



**BA Celtic Studies Level 6,
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Course Module: (HHP6902), Centre for Humanities and Social
Sciences**

Assignment Essay Topic:

2. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 marked a defeat for Irish Republicanism. Discuss with particular attention given to the relationships between the main protagonists involved in negotiations.

Although the Treaty of 1921 marked a defeat for Irish Republicanism in its idealised form, it could be considered that far from extinguishing the movement, the whole conception of the Irish Free State, and its establishment in 1922, as a consequence of the Treaty, was a deeply contested process, as Charles Townshend emphasises in his 'Easter 1916', with the 'Irish Republican Army ready to return to violence' against not only Britain but the State also.¹ The survivors and followers of the 1916 campaign had ended up taking opposite sides, splitting the conscience of the former rebels. By this time, the Irish Volunteers had been reconstituted into the IRA. This is perhaps understandable when we consider that the related political face of the IRA, Sinn Féin, had actually conceived an independent Irish Parliament in 1919 in Dublin as a consequence of electoral supremacy. The 'Army' was therefore considered as a prerequisite to establishment of statehood, as with any other independent nation. Of course, with the formation of a post-treaty 'national army', the concept of a separate 'republican' army became defunct. But in any case, with regard to Sinn Féin's prospects, the phrase 'political oblivion' (in 1923) has been put forward by the prominent nationalist commentator, Brian Feeney, who also summarised the future for the Party as a 'marginalised rump'.²

¹ Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916, The Irish Rebellion*, p. 344, (Penguin UK:/Penguin Books Ltd., 2006)

² Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin, A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002)

It could therefore be argued that the Treaty, although regarded as a pragmatic achievement and solution to the Irish question as to what exactly the form of home rule government should take, was just one milestone on the road to a fully independent Irish republic, littered as it was with the death and wreckage of insurrection, with a long history dating back to the revolt of 1798, fomented by the Society of United Irishmen. By the time of 1916 Easter Rising, a major impetus for events leading to the Treaty, we are faced with an intervening century of failure to resolve the home rule issue. However, to the present-day outsider, reviewing the literature chronicling this event, and the rather tortuous proposals, counter-proposals, and rejections, it would seem a wonder that it was finalised at all. Nevertheless, one particular view on the proceedings leading to the signing of the Treaty has been very concisely summarised in Jeremy Smith's *Making Peace in Ireland*, where we are introduced to some of the protagonists who are described as flexible or even 'slippery' individuals, who might change position in order to achieve a settlement which could be 'obtainable rather than desirable'.³ However, according to Alan O'Day, and his *Irish Home Rule*, a work dedicated to a discussion of the problem between the years 1867 -1921, the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 and the Treaty of 6th December. . . 'succeeded in 1920 and 1921 because southern Protestants and northern Catholics were left out of the negotiations.'⁴

But perhaps more importantly, a major decisive factor was to emerge in the ascendancy of the rather charismatic political presence of David Lloyd George, who, possibly under pressure himself to resolve the chronic spectre of insurrection and murderous events, issued the ultimatum of sign or face the consequences of continued British military intervention, and even an increased presence in that respect:

[Lloyd George] stated that he had always taken it that Arthur Griffith spoke for the Delegation, that we were all plenipotentiaries and that it was now a matter of peace or war and we must each of us make up our minds. He required that every delegate should sign the document and recommend it, or there was no agreement. He said that they as a body had hazarded their political future and we must do likewise and take the same risks. At one time he particularly addressed himself to me and said very solemnly that those who were not for peace must take full responsibility for the war that would immediately follow refusal by any Delegate to sign the Articles of Agreement.

'He [Lloyd George] then produced two letters one of which he said he must that night send to Craig. One was a covering letter to H.M. Government's proposals for the future relations of Ireland and Great Britain and stated that the Irish Delegation had agreed to recommend them for acceptance by Dail Eireann. The other stated that the Irish Delegation had failed to come to an agreement with H.M. Government and therefore he had no proposals to send to Craig.

³ Jeremy Smith *Making Peace in Ireland*, p.46

⁴ Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.304

LLOYD GEORGE stated that he would have to have our agreement or refusal to the proposals by 10 p.m. that evening. That a special train and destroyer were ready to carry either one letter or the other to Belfast and that he would give us until ten o'clock to decide.’⁵

In this extract of the minutes, the phrase used by Lloyd George which possibly stands out for him with particular importance is concerned with ‘political future’ of the British side. However, from the stance of Arthur Griffith there lay the question of not just political control and credibility in the immediate term, but a wider scope of economic development in keeping with a republican model in the longer term:

‘To the very end of negotiations with the British in London, Griffith had pushed for economic freedom. The agreement for a Treaty was signed in London at 2.20 in the morning on 6 December 1921. The last few days were fairly chaotic, as has been described elsewhere. Griffith reported to de Valera that week that, before signing the agreement, he had told Lloyd George that “provided we came to agreement on other points, I would accept inclusion in the Empire on the basis of the Free State. After that they went on and gave way on Fiscal autonomy wholly, yielded more on defence and some minor matters “.’

‘According to the economist Patrick Lynch, Griffith had set great store by the advantage and importance of fiscal and financial independence’⁶

In 1922 Dáil Éireann narrowly approved the Treaty, against the wishes of Éamon de Valera, the Dail’s President, setting in motion his resignation and events which would split Sinn Féin into pro and anti Treaty factions. The controversial areas of the Treaty are outlined following. The ‘Free State’ was obviously something of a misnomer viewed on the simplistic basis of establishing a totally independent entity:

Article 2. 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.

3. 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.

⁵ Robert Barton, Anglo Irish Treaty Notes, No. 213 NAI DE 2/304/1, of two sub-conferences held on December 5/6, 1921 at 10 Downing St. (<https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1921/notes-by-robert-barton>)

⁶ Colum Kenny ‘A Man Who Has Both Arms’: Arthur Griffith, the Economy and the Anglo-Irish Treaty Agreement 1921 (Irish Economic and Social History 2023, Vol. 50(1) 74–92 (Sage Publications, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ies>, p. 90)

4. 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 H.M. 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.⁷

It was this Article 4 which was to be the most controversial aspect when viewed by the anti-treaty party during the so-called 'split' of the years 1921 to 1922. As the Free State had been moulded into a dominion status model, as conceived as a companion to Canada, in the wider Commonwealth group, the continued umbilical connection via recognition of a monarchical patrimony came as a preconceived component, the very last clause that Sinn Féin hardliners would wish to accept. But beside this, the present-day student of the period might be taken aback by the kind of rhetoric and characterization in language generated across the spectrum of debate: for example the following kind of contradictory attitude: 'war had welded the people together but even the mere prospect of peace with Britain divided them'.⁸ Or perhaps a rather disaffected cavalier attitude as in, 'claims that under the treaty the Irish people would march into the empire with their heads up: rather into it with their hands up'.⁹ The split between the 'radicals' and 'moderates' therefore drifted into open conflict outside the political arena.

The resulting civil war had the consequence of a temporary defeat for republicanism in its purest form as insisted upon by Eamon de Valera. As for Lloyd George, he could emerge with a more positive image. His secretary, Frances Stevenson concluded that 'Lloyd George had succeeded in having a unanimous Cabinet, which was a great achievement'. Her diary entry for July 20th, 1921 recorded Lloyd George as confiding that 'if he settles Ireland, he is prepared to go out of office. He was quite serious about it as he believed that were he to settle Ireland, he can go no higher.'¹⁰

⁷ Articles 2,3, and 4 of the Treaty.

⁸ Michael Laffan *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p.353

⁹ *Ibid.* p.355

¹⁰ John Bowman, *When Lloyd George met de Valera: Why do you insist on Republic?* The Irish Times, July 10th, 2021

In contrast, the fate of the two principal plenipotentiaries in the Irish delegation, Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith was to prove deathly in the wake of the settlement. With Griffith, the underlying state of deteriorating health was to prove terminal. In the case of Collins, the phrase 'to live and die by the sword' was to prove true, as the once mastermind behind assassination activities was to suffer the same fate. Conversely, a non-signatory, but very much a prominent absentee from the negotiations, but acting as it were as a kind of godfather figure, Eamon deValera, went on to prevail as a dominant figure in Irish politics for decades after the signing. Here again, economic prospects were to play an increasingly important factor in the interwar years and the protectionist economy not really transforming the south into a mirror image of the early century success of the Ulster shipbuilding and linen manufacturing powerhouse:

'Twice, in the 1950s and the 1980s, the case for the Republic of Ireland being considered a failed economic entity was a strong one. The impact of a post-colonial, but self-imposed, trade dispute in the 1930s and semi-autarky imposed by the Second World War were severe.'¹¹

'Dependence on the UK was reduced slowly over time but major problems in the IFS economy remained unresolved (e.g., small under-capitalised farms in agriculture and the low productivity of IFS manufacturing).'¹²

'The long-run impact of the revolution can be considered in the way it influenced human capital formation. Human capital refers to the skills and knowledge of the labour force and development and improvement, through education or on the job training, in human capital is seen as an important driver of economic growth. Reform of the education system was a prominent aspect of Griffith's propagandist piece 'Sinn Féin Policy' and these could be interpreted as arguing for investment in human capital. For example, Griffith stated that 'in Ireland secondary education causes aversion and contempt for industry and "trade" in the head of young Irishmen'¹³

Whether the Treaty contributed to the advancement of these ideals of Griffith would seem to have to be measured against the ongoing desire for emigration and the possibility of a better prospect elsewhere, possibly involving those same 'young Irishmen'. Statistical data of the decade following the signing of the Treaty saw no let up in the movement to the United States up to the time of the consequences of the Wall Street Crash.¹⁴ Twenty years on, in a post-war Britain, with a Labour government intent on reconstruction and inauguration of a welfare state, the attraction of an alternative lifestyle where employment was relatively plentiful became something of a focus of attention for the emigrant:

¹¹ Ó Gráda, C. and O'Rourke, K. H., 'The Irish economy during the century after partition', *Economic History Review*, 75 (2022), pp. 336–70

¹² Eoin McLaughlin, *Paper 2015-13 Economic Impact of the Irish revolution*, Discussion papers in Environmental Economics, University of St. Andrews, pp. 10 - 11.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1044511/migration-ireland-to-us-1820-1957>

'Post-1921 due to political and economic changes there was shift to Britain which into the 1960s remained the destination of choice for over 80% of emigrants, and remained the destination for the largest number of Irish emigrants up until the 1990s. Irish emigration is also notable for the number of women who have emigrated – up until the 1980s women's rates of emigration were often higher than men's.' ¹⁵

A question which seems to emerge from some of the details discussed above is whether Lloyd George's view of the situation as a 'great achievement' was justified. Regardless of whether the Treaty established a republic or dominion, the Irish side were faced with the perennial dilemma as to what the attitude to or from the province of Ulster should be. A Boundary Commission was to be established, fixing the limits of administration. There was little hope of a totally unified country. And from the stance of economic development both the north and south were to suffer low productivity or decline in traditional industry, for example such as the shipbuilding and maritime engineering propensity of Belfast. Both were to require inward investment or government subsidy.

While the consequences and rationale for the 1916 Rising were primarily concerned with politics, cultural identity and the forsworn ideal of home rule with an independent parliament. . . 'the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies' ; ¹⁶ the post Treaty decades were to fall under the shadow of wider global conflict. Realistically, in the aftermath of the 1916 destruction and later conflict, possibly Lloyd George and his Cabinet had come to the point where the arrangements agreed did in fact appear to be relatively speaking a desperately welcomed catharsis from a seemingly intractable situation of facing a group of men infused with a kind of burning vision of destiny, to which the traditional Westminster Parliamentary representatives had considerable difficulty relating to.

¹⁵ Ireland Dept for Foreign Affairs : Irish Abroad Unit, 20 June 2017, 017/1--Global-Irish-in-Numbers para. 4

¹⁶ 'Proclamation of Independence', 1916.

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