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Irish Associations Essay

The day of the first meeting of the Dáil, or the first republican parliament, is historically remembered as being the start of the Irish War for Independence, as two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC)—the police force in Ireland who were viewed as supportive of British Rule and Law—were shot by Irish Volunteers. However, this immediate spark to the nation's two-year battle for independence from Great Britain had long been preceded by mounting tension and violence.

Ireland had fostered political tension between the separatist Sinn Fein Party and the British administration, which was based in Dublin Castle, with both sides determined to either gain or maintain political power over Ireland. In 1912, the British government legislated a Bill for Home Rule, which granted Ireland very limited capabilities to run an autonomous government—a state which Irish nationalists had been pushing for for nearly 40 years. Yet, pro-British unionists from the northern Irish province of Ulster opposed the Bill, and thus created a small army called the Ulster Volunteers to counteract the possibility of Irish self-government. In response, Irish nationalists formed a small army of their own, named the Irish Volunteers, to ensure the enactment of the Bill for Home Rule. While the primarily Catholic Irish nationalists and the primarily Protestant unionists possessed contrasting religious and political views, their tensions were assuaged following their agreement to support the British war effort at the beginning of World War I.

Shortly after, in 1916, the Irish Republican Brotherhood emerged as more radical Irish nationalists and disagreed with Ireland's support for Britain in WWI, demanding more

independence than the basics that the Bill for Home Rule granted the republic. As such, the Brotherhood incited a rebellion, formally known as the Easter Rising in Dublin. The British quickly repressed the Easter Rising, executing and arresting many nationalists, which fostered even more Irish hatred towards the British.

The Sinn Fein Party won the General Election in December of 1918 on the basis of an unequivocal demand for Irish independence and unity. Soon after, the Sinn Fein Party established a provisional government, one which opposed Britain's authority in Ireland. On January 21, 1919, Sinn Fein Politicians met to establish the Dáil, with the intent to declare independence. As a Republic, the Sinn Fein Party was hopeful and determined to sever legal ties with the British Empire, instead of simply accepting a form of limited Home Rule.

At the beginning of the war, Sinn Fein and the Dáil employed nonviolent tactics towards the RIC such as boycotts and hunger strikes, yet Irish revolutionary Michael Collins did not find these effective. Once Collins formed a group which would target and assassinate members of the RIC, the Dáil became concerned that Collins' group was working too independently. As such, the Dáil reorganized their soldiers into the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

In early 1920, the IRA began pillaging RIC barracks and subsequently burning them to the ground. In response, British Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, assembled a team of WWI veterans, the RIC Special Reserve. Nicknamed "The Black and Tans" for the color of their uniforms, this group was extremely malicious, often retaliating towards civilians after IRA attacks on them.

Dáil courts had been established to replace the British Legal System's influence in Ireland, with Irish people consequently refusing to partake in British Courts. As a result, Ireland's justice system had reached a stalemate, frustrating RIC policemen and enabling them to

leave Ireland. Thus, the RIC was reinforced with an auxiliary division, who were just as brutal as the Black and Tans.

Soon after, the violence intensified, with increasing IRA attacks on RIC barracks across Ireland. One of the most infamous days of the war came on Bloody Sunday—November 21, 1920. The IRA killed 13 British Intelligence Officers and 2 civilians, so the RIC was incentivized to commit an equivalent attack. Later that afternoon, the RIC Auxiliaries went to a Gaelic football match at Crogue Park and killed 15 civilians.

In December of 1920, in Westminster, the Government of Ireland Act 1920 was enacted. This stated that the Parliament in Belfast would control the 6 northeastern counties of Ireland because of its strong Unionist presence which would become Northern Ireland. Further, the Parliament in Dublin would control the other 26 counties, becoming Southern Ireland. Though divided, both Northern and Southern Ireland would remain a part of the United Kingdom. Sinn Fein representatives had not chosen to partake during this time at Westminster; therefore, the act was very disconnected with the present state of Ireland. Many people in Ireland were adamant about separating from the British Empire, which this Government of Ireland Act had not granted them.

Republican Eamon de Valera and the Dáil attempted to regain control over this tumultuous war in early 1921. Tension had been mounting between Michael Collins and Cathal Brugha over who had more influence over the IRA: indeed, Brugha was the Minister of Defense, yet the IRA looked more towards Collins as a leader. De Valera disliked the guerilla tactics that the IRA had previously been using, so he opted for a more formal attack to capture the Custom House in Dublin. The guerilla tactics that the IRA had used throughout the war was a leading reason for why the Irish war for Independence was not always viewed as a war. The British were

not as accustomed to having to combat warfare outside of their usual formal styles. One of the bloodiest moments of the war came from this strategy, when the IRA was very easily defeated by the British, with 80 IRA men captured and IRA supplies running severely scarce.

In June of 1921, the British government decided to call a truce, unaware of how close the IRA was to crumbling. Belfast's Bloody Sunday came the day before the truce was to come into effect, in which the IRA killed 2 policemen during an RIC raid, instigating massive riots and house burnings.

Nevertheless, the truce was effective on July 11, 1921, and the fighting primarily halted. Among others, Michael Collins traveled to England to negotiate a treaty, yet an Irish Republic or a united, 32-county Ireland was never an option. The Anglo-Irish Treaty resulted, creating the Irish Free State comprised of the 26 counties that were a part of Southern Ireland. The Free State was considered a dominion of the British Empire, where the king would remain Head of State and Britain would keep control over the Free State's three most strategic ports.

When Collins returned to Ireland, he faced a divided government. Collins, on one hand, believed that the treaty was an optimal first step to an Irish Republic and achieving full freedom. Conversely, De Valera refused to support to the treaty—this political division shortly triggered the Irish Civil War.