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By

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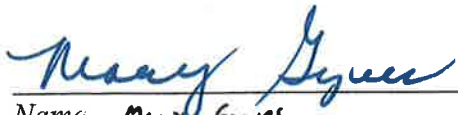
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HISTORY

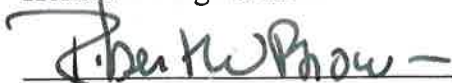
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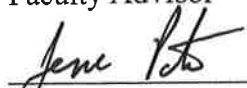
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University of North Carolina - Pembroke

Ireland's Path to Freedom  
with Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins  
1916-1923

Senior Thesis submitted to  
The Faculty of the Honor College

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The path to Ireland's independence was long and tortuous. After centuries of ineffective opposition to British domination, Irish rebels in the early part of the twentieth century forced Great Britain to ease her stranglehold on Ireland. Their actions changed the political landscape of Ireland irrevocably. Ireland became a dominion of Great Britain in 1922, and achieved republic status in 1949 when Ireland officially left the Commonwealth. Before this was accomplished, many Irish rebels achieved mythic status in the minds of the Irish people. This paper focuses on only two such rebels from the twentieth century, Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins.

De Valera and Collins were larger-than-life Irish heroes who fought as allies for Irish independence from the Easter Rising through the Anglo-Irish War, and then were on opposite sides in the subsequent Irish Civil War. Their goals were the same: an independent Ireland, but they disagreed on the path to this freedom. This paper will look at their complementary efforts as Ireland severed the ties with Great Britain, and their ideological split that contributed to the Civil War. I will not address the issues of Northern Ireland here. Northern Ireland, that is the 6 counties in Ulster which were predominately Protestant, was adamantly determined to remain part of Great Britain. They feared their Protestant voting bloc would be diluted to the point of insignificance if they were forced to be part of an Irish Free State.

After centuries of British control in Ireland, and several failed attempts to obtain Home Rule<sup>1</sup>, the Irish had been granted an undefined form of Home Rule by the British Parliament in 1912. The outbreak of World War I delayed the implementation of Home

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<sup>1</sup> Home Rule was a process which would allow an Irish Parliament more direct control over local affairs while the Parliament in Westminster would continue to control Crown affairs, foreign policy, military affairs, duties and customs for the Irish.

Rule. With British troops bogged down in the trenches of France, militant Irish groups saw an opportunity to foment a rebellion to free Ireland of any and all British control. In fact, many were waiting for just this opportunity.

The Easter Rising of 1916 was the opening act of the Irish War for independence. The nationalistic groups, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the Irish Volunteers, decided the time was right for a rebellion.<sup>2</sup> The founder and leader of the Volunteers, Eoin MacNeill, was not in favor of this action and refused to muster his men.<sup>3</sup> This caused a slight delay, but the revolution's other leaders, Tom Clarke, Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, ordered the rising to go forward on Easter Monday.<sup>4</sup> As a result, a small band of 1500 rebels marched into Dublin and occupied the General Post Office and several other strategic buildings around the city. Two flags were raised over the city, one inscribed with "Irish Republic" and the other a tricolor of orange, white and green, the colors of the new republic. Patrick Pearse read the proclamation declaring Ireland a republic, and copies were distributed around the city.

The rising was a fiasco. It was not well planned. The leaders may have been idealists, but they were certainly not skilled in military tactics. For example, the rebels cut telephone wires only then to realize they could not communicate with each other. In an attempt to keep any loss of civilian life by gas explosions in homes to a minimum, they had part of the gas works dismantled. This threw the city into darkness.<sup>5</sup> At the post office, fearing that the British would attack with gas, one rebel prepared an antidote,

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<sup>2</sup> R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin, 1988), 461.

<sup>3</sup> Max Caulfield, *The Easter Rebellion, Dublin 1916*, (Boulder: Roberts Rinehart, 1995), 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> T. Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow, A Joint Biography of Collins and de Valera* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 25.

though he acknowledged that it would do nothing if an attack came.<sup>6</sup> In a serious miscalculation, Connolly, a socialist, believed that the British would not destroy property belonging to the government or important British peers. Nevertheless, the British army, with its superior firepower, flattened many buildings and caused major fire damage in others. The Rising was put down within a week.

The civilian population's reaction to The Rising was mixed. At first, many expressed anger towards the rebels at the damage to property and the loss of life; others thought the rebels had shown courage in holding out so long against a well equipped army.<sup>7</sup> However, the British response after The Rising had a unifying influence. It created widespread sympathy for the rebels and alienated the Irish people.

In response to The Rising, the British Army immediately court-martialed and executed fifteen of the leaders. James Connolly, who was so badly wounded that he could not sit up, was tied to a chair in order to be executed.<sup>8</sup> The only rebel battalion leader not executed was Eamon de Valera. He was an American by birth and the British did not want to create any obstacles for America to join them as allies against the Axis powers.<sup>9</sup> The rank and file rebels were interned in prisons in Wales.

The reaction of the Irish population became one of outrage. They believed the leaders should have had a public trial. In the view of the typical Irishman, this British blunder transformed the rebels from troublemakers into genuine heroes fighting to preserve Ireland for the Irish. They became martyrs for the national cause in a predominately Catholic nation that venerated martyrdom. A republic was now the goal;

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<sup>6</sup> Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> BBC History of the 1916 Easter Rising. [www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/history](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/history).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kee, *The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism*, (London: Penguin, 1972), 578.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *Eamon de Valera: The Man Who Was Ireland*, (New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1993), 81.

no longer would Home Rule be sufficient for the growing number of radicalized nationalists.

The various militant groups unified and were subsumed under the Sinn Féin party which reorganized as both a political and military machine. By the end of 1917, Sinn Féin had 250,000 members and an untold number of supporters. When de Valera was released from prison, as a measure of goodwill by Prime Minister Lloyd George, he was elected Sinn Féin's leader. However, he was rearrested and incarcerated in England. This time, Michael Collins staged a remarkable escape for de Valera.<sup>10</sup> De Valera had obtained a wax impression of the jail key when he "borrowed" the priest's master key while he was saying Mass. A drawing of this was sent to Collins who smuggled in a real key inside a cake. When de Valera reached the outside, Collins and Harry Boland were waiting to spirit him away.<sup>11</sup>

De Valera was a skillful politician. He and other Sinn Féin members stood for election to the British House of Commons in 1918 on the issue of national independence. They won an astonishing 73 seats out of 105, including a strong foothold in the Ulster counties.<sup>12</sup> The formerly unstoppable Irish Parliamentary Party, led by John Redmond, won only six seats. These newly elected Irish members refused to sit in the Parliament at Westminster, and instead established their own Parliament, the Dáil, in Dublin with de Valera as its President and Michael Collins as its Minister of Finance. Significantly, as Pearse had done in 1916, they declared Ireland independent.

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<sup>10</sup> An escape was not necessary as de Valera and others were about to be released. But de Valera wanted the propaganda value of an escape from the onerous Brits. Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 125.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: The Man Who Made Ireland*. (New York: Palgrave, 1990), 100.

<sup>12</sup> D. George Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 93.

Consequently, the British declared the Dáil and Sinn Féin illegal. As a result, sporadic violent confrontations escalated into a full-blown Anglo-Irish War. In addition to regular army troops, the British dispatched two paramilitary groups. The Black and Tans, composed of demobilized military men, numbered more than 10,000, and the Auxiliary Division, made up of ex-army officers, numbered around 1900.<sup>13</sup> No longer were the military and police force “policing Ireland on behalf of the civilians; rather, it looked more and more like an army of occupation.”<sup>14</sup>

The military wing of Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), was led by Collins, who had been a minor player in the Easter Rising, but would become a brilliant guerrilla-style leader. He was determined to never again repeat the mistakes of 1916 and be caught in buildings fighting a better armed, larger enemy. Collins believed that the only way to beat the well-armed British force was to use guerrilla tactics. He became the “supreme architect of the hit-and-run ambush technique which effectively countered this superiority.”<sup>15</sup>

Collins waged both a guerrilla war and an intelligence war against the British and British supporters. In addition to the military arm of the IRA, Collins had men and women “in post offices, on the railways, on channel ferries, in every prison in Ireland and many in England” in his employ gathering intelligence.<sup>16</sup> Dublin police with high security clearance were Collins’s men. Because of their information, Collins knew every move of the Special Branch of the police in advance.<sup>17</sup> He even had an informer in the

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<sup>13</sup> BBC History

<sup>14</sup> Boyce, *Ireland*, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Coogan, *Michael Collins*. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Bowden, “The Irish Underground and the War of Independence 1919-21.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (April, 1973): 3-23. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

office of the Head of Scotland Yard.<sup>18</sup> Collins recognized early on that spies and informers existed in his own organization. They were eliminated, often in broad daylight in the Dublin streets. The members of the police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) did nothing; either in clandestine support of the IRA or in fear of becoming a marked man vis à vis the IRA.<sup>19</sup>

Atrocities were committed by both sides. For example, on one occasion, the Black and Tans killed six Volunteers near Cork. "When the bodies were found, the heart had been cut out of one, the tongue from another, the nose from a third. The skull of a fourth had been battered in, and the bodies of the two others were identifiable only by their clothes."<sup>20</sup> Not to be outdone in this savagery, in Tralee, some Volunteers threw two Black and Tans into a gas fire alive.<sup>21</sup> Again, On November 21, 1920, a day which became known as "Bloody Sunday," an IRA assassination squad of young, unmarried men known as the "Twelve Apostles" carried out simultaneous raids on the homes of suspected British undercover agents, killing them in the presence of their families.<sup>22</sup> In retaliation, that afternoon the Black and Tans intruded on a well-attended football game in Croke Park, Dublin, and opened fire on the crowd killing twelve people. Later that evening two IRA sympathizers were interrogated and killed at police headquarters. A week later, the IRA attacked an Auxiliary division and killed seventeen out of eighteen men. Apparently some of the injuries were inflicted after death.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Bowden, "The Irish Underground," 17.

<sup>20</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland Since the Rising*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1966), 30.

<sup>21</sup> Coogan, *Ireland Since the Rising*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Coogan, *Michael Collins*, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Kee, *The Green Flag*, 695.



Collins's intelligence gathering and guerrilla tactics were so effective that the British soon realized that they had to deal with the Irish situation once and for all.<sup>24</sup> He had successfully forced the British to the negotiating table. The Anglo-Irish War ended when the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and de Valera worked out the details of a truce on July 11, 1921.<sup>25</sup> De Valera visited Lloyd George in July 1921 for four days; they continued their discussions through written correspondence until September before any official negotiations began. Lloyd George was offering dominion status with certain qualifications because of Ireland's proximity to Great Britain. De Valera argued that the Irish desired to be free. He indicated that Britain's plan to maintain control of a nation merely for strategic military interests was acceptable to neither the Dáil nor the Irish people.<sup>26</sup> At this point, the stumbling block was not particularly the six Ulster counties who were demanding to remain part of Great Britain; it was self-determination. De Valera wrote,

Dominion status for Ireland everyone who understands the conditions knows to be illusory. The freedom which the British Dominions enjoy is not so much the result of legal enactments or of treaties as of the immense distances which separate them from Britain and have made interference by her impracticable. The most explicit guarantees, including the Dominions' acknowledged right to secede, would be necessary to secure for Ireland an equal degree of freedom. There is no suggestion, however, in the proposals made of any such guarantees. Instead, the natural position is reversed; our geographical situation with respect to Britain is made the basis of denials and restrictions unheard of in the case of the Dominions; the smaller island must give military safeguards and guarantees to the larger and suffer itself to be reduced to the position of a helpless dependency.<sup>27</sup>

Lloyd George's response was every bit as firm and unyielding,

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<sup>24</sup> In February 1920 the Government of Ireland Bill was passed by Parliament creating two Irelands with separate parliaments. It declared that this partition would not be permanent and that a Council would work toward reconciliation. Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923*, 96.

<sup>25</sup> Boyce, *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>26</sup> Official Correspondence relating to the Peace Negotiations (Dublin: Dail Eireann, 1921), 10. [www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E900003-001/index.html](http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E900003-001/index.html).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

...but we must direct your attention to one point upon which you lay some emphasis and upon which no British Government can compromise, namely, the claim that we should acknowledge the right of Ireland to secede from her allegiance to the King. No such right can ever be acknowledged by us. The geographical propinquity of Ireland to the British Isles is a fundamental fact. The history of the two islands for many centuries, however it is read, is sufficient proof that their destinies are indissolubly linked.<sup>28</sup>

De Valera made several attempts to meet with James Craig and Sir Edward Carson, Unionist leaders of the Ulster counties, so they could present a united front to Lloyd George to no avail.<sup>29</sup> Finally, de Valera sent Collins, now Minister of Finance, and Arthur Griffith, the Minister of Home Affairs, to England as leaders of the official negotiating team to get what he himself had been unable to wrest from Lloyd George's hands. Despite Collins's and Griffith's attempts to keep Ireland whole, Ulster Unionists would not accept rule by Dublin. Therefore, they had to negotiate from the position that Ulster would not be forced to be part of the Irish Free State.<sup>30</sup> The negotiations were exceedingly contentious. Lloyd George ultimately concluded the British involvement in the negotiations with a threat of immediate war if a treaty was not forthcoming.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, on December 6, 1921, the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland was signed. The agreement was subject to ratification by both the British Parliament and the Dáil. There remained hurdles and strong opposition on both sides. Sir Edward Carson, an Ulster Unionist, accused Parliament of abandoning the Irish Protestants living in southern Ireland. In the Dáil, the agreement caused a terrible split between the pragmatic pro-Treaty members led by Collins and

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<sup>28</sup> Official Correspondence relating to the Peace Negotiations. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>30</sup> Griffith had assurances from the British that if Ulster did not agree to an all Ireland Parliament, the Boundary Commission would be so favorable to the South that Ulster would be forced to join eventually. Everyone knew Ulster would opt out. Cornelius O'Leary and Patrick Maume, *Controversial Issues in Anglo-Irish Relations 1910-1921*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 95.

<sup>31</sup> Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923*, 102.

Griffith who thought of the treaty as one more step toward total independence and the idealistic anti-Treaty Republicans led by Cathal Brugha, the Minister of Defense, who saw it as a betrayal of republican ideals and would accept nothing less than full independence for all of Ireland.

De Valera was opposed vehemently to the Treaty for obtuse reasons. He argued that Griffith and Collins had overstepped the authority of their plenipotentiary powers. He suggested that they had no authority to sign the Treaty, and that they should have gained complete independence for Ireland; something he himself had not been able to get in months of correspondence with Lloyd George.<sup>32</sup> Collins defended his decision,

But in any sane view our military resources were terribly slender in the face of those of the British Empire...It was obvious what would have been involved in a renewal of armed conflict on a scale which we had never met before. And it was obvious what we should have lost in strength if the support of the world which had hitherto been on our side had been alienated, if Ireland had rejected terms which most nations would have regarded as terms we could honourably accept.<sup>33</sup>

The Dáil meetings from December 14, 1921 to January 10, 1922 to ratify the treaty were contentious. De Valera continued to focus narrowly on whether or not the credentials he had given to the plenipotentiaries had been presented and accepted by the British. He referred to paragraph 3 of the credentials in particular. It states, "It is also understood that the complete text of the draft treaty about to be signed will be similarly submitted to Dublin, and reply awaited."<sup>34</sup> Collins read the original credentials aloud,

In virtue of the authority vested in me by Dáil Éireann, I hereby appoint ....as envoys plenipotentiaries...to negotiate and conclude on behalf of Ireland, with the representatives...a treaty or treaties of settlement, association and accommodation

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Collins, *Path to Freedom*, (London: Talbot, 1922), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Collins, *Path to Freedom*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Deputies of Dáil Éireann, in Dublin, Ireland, Sessions from December 14, 1921 to January 10, 1922, *Debate on the Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland*, 11. [www.ucc.ie/published/E900003-001/index.html](http://www.ucc.ie/published/E900003-001/index.html).

between Ireland and the community of nations, known as the British Commonwealth...signed Eamon de Valera.<sup>35</sup>

Arthur Griffith, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the leader of the negotiating team, noted that the credentials were not presented or accepted, but that Lloyd George had seen the document. He noted further,

The point President de Valera wants to know about is as to whether we considered that we had full power to make a treaty to bind the nation without the Dáil being consulted. Now the British Ministers did not sign the treaty to bind their nation. They had to go to their Parliament as we to ours for ratification.<sup>36</sup>

Collins went on to note that their signatures on the Articles of Agreement indicated their recommendation for acceptance, but the Dáil was free to accept or reject the Treaty.

The Articles of Agreement conferred upon Ireland a status commensurate with the other dominions in the British Empire. An oath would be taken to swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as established by law. It only called for faithfulness to the king by virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her membership in the British Commonwealth. A literal interpretation of this was that there was no oath to the king. "Common citizenship" could be interpreted in two ways: the Irish were still subjects of the king, or citizenship did not require being subjects and was voluntary according to the Treaty.<sup>37</sup> These issues, now along with the partitioning of Ireland, became the heart of the Republican's opposition to the Treaty.

Nevertheless, the Dáil approved the Anglo-Irish Treaty in January 1922 by 64 votes to 57 votes – not an overwhelming vote of support. Despite the vote in favor of

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<sup>35</sup> Deputies, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Deputies, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Kee, *The Green Flag*, 726.

approval, de Valera resigned his position as President and refused to recognize the Provisional Government. He joined the anti-Treaty Republicans who declared him president of a non-existent Irish Republic. They left the Dáil in protest and demonstrated that they were willing to use violence and risk civil war to continue their struggle.

In fact, civil war erupted in June 1922 as the Provisional Government was beginning the transformation into the Free State. The IRA, which had been in existence longer than the Dáil or the Provisional Government, split into two warring factions over the Treaty. Pro-Treaty members became the Irish Free State army, and those calling themselves Republicans remained in the IRA. It was the IRA's contention that having forced the British to negotiate, "one more good push would bring the Republic."<sup>38</sup> Some Republicans believed they were bound by the honor of the oath they swore to the Republic in 1916. If they stopped now and accepted the dominion status, it would somehow be dishonorable.<sup>39</sup> No amount of progress on the step-by-step path to independence would change their stance, not even when Collins accepted the "surrender" of Dublin Castle from the British.<sup>40</sup>

While de Valera did not actually participate in the violence of the Civil War, his rhetoric further destabilized the situation. As President of the (non-existent) Republic, de Valera should have had control of the IRA, but he did not. He told the *Manchester Guardian* that while the IRA was independent of his political party they had the same goals: to save the Irish people from being coerced by the British Government to surrender

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<sup>38</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 307.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

their independence, and he thought the IRA was entitled to use force to prevent elections.<sup>41</sup>

The Archbishop of Dublin held a meeting in April 1922 to attempt to avert civil war. Collins, Griffith, de Valera, and Brugha were in attendance. Both de Valera and Brugha refused to agree to an election or a plebiscite on the Treaty. In a press statement, de Valera said: "Republicans maintain that there are rights which a minority may justly uphold, even by arms, against a majority."<sup>42</sup>

In an effort to avert this catastrophe, in May 1922, Collins and de Valera came to an agreement to call for new elections for the government of the Free State. They would form a coalition government of five pro-Treaty and four anti-Treaty ministers and they would help create the new constitution.<sup>43</sup> De Valera stated that the source of all authority in the constitution should be the Irish people and that direct authority of the king would be inappropriate.<sup>44</sup> Collins believed that a constitution could be drafted within the boundaries set by the Anglo-Irish Treaty that did not incorporate the oath of allegiance to the king or the role of the British government in domestic affairs.<sup>45</sup> The IRA also agreed with this approach. Unfortunately, the British government insisted that the new Free State constitution "conform to the terms of the treaty, especially in giving the Crown a genuine place in the constitution and allowing judicial appeals to the British Privy Council."<sup>46</sup> De Valera and the Republicans could not agree to this and minor hostilities resumed between the parties. It was not an all out civil war just yet.

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<sup>41</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 313.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>43</sup> Kee, *The Green Flag*, 736.

<sup>44</sup> D.H. Akenson, "Was De Valera a Republican?" *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Apr. 1971): 251.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>46</sup> Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923*, 106.

Needless to say, the Irish people were tired of war, violence and the destruction of property; this was quite evident in their votes. Pro-Treaty candidates beat anti-Treaty candidates by a 2-to-1 margin. Of even more significance is that other parties, including Labor, independents and farmers, won more votes than the pro-Treaty candidates.<sup>47</sup> The implication, of course, was that voters wanted to get on with their lives and put politics and fighting behind them. There had been enough killing and destruction of property. Unfortunately, and despite the apparent wishes of the electorate, a brutal civil war ensued before de Valera and the Republicans would put down their arms and join the government.

The major catalyst for the onset of the Civil War was the assassination of British Field Marshall for Northern Ireland, Sir Henry Wilson, by two IRA members in London. British Cabinet member, Winston Churchill, warned Collins to take action to curb the IRA or he would send British troops back into Dublin.<sup>48</sup> The Dublin members of the IRA had previously barricaded themselves in the Four Courts building, a government judicial complex in April 1922. In addition, they stole cars from a Dublin car dealer in order to drive to Northern Ireland to continue their attacks on the British. They also kidnapped Ginger O'Connell, the deputy chief of staff of the Provisional Government's army, in retaliation when the Provisional Government had a few of their own men arrested.<sup>49</sup> Subsequently, the IRA, through one of its leaders named Rory O'Connor, declared the Free State government, courts and police illegal. He said the IRA had set up "an

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<sup>47</sup> Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923*, 106.

<sup>48</sup> Dwyer, 307.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

executive which would issue orders to the IRA all over the country. Asked if this was a military dictatorship, he said 'You can take it that way if you like.'"<sup>50</sup>

The IRA's ongoing activities and Churchill's ultimatum, forced Collins's hand. Collins noted, "The safety of the Nation is the first law and henceforth we shall not rest until we have established the authority of the people of Ireland in every square mile under their jurisdiction."<sup>51</sup> On June 28<sup>th</sup>, Collins issued an ultimatum to those inside the Four Courts complex; when it went unanswered, the army bombarded their IRA brothers with borrowed artillery from the British.

De Valera criticized Collins and the Free State forces for attacking their former comrades on behalf of the English. He further noted that the IRA "would most loyally have obeyed the will of the Irish people freely expressed."<sup>52</sup> In fact, they had disregarded the will of the people and de Valera was either deluding himself or lying. De Valera joined his old unit as a private soldier, but spent the time at the Hamman Hotel with Cathal Brugha and other old Republicans. This may indicate just how insignificant de Valera was to the leadership of the IRA that he was not entreated to take a position as an officer. During the street fighting that ensued, De Valera got away in a Red Cross ambulance, but Brugha was fatally wounded when he took an automatic gun out into the street and started firing on Free State troops.<sup>53</sup> The fighting lasted only eight days, but the city was in ruins for the second time in six years.

In the next six weeks, the Free State Army took control over the cities and towns throughout Ireland. Interestingly, de Valera, as the Republican President should have had

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<sup>50</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 30.

<sup>51</sup> Coogan, *Michael Collins*, 386.

<sup>52</sup> Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, 309.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.



responsibility for the IRA; however, the real power was in the hands of its Minister of Defense, Liam Lynch.<sup>54</sup> Lynch took his men into the countryside and conducted guerrilla warfare. They did not have the complete support of the populace as they did during the Anglo-Irish war, so they were at higher risk of being identified and arrested by the Free State army. The brutality on both sides escalated.

There were episodes where IRA men blew up a mine killing five Free State Army members. In reprisal, Free State Army used IRA members to clear land mines with deadly consequences. In at least one case, some Free State soldiers tied eight Republicans to a log and then detonated a land mine near them.<sup>55</sup> In return, IRA members destroyed railroad lines, roads, bridges, cut telephone and signal wires, extorted money and supplies from ordinary folk, and "murdered RIC men, ex-servicemen or other individual whom old scores of one sort or another needed to be settled occurred weekly, sometimes daily."<sup>56</sup> Families of Dáil members were assassinated and an extensive library containing invaluable china and paintings was destroyed simply because the owner was a member of the Dáil.<sup>57</sup>

Understandably, the Provisional Government stopped payments for support to the dissident IRA members. The latter responded by organizing bank and post office raids around the country.<sup>58</sup> Collins resigned as Minister of Defense to take up the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Irish Free State Army, and Richard Mulcahy assumed the office of the Minister of Defense. When the IRA began a policy of assassinating Dáil members, judges and even journalists sympathetic to the Provisional Government, the

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<sup>54</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 341.

<sup>55</sup> Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923*, 107.

<sup>56</sup> Kee, *The Green Flag*, 738.

<sup>57</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 342.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

Provisional Government's response to the Republican activities was with "summary executions without trial."<sup>59</sup> Mulcahy ordered the execution of Republican prisoners in reprisal for the murders of elected officials and judges in November 1922 despite the absence of any evidence indicating direct responsibility for the murders. All together, seventy-seven executions took place.

The public, which strongly supported the government because it was Irish, did not raise any outcry over these tactics.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the Catholic Church was very vocal in its moral support of the Free State. In fact, the bishops issued a pastoral letter, in October 1922, calling the Republicans' war effort immoral noting that there was no oath that can bind anyone "to carry on warfare against his own Country in circumstances forbidden by the law of God."<sup>61</sup> The impact of the pastoral letter on the clergy was dramatic and some priests began to refuse confessional forgiveness and communion to Republicans who did not repent. This kind of religious pressure must have been helpful to the Free State. In addition, the pastoral letter criticized de Valera, though not by name, "Vanity, perhaps self-conceit, may have blinded some who think that they, and not the nation, must dictate the national policy."<sup>62</sup>

In the public's mind, de Valera was associated with the IRA violence; however, the radical IRA leadership had no real interest in his political leadership. When de Valera appealed to them to support the Dáil; O'Connor (an IRA leader in charge of chemicals and ammunition) is quoted as saying "Some of us are no more prepared to stand for de

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<sup>59</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 513.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>61</sup> Coogan, *The IRA*, 32.

<sup>62</sup> Coogan, *De Valera*, 344.

Valera than the Treaty.”<sup>63</sup> When de Valera tried to persuade the Republicans to give up the fight, Liam Lynch, the IRA Chief of Staff, told his deputy chief, Liam Deasy, to “Give him no encouragement;” and Deasy told his men that they were “on no account to give Dev any encouragement as his arguments don’t stand up.”<sup>64</sup>

Of note is the fact that de Valera did not disassociate himself from the Republican movement. He considered himself to be their comrade, but he did not want to be regarded as a leader of their armed wing.<sup>65</sup> In fact, he continued to issues inflammatory statements and speeches that contributed to the incitement of civil war. For instance, *The Irish Independent* newspaper quotes de Valera on March 16, 1922, in a speech in Dungarvan,

The Treaty...barred the way to independence with the blood of fellow-Irishmen. It was only by Civil War after this that they could get their independence...if you don’t fight today, you will have to fight tomorrow; and I say, when you are in a good fighting position, then fight on.<sup>66</sup>

The following day, St Patrick’s Day, the same newspaper reported him saying to a crowd that included seven hundred members of the IRA, many carrying rifles,

If they accepted the Treaty, and if the Volunteers of the future tried to complete the work the Volunteers of the last four years had been attempting, they would have to complete it, not over the bodies of foreign soldiers, but over the dead bodies of their own countrymen. They would have to wade through, perhaps, the blood of some of the members of the Government in order to get Irish freedom.<sup>67</sup>

De Valera was strongly criticized for his inflammatory rhetoric by editorials, the Church and the population in general; however he defended his comments as either a

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<sup>63</sup> Coogan, *The IRA*, 309.

<sup>64</sup> Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, 322.

<sup>65</sup> Coogan, *The IRA*, 39.

<sup>66</sup> Coogan, *Eamon deValera*, 310.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

response to Collins's argument that the Treaty gave the Irish the freedom to achieve freedom or that he was misrepresented.<sup>68</sup>

After the death of one of the most tenacious IRA leaders, Liam Lynch, in a skirmish near Waterford, the conflict seemed to run out of steam. De Valera asked the IRA leadership to call a ceasefire, but they refused. However, Frank Aiken, who took over as IRA Chief of Staff, called for a ceasefire by the IRA on April 30, 1923. Aiken followed this on May 24th by an order to IRA to dump arms (collectively hide them) rather than surrender them or continue a fight which they were incapable of winning. De Valera tried one last time to make the Free State acquiesce to his way of thinking. He sent President Cosgrave, who succeeded Griffith after his death, a note requesting that for the IRA to surrender, the Free State would have to reject the oath and give the IRA representation in the Free State army. In addition, the funds that he had raised in the United States, more than a quarter of a million dollars, should be unfrozen and made available for Republican causes.<sup>69</sup>

Cosgrave was having none of it. Thousands of anti-Treaty IRA members, including de Valera, were arrested by the Free State forces in the weeks after the end of the war, when they had dumped their arms and returned home. Cosgrave was smart enough to realize how popular de Valera remained in the hearts of many Irish; therefore, he released him from jail in the summer of 1924. To execute de Valera would have "alienate[d] further a substantial proportion of the population at a time when peace and reconciliation were essential if the Free State was to survive."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 312.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>70</sup> Phil Chapple. "Dev: The Career of Eamon de Valera: Phil Chapple Examines a Titanic and Controversial Figure in Modern Irish History." *History Review*. No. 53, (2005): 28.

The Civil War really ended in May 1923 when the IRA agreed that violence was no longer an acceptable agent of change. Sadly, during this time Arthur Griffith, the Prime Minister, and Michael Collins had died: Griffith of a stroke on August 12, 1922, and Collins from a Republican bullet in an ambush in Cork County ten days later.

De Valera, who took no council from anyone, had believed that if he could bring the extremists into his political party, he would have the political clout to stop the Treaty's implementation. However, his inflammatory Republican-style rhetoric only emboldened the Republicans. In addition, because de Valera was held in such high esteem by many in Ireland, he gave more legitimacy to the Republicans than they might have otherwise garnered. As it turned out, the Republicans wanted no political solution. They were perfectly willing to use force to prevent elections and prevent the implementation of the Treaty that, in their minds, went against the oath they had taken to the Irish Republic that encompassed all of Ireland's thirty-two counties.

Early on, de Valera and Collins were representative of the Irish who showed that a united front could break the British subjugation of Ireland. They, as the early leaders of the Irish Republican movement, created an environment that forced the British government to consider some form of freedom for Ireland. To run the British out of Ireland, they took advantage of world sympathy for self-determination and the British public's dismay at the continuing violence against British subjects and British property. Unfortunately, there would be an internal conflict between the nationalist factions before Ireland, in the southern twenty-six counties, could begin to operate as a cohesive government to rebuild Ireland.

Collins was able to make the transition from military action as the only means of obtaining Irish independence to diplomatic and political solutions. He was pragmatic enough to realize that it was in Ireland's interest to modify as best they could the real practical offer of dominion status, with certain safeguards, while defending the integrity of the ethereal Republic, proclaimed in 1916 and ratified by Dail Eireann in 1919.<sup>71</sup>

De Valera, on the other hand, was intransigently single-minded in his insistence that the Republic which was declared in 1916 and again in 1919 not be dismantled.<sup>72</sup> In fact, his view would not be altered despite the electorate's vote to approve the Treaty. His argument there was that the "people had never a right to do wrong."<sup>73</sup> Consequently, de Valera, who was to prove to be a skilled politician and was already a proven leader, played a dangerous and deadly word game of inciting anti-Treaty actions while claiming to have been misrepresented.

As Michael Collins hoped, and as Eamon de Valera proved in his years as President and Taoiseach (Prime Minister), the Treaty gave them a blueprint for developing into a real republic, that is the "freedom to achieve freedom"<sup>74</sup>. The Nationalists had attempted to create a Gaelic, economically self-sufficient, sovereign nation for all of Ireland. For the counties in the South, they succeeded.

De Valera and his new party, Fianna Fáil, finally joined the government in 1927. In 1932, Fianna Fáil won enough seats that de Valera formed his first government. As President, he pursued a republican policy and removed the oath of allegiance to the

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<sup>71</sup> D. George Boyce, *Nationalism In Ireland, Third Edition*, (London: Routledge, 1995). 328.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>73</sup> Coogan, *Eamon de Valera*, 311.

<sup>74</sup> *Deputies*, 13.

British crown from the Irish Free State constitution.<sup>75</sup> In 1937, he introduced a new constitution. Finally, in 1949, the External Relations Act of 1936 was replaced by an act declaring Ireland a Republic. The British government and de Valera proved Collins right: the dominion status conferred by the Treaty did result in complete independence for the South.

However, as with most civil wars, the conflict resulted in a bitter legacy which continued to affect Irish politics for decades, even to today. The two strongest parties today, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are descended from the anti-Treaty and pro-Treaty forces of 1922 respectively. Also, the IRA continues to exist in various forms.

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<sup>75</sup> T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 4th Ed. (Lanham: Rinehart, 2001), 276.

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