

# CHAPTER 2

## PEACE, WAR AND NEUTRALITY: BRITAIN, NORTHERN IRELAND AND IRELAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR c1932–49

### UNIT 1

### Anglo-Irish Relations Before World War II

#### The Background to Partition: Ireland, 1912–21

##### Introduction

The years 1912–21 saw significant changes in the relationship between Ireland and Britain. In 1912 all of Ireland was under British rule. Within ten years there were two separate and distinct states in Ireland: Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom, while the Irish Free State had gained a large degree of independence from Britain.

##### Home Rule

In 1912 Britain's Liberal Government promised to introduce Home Rule to Ireland. This would establish a parliament in Dublin to look after Ireland's internal affairs. At the same time Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom. Home Rule had been the goal of Ireland's **nationalist** politicians for almost a century. It now seemed as if that goal was to be achieved.

However, not everyone in Ireland was delighted by this prospect. Significant parts of the population of the province of Ulster were **unionists**. They feared that a parliament in Dublin would come under the influence of the Catholic Church. They were determined that Ireland should not have its own parliament.

Both sides built up private armies to ensure that they got their way. By mid-1914 it seemed as if civil war was about to break out between the two sides; however, with the start of the Great War in August 1914, it was agreed to postpone the introduction of Home Rule until the conflict had ended.



*Punch cartoon showing Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond trying to herd a group of pigs representing Ireland through the Home Rule gate. The pig representing the unionists of North-East Ulster is trying to escape*

##### The Easter Rising, 1916

Not everyone was prepared to wait. In April 1916 a group of **republicans** led by Padraig Pearse staged a rebellion against British rule and

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*The 1916 proclamation of independence*

declared Ireland a **republic**. While the rebellion failed, the harsh way in which the British Government reacted to it had a profound impact on Irish politics. Instead of wanting Home Rule, many nationalists now demanded that Ireland be given full independence.

By 1918 the previously insignificant Sinn Féin had replaced the more moderate Irish Parliamentary Party as the largest political party in Ireland. Moreover, rather than send MPs to London, Sinn Féin set up its own parliament in Dublin, Dáil Éireann. With its calls for the creation of an independent Irish Republic (Source A), the scene was set for some sort of conflict.

### The Government of Ireland Act, 1920

The conflict was not long in coming. In January 1919 the IRA began what became known as the Anglo-Irish War against the British forces in Ireland. While fighting this war, the British began the search for an acceptable political solution. The result was the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. This proposed the **partitioning** of Ireland and the establishment of **devolved** governments in both parts of Ireland.



1920 Painting by Sean Keating of an IRA flying column

The unionists had been concerned that Britain would give in to Sinn Féin (Source B) and so were delighted at the terms of the Government of Ireland Act. They therefore agreed to the idea of partition and began the process of setting up their own parliament. Sinn Féin, however, rejected the Government of Ireland Act, saying that it didn't

give Ireland enough freedom. The war therefore continued for another six months before a ceasefire was agreed and negotiations began. These discussions resulted, in December 1921, in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which established a 26-county Irish Free State.

Although it was still not full independence, it gave Dublin more power than home rule. In the words of Michael Collins, it gave Irish politicians 'freedom, not the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it'.

#### SOURCE A

Sinn Féin aims at securing international recognition of Ireland as an independent Irish Republic.

*Sinn Féin President, Éamon de Valera, explains his party's aims, 1917*

#### SOURCE B

We in Ulster will tolerate no Sinn Féin. If [the British Government] is unable to protect us from Sinn Féin and won't take our help, we will take the matter into our own hands.

*Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson, warning the British Government about the consequences of giving in to Sinn Féin, July 1920 (adapted)*

### The Irish Free State, 1922–32

Many in Sinn Féin were happy with the Treaty (Source A); however, not all of Collins's colleagues agreed. As a result the Treaty split the IRA and Sinn Féin. In particular, divisions emerged over the issues of partition and the Free State's remaining links with Britain (Source B).

#### (i) Partition

Partition had become a reality with the establishment of Northern Ireland in 1921. During the negotiations leading to the Treaty the Sinn Féin delegation reluctantly accepted the partition of Ireland as a temporary price to pay for political independence. They were helped here by the British promise to set up a Boundary

Commission to examine the location of the border at a future date. The Irish delegation was told that this Commission would take land off Northern Ireland and leave it too small to survive. In this way Ireland would be united again.

This promise did not convince all republicans. The anti-treaty supporters, led by Éamon de Valera, attacked the Treaty for its acceptance of partition. They argued that it meant the abandonment of half a million nationalists living inside the new state of Northern Ireland.

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*Dublin Opinion cartoon commenting on what the 1921 Treaty was doing to Ireland*

## (ii) Links Between Britain And The Irish Free State

As part of the Treaty, Sinn Féin accepted that the Irish Free State was a **dominion** of the British Commonwealth, with the same constitutional status and rights as Canada. There would be three key features to this dominion:

- ◆ The Crown in Ireland would be represented by a Governor General;
- ◆ The elected representatives to Dáil Éireann would have to swear an Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown (Source C);
- ◆ The highest court of appeal in legal cases would be the **Privy Council** in Westminster.

Britain also retained three ports in the Irish Free State as naval facilities: the so-called 'Treaty Ports' of Berehaven, Cobh and Lough Swilly.

Again there was fury from the anti-Treaty side. They argued that the Oath meant that Ireland would still be controlled by Britain. They also argued that an oath to the king would break the oath that they had all sworn to an Irish Republic. Yet the majority of the Dáil agreed with Collins and the Treaty was accepted by 64 votes to 57. In protest de Valera and his followers walked out of the Dáil.

The republicans' failure to reach accommodation over these issues led to the Irish Civil War of 1922–3. The pro-Treaty side was victorious in the Civil War and for the next nine years the Free State was governed by a pro-Treaty party, Cumann na nGaedheal, headed by William T Cosgrave. In 1926 de Valera established the Fianna Fáil Party. They entered the Dáil in 1927 and within a year had become the official opposition party in the Dáil.

## Developments, 1923–32

Cosgrave's Government soon began to challenge the Free State's relationship with Britain by trying to show that they could do the same kind of things as other independent countries:

- ◆ In 1923 they joined the **League of Nations**;
- ◆ In 1924 the Irish Free State became the first Commonwealth country to appoint its own ambassador to the USA;
- ◆ At **Imperial Conferences** held in 1926 and 1930 the Irish representatives encouraged the other dominions to push for equal status with Britain. This pressure led to the Statute of Westminster of 1931. This law allowed a dominion to leave the Commonwealth whether Britain agreed or not.

### SOURCE A

To me this treaty gives me what I and my colleagues fought for; it gives us for the first time in 700 years, the evacuation of Britain's armed forces out of Ireland.

*Seán MacEoin gives a supporter's view of the Treaty, December 1921*

**SOURCE B**

The two great principles for which so many have died – no partition and no control of Ireland by any foreign power – have gone by the board in this treaty.

*Seán T O'Kelly provides the view of those members of Sinn Féin who were against the Treaty, December 1921*

**SOURCE C**

I \_\_\_\_\_ do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established and that I will be faithful to His Majesty King George V, his heirs and successors by law, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.

*Extract from Oath of Allegiance (Article 4, Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1921)*

**QUESTIONS**

1. How did Sinn Féin and the IRA react to the 1921 Treaty?
2. Why was there opposition to the Treaty?  
Use the following headings to help you.
  - ◆ Partition;
  - ◆ Links with Britain.
3. Which two political parties were set up in the Irish Free State after the Civil War?
4. What steps did Cumann na nGaedheal take in order to increase the amount of independence the Free State had?

**REVISION TIP** 

Although this information is background to the period that you will be examined on, it is still important information for you to understand. In particular, you need to be aware of why there were divisions in the Free State over the 1921 Treaty.

**The Northern Ireland State, 1920–32****The Government of Northern Ireland**

They might not have sought their own parliament but once they had it, the unionists set about making it work (Source A). In the elections that were held for the new Northern Ireland Parliament in May 1921 the unionists won 40 out of 52 seats. The unionist leader, Sir James Craig (from 1927: Lord Craigavon), became the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. With such a majority it was easy for the unionists to dominate the political institutions. Indeed Sir James Craig once said, 'All I boast of is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State.'



*James Craig*

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*The opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament, June 1921*

## Political Relations between Britain and Northern Ireland

Under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act the parliament in Belfast would control most of the everyday affairs of the new state. Westminster, however, retained responsibility for foreign affairs, defence and taxation. It also retained the power to overrule any law made by the Northern Ireland Parliament. However, after 1921 the British Government took little interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

## Nationalist Reactions to the New State

Many nationalists resented the new state in which they made up only one-third of the population (Fig 2.1) (Source B). In particular, they resented the discrimination they faced in housing, employment and local government. They also faced an increase in violence. Between 1920 and 1922 over 400 people were killed in sectarian fighting in Belfast alone and many Catholics were forced from their homes and jobs.

Since they expected partition to be temporary, nationalists refused to recognise the existence of Northern Ireland. They demonstrated their refusal to recognise the state in a number of ways:

- ◆ Nationalist MPs refused to take their seats in the Northern Ireland Parliament;
- ◆ Teachers in Catholic schools were paid by Dublin;
- ◆ Catholics did not join the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) formed in 1922.

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*Fig 2.1 Map showing the percentage of Catholics in Ulster, 1920*

However, the hoped-for collapse of Northern Ireland did not materialise. When the Boundary Commission promised by Britain failed to alter the border it became clear that partition was permanent.

## Unionist Responses

Nationalists' negative reaction to Northern Ireland increased the suspicions and fears of unionists. Many unionists believed that nationalists were out to undermine the new state. For this reason they regarded them as disloyal and not to be trusted with political power. These fears led to the introduction of a range of repressive measures:

- ◆ The establishment of the Ulster Special Constabulary. Set up to support the police, this became a mainly Protestant force. It had a part-time section called the B Specials who were particularly feared by Catholics.
- ◆ The introduction of the Special Powers Act in 1922. This allowed the government to arrest and detain people without any trial. Although it was supposed to be temporary, it was made permanent in 1933 and actually survived until 1970.
- ◆ Unionists increased their control over local councils by abolishing **Proportional Representation (PR)** and by **gerrymandering** electoral boundaries to ensure unionist control of local authorities where Catholics

were in a majority. This form of discrimination was particularly obvious in Derry/Londonderry.

Craig and his government also feared interference in the affairs of Northern Ireland by Dublin. Although these fears reduced after the failure of the Boundary Commission in 1925, many unionists remained suspicious of the external threat to their state.

### Segregation Reinforced?

Even before partition Ulster society had been deeply divided. These divisions increased after partition with the creation of a unionist-dominated state. Protestants and Catholics attended separate schools. Moreover members of the different religions rarely mixed socially and often lived in different areas. The two communities often had separate sporting interests and joined different organisations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Orange Order.

#### SOURCE A

[Unionists] fully realised that there was little sympathy and affection for them in Britain and feared that Westminster might try and force them into the South. Therefore they saw safety in 'Having a parliament of our own, for we believe that once a parliament is ... working well ... we should fear no one, and we feel that we would then be in a position of absolute security'.

*Protestant attitude to the setting up of the Northern Ireland Parliament as stated by historian Patrick Buckland in A History of Northern Ireland*

#### SOURCE B

This so-called northern parliament is a danger to our liberties and a barrier to the permanent solution of the Irish problem, we (nationalists) can neither give it recognition nor lend it support.

*The Catholic attitude to the new Northern Ireland state as expressed by Mgr George Crolley, Parish Priest of St Matthew's, Belfast, April 1921*

## QUESTIONS

1. Who won the elections held for the first Northern Ireland Parliament?
2. How much power did the new Northern Ireland Parliament have?
3. How did Northern nationalists react to the establishment of Northern Ireland?
4. What steps did the Northern Ireland Government take to ensure that nationalists would not be able to undermine their new state?
5. What evidence can you find to show that Northern Ireland was a divided society?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

In what ways could Northern Ireland be described as 'a Protestant State'?

## REVISION TIP

As with the previous chapter this information is background to the period that you will be examined on. However, you still need to understand the reasons why Northern Ireland was such a divided state.

## The Free State under de Valera, 1932–6

### De Valera Becomes President

In March 1932 Fianna Fáil, with Labour Party support, succeeded Cumann na nGaedheal as the Free State's government. As a result Éamon de Valera, the senior surviving commandant from the 1916 Rising and the leading opponent of the Treaty, became President of the Executive Council (Cabinet). He had finally been given the opportunity to dismantle the Treaty's terms (Source A).



Éamon de Valera

### De Valera's Political Views

Soon after coming to power de Valera wrote to the British Government condemning the Oath of Allegiance as an 'intolerable burden on the conscience of a people'. He then started a process to remove the remaining symbols of British power in the Free State. De Valera was careful to take each step carefully and within the law. He knew that this would make any retaliation by the British more difficult.

### Dismantling the Treaty, 1932-6

There were a number of stages in dismantling the Treaty:

1. In April 1932 de Valera introduced a law to remove the Oath of Allegiance that all members of the Dáil had to swear to the King. Despite British protests and opposition from Cumann na nGaedheal, the government passed the Removal of the Oath Act in May 1933. To Irish nationalists this was an important step in removing links to Britain and strengthening their political independence. However, it was regarded by Britain as breaking the terms of the Treaty and it increased their suspicions of de Valera.
2. In November 1932 the British Government was forced to recall the King's representative in the Free State, Governor-General James MacNeill. This was because de Valera had instructed Fianna Fáil ministers to ignore the Governor General and boycott all of the official functions that he attended. De Valera would have preferred to get rid of the Governor General completely, but he realised

that he needed someone to sign the bills the Dáil passed into law.

MacNeill was replaced by a member of Fianna Fáil, Domhnall O'Buachalla who was given the title of *an seanasca* (Chief Steward). Although he remained in this post until it was abolished in 1937, his powers were officially reduced in 1933. He never lived in the Governor General's official residence in Phoenix Park and he undertook no official duties.

3. At the same time de Valera amended the Free State Constitution to prevent Free State citizens using the Privy Council, the highest court in Britain, to appeal against decisions made in Irish courts. The British Government challenged de Valera's actions before the Privy Council in 1935. The court decided that everything that de Valera was doing was allowed under the terms of the Statute of Westminster.
4. In December 1936 de Valera took advantage of the **abdication crisis** in Britain to pass the External Relations Act. This law removed the King's authority within the Free State, although in theory the Free State continued to recognise the monarch as Head of the Commonwealth. As a result, the office of Governor General also ceased to exist.

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*Cartoon of de Valera destroying the Commonwealth bridge*

Within four years of coming to power de Valera had successfully removed many of the limitations on Irish independence.

**SOURCE A**

Let it be clear that we yield no willing assent to any form or symbol that is out of keeping with Ireland's right as a sovereign nation. Let us remove these forms one by one, so that this state we control may become a republic in fact.

*De Valera outlining his policy aims at a rally commemorating the 1916 Easter Rising, April 1933*

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why was de Valera so opposed to the Oath of Allegiance?
2. Fill in the following table to show the steps de Valera took to weaken the terms of the 1921 Treaty:

| Area                | Date | Action taken | Result |
|---------------------|------|--------------|--------|
| Oath of Allegiance  |      |              |        |
| Governor General    |      |              |        |
| Privy Council       |      |              |        |
| Position of Monarch |      |              |        |

3. How did de Valera ensure that it would be difficult for the British Government to oppose the actions that he took?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Did the changes introduced by de Valera 1932–6 make any real difference to life in the Irish Free State?

**REVISION TIP**

Some very important changes to the constitutional position of the Irish Free State took place between 1932 and 1936. You need to explain why de Valera wanted to make these changes and how the 1931 Statute of Westminster had made it possible for him to do so.

**The Economic War, 1932–8****Introduction**

Initially Britain and the Free State were close trading partners. This changed, however, when a dispute broke out between the two states over the issue of land annuities. The resulting trade dispute, which lasted from 1932 to 1938, became known as the Economic War. It badly damaged relations between the Free State, Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Causes**

From 1870 the British Government had lent large sums of money to Irish tenants to enable them to buy their own land. Each year the farmers had paid back a part of the loan. The payments were known as land annuities. Between 1922 and 1932

the Irish Government collected the money due and passed it on to the British Government. This was increasingly resented by many Irish farmers.

Fianna Fáil had promised to cancel these payments if they gained power. De Valera was as good as his word: as soon as he won power he withheld the payments. De Valera justified his position by stating that Ireland was in an economic depression and that as Northern Ireland had been allowed to keep their land annuities as a 'free gift', then so too should the Free State.

In response Britain imposed import duties of 20% on all goods imported from the Free State. The Irish Government retaliated by placing taxes on goods coming from Britain and Northern Ireland, including coal, which the Irish economy depended on.

### Response of the Irish Government

De Valera called a general election in 1933 over the Economic War. Although this only gave Fianna Fáil an overall majority of one seat in the Dáil, it strengthened de Valera's position and his stance against Britain. The Free State also benefited from the £5m it gained from collecting the land annuities for itself rather than for Westminster.

De Valera hoped that by making British goods more expensive, Irish businessmen would be encouraged to set up factories to produce commodities previously imported from Britain. Sean Lemass the Minister for Industry and Commerce stated, 'We believe that Ireland can be made a self-contained unit.' However, by 1935 it was clear that Ireland was suffering more from the effects of the Economic War than Britain and in that year they agreed a Coal-Cattle Pact, which increased trade in these two commodities.

### Effects of the Economic War

The Economic War had three main effects:

#### 1. *The Irish economy*

The Economic War hit the Irish economy hard. Irish farmers were affected badly with the loss of markets for their agricultural produce. In 1932 over 90% of the exports of the Free State went to Britain; most of this trade was agricultural. By

1934 cattle exports were about 35% lower than they had been in 1929.

This was despite trying to make Irish farmers less dependent on the British market by encouraging them to move away from cattle and increase production of crops such as wheat and sugar beet. Irish farmers lost millions of pounds because they could find no markets for their goods during a period of worldwide economic despair (Source A).

The Economic War also damaged trade with Northern Ireland, which retaliated by cutting imports of goods from the Free State, as Fig 2.2 shows. This led to more smuggling across the border to avoid import duties.

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*Cartoon highlighting cross-border smuggling*

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*Fig 2.2 Trade between the Free State, Northern Ireland and Great Britain, 1932-8*

## 2. Relations between Britain and Ireland

The Economic War led to a deterioration in Anglo-Irish relations. De Valera viewed the War as part of Ireland's political battle with Britain. He believed that if the Free State lost the battle over land annuities, it would lose its political freedom and independence (Source B). Britain suffered less economic effects from the War and was willing to move towards ending it from 1935.

## 3. Effects on Northern Ireland

Apart from affecting cross-border agricultural trade, the War increased unionist fears of the Free State (Source C). Ironically the dispute strengthened partition in that it caused major economic problems in border areas like Donegal, which were cut off from their traditional markets in Strabane and Derry/Londonderry.

### SOURCE A

The attempt to get self-sufficiency had failed. Agricultural exports to Britain were still the mainstay of the economy.

*Historian M E Collins writing about the Economic War in Ireland, 1868–1966*

### SOURCE B

If the British Government should succeed in beating us in this fight then we could have no freedom, but at every step they could threaten you ... and force you again to obey the British. What is involved is whether the Irish nation is going to be free or not.

*De Valera commenting on the importance of the Economic War, November 1932*

### SOURCE C

De Valera's confrontation policy ... was seen in the north as a strategy to destroy the Treaty settlement and reopen the question of unity.

*Historian D Kennedy describes Northern Ireland's reaction to the Economic War*

## QUESTIONS

1. What were the land annuities?
2. Why did de Valera decide to stop paying this money to the British Government?
3. What economic steps were taken by each side to begin the Economic War?
4. In what ways did de Valera hope the Economic War would benefit the Free State's economy? Was he correct?
5. Explain the impact of the Economic War under the following headings:
  - ◆ The Irish economy;
  - ◆ Relations with Britain;
  - ◆ Relations with Northern Ireland.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Did de Valera make a mistake in starting the Economic War?

To what extent did de Valera have political and not just economic aims during the Economic War?

## REVISION TIP



Examiners will expect you to be able to explain the reasons why the Economic War started and the impact that it had on the Free State economy and relations within the British Isles.

## De Valera and the 1937 Constitution

### Introduction

In 1937 de Valera introduced a new **constitution** to replace the 1922 Constitution, which had been written by supporters of the Treaty. De Valera believed that starting afresh would allow him to create an Ireland that was much closer to his idea of a republic. This was to be the culmination of his policy of removing all remaining political links with Britain.

### The 1937 Constitution

The new constitution, known in Irish as *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, introduced three important political changes to the structure of the state:

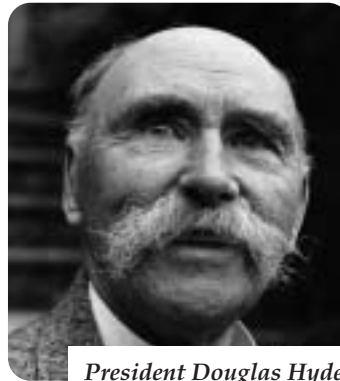
1. The name of the state became Éire or, in English, Ireland;
2. The leader of the government was to be the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) instead of President;
3. A new (largely ceremonial) Head of State would be elected every seven years. That person would hold the title of President.

Under the terms of the Constitution (Source A) the special position of the Catholic Church was recognised. At the same time 'freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion' was granted to all other faiths. Article II claimed political jurisdiction over the whole island. However, it added that until the end of partition Éire's laws would only apply to the 26 counties.

The Constitution made no mention of the King, yet Éire remained as a member of the Commonwealth. De Valera believed that keeping this link with Britain might make it easier to end partition. However, with the changes introduced in 1937, Éire became a republic in all but name. De Valera just did not use that word for fear of annoying the British or the unionists.

The Constitution was submitted to the vote of the people in a referendum. In the event the result was quite close with 685,105 voting in favour and 527,945 voting against. Over 30% of the electorate did not vote at all. In 1938 Douglas

Hyde, a renowned Gaelic scholar, was elected as Éire's first President.



President Douglas Hyde

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*The inaugural procession of President Douglas Hyde passing Dublin's GPO, 1938*

### Response of the London and Belfast Governments

Although the new constitution had removed nearly all symbolic and effective links between London and Dublin, the British Government treated the changes introduced by the 1937 Constitution as insignificant (Source B). In reality the British were not too sure whether Éire remained in the Commonwealth or not. However, unionists were not so calm. The Constitution reinforced their fears and suspicions of their neighbours and strengthened their determination to achieve closer links with Britain (Source C).

The unionist government, located at Stormont since 1932, took full advantage of the opportunity provided to denounce Éire. In particular, they opposed Article II with its

territorial claim over the six counties, and denounced the special recognition given to the Catholic Church and the Irish language. Indeed Lord Craigavon used the unionists' outrage to call a snap general election in 1938, which increased his majority.

### Response of Northern Nationalists

The new Constitution did nothing to solve political, social and economic discrimination in the six counties. Although some articles claimed to apply to all of Ireland (Articles II and III), Northern nationalists continued to feel isolated and ignored. Indeed it could be argued that the constitutional changes, by removing almost all links with Britain, had reinforced partition and made eventual reunification even less likely, thus condemning Northern nationalists to their fate as a forgotten minority.

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*Bunreacht na hÉireann (The Irish Constitution)*

#### SOURCE A

- Article II The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and territorial seas.
- Article III While maintaining the right to rule all thirty-two counties in Ireland, the laws passed by the Dublin parliament will apply only to the twenty-six counties until Ireland is reunified.
- Article XLIV The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens.

*Extracts from Bunreacht na hÉireann (The Irish Constitution, 1937)*

#### SOURCE B

His Majesty's government ... [is] prepared to treat the new Constitution as not effecting a great change in the position of the Irish Free State.

*London's response to Bunreacht na hÉireann*

#### SOURCE C

The effect of ... this new Constitution ... will be to strengthen ... the determination of Ulster to resist attacks from there (Éire) and make the links between Britain and ourselves stronger.

*Stormont's attitude towards the new Irish Constitution*

## QUESTIONS

1. Why did de Valera want to introduce a new constitution?
2. List the key points of the 1937 Constitution.
3. How did the new Constitution weaken the Free State's relationship with Britain?
4. Why did de Valera not declare that the Free State was now a republic?
5. How did the following groups react to the constitutional changes:
  - ◆ British Government;
  - ◆ Northern Ireland Government;
  - ◆ Northern nationalists?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Do you agree that the 1937 Constitution made the reunification of Ireland even less likely than before?

## REVISION TIP

The 1937 Constitution marks an important stage in the development of Ireland as a republic. Examiners will want you to be able to explain the reasons why de Valera made the changes that he did.

## British Responses to the Threat of War 1933–9

### Growing Unrest in Europe

The rise of **Fascism** and **Nazism** in the 1930s threatened Britain's position in Europe. This in turn impacted upon relations between Britain and Ireland.

### Threats of War

As the threat of another major war steadily increased, Britain faced a major dilemma about how to respond to the growing menace of Nazism and Fascism. Britain had three main options: neutrality, rearmament or appeasement.

#### 1. Neutrality

This would mean that in a future military conflict a country would not support or help any of the powers taking part. In the 1930s there were many supporters of peace, pacifism and neutrality in Britain. At the same time, however, Britain had an empire to protect.

#### 2. Rearmament

The alternative policy to neutrality for Britain in the 1930s was rearmament. This would be expensive for any British government and difficult to justify in a time of economic depression. In 1935 Britain commissioned a secret report on the conditions of Britain's defences. The findings gave cause for concern:

- ◆ The Royal Navy was incapable of defending the Empire and British trade;
- ◆ The army was small and poorly equipped and would not be able to offer much help to the French army (if Germany attacked);
- ◆ The Royal Air Force had few bombers or fighter planes and totally inadequate defence systems.

However, when German rearmament intensified, the British Government was forced to give rearmament serious consideration. Defence chiefs encouraged the politicians to increase defence spending whilst using diplomacy to prevent immediate conflicts. The result was

increased spending on rearmament (Table 2.1) and the policy of appeasement.

| <i>Percentage of gross national product devoted to defence</i> |                |                |
|--|----------------|----------------|
|  | <i>Germany</i> | <i>Britain</i> |
| 1933   | 1.0            | 3.0            |
| 1934   | 3.0            | 3.0            |
| 1935   | 7.4            | 3.3            |
| 1936   | 12.4           | 4.2            |
| 1937   | 11.8           | 5.6            |
| 1938   | 16.6           | 8.1            |
| 1939   | 23.0           | 21.4           |

*Table 2.1 Percentage of British and German GNP devoted to defence 1933–9*

### 3. Appeasement

Appeasement was an alternative to the two extremes of neutrality and rearmament. It meant making concessions to buy off an aggressive nation. In the end Britain adopted appeasement for three main reasons:

- ◆ There were bitter memories of the horror and human cost of World War I. Many wanted to avoid another war if at all possible;
- ◆ Until 1938–9 many British politicians regarded Hitler as being a reasonable politician. They also wanted to right the wrongs of Versailles in 1919;
- ◆ Britain could not afford to bear the cost of major war in the mid-1930s; rearmament was too expensive for a country still weakened economically by World War I and the Great Depression.

Appeasement did allow Britain to start rearmament; however, Hitler and others took advantage of the policy to build up their own armed forces. Yet as late as December 1937, Neville Chamberlain was still justifying appeasement (Source A).

### The End of Appeasement, 1938–9

Germany's acquisition of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938, and the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, finally discredited the policy of appeasement. By April 1939 Britain and France had given security guarantees to Poland in an attempt to deter Germany from further expansion. However, with the invasion of Poland in September 1939 it was clear that this strategy had failed too (Source B).



*Neville Chamberlain*

#### SOURCE A

The Chiefs of Staff . . . said they could not foresee the time when our defence forces would be strong enough to safeguard Britain's territory, trade and vital interests against Germany, Italy and Japan at the same time. They had urged that Britain's foreign policy must be governed by this consideration. Chamberlain argued that Germany was the real key to the question. In the light of the recent consideration given by the Cabinet to the question of improving relations with Germany, it was necessary to develop that theme further.

*Report of Chamberlain's address to the British Cabinet, 8 December 1937 (adapted)*

**SOURCE B**

You can imagine what a bitter blow it is to me that all my long struggle to win peace has failed ... Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins.

*Chamberlain speaking to the British nation, announcing that Britain had declared war on Germany, 3 September 1939*

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why was there increasing unrest in Europe in the mid-1930s?
2. Fill in the following table from the British government perspective:

| Option      | Arguments for | Arguments against |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Neutrality  |               |                   |
| Rearmament  |               |                   |
| Appeasement |               |                   |

3. Why did Britain finally give up the policy of appeasement?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Was appeasement a policy that showed the weakness of the British Government?

**REVISION TIP**

Make sure that you understand what foreign policy options the British Government had in this period and why she made the choices that she did.

**The Anglo-Irish Agreements, 1938****Introduction**

The changing situation in Europe forced Britain to try to improve its relations with Éire. Two issues in particular were damaging relations between the two countries: the Economic War and the Treaty Ports.

**The Treaty Ports**

Under the terms of the 1921 Treaty Britain had retained military garrisons at the ports of Berehaven, Cobh and Lough Swilly. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, realised the continued strategic value of the ports to Britain's defence policy. However, he was convinced that returning them to Éire would help end the Economic War and would win Éire's support during a future war (Source A).

De Valera believed that Britain's control of the Treaty Ports undermined Éire's ability to develop her own foreign policy. He also felt that it weakened her claim of independence as stated in the 1937 Constitution. He viewed the return of the Treaty Ports as another step in his policy of gradually dismantling the Treaty. If Britain returned the ports, it would end British interference in Éire's affairs and remove the last British military forces from Éire.

photo

to come

*British troops leaving the Treaty Port at Cobh, 1938*

## The Anglo-Irish Agreements, 1938

Since 1935 both Britain and Ireland had been moving towards a solution to end the Economic War. During 1938 relations between the two countries improved dramatically, as Chamberlain made a determined effort to deal with the main issues affecting relations. On 25 April 1938, after three months of negotiations, British and Irish delegations signed three separate agreements on Finance, Trade and Defence. The Agreements ended the Economic War and returned the Treaty Ports to Éire.

### *The terms of the agreements*

#### Éire shall:

1. Remove all special taxes placed on British goods sold in Ireland;
2. Pay Britain £10 million as a final settlement of all debts owed to Britain.

#### Britain shall:

1. Remove all special taxes placed on Irish goods sold in Britain;
2. Leave the naval bases occupied by British troops under the terms of the 1921 Treaty.

## Reactions to the Agreements

The Agreements received a favourable response from most people, particularly as they improved Anglo-Irish relations at a time of a growing threat of war. However, the Agreements were severely criticised by Winston Churchill, who warned that the return of the Treaty Ports was a major mistake. He feared that Éire would not allow Britain to use the ports again even 'in the hour of need'.

Unionists were also concerned about the Agreements and the apparent improvement in Anglo-Irish relations. Some even feared that this could lead to the end of partition. Craigavon was particularly worried, arguing that the Ports' return was bad for the security of all of the British Isles (Source B).

## Significance of the Agreements

Britain might have gained financially from the Agreements, but when World War II broke out many in Britain realised the potential effects of the loss of the Treaty Ports, a loss that was

reinforced by de Valera's decision to declare Éire's neutrality.

Taken as a whole the Agreements were a triumph for de Valera. In addition to the financial settlement, the return of the Treaty Ports broke another symbolic link with Britain. It also reinforced Éire's independence and made it possible for her to pursue a policy of neutrality during World War II (Source C).

### SOURCE A

The present time seems a suitable one for [returning the Treaty Ports to Ireland] since [their importance] has somewhat decreased in view of the recent changes of defence policy of this country.

*British Deputy Chiefs of Staff Report on the Importance of the Treaty Ports to Britain's defence. April 1936*

### SOURCE B

I gave the most solemn warnings to British Ministers on the dangers of such unnecessary action as surrendering these valuable bases for British use as protection not only for Great Britain and Ulster, but for southern Ireland also.

*Craig recalls his concern over the danger of returning the Treaty Ports to Éire, November 1940*

### SOURCE C

Handing over the treaty ports recognises and finally establishes Irish sovereignty over the 26 counties.

*De Valera's reaction to the return of the Ports, April 1938*

## QUESTIONS

1. Why was Chamberlain willing to improve relations with Éire?
2. What benefits did Chamberlain see in returning the Treaty Ports to Éire?
3. Why would de Valera have been so pleased at the return of the Treaty Ports?
4. Which side gained most economically from the 1938 Agreements?
5. Explain the different reactions to the Agreements.
6. Why were the Agreements so important for Éire's foreign policy?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

How significant were the Anglo-Irish Agreements and who gained the most from their terms?

## REVISION TIP

While examiners will expect you to be able to write about the economic terms of the 1938 Anglo-Irish Agreements. You must be aware of the Agreements' implications for both British and Irish foreign policy.

## Developments in Northern Ireland 1938–9

### IRA Violence

With the return of the Treaty Ports to Éire, Northern Ireland's strategic importance to Britain increased. However, Northern Ireland was in the minds of British politicians for reasons

other than strategy in early 1939. In January 1939 the IRA gave Britain four days to announce their withdrawal from Northern Ireland. When this deadline was ignored they started a bombing campaign in Britain. By August 1939 over 120 bombs had been planted at various targets across the United Kingdom, causing loss of life and damage to property.

photo  
to come

*Reaction to the IRA bombing campaign*

However, rather than alter British policy on partition, the IRA campaign only served to strengthen London's determination to hold on to the North. Again the knowledge of Northern Ireland's likely strategic importance in any forthcoming war would have been at the forefront of the Government's thinking. Therefore the British Government introduced emergency measures to deal with the IRA threats. The Dublin Government introduced similar measures at the same time.

### The Conscription Issue

In April 1939 the British government decided to introduce **conscription** to build up their armed forces for war. However, it was decided that Northern Ireland would be exempt from conscription. The British Government feared that many nationalists would oppose being made to fight for Britain. Craigavon was furious at this decision and demanded that conscription be extended to Northern Ireland. He argued that this would strengthen the links between Belfast

and London and would reassure those unionists who were worried that partition would be ended to buy the support of Éire.

Northern nationalists were angered by Craigavon's demands, and the North's Catholic bishops issued a statement opposing his request. The Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal MacRory, stated that resistance to the introduction of conscription would be morally justified. De Valera also voiced his concerns. However, his intervention only increased unionist fears about the role of Éire and the loyalty of Northern nationalists.

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*Cardinal Joseph MacRory*

In May 1939 Chamberlain invited Craigavon to London to discuss the conscription issue. Craigavon explained that Northern Ireland was trying to express its loyalty to Britain and that the people wanted to play a full part in the war effort. Chamberlain explained to Craigavon that Northern Ireland's 'special difficulties' were the reason why conscription could not be introduced. In the short term this solved the problem; however, it would re-emerge during the war (Source A).

### Defence Production

As some form of compensation for the refusal to extend conscription, Northern Ireland was awarded a number of large defence contracts. In total over £6 million worth of contracts went to a range of industries. At the forefront of the orders were the new Short and Harland aircraft factory and the Harland and Wolff shipyard. As a result of this new investment, the number of unemployed fell by over 30,000 during the course of 1939. At the same time it meant that as

a vital supplier of war materials, Belfast could be a target for enemy bombers.

### Declaration of War: Response of Northern Ireland

Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The legacy of partition meant that the six counties were also at war with Germany. This would affect all its citizens whether they supported the war or not. With Éire declaring neutrality, the war gave Northern Ireland its chance to show its allegiance to Britain. The Stormont Government therefore pledged its loyalty to the King and offered its full support for the war effort. However, did it know what it was letting itself in for? (Source B)



*The declaration of war*

**SOURCE A**

J. (James) was asked flat out by Chamberlain, 'is Ulster out to help Britain in her war effort?' To which, of course, he answered, 'you know we are. I have offered personally all the resources at our disposal to help you, and we have passed resolutions in our Parliament to the same effect.' Chamberlain said, 'if you really want to help us, don't press for conscription, it will only be an embarrassment.' What else could J. do than say, 'Very well then, I won't!'

*Lady Craigavon writing about how Chamberlain persuaded Craig not to push for the extension of conscription to Northern Ireland, May 1939*

**SOURCE B**

During the first year of the war ... Craigavon proclaimed the unyielding support of the people of Northern Ireland without having the slightest idea of what that might involve.

*Historian Jonathan Bardon comments on Northern Ireland's readiness for war*

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why did Northern Ireland's strategic importance increase after 1938?
2. What were the aims of the IRA's 1939 campaign? What impact did it have on British policy towards Northern Ireland?
3. Why did unionists want conscription, and nationalists oppose it?
4. Why did Britain not extend conscription to Northern Ireland in 1939?
5. How did the Northern Ireland Government respond to Britain's declaration of war on 3 September 1939?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

What did the conscription issue reveal about attitudes of the two communities in Northern Ireland to Britain?

**REVISION TIP**

The return of the Treaty Ports to Éire greatly increased the strategic importance of Northern Ireland. Make sure that you can explain to the examiner just why Northern Ireland became so important at this time.

**Summary of Key Issue One**

Differences over the issue of self-government led to the establishment of two states and parliaments in Ireland between 1921 and 1922. The years 1922–32 saw both new states establishing themselves and focusing on different priorities. In the case of Northern Ireland the aim was to maintain a viable state free from the influence of the Irish Free State and the nationalist minority within Northern Ireland. In the south the priority was the achievement of increasing independence from Britain.

De Valera continued and accelerated the drive for independence to the point that by 1937 the Irish Free State (now Éire) was a republic in all but name. At the same time much of what went on in Northern Ireland was dictated by the actions of her larger neighbours. Britain meanwhile was trying to deal with the prospect of impending conflict in Europe.

## Sample of CCEA Examination on Key Issue One

### FOUNDATION LEVEL

This question is about Anglo-Irish relationships in the 1930s.

(a) Below is a list of names associated with Anglo-Irish relationships in the 1930s:

|                 |                |                   |                     |              |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Eamon de Valera | Lord Craigavon | Winston Churchill | Neville Chamberlain | Douglas Hyde |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|

Following the example below, match each name to the correct description:

| DESCRIPTION   | NAME         |     |
|---|--------------|-----|
| 1 First President of Éire under the 1937 Constitution.                                    | DOUGLAS HYDE |     |
| 2 British Prime Minister who ended the Economic War.                                      | _____        |     |
| 3 Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in 1935.   | _____        |     |
| 4 Prime Minister of Éire who caused the Economic War.                                     | _____        |     |
| 5 British Politician who opposed giving back the Treaty Ports.                            | _____        | [4] |
| (b) (i) Give <b>one</b> way in which de Valera dismantled the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. |              | [2] |
| (ii) Describe <b>two</b> effects of his actions.  |              | [4] |
| (c) Choose <b>ONE</b> of the following:   |              |     |
| <b>EITHER</b> The Economic War  |              |     |
| <b>OR</b> World War Two   |              |     |
| <b>The Economic War</b>   |              |     |
| (i) What caused the Economic War?   |              | [6] |
| (ii) How did it affect relations between Britain, Northern Ireland and Éire?              |              | [9] |
| <b>World War Two</b>  |              |     |
| (i) Why did Britain decide to stop appeasing Hitler in 1939?                              |              | [6] |
| (ii) How did Éire and Northern Ireland respond to the outbreak of World War Two?          |              | [9] |

### HIGHER LEVEL

This question is about Anglo-Irish relationships in the 1930s.

- (a) (i) Write down two reasons why de Valera wanted to dismantle the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.  
(ii) Write down two ways in which de Valera dismantled the Anglo-Irish Treaty. [4]
- (b) (i) How did the Economic War start in 1933?  
(ii) How was the Economic War ended in 1938? [9]
- (c) Britain and Northern Ireland went to war with Germany in 1939.  
(i) Why did Britain change its policy of appeasement? [6]  
(ii) Why did Éire choose to remain neutral? [6]