

THE IRISH QUESTION

A SHORT HISTORY

Part II – from the 20th century to the present day

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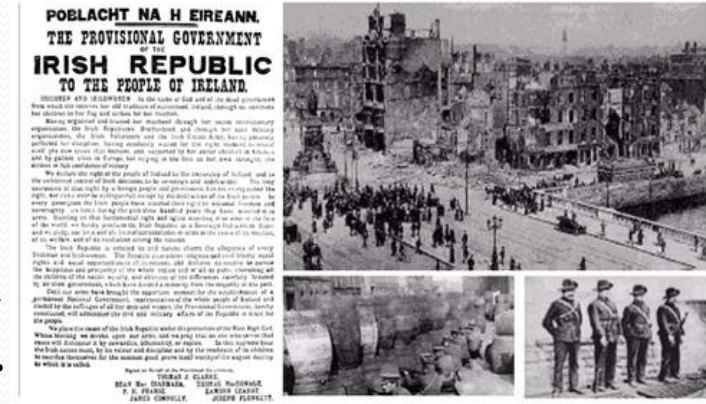
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5. The early 20th c.: 1914


- On 18th September 1914 the **Government of Ireland Act** was passed by Parliament to provide *home rule* for Ireland within the UK.
- However with the outbreak of the First World War it was formally postponed for a minimum of 12 months: Britain couldn't afford to go into war without the Irish to the point that, in March 1918, conscription became a serious threat.
- The Armistice ended the Great War on 11th November 1918 so that the military draft bill was never implemented.
- Nevertheless subsequent developments in Ireland led to further postponements of the Act till it was finally repealed in 1920. Meanwhile...

6. From 1916...



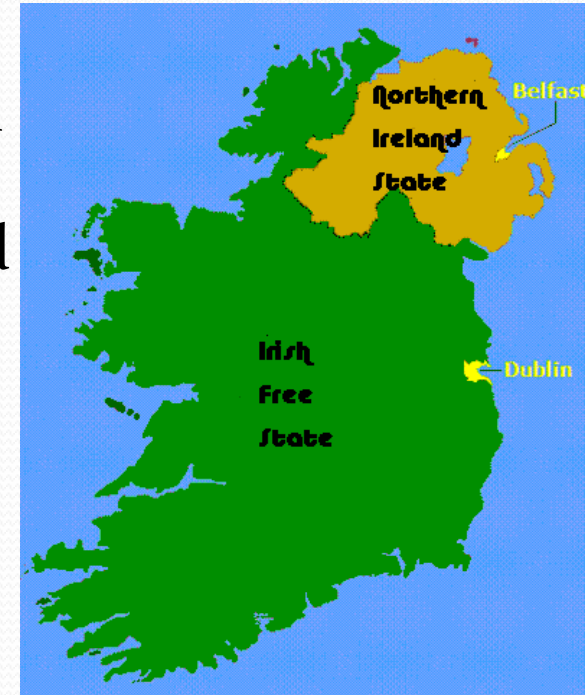
- In 1916 the **Easter Rising** took place: it was mounted by Irish republicans with the aims of ending British rule in Ireland as well as establishing the Irish Republic.
- The Rising lasted from **24th April** (Easter Monday) to **30th April** 1916: members of the *Irish Volunteers*, led by schoolteacher and barrister **Patrick Pearse**, joined by the smaller *Irish Citizen Army* of **James Connolly**, along with 200 members of *Cumann na mBan* (the women's paramilitary organisation), seized key locations in Dublin and proclaimed the Irish Republic independent of Britain.
- The Rising was suppressed after seven days of fighting, and its **leaders were court-martialled and executed**, but it succeeded in bringing physical force republicanism back to the forefront of Irish politics.

6. ... to 1919.

- In the **1918** General Election to the British Parliament, republicans (then represented by the **Sinn Féin** party, Irish for *we ourselves*, founded in 1905) won 73 seats out of 105: theirs was a policy of abstentionism and Irish independence.
- In January **1919**, the elected members of  who were not still in prison at the time, including survivors of the Rising, convened the First Dáil, i.e. a unicameral, revolutionary parliament which refused to recognise the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and established the Irish Republic.
- The British Government in turn refused to accept the legitimacy of the newly declared nation, precipitating the **Anglo – Irish War** (also known as the Irish War of Independence).

7. 1919-1921: the Anglo-Irish War.

- The **Irish War of Independence** was a guerrilla war mounted by **the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against the British government** and its forces in January **1919**, following the Irish Republic's declaration of independence. Both sides agreed to a truce in July 1921, but violence continued in the northeast (mostly between republicans and loyalists).
- The post-ceasefire talks led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty on 6th December **1921**, which ended British rule in most of Ireland and established the **Irish Free State**, a self-governing dominion of 21 counties, which replaced the Irish Republic.
- Six **northern counties** of Ulster, one of the four provinces of Ireland, **would**, however, remain within the United Kingdom as **Northern Ireland**.



8. From 1922 to 1949.

- The Irish Free State came to an end in 1937, when the citizens voted by **referendum** to replace the 1922 constitution.
- It was succeeded by the **modern state of Ireland** in 1937, an entirely sovereign state with a new constitution.
- **1940-45**: in World War II, the Irish Free State remained neutral while Northern Ireland took part in the fighting.
- The last formal link with the United Kingdom was severed in **1949** when the Oireachtas (national parliament) passed **the Republic of Ireland Act**.
- Nevertheless the Irish question has remained alive throughout the second half of the 20th century...

9. From 1949 to 1972.

- Catholics supported by the IRA (*Irish Republican Army*) attempted to reunite the island: a terrorist campaign began.
- **1962**: the terrorist attacks were stalled by the lack of weapons.
- **1963-68**: discrimination against Catholics spread in housing, jobs and political representation because they were seen as a threat to the State – the Catholics started to fight for their Civil Rights.
- **1969**: the *Troubles* began with British troops sent to Ireland permanently – this was followed by the introduction of *internment without trial* to stem IRA attacks in 1971.

10. Bloody Sunday.

- On 30th January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, **26 unarmed civil rights protesters** and bystanders (including **7 teenagers** and **3 pregnant women**) were **shot** by members of the British Army, soldiers of the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment.
- The incident occurred during a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march organized to protest against the continuation of *internment without trial*. It became known as **Bloody Sunday**.
- The events caused shock and revulsion at an international level: within Ireland the killings resulted in a dramatic increase in support for Republicanism in general and the IRA in particular.
- The IRA, with its violent and antidemocratic character, committed atrocities and massacres at home as well as bombings even in London at the same time as Protestant para-military groups.

10. “*unjustified and unjustifiable*”.

- Two **investigations** were held by the British Government:
 1. the Widgery Tribunal, immediately after the event, largely cleared the soldiers and British authorities of blame;
 2. the Saville Inquiry, chaired by Lord Saville of Newdigate, established in 1998 to reinvestigate the events, lasted twelve years. Saville’s report was made public on 15th June 2010, and re-opened the controversy: the report found that all of those shot were unarmed, and that **the killings** were both “**unjustified and unjustifiable**”.

On the publication of the Saville report **the British prime minister**, David Cameron, **made a formal apology on behalf of the United Kingdom.**

11. The late 20th c.: 1972 - 1981

- **1974**: the proposal for an executive formed by Protestants and Catholics together failed.
- **1979**: **Lord Louis Mountbatten**, the Queen's cousin, was killed by a bomb blast on his boat in Ireland.
- **1981 (5th May)**: Bobby Sands, an Irish volunteer of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and member of the British Parliament died on hunger strike while imprisoned in HM Prison Maze . Following his example republican prisoners joined the strike at staggered intervals in order to maximise publicity.



Bobby Sand's example.

- The hunger strike centred around five demands:
 - the right not to wear a prison uniform;
 - the right not to do prison work;
 - the right of free association with other prisoners and to organize educational and recreational pursuits;
 - the right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week;
 - full restoration of remission, lost through the protest.
- The prisoners' aim was to be recognized as political prisoners or prisoners of war, not to be classed as criminals: their behaviour inspired a new way of resistance all over the world.



12. The Enniskillen bombing.

- On 8th November 1987 the Remembrance Day bombing (also known as the Enniskillen bombing or Poppy Day massacre) took place in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland.
- **11 people were killed** when a Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) bomb exploded at the town's war memorial (cenotaph) during a Remembrance Sunday ceremony – held to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts.
- The bombing was described by the BBC as a turning point in *The Troubles* and an attack that shook the IRA "to its core".



13. 1994 - 1998

- **1994:** the IRA proclaim a ceasefire and the Irish Peace Process is set in motion with “talks” between the British **Prime Minister John Major** and **Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams**.



- **1996 (February):** the IRA calls off its ceasefire and one hour later sets off a bomb at South Quay which injures 100 and causes millions of pounds' worth of damage...

14. The Belfast Agreement.



- On 10th April 1998 the **Belfast Agreement** (or the **Good Friday Agreement**) was signed in Belfast by the British and Irish governments through their P. M.s **Tony Blair** and **Bertie Ahern**: it was a major political development in the Northern Ireland peace process.

- It established the Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved legislative powers and marked a de-escalation of violence in *The Troubles* as the whole period of ethno-political conflict is generally known. It also committed its participants:
 - to *partnership, equality and mutual respect between these islands*;
 - to use *exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues*;
 - to *oppose any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose*.

15. The Omagh bombing.

- On 15th August 1998 the **Omagh bombing** took place: the paramilitary car bomb attack was carried out by the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), a splinter group of former Provisional Irish Republican Army members opposed to the Belfast Agreement. **29 people died** as a result of the attack and about **220 people** were injured.
- Described as *Northern Ireland's worst single terrorist atrocity, an appalling act of savagery*, it made victims among both Protestants and Catholics, teenagers and children, natives and tourists.
- The nature of the bombing created a strong international and local outcry against the RIRA, which later apologised.



16. From 2000 ...

- Violence continued, though on a sporadic basis:
 1. **3rd August 2001: the Ealing bombing** – a Real IRA car bomb **injured 7 civilians** in Ealing, west London;
 2. **12th July 2005: police were attacked** with blast and petrol bombs during rioting in an area of Belfast, following an **Orange Order** parade. **80 police officers were injured** and several people were arrested;



3. **25th February 2006: the Dublin riots** a unionist demonstration was to take place down O'Connell Street but counter-demonstrators blocked the route of the proposed march. **14 people**, including journalists and photographers, were **hospitalised** and a further 41 people were arrested;

16. ... to 2011.

4. **7th March 2009: two British Army soldiers were shot dead** and two more seriously injured during a Real IRA gun attack. Two days later a **police officer was shot dead** by the Continuity IRA;
5. **February – October 2010: car bomb attacks** were organised by the RIRA throughout the year;
6. **June – July 2011: the Northern Ireland riots** took place. Scores of youths attacked police in an expression of rage over an Orange Order parade in north Belfast, throwing stones, golf balls, gasoline bombs and fireworks at police.



- The peace process is far from over...