Chief of Staff, Irish Republican Army, 1918-21. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for Clontarf, 1918-23; (Cumann na nGaedheal, later Fine Gael) for Dublin City North and other Dublin constituencies, 1923-43; for South Tipperary, 1944-61; acting Minister for Defence, 1919; supported the Treaty; Provisional Government Minister of Defence, 1922; Chief of Staff, Free State Army, 1922; succeeded Collins as army Commander-in-Chief, 1922-23; Minister of Defence, Irish Free State, 1922-24; resigned over the government's handling of the Army Mutiny. Returned to office as Minister for Local Government, 1927-32. Founder-member of Fine Gael; succeeded William Cosgrave as party leader, 1944-59; Minister of Education, 1948-51 and 1954-57.

NIEMEYER, Sir Otto Ernst (23 Nov. 1883 - 6 Feb. 1971). British civil servant and banker. Born: London. Education: St Paul's School; Balliol College, Oxford. Entered the Treasury civil service, 1906-27; Controller of Finance, 1922-27. Later served on numerous financial missions for the British government to Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, India, and China.

O'BRIEN William (2 Oct. 1852 - ? 1928). Irish politician, journalist and land agitator. Born: County Cork. Education: Cloyne Diocesan School; Queen's College, Cork. Political career: MP (Nationalist) for Mallow, 1883; for North-East Cork, 1887; for Cork City, 1892-1909 and 1910-18. Broke with Parnell, 1891; was a moving force in the re-unification of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1900. Opposed Third Home Rule Bill, 1912-14; retired from politics, 1918.

O'BYRNE, John (24 April 1884 - 14 Jan. 1954). Irish jurist. Born: County Wicklow. Education: Patrician Monastery, Tullow, County Carlow; University College, Dublin; Royal University of Ireland. Called to the Irish Bar, 1911; member of the committee that drafted the Irish Free State Constitution, 1923; member of the Judiciary Committee, 1923; Delegate to the League of Nations, 1924; Attorney-General, 1924-26; Judge of the High Court of Justice, 1926-40; Judge of the Supreme Court of Justice, 1940-54.

O'HIGGINS, Kevin Christopher (7 June 1892 - 10 July 1927). Irish politician. Born: Queen's County (Laois); nephew of Timothy Healy. Education: Clongowes Wood

College, Maynooth (expelled); University College, Dublin. Called to the Bar, 1923. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for Laois-Offaly, 1918-22; for various Dublin constituencies, 1922-27; Assistant Minister for Local Government, 1919-22; Provisional Government Minister for Economic Affairs, 1922; played a leading role in drafting the Irish Free State Constitution, 1922; Free State Minister of Home Affairs, 1922-27; Minister of Justice, 1924-27; later Minister of External Affairs and Vice President of the Executive Council; assassinated by Republican gunmen.

O'SHIEL, Kevin (? 1891 - ? 1970). Irish Nationalist political organiser and lawyer. Born: Omagh, County Tyrone. Career: called to the Irish Bar, 1915; Sinn Féin leader in Ulster, 1916-19; Republican Court Judge, 1919-22; Secretary, North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, 1922-23; Land Commissioner, 1923-63.

PEEL, 2nd Viscount, William Robert Wellesley (7 Jan. 1867 - 28 Sept. 1937). British politician. Education: Harrow; Balliol College, Oxford. Called to the bar, Inner Temple, 1893. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Southern Division of Manchester, 1900-06; and for Taunton, 1909-12; Chairman, London County Council, 1914; Chairman of the Committee on the Detention of Neutral Vessels, 1916; Joint Parliamentary Secretary to National Service Department, 1917; Under-Secretary of State for War, 1919-21; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Transport, 1921-22; Secretary of State for India, 1922-24 and 1928-29; First Commissioner of Works, 1924-28; Lord Privy Seal, 1931; member of the Indian Round Table Conference, 1930-31; Chairman, Burma Round Table Conference, 1931-32; Chairman, Palestine Royal Commission, 1936-37. Created Earl Peel, 1929.

PIERCY, William (7 Feb. 1886 - 7 July 1966). British businessman and financier. Secretary to the Colwyn Committee, 1923-4; Director of the Bank of England, 1946-56. Created 1st Baron Piercy of Burford, 1945.

POLLOCK, Hugh McDowell (16 Nov. 1852 - 15 April 1937). Ulster politician. Born: County Down. Education: Bangor Endowed School. Chairman, Belfast Chamber of Commerce. Political career: represented Belfast Chamber of Commerce at the Irish Convention, 1917-18. Political career: MP, Northern Ireland Parliament, (Unionist) for South Belfast, 1921-29; for Windsor, 1929-37; Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, 1921-37.

RIDDELL, George Allardice (25 May 1865 - 5 Dec. 1934). British journalist and newspaper proprietor. Confidant of David Lloyd George. Chairman, News of the World, Ltd.; represented British press at the Paris Peace

Conferences, 1919-22 and at Washington Conference on Disarmament, 1921-22. Created 1st Baron Riddell, 1920.

SALISBURY, 4th Marquess of, James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil (23 Oct. 1861 - 4 April 1947). British politician. Born: London; elder brother of Robert and Hugh Cecil. Education: Eton; University College, Oxford. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Darwen Division, 1885-92; Rochester, 1893-1903; Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1900-3; Lord Privy Seal, 1903-5; President of the Board of Trade, 1905; Lord President of the Council, 1922-24; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1922-23; Lord Privy Seal, 1924-29; Leader of the House of Lords, 1925-29.

SCOTT, Charles Prestwich (26 Oct. 1846 - 1 Jan. 1932). British journalist. Education: private; Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Editor, the Manchester Guardian, 1872-1929. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Leigh Division, Lancashire, 1895-1906; long-time confidant of David Lloyd George.

SELBORNE, 2nd Earl of, William Waldegrave Palmer (17 Oct. 1859 - 26 Feb. 1942). British politician. Brother-in-law of the 4th Marquess of Salisbury and Lords Robert and Hugh Cecil. Education: Winchester; University College, Oxford. Assistant Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for War and Chancellor of Exchequer, 1882-1885. Political career: MP (Liberal) for East Hampshire, 1885-86; (Liberal Unionist) for East Hampshire, 1886-92; for West Edinburgh, 1892-95; Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1895-1900; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1900-05; Governor of Transvaal and High Commissioner for South Africa, 1905-10; President of the Board of Agriculture, 1915-16.

SIMON, Sir John Allsebrook (28 Feb. 1873 - 11 Jan. 1954). British politician. Education: Fettes College, Edinburgh; Wadham College, Oxford. Barrister. Political career: MP (Liberal) for Walthamstow Division, Essex, 1906-18; for Spenn Valley Division of Yorkshire, 1922-31; (Liberal National) for Spenn Valley, 1931-40; Solicitor-General, 1910-13; Attorney-General with a seat in Cabinet, 1913-15; Home Secretary, 1915-16; Foreign Secretary, 1931-35; Home Secretary and Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, 1935-37; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1937-40; Leader of the Liberal National Party; Lord Chancellor, 1940-45. Created 1st Viscount Simon of Stackpole Elidor, 1940.

SNOWDEN, Philip (18 July 1864 - 15 May 1937). British politician. Born: Yorkshire. Education: Board School. Civil servant, 1886-93; journalist and lecturer. Political career: chairman of the Independent Labour Party, 1903-6 and 1917-20; MP (Labour) for Blackburn, 1906-18; for Colne Valley Division of Yorkshire, 1922-31;

first Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1924 and 1929-31; Lord Privy Seal, 1931-32. Created 1st Viscount Snowden of Ickornshaw, 1931.

SPENDER, Lilian, née Dean (? 1880 - ? 1968). Ulster Unionist supporter and diarist. Born: London. Education: Reading Agricultural College. Married Wilfrid Spender, 1913.

SPENDER, Sir Wilfrid Bliss (6 Oct. 1876 - 21 Dec. 1960). Northern Irish civil servant. Education: Winchester College; Staff College, Camberley. Career: Joined the Royal Artillery, 1897; resigned over the Ulster Question, 1913; founder-member of the Ulster Volunteer Force, 1913; served in the Ulster Division during World War I; re-established and commanded the Ulster Volunteer Force, 1919; first Secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet, 1921-25; Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, and Head of Northern Ireland's Civil Service, 1925-44; member of the Joint Exchequer Board, 1933-54.

STACK, Austin (? 1880 - 29 April 1929). Irish politician. Born: County Kerry. Founder-member of the Irish Volunteers in County Kerry, 1913; arrested and imprisoned at the outbreak of the Easter Rising, 1916-17. Political career: MP/TD (Sinn Féin) for West Kerry, 1918-21; TD for County Kerry and West Limerick, 1921-23; Deputy Minister for Home Affairs, 1919-21; Minister of Home Affairs, 1921-22.

STEEL-MAITLAND, Sir Arthur Herbert Drummond Ramsay (5 July 1876 - 3 March 1935). British politician. Education: Rugby; Balliol College, Oxford. Political career: MP (Conservative) for East Birmingham, 1910-18; for Erdington, 1918-29; for Tamworth Division of Warwickshire, 1929-35; Conservative Party chairman, 1911; Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies, 1915-17; Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Foreign Office and Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade in his capacity as Head of the Department of Overseas Trade (Development and Intelligence) 1917-19; Minister of Labour, 1924-29.

STEPHENS, Edward Millington (? November 1888 - ? 1955). Irish civil servant. Born: Dublin. Career: secretary to the committee that drafted the Irish Free State Constitution, 1922; Secretary, North-Eastern Boundary Bureau, 1923-26; later Assistant Registrar to the Supreme Court and Registrar of the Court of Criminal Appeal; nephew and biographer of Irish playwright, J.M. Synge.

STEVENSON, Frances (7 Oct. 1888 - 5 Dec. 1972). British Cabinet secretary. Born: Worthing, England. Education: London University. Private secretary to David

Lloyd George, 1912-43. Married Lloyd George, 1943.

STRACHEY, John St Loe (9 Feb. 1860 - 26 Aug. 1927). British journalist and barrister. Education: Balliol College, Oxford. Editor and proprietor of The Spectator until he retired, Dec. 1925.

STURGIS, Sir Mark Beresford Russell (? 1884 - 29 April 1949). British civil servant. Secretary to H.H. Asquith, 1906-10; Special Commissioner of Income Tax, 1910; Chairman, Treasury Selection Board, 1919-20; Joint Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland, 1920-22; Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Irish Services, 1922-24. Took by deed poll additional surname of Grant, 1935.

TALLENTS, Sir Stephen George (20 Oct. 1884 - 11 Sept. 1958). British civil servant. Education: Harrow; Balliol College, Oxford. Joined the Board of Trade, 1909-14; served in World War I with the Irish Guards, 1914-15; worked in the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-16; Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Food, and member of the Food Council, 1918; Chief British Delegate for Relief and Supply of Poland, 1919; British Commissioner for the Baltic Provinces, 1919-20; Private Secretary to Viscount Fitz-Alan, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, 1921-22; Imperial Secretary, Northern Ireland, 1922-1926; Secretary to Empire Marketing Board, 1926-33; Public Relations Officer, General Post Office, 1933-35; BBC Controller for Public Relations, 1935-40; BBC Controller for Overseas Services, 1940-41; Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Town and Country Planning, 1943-46.

THOMAS, James Henry (3 Oct. 1874 - 21 Jan. 1949). British trade union leader and politician. Born: Newport. Education: Council schools. General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, 1918-24 and 1925-31. Political career: MP (Labour) for Derby, 1910-31; (National Labour) for Derby, 1931-36; Vice-Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, 1921; Colonial Secretary, 1924, and 1931; Lord Privy Seal and Minister of Employment, 1929-30; Dominions and Colonial Secretary, 1935-36.

TYRRELL, William George (17 Aug. 1866 - 14 March 1947). British civil servant. Born: Naini Tal, India. Education: Balliol College, Oxford. Entered the Foreign Service, 1889; private secretary to Sir Edward Grey, 1907-15; Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1919-25; Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1925-28; Ambassador to France, 1928-34. Later President of the British Board of Film Censors, 1935-47. Created Baron Tyrrell of Avon, 1929.

UPCOTT, Sir Gilbert Charles (25 Feb. 1880 - 26 June 1967). British civil servant. Born, Cullompton, Devon.

Education: Marlborough; Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Joined the Treasury, 1903; Treasury Deputy Controller, 1921-31; Comptroller and Auditor General, Exchequer and Audit Department, 1931-46.

WATERFIELD, Sir Alexander Percival (16 May 1888 - 2 June 1965). British civil servant. Education: Westminster; Christ Church, Oxford. Joined the Treasury, 1911; Treasury Remembrancer in Ireland, 1920-22; Principal Assistant Secretary, 1934-39; member of Palestine Partition Commission, 1938; Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Information, 1939-40; Civil Service Commissioner, 1939-51.

WATT, Samuel (6 April 1876 - 18 Nov. 1927). British civil servant. Born: County Down. Education: Trinity College, Dublin. Entered the civil service, working first in the Public Record Office, Dublin, the Local Government Board of Ireland and Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin, before moving to the Admiralty in London. Private Secretary to successive Chief Secretaries for Ireland, 1918-20. Transferred from the Irish Office to work for the new Northern Ireland government, 1921. According to his obituary in The Times, his 'experience was invaluable in this stormy period'.

WHISKARD, Sir Geoffrey Granville (19 Aug. 1886 - 19 May 1957). British civil servant. Education: St. Paul's School; Wadham College, Oxford. Joined the Home Office, 1911; Assistant Secretary, Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle, 1920-22; Colonial Office, 1922-25; Dominions, Office. 1925-29; Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Dominions Office, 1930-35; British High Commissioner to Australia, 1936-41; Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Works and Buildings, 1941-43; Ministry of Town and Country Planning, 1943-46.

WILSON, Field Marshal Sir Henry Hughes (5 May 1864 - 22 June 1922). British soldier and politician. Born: County Longford. Education: Marlborough School. Commissioned in the 6th Battalion, Rifle Brigade of the Longford Militia; served in the Boer War; attached to Headquarters Staff, 1901; Brigadier General, 1907; Director of Military Operations, War Office, 1910-14; Lieutenant-General, 1914; secretly backed the Curragh Mutiny, 1914; Deputy Chief of Staff, 1914; chief liaison officer for the British Expeditionary Force to the French Army, 1915; commanded the 4th Corps, 1916; Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1918-22; Field Marshal, 1919; became estranged from Lloyd George over Versailles Treaty and government policy toward Ireland, 1919-21. Political career: MP (Unionist) for North Down, 1922; Security Adviser to the Northern Ireland government, 1922; assassinated, June 1922.

WOOD, Edward Frederick Lindley (16 April 1881 - 23

Dec. 1959). British politician. Education: Eton; Christ Church and All Soul's, Oxford. Political career: MP (Conservative-Unionist) for Ripon Division, West Riding, Yorkshire, 1910-25; Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies, 1921-22; President of the Board of Education, 1922-24; Minister of Agriculture, 1924-25; Viceroy of India, 1926-31; President of the Board of Education, 1932-35; Secretary of State for War, 1935; Lord Privy Seal, 1935-37; Leader of the House of Lords, 1935-38 and 1940; Lord President of the Council, 1937-38; Foreign Secretary, 1938-40; British Ambassador to Washington, 1941-46. Created 1st Baron Irwin, 1925, and 1st Earl of Halifax, 1944.

WORTHINGTON-EVANS, Sir Laming (23 Aug. 1868 - 14 Feb. 1931). British politician. Qualified as a solicitor. Political career: MP (Conservative) for Colchester, 1910-1918; for Essex, Colchester Division, 1918-29; for St. George's Division of Westminster, 1929-31; Controller, Foreign Trade Department, Foreign Office, 1916; Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Munitions, 1916-18; Minister of Blockade, 1918; Minister of Pensions, 1919-20; Minister without Portfolio, 1920-21; Secretary of State for War, 1921-22 and 1924-29; Postmaster-General, 1923-24.

YOUNGER, George (13 Oct. 1851 - 29 April 1929). British political leader. Education: Edinburgh Academy. Chairman of George Younger & Son Ltd., brewers; Conservative and Unionist Party chairman, 1916-23; party Treasurer, 1923-29. Created 1st Viscount Younger of Leckie, 1923.

APPENDIX IIARTICLES OF AGREEMENT FOR A TREATY
BETWEEN
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

ARTICLE I

Ireland shall have the same constitutional status in the Community of Nations known as the British Empire as the Dominion of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Dominion of New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa with a Parliament having powers to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of Ireland, and an Executive responsible to that Parliament, and shall be styled and known as the Irish Free State.

ARTICLE II

Subject to the provisions hereinafter set out the position of the Irish Free State in relation to the Imperial Parliament and Government and otherwise shall be that of the Dominion of Canada, and the law, practice and constitutional usage governing the relationship of the Crown or the representative of the Crown and of the Imperial Parliament to the Dominion of Canada shall govern their relationship to the Irish Free State.

ARTICLE III

The representative of the Crown in Ireland shall be appointed in like manner as the Governor-General of Canada and in accordance with the practice observed in the making of such appointments.

ARTICLE IV

The oath to be taken by Members of the Parliament of the Irish Free State shall be in the following form:

I . . . do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established and that I will be faithful to His Majesty King George V., his heirs and successors by law, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.

ARTICLE V

The Irish Free State shall assume liability for the service of the public debt of the United Kingdom as existing at the date hereof and towards the payment of

war pensions as existing at that date in such proportion as may be fair and equitable, having regard to any just claims on the part of Ireland by way of set-off or counter-claim, the amount of such sums being determined in default of agreement by the arbitration of one or more independent persons being citizens of the British Empire.

ARTICLE VI

Until an arrangement has been made between the British and Irish Governments whereby the Irish Free State undertakes her own coastal defence, the defence by sea of Great Britain and Ireland shall be undertaken by His Majesty's Imperial Forces, but this shall not prevent the construction or maintenance by the Government of the Irish Free State of such vessels as are necessary for the protection of the revenue or the fisheries.

The foregoing provisions of this article shall be reviewed at a conference of representatives of the British and Irish Governments to be held at the expiration of five years from the date hereof with a view to the undertaking by Ireland of a share in her own coastal defence.

ARTICLE VII

The Government of the Irish Free State shall afford to His Majesty's Imperial Forces:

(a) In time of peace such harbour and other facilities as are indicated in the Annex hereto, or such other facilities as may from time to time be agreed between the British Government and the Government of the Irish Free State; and

(b) In time of war or of strained relations with a foreign power such harbour and other facilities as the British Government may require for the purposes of such defence as aforesaid.

ARTICLE VIII

With a view to securing the observance of the principle of international limitation of armaments, if the Government of the Irish Free State establishes and maintains a military defence force, the establishments thereof shall not exceed in size such proportion of the military establishments maintained in Great Britain as that which the population of Ireland bears to the population of Great Britain.

ARTICLE IX

The ports of Great Britain and the Irish Free State shall be freely open to the ships of the other country on payment of the customary port and other dues.

ARTICLE X

The Government of the Irish Free State agrees to pay fair compensation on terms not less favourable than those accorded by the Act of 1920 to judges, officials, members of police forces and other public servants who are discharged by it, or who retire in consequence of the change of government effected in pursuance hereof.

Provided, that this agreement shall not apply to members of the Auxiliary Police Force or to persons recruited in Great Britain for the Royal Irish Constabulary during the two years next preceding the date hereof. The British Government will assume responsibility for such compensation or pensions as may be payable to any of these excepted persons.

ARTICLE XI

Until the expiration of one month from the passing of the Act of Parliament for the ratification of this instrument the powers of the Parliament and the Government of the Irish Free State shall not be exercisable as respects Northern Ireland, and the provisions of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 shall, so far as they relate to Northern Ireland, remain of full force and effect, and no election shall be held for the return of members to serve in the Parliament of the Irish Free State for constituencies in Northern Ireland, unless a resolution is passed by both Houses of the Parliament of Northern Ireland in favour of the holding of such elections before the end of the said month.

ARTICLE XII

If before the expiration of the said month an address is presented to His Majesty by both Houses of the Parliament of Northern Ireland to that effect, the powers of the Parliament and the Government of the Irish Free State shall no longer extend to Northern Ireland, and the provisions of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 (including those relating to the Council of Ireland), shall, so far as they relate to Northern Ireland, continue to be of full force and effect, and this instrument shall have effect subject to the necessary modifications.

Provided, that if such an address is so presented, a Commission consisting of three persons, one to be appointed by the Government of the Irish Free State, one to be appointed by the Government of Northern Ireland, and one who shall be Chairman, to be appointed by the British Government, shall determine, in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions, the boundaries between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, and for the purposes of the Government of

Ireland Act of 1920, and of this instrument, the boundary of Northern Ireland shall be such as may be determined by such Commission.

ARTICLE XIII

For the purpose of the last foregoing article, the powers of the Parliament of Southern Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 to elect members of the Council of Ireland shall, after the Parliament of the Irish Free State is constituted, be exercised by that Parliament.

ARTICLE XIV

After the expiration of the said month, if no such address as is mentioned in Article XII hereof is presented, the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland shall continue to exercise as respects Northern Ireland the powers conferred on them by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, but the Parliament and Government of the Irish Free State shall in Northern Ireland have in relation to matters in respect of which the Parliament of Northern Ireland has not power to make laws under that Act (including matters which under the said Act are within the jurisdiction of the Council of Ireland) the same powers as in the rest of Ireland, subject to such other provisions as may be agreed in manner hereinafter appearing.

ARTICLE XV

At any time after the date hereof the Government of Northern Ireland and the provisional Government of Southern Ireland, hereinafter constituted, may meet for the purpose of discussing the provisions, subject to which the last foregoing Article is to operate in the event of no such address as is therein mentioned being presented, and those provisions may include:

- (a) Safeguards with regard to patronage in Northern Ireland;
- (b) Safeguards with regard to the collection of revenue in Northern Ireland;
- (c) Safeguards with regard to import and export duties affecting the trade or industry of Northern Ireland;
- (d) Safeguards for minorities in Northern Ireland;
- (e) The settlement of the financial relations between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State;
- (f) The establishment and powers of a local militia in Northern Ireland and the relation of the defence forces of the Irish Free State and of Northern Ireland respectively;

and if at any such meeting provisions are agreed to, the same shall have effect as if they were included amongst the provisions subject to which the powers of the Parliament and the Government of the Irish Free State are to be exercisable in Northern Ireland under Article XIV hereof.

ARTICLE XVI

Neither the Parliament of the Irish Free State nor the Parliament of Northern Ireland shall make any law so as either directly or indirectly to endow any religion or prohibit or restrict the free exercise thereof or give any preference or impose any disability on account of religious belief or religious status, or affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending the religious instruction at the school, or make any discrimination as respects State aid between schools under the management of different religious denominations, or divert from any religious denomination or any educational institution any of its property except for public utility purposes and on payment of compensation.

ARTICLE XVII

By way of provisional arrangement for the administration of Southern Ireland during the interval which must elapse between the date hereof and the constitution of a Parliament and Government of the Irish Free State in accordance therewith, steps shall be taken forthwith for summoning a meeting of members of Parliament elected for constituencies in Southern Ireland since the passing of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, and for constituting a provisional Government, and the British Government shall take the steps necessary to transfer to such provisional Government the powers and machinery requisite for the discharge of its duties, provided that every member of such provisional Government shall have signified in writing his or her acceptance of this instrument. But this arrangement shall not continue in force beyond the expiration of twelve months from the date hereof.

ARTICLE XVIII

This instrument shall be submitted forthwith by His Majesty's Government for the approval of Parliament and by the Irish signatories to a meeting summoned for the purpose of the members elected to sit in the House of Commons of Southern Ireland and, if approved, shall be ratified by the necessary legislation.

Signed on behalf of the British delegation:
LLOYD GEORGE,
AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN,

BIRKENHEAD,
WINSTON S. CHURCHILL,
L. WORTHINGTON-EVANS,
HAMAR GREENWOOD,
GORDON HEWART.

On behalf of the Irish delegation:

ART O GRIOBHTHA
(ARTHUR GRIFFITH).
MICHEAL O COILEAIN
(MICHAEL COLLINS).
RIOBARD BARTUN
(ROBERT C. BARTON).
E.S. O DUGAIN
(EAMON J. DUGGAN).
SEORSA GHABHAIN UI DHUBHTHAIGH
(GEORGE GAVAN DUFFY).

6th December 1921.

ANNEX

1. The following are the specific facilities required:

Dockyard Port at Berehaven

(a) Admiralty property and rights to be retained as at the date hereof. Harbour defence to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties.

Queenstown

(b) Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties. Certain mooring buoys to be retained for use of His Majesty's ships.

Belfast Lough

(c) Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties.

Lough Swilly

(d) Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties

Aviation

(e) Facilities in the neighbourhood of the above ports for coastal defence by air.

Oil Fuel Storage

(f) Haulbowline	{To be offered for sale to
	{commercial companies under
Rathmullen	{guarantee that purchasers
	{shall maintain a certain
	{minimum stock for

{Admiralty purposes.

2. A Convention shall be made between the British Government and the Government of the Irish Free State to give effect to the following conditions:

(a) That submarine cables shall not be landed or wireless stations for communication with places outside Ireland be established except by agreement with the British Government; that the existing cable landing rights and wireless concessions shall not be withdrawn except by agreement with the British Government; and that the British Government shall be entitled to land additional submarine cables or establish additional wireless stations for communication with places outside Ireland.

(b) That lighthouses, buoys, beacons, and any navigational marks or navigational aids shall be maintained by the Government of the Irish Free State as at the date hereof, and shall not be removed or added to except by agreement with the British Government.

(c) That war signal stations shall be closed down and left in charge of care and maintenance parties, the Government of the Irish Free State being offered the option of taking them over and working them for commercial purposes subject to Admiralty inspection and guaranteeing the upkeep of existing telegraphic communication therewith.

3. A Convention shall be made between the same Governments for the regulation of Civil Communication by Air.

APPENDIX III

House of Lords, S.W.1.
March 3rd, 1922.

Secret.

My dear Balfour,

I understand that you wish to be reassured as to the meaning of the clause in the Articles of Agreement which relates to the determination of the boundary between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland.

It seems to me right in the first place to set out the exact words used in the Treaty, and to draw attention to the context in which they appear.

They appear in the form of a proviso to Article 12 of the Treaty. The main purpose of that Article is to preserve to Northern Ireland, if the Parliament of Northern Ireland desire, the maintenance of the provisions of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, so far as they relate to Northern Ireland. The Article contemplates the maintenance of Northern Ireland as an entity already existing - not as a new State to be brought into existence upon the ratification of the Articles of Agreement. It is regarded as a creature already constituted, having its own Parliament and its own defined boundaries.

The Article then proceeds (by way of proviso, as I have said) to provide for the modification of those boundaries, and it does so in the following form (leaving out immaterial words):-

"Provided that a Commission shall
"determine, in accordance with the wishes of the
"inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with
"economic and geographic conditions, the boundaries
"between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland,
"and for the purposes of the Government of Ireland
"Act, 1920, and of this instrument, the boundary
"of Northern Ireland shall be such as may be
"determined by such Commission."

We have, therefore, a territory, namely, that of Northern Ireland, the boundaries of which are defined by the Act of 1920, and we have an Agreement that those boundaries should be subject to determination by a Commission in accordance with certain conditions set out in the Treaty.

This seems to me to differ in no way from the ordinary precedents set in innumerable Treaties between European States during the 19th century. Compare, for example, the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria by the Treaty of Berlin. Article 2 of that Treaty sets out in detail the territories to be comprised within the new Principality just as the Government of Ireland Act sets out in detail the territories to be comprised within Northern Ireland.

The Article of the Berlin Treaty proceeds (I translate myself for clearness sake):-

"This delimitation will be fixed on the spot by
 "the European Commission on which the signatory
 "Powers will be represented. It is understood -

"(1) That this Commission will take into
 "consideration the necessity of His
 "Imperial Majesty the Sultan being able
 "to defend the frontiers of the Balkans
 "of Eastern Rumania.
 "(2) That no fortifications can be
 "erected in a zone ten kilometres
 "round Samakow."

The only difference, as it seems to me, between the governing instruments in the two cases is that in one case (that of Bulgaria) the fixing of the territory and the power of rectifying the boundary of the territory so fixed are included in one document, and that in the other case (that of the Irish Treaty) the Government of Ireland Act, to which express reference is made in the Treaty, and the Treaty itself must be read together. Of course different considerations are set out in the two cases as those which the Commission is to apply as criteria, but this constitutes no difference in principle.

It appears to me inconceivable that any competent and honest arbitrator could take the opposite view. If the Article had meant what Craig now apprehends that it does, quite obviously the Agreement would have been drafted in very different words. I might remark incidentally that I can hardly suppose that in that case the duty would have been committed to a Commission. The natural course would have been that the Governments concerned should retain everything but details in their own hands, in accordance again with the precedents of Treaties. But assuming that it was intended that a Commission should operate which might conceivably wholly change the character of Northern Ireland by enormous reductions of its territory, I think it would have been necessary to say:

"A Commission shall determine in accordance with
 "the wishes of the inhabitants, etc., what portions

"of Ireland shall be included in the Irish Free
"State and what portions shall be included in
"Northern Ireland, and shall fix the boundary
"between the portions thus allotted."

That my own view is well founded is made even clearer by the attitude of Carson and Craig during the earlier debates on the Treaty. This particular clause is the only one which can interfere with the status of Ulster as fixed by the Act of 1920, and it therefore focuses the whole searchlight of the controversy. Yet until Collins made the suggestion, no living soul in either House ever suggested that the clause was capable of the fantastic meaning of which Craig now professes himself to be apprehensive.

In the debates of December, Carson was seeking eagerly for any basis upon which he could establish his charge of treachery to Ulster. If you read his speech, you will not find a word suggesting that he then took this view. The real truth is that Collins, very likely pressed by his own people and anxious to appraise at their highest value the benefits which he had brought to them, in a moment of excitement committed himself unguardedly to this doctrine, and that it has no foundation whatever except in his overheated imagination.

If and when Collins and Griffiths obtain a majority and a sane Parliament, I think it highly probable that they will come to terms with Craig. If this does not happen, I have no doubt that the Tribunal, not being presided over by a lunatic, will take a rational view of the limits of its own jurisdiction and will reach a rational conclusion.

Yours as ever,
(Sgd.) BIRKENHEAD

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