



Unit 6:

The War of Independence 1919-1921

A Short History

UNIT 7:

THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

PHASE I: JAN 1919 - MARCH 1920

The first phase of the War of Independence consisted mainly of isolated incidents between the IRA and the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). From the beginning of the conflict, the British government refused to recognise the Irish Republic or to admit that a state of war existed between this republic and the UK. The violence in Ireland was described as 'disorder' and the IRA was a 'murder gang' of terrorists and assassins. For this reason, it was the job of the police rather than the 50,000-strong British army garrison in Ireland to deal with the challenge to the authority of the British administration. British soldiers would later become heavily involved in the conflict, but from the beginning the police force was at the front line of the conflict.

SOLOHEADBEG AMBUSH

On the same day as the meeting of the First Dáil on 21 January 1919, members of the South Tipperary Brigade ambushed a convoy of RIC at Soloheadbeg. The aim of the operation was to capture the gelignite being escorted to a local quarry, and to intensify hostilities against the RIC. Led by Dan Breen, Séan Treacy and Seamus Robinson, the Tipperary Volunteers acted independently of Volunteers General Headquarters (GHQ), which had forbidden arms raids. The ambush resulted in the deaths of two police constables, James McDonnell and Patrick O'Connell. The action was condemned by the church and the attackers reprimanded by GHQ.

POLICE BOYCOTT

Eamon de Valera escaped from Lincoln Jail on 3 February 1919 and when the remaining 'German Plot' prisoners were released in March 1919, the President of the Dáil was able to return to Ireland without danger of arrest. He presided at a meeting of Dáil Éireann on 10 April 1919 at which the assembly confirmed a policy of boycotting against the RIC.

THE RIC ARE "SPIES IN OUR MIDST ... THE EYES AND EARS OF THE ENEMY ... THEY MUST BE SHOWN AND MADE TO FEEL HOW BASE ARE THE FUNCTIONS THEY PERFORM AND HOW VILE IS THE POSITION THEY OCCUPY".

- Eamon de Valera (Dáil Debates, vol. F, no. 6, col. 67)-

This 'social war' first initiated by republicans in 1917, succeeded in driving a wedge between the RIC and the community and prepared the ground for the actual war that was waged against the force from early 1920.

-Document A -

ROINN COSANTA.
BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS
DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 450...
**Brigid O'Mullane, Cumann na mBan
Organiser, 1917-1923**
In 1919, owing to the officiousness of the local police in supplying information to the British military, Cumann na mBan decided to have an extra activity, namely, the social ostracism of the police throughout the country.
This I put into operation by getting the Cumann na mBan girls to refuse to dance with, or even to greet the police on the street, and further, to encourage shopkeepers to have no business dealings with them. I even got mothers to pull in their children from the doorways of the houses when the policemen were passing. This turned out to be a most effective method of preventing the police from supplying the British army with information.

The RIC was poorly prepared for the conflict. In 1919 the police force did not have the equipment, the training or the young men it needed to fight a guerrilla war. Their distinctive uniforms made them conspicuous and their barracks were often located in isolated rural areas. After a series of sporadic, unsuccessful attacks on police barracks in the second half of 1919, the RIC inspector general ordered the closure of the more vulnerable police stations. The police force was concentrated in more heavily fortified barracks that were better protected against rebel attacks.

As the number of violent incidents gradually increased, the British authorities introduced Special Military Areas where all public meetings were banned. Nonetheless, the RIC who were predominately Irishmen, became demoralised and less effective against the IRA. Many resigned or retired and the strength of the force declined steadily until the autumn of 1920.

THE INTELLIGENCE WAR

The 'intelligence war' was one of the most important military aspects of the Irish War of Independence. As IRA Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins built up an effective spy network which included Ned Broy, a member of G Division - an intelligence-gathering unit of plain-clothes Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) detectives. Collins' intelligence sources also included policemen, clerks, typists, waiters, hotel porters, post office staff, bar staff, railway officials and journalists.

Collins established a Volunteers General Headquarters (GHQ) Intelligence Department with offices at 3 Crow Street, only about 200 yards from Dublin Castle. Its personnel monitored British agents and spies, kept records on enemy personnel and monitored their telephone, telegraph and postal communications.

Collins' assistant Joe O'Reilly, called twice a day to collect reports and deliver instructions.

THE SQUAD

Having familiarised himself with the British intelligence system, Collins began eliminating its most prominent officers. In the summer of 1919, he established a special unit of full-time gunmen from Dick McKee's Dublin Brigade, IRA. The 'Squad' established a secret headquarters in a building disguised as Moreland's Cabinetmakers, Upholsterers and Builders in Upper Abbey Street.



On 30 July 1919 Squad members assassinated their first 'G'-man, Detective Sergeant Patrick Smyth. This was followed on 11 September by the assassination of Detective Sergeant Daniel Hoey. On the same day, the Dáil was declared a dangerous assembly and soon afterwards Collins went on the run, the Dáil government departments were forced underground, and the British government suppressed Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers. The year ended with the Squad's failed attempt on the life of Lord French at Ashtown railway station.

On 21 January 1920 the new Assistant Commissioner of the police, William Redmond, was shot dead and a reward of £10,000 was offered for the body of Michael Collins - dead or alive.

PHASE II: MARCH 1920 - DEC 1920

From 1 January when 1920 when IRA General Headquarters (GHQ) officially approved offensive action against Crown Forces saw the intensity of activities increase all over the country. Unlike IRA activity during 1919, which consisted mainly of arms seizures and attacks on individual policemen, the new year marked the commencement of an all-out assault on the RIC.

At Easter 1920 GHQ ordered a major mobilisation by the Irish Volunteers for a concerted nationwide assault that saw the destruction of over 300 buildings, including vacated police barracks, courthouses and taxation offices on the night of 3-4 April. By the end of the year, 533 police barracks were destroyed, of which twenty-three had been in use when attacked.

Raids and arrests became more frequent and curfew was introduced. However, some police began resorting to violence outside the law. On 20 January 1920, after an RIC constable was wounded in Thurles, County Tipperary, his comrades rioted, firing in

the streets and smashing the windows of buildings belonging to prominent local republicans.

On 20 March 1920, after the Volunteers had killed three RIC constables in three days, Lord Mayor Tomás MacCurtain was shot dead in his own home in Cork city, almost certainly by the police. The conflict was made more bitter by such acts and the reprisals that followed.

BRITISH COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

By this time the British government was taking steps to reinforce the demoralised RIC. In December 1919, it initiated a recruitment campaign in Britain aimed at young ex-servicemen with military skills and experience.

Due to a shortage of the dark bottle-green RIC uniform, the new RIC recruits were uniformed in a mixture of police and military clothing; in some cases they wore military trousers and tunic with a policeman's cap and belt. Within a few months they were nicknamed 'Black and Tans', most likely after a famous pack of foxhounds in County Tipperary.

The Black and Tans began to arrive in Ireland in March 1920. They were most numerous in the south, where the fighting was fiercest and police casualties and resignations had been the highest. Like their Irish comrades the Black and Tans also soon became associated with unofficial reprisals.

The Black and Tans were supplemented in July by the new Auxiliary Division of the RIC. The elite corps of ex-British Army officers were paid twice as much as the cadets and the Auxiliary companies were heavily armed with light machine guns and repeating shotguns as well as service rifles and revolvers.



Wrecked RIC barracks, MacCurtain Street, Cork, following an IRA bomb attack on 1 July 1920

Auxiliary companies were also full motorised, with touring cars for officers, Crossley Tenders (lightduty trucks) for their men, and even armoured cars. They wore distinctive khaki and black uniforms topped with a tam-o-shanter bonnet. The Auxiliary Division soon gained a reputation for harsh treatment of civilians, assassinating known and suspected revolutionaries and burning the homes and shops of their supporters.

IN ITS ATTEMPTS TO STAMP OUT THE 'MURDER GANG' IN IRELAND, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAD CREATED UNIFORMED GANGS OF ITS OWN, WHO FOUGHT WHAT WAS, IN EFFECT, A POLITICAL GANG WAR WITH THE IRA UNTIL THE TRUCE OF JULY 1921.

- David M. Leeson, *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, (CUP, Cork 2017)-

Prior to 1920, direct attacks by the IRA were focused on the RIC and the British Army remained on

the sidelines of the conflict. However, as the RIC required greater support, the military presence in Ireland increased. Troops began to take over large local buildings such as workhouses and other public buildings and by the summer of 1920 the IRA and the British army were engaged in a bloody guerrilla war.

By this point it was clear to the newly-appointed Chief Secretary, Sir Hammar Greenwood, and the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Ireland, General Sir Nevil Macready, that British authority in Ireland was becoming less effective. On 9 August 1920 the government introduced the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act, which gave Dublin Castle the power to govern by regulation. Mass arrests, internment, deportations, courts martial, curfews and executions were implemented as the military situation deteriorated.



[Photo: Irish Examiner]

Members of 'K' Company, Auxiliary Division, RIC, at Lower Glanmire train station (now Kent Station), Cork, circa 1920-1

THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY (IRA)

Nearly every community in Ireland contained an Irish Republican Army (IRA) presence. Some IRA units - frustrated by a lack of arms and ammunition - were largely inactive. Others, particularly those in southern Munster, created sophisticated guerrilla organisations.

In theory, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was commanded by a General Headquarters (GHQ) staff in Dublin. In reality, most IRA brigades governed their own areas with little direct oversight. GHQ offered encouragement and unity to the underground army, especially through the distribution of its journal *An t-Óglach* edited by Piaras Beaslai.

IRA Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy oversaw the directors of ten departments including Intelligence, Organisation, Training, Publicity and Engineering, Purchasing, Munitions, and Chemicals. Expertise about bomb building and road destruction was distributed across the organisation, while Michael Collins' intelligence department passed on relevant information to provincial units.

Many of the IRA were not armed due to the short supply of guns. They relied on other weapons such as stealth, resourcefulness, patience and discipline. They were engaged in felling trees or digging trenches to block off roads, scouting and carrying dispatches. Different brigades produced landmines, bombs and hand grenades. Volunteers

with a knowledge of engineering and explosives prepared and planted land mines at strategic points and supervised bridge destruction.

FLYING COLUMNS & GUERRILLA TACTICS

After the introduction of the 'Restoration of Order in Ireland Act' in August 1920, more and more IRA men were forced to leave their homes and go 'on the run' to avoid arrest. These fugitive Volunteers banded together for safety and became the nucleus of elite IRA active service units, or 'flying columns'.

"WHAT WE HAD IN MIND WAS AN EFFICIENT, DISCIPLINED, COMPACT AND SWIFT-MOVING BODY OF MEN WHICH WOULD STRIKE AT THE ENEMY WHERE AND WHEN A SUITABLE OPPORTUNITY AROSE."

- Donal O'Hannigan, 'Origin of the Flying Column,' *An Cosantóir* 6:12 (1946) -

Flying columns were composed of young, full-time, armed Volunteers available for joint operations with local IRA units. After the first columns were formed in Limerick in the summer of 1920, IRA GHQ quickly recognised the military potential of their hit and run tactics and in August encouraged the organisation of additional columns across the country.

Led by men such as Tom Barry, Liam Lynch and Ernie O'Malley, IRA 'flying columns' and local IRA units engaged in highly effective form of guerrilla warfare.

REPUBLICAN WOMEN

Cumann na mBan played an important role as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers during the War of Independence. Less likely to be searched by police, female dispatch carriers transported messages from General Headquarters (GHQ) to regional brigades and between Volunteer units. Postmistresses who were in Cumann na mBan played an especially important role in interrupting communications intended for the police and military, and by warning the local IRA of the Crown-forces' plans.

Cumann na mBan also assisted in the acquisition, storage and transportation of armaments and offered their homes as safe houses for Volunteers on the run. Their training in first aid was valuable in treating Volunteers who were wounded in engagements with Crown Forces.

Cumann na mBan also continued its political work during the period from 1919 to 1921, including

advertising and collecting for the Dáil Loan and participating in the Dáil's boycott of the RIC. When republican funerals, executions, and hunger strikes became more common in the second stage of the War of Independence, Cumann na mBan frequently organised prayer vigils as a form of public protest. At a time when the Crown forces aggressively dispersed civilian demonstrations, these vigils created a safe space to express messages of solidarity and defiance.

As the conflict progressed, the authorities became more aware of the extent of women's involvement and they were more likely to be searched, arrested and imprisoned. Approximately forty-six women were imprisoned for republican-related activities in early 1921. Cumann na mBan members also suffered non-judicial repercussions for their actions, such as having their hair cut off.

At the time of the Truce in mid-1921 Cumann na mBan had an approximate membership of 18,000.



Cumann na mBan protest outside Mountjoy Jail, 23 July 1921
[Source: National Library of Ireland, HOG 165]

REPRISALS

One of the first major reprisals occurred when the Crown forces terrorised the inhabitants of the town of Tuam in Co. Galway. The killing of two RIC constables – Patrick Carey and James Burke – in an ambush at Newtown Darcy, about three miles from Tuam, on 19 July 1920 resulted in a police reprisal in the early hours of the following morning that saw indiscriminate firing and widespread looting and burning of property in Tuam town. In August 1920, Black and Tans burned the Town Hall, Market Hall and the Urban District Offices in Templemore, County Tipperary after the assassination of a District Inspector.

On September 20, Head Constable Peter Burke was shot dead by the IRA in a pub in Balbriggan, Co. Dublin. Two hours later, a party of Auxiliaries arrived from Gormanstown depot. For five hours, they ran riot in the town. One of their first acts of reprisal was to burn down the hosiery factory, the principal employer in the area. Houses were cleared of inhabitants and burned to the ground. The invaders took John Gibbon out of his house into the street, where they shot and bayoneted him. They also seized James Lawless and took him to the local police barracks, where he was killed.

The capture of Mallow Barracks by a small force of the IRA's Cork No. 2 Brigade led by Liam Lynch on the evening of 27 September 1920, sparked a British

reprisal that devastated Mallow town. On the same evening in Trim, County Meath, up to 200 Black and Tans burned homes and business premises owned by suspected republicans as a reprisal for an IRA attack on the town's RIC barracks. The Irish White Cross allocated £277 in relief funds to the town in 1921.

A spate of IRA attacks in Kerry from late October to early November 1920, in which the IRA killed fourteen constables, resulted in the 'Siege of Tralee' – a series of reprisals and burnings of public buildings and business premises. Attacks on property peaked in November–December 1920, when 180 such incidents were recorded, culminating in the burning of Cork city on 11 December 1920. After a rebel grenade attack left one Auxiliary dead and eleven wounded, Auxiliary cadets set fire to part of Cork city centre, damaging or destroying over eighty commercial premises, as well as City Hall and the Carnegie Library.

Reprisals finally became official policy at the end of December 1920 when the British army's military governors began imposing them on districts that were under martial law. The first official reprisal occurred at Midleton, east Cork on 29 December 1920, when six houses were destroyed following an IRA ambush. In the first two months of 'official reprisals' in 1921 Dáil Éireann Publicity Department recorded seventy-nine attacks on property.

AN T-ÓGLÁC

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS.

[Vol. II No. 21]

OCTOBER 15, 1920

[PRICE: Two pence]

Preparations should be made to deal with the form of atrocity known as 'reprisals' ... It is the duty of every ... at the present juncture to leave no stone ... striking effective blows ...

[The enemy's] present attempt at "terrorism" is a last desperate gamble; he is playing his last card; and he will be beaten by the cool determination and efficiency of the A ... of the Irish Republic...As we go to Press the news c ... that the enemy have murdered in cold blood in Mau ... prisoner taken in action - Kevin ... of age. He met his

MUNITIONS STRIKE

The munitions strike which began in Dublin Port in May 1920, was the most significant example of non-violent resistance during the War of Independence. Dock workers and railwaymen refused to handle or to operate trains carrying munitions of war or armed troops and police. The strike seriously disrupted the movements of supplies and troops forcing them onto Ireland's roads where they were more vulnerable to attack. The railway companies, under war-time government control since December 1916, dismissed workers and closed some Irish railway lines. When the British government threatened to close the entire railway system, a special conference organised by the ITGWU in November 1920 called off the strike.

TERENCE MACSWINEY AND KEVIN BARRY

The war moved into a more ferocious stage in late 1920 with the execution of eighteen-year-old medical student, Kevin Barry and the death of Terence MacSwiney in Brixton Prison, London on 25 October 1920 after 74 days on hunger strike.

On 20 September 1920 young IRA member, Kevin Barry was captured with a pistol in his hand after an attack on a military party drawing provisions from a bakery in Church Street, Dublin. Three soldiers were killed and on 1 November, Barry became the first Volunteer to be executed under the provisions of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act. Sinn Féin actively

publicised the execution to gain sympathy for the republican cause.

Playwright, IRA commander and member of the first Dáil, Terence MacSwiney succeeded Tomás Mac Curtain as republican lord mayor of Cork in March 1920. Imprisoned in August on charges of sedition, MacSwiney embarked on a hunger strike which lasted for seventy-four days. Newspapers all over the world carried information on his deteriorating health sparking riots on the streets of Barcelona and a dockworkers strike in New York. Attempts by the British authorities to suppress MacSwiney's funeral in Ireland only drew further attention to one of the watershed events of the War of Independence.

THE DÁIL PUBLICITY DEPARTMENT

In the context of harsh press censorship under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), the *Irish Bulletin*, produced by the Dáil's Publicity Department under Desmond Fitzgerald, was the most important organ of republican publicity during the War of Independence. The daily news sheet, first published on 11 November 1919, highlighted the 'acts of aggression' by the police and military in Ireland, and defended IRA attacks on the Crown forces as a war against 'illegal forces of occupation'.

By 1921, foreign language editions of the *Bulletin* were being produced to cater for its popularity in Europe where it had gained a reputation as a trusted source. The news-sheet had decisive effect on British and international public opinion in relation to the Irish conflict. Dublin Castle's *Weekly Summary* launched in May 1920, responded by attacking the IRA as a 'murder gang' and always insisting that the rebels were on the verge of defeat.



L-R: KEVIN BARRY
AND TERENCE
MACSWINEY

November 1920 proved a turning point in the Irish War of Independence. After the events of Bloody Sunday in Dublin and the Kilmichael ambush in Cork (in which seventeen members of the RIC's Auxiliary Division were killed), the hostilities could no longer be defined as simply a police action. It was a military conflict.

BLOODY SUNDAY

Michael Collins received information that a group of Secret Service officers known as the 'Cairo Gang' had been sent to Dublin to eliminate the IRA Intelligence network. With GHQ approval, Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy were put in charge of the task of 'eliminating' the British agents. Despite the arrest of Clancy and McKee, it was agreed that the planned mission would go ahead on the morning of Sunday 21 November 1920. Just after nine o'clock, separate IRA assassination teams simultaneously struck various locations in Dublin and 'executed' eleven suspected British agents.

That afternoon, Crown forces opened fire on the crowd during a challenge football match between Dublin and Tipperary in Croke Park killing fourteen civilians and the injuring of a further sixty-four. That night McKee and Clancy and an innocent man called Conor Clune were shot dead in Dublin Castle.

THE KILMICHAEL AMBUSH

Perhaps the most notorious of the ambushes during the War of Independence occurred halfway between Dunmanway and Macroom on Sunday, 28 November 1920. At a place called Kilmichael, the flying column of the West Cork Brigade commanded by twenty-three-year-old Tom Barry ambushed and killed seventeen of the eighteen Auxiliaries under RIC District Inspector Francis Crake.

Tom Barry maintained that the Auxiliaries pretended to surrender at one point during the engagement, before resuming the fight. This deception, he said, cost the lives of two of his men who broke cover and the treachery prompted him to take no prisoners. Barry's critics have suggested that he concocted the false surrender to justify a premeditated massacre. Whatever happened amidst the fog of war, reprisals quickly followed.

MARTIAL LAW

Martial law was subsequently proclaimed in counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary on 10 December 1920, - two days before Auxiliaries set fire part to Cork city centre. Martial Law was proclaimed in four more counties - Clare, Waterford, Kilkenny and Wexford - on 29 and 30 December. A system of official reprisals was also introduced in the south-western counties of Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary in December 1920.

A SMALL BODY OF ASSASSINS, A REAL MURDER
GANG, DOMINATE THE COUNTRY AND TERRORISE
IT.... IT IS ESSENTIAL IN THE INTERESTS OF IRELAND
[THAT] THAT GANG SHOULD BE BROKEN UP WE
HAVE MURDER BY THE THROAT.

- House of Commons, Prime Minister' Lloyd George's Statement, 9 Oct 1920 -

Two-tier Military Courts were established in the Martial Law Area (MLA). The Summary Court dealt with less serious cases, trying 2,296 people and imposing 549 sentences of imprisonment. The upper tier was responsible for major offenses against Martial Law. It tried just 128 people between late December 1920 and the Truce in July 1921, sentencing thirty-seven men to death. Fourteen of these men were executed. Military Court trials were held at Victoria Barracks, Cork, New Barracks, Limerick and Waterford Barracks.

PHASE III: JAN 1921 - JULY 1921

The final phase of the war began in early 1921 as the increased British military presence and their military tactics, as well as continuing arms shortages, undermined the capacity of the IRA to perform demanding operations. GHQ's advice was to carry out a larger number of smaller operations requiring fewer weapons and posing less risk to Volunteers. The fighting intensified on both sides with more ambushes and executions.

THE DROMKEEN AMBUSH

After two disastrous months during which twelve Volunteers died, the IRA in Limerick staged the Dromkeen ambush - one of the most decisive IRA actions in the War of Independence. About fifty men from the Mid-Limerick Brigade and East Limerick Brigade active service units carried out the joint operation under the overall command of Donnchadh O'Hannigan. Eleven policemen were killed at Dromkeen - second only to Kilmichael in the number of confirmed British fatalities - and no Volunteers were lost. The policy from the outset was to take no prisoners and two policemen were killed after their surrender.

CLONFIN, CO LONGFORD

County Longford was one of the most violent counties during the War of Independence. Sinn Féin's victory in the Longford South by-election in May 1917, was the catalyst for the emergence of a strong republican movement, politically and militarily, in the county. The Longford IRA's most successful engagement with Crown forces was at an ambush at Clonfin, between Granard and Ballinalee, on 2 February 1921, which resulted in the deaths of four Auxiliaries.

CROSSBARRY, CO CORK

On 19 March 1921, acting on reliable intelligence on the location of IRA brigade headquarters, Crown Forces organised an extensive sweep of the area between Bandon and Cork City. Tom Barry orchestrated a bold fighting retreat, inflicting at least ten fatalities on the enemy, while suffering three. This event at Crossbarry, were the closest to a conventional battle in the whole of the Anglo-Irish war.

THE ARMY OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC

In March 1921, in response to the continued British insistence that the IRA was an undisciplined 'murder gang', the Dáil clarified that the IRA had been fighting on its behalf and assumed responsibility for the actions of the Volunteers up to that point. In April, de Valera told a newspaper correspondent:

"FROM THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS WE FASHIONED THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY TO BE THE MILITARY ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT ... THE GOVERNMENT, THEREFORE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTIONS OF THIS ARMY."

- Eamon de Valera, April 1921-

TOURMAKEADY, CO MAYO

The 'Battle of Tourmakeady', as it became known, was one of the most famous episodes of the War of Independence. On 3 May 1921, an RIC/Black and Tan patrol was ambushed by IRA volunteers in the village of Tourmakeady. Four policemen were killed in the attack with the IRA column taking to the nearby Partry Mountains in the aftermath. The ambush conferred legendary status on the leader of the IRA flying column, the late Commandant Tom Maguire.

THE SECOND DÁIL

The Government of Ireland Act came into force on the day before Eamon de Valera's return to Dublin on Christmas eve 1920. The Act partitioned Ireland along the same lines set out by Lloyd George in 1916 and provided for two Home Rule governments in Ireland. One in Dublin for twenty-six counties and one in Belfast for six north-eastern counties where unionists formed an electoral majority. Provisions were made for the eventual unification of Ireland, but only when, and if, the unionists wanted it. Despite the fact that the act implemented partition, the Dáil and the IRA were still determined to continue fighting for an All-Ireland Republic completely independent from Britain.

Under the terms of the Act an election was held in the twenty-six counties on 19 May 1921 to return members to the Parliament of Southern Ireland. The Dáil rejected the Government of Ireland Act, but decided to use the election arrangements to return members for the second Dail. Unopposed in 124 of the 128 new constituencies, Sinn Féin swept the board.

Six days later an election was held in the six counties for the Parliament of Northern Ireland. Unionists won 40 out of 52 seats while Sinn Féin candidates won 6 seats. Sinn Féiners elected in both elections now formed the second Dáil which maintained itself as a parliament of an All-Ireland Republic.

BURNING OF THE CUSTOM HOUSE

Conscious the criticisms leveled against the IRA, de Valera called for a more conventional military campaign. If not large set-piece battles, then at least

something other than ambushes and assassinations. The result was the attack on the Customs House on 25 May 1921.

As the seat of British local government in Ireland, the Custom House was a symbolic target. The burning was carried out by a Dublin IRA party of over 100, overseen by OC of the Dublin Brigade, Oscar Traynor. It proved impossible to set fire to the building and evacuate it before British forces arrived on the scene. Five IRA men died, and dozens were amongst the over one hundred suspects arrested by the Crown Forces. Both the ASU and the Dublin's 2nd Battalion were seriously weakened as a result and the surviving activists amalgamated into the Dublin Guard.

CALLS FOR A TRUCE

In February 1921 Brigadier-General Crozier commanding the Auxiliaries resigned and made public his disgust with government policy in Ireland. At the Commonwealth Conference in June, the South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts persuaded Lloyd George to invite de Valera to London for talks. A breakthrough in negotiations came from an unlikely source. On 22 June King George V opened the Northern Irish Parliament and made a plea for peace:

I APPEAL TO ALL IRISHMEN TO PAUSE, TO STRETCH OUT
THE HAND OF FORBEARANCE AND CONCILIATION AND TO
JOIN IN MAKING FOR THE LAND WHICH THEY LOVE A NEW
ERA OF PEACE, CONTENTMENT AND GOOD WILL ...

- King George V, 22 June 1921-

Following this plea, Lloyd George proposed a meeting in London. De Valera accepted and the Anglo-Irish Truce came into operation on 11 July 1921. The fighting was over, but an equally difficult battle was about to begin around the conference table.