

1. A Fragile Peace

Lest we forget

From early morning on Monday 11 November 1918 crowds gathered in Downing Street as the War Cabinet filed into Number 10. There was an air of expectancy. Soon Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, appeared on the steps. "At 11 o'clock this morning the War will be over. We have won a great victory and we are entitled to a bit of shouting." Britain celebrated in style. Policemen blew whistles, cars blared klaxon-horns, trams clanged their bells and buses hooted. The large crowds rejoiced and sang Land of Hope and Glory and Rule Britannia, amidst a sea of waving flags. By late afternoon as dusk fell, theatres and restaurants were bathed in light after years of blackout.

Not far short of two million Germans and Russians were dead, well over one million French and just under one million from the British Empire. USA losses were about 56,000 though some claim the figure was double. The insanity of four years of bitter conflict was summed up by Ezra Pound. "War, one war after another; men who start'em couldn't put up a good hen-roost."

Alan Clark talked of lions led by donkeys. "The old professional army of the United Kingdom, that always won the last battle, whose regiments fought at Quebec and Corunna in the Indies, were trained in musketry at Hythe, drilled on the parched earth of Chuddapore, and were machine-gunned, gassed and finally buried in 1915." Sir John French, leader of the Expeditionary Force, and his successor, Haig, were singled out, abetted by incompetent politicians. Major-General Sir Henry Wilson, appointed director of Military Operations in 1910, attended his first War Cabinet in 1913. He was appalled. "An historic meeting of men, mostly entirely ignorant of their subject."

Highly influential proprietor of the Daily Mail and the Times, Lord Northcliffe, was scathing about war leadership generally, and Herbert Asquith in particular, describing him as a limpet. This contrasted with Lloyd George and more so Churchill, impressed by his boldness and possessing a clearer head. For historian A. N. Wilson, the "languid, emotional and sexually obsessed" Asquith was "indecisive, vain and fundamentally idle." Unsited to wartime leadership he was out of his depth. Asquith almost cracked over the Irish question and political manoeuvrings in Europe as war loomed and admitted that a preoccupation with mistress Venetia Stanley clouded his judgement.

The political landscape would change again and forever. Asquith's national government in 1915, without consulting Liberal colleagues, heralded the demise of the Liberal Party. Only nine years before it had swept to a landslide victory. Whilst some sort of normality returned to British society, seismic changes had taken place in the intervening four years and in 1918 itself.

This truly had been a world war involving Russia, Japan, Africa, Near and Far East and above all Europe with the later involvement of America. By the end of this carnage, a communist revolution had taken place in Russia; the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires ceased to exist; the Kaiser, Wilhelm II, had fled to Holland; the Middle-East was nominally controlled by France and Britain; the Jews still sought a homeland; Ireland was moving towards either a form of independence or civil war; women aged 30 and over had the vote and socialism had

overtaken liberalism in Europe. The world was a different place now and felt different with America as the peace broker.

No single reason emerges for the defeat of Germany; rather a web of factors that together sapped the morale and spirit of the German people, not least increasingly socialist inspired, anti-war, anti-monarchy and anti-government. Entry of the United States in 1917 was pivotal, psychologically, with Germany feeling the whole world was turned against them. A young Vera Brittain was a nurse in Etaples, near Boulogne in the spring of 1918 and watched a contingent of USA troops march by, "so godlike, so magnificent, so splendidly unimpaired in comparison with the tired, nerve-wracked men of the British Army."

From a logistics stance, the defining and determining factor was munitions that by 1918 began to outstrip that of Germany. French artillery units had doubled since 1915 and heavy artillery had expanded from 300 guns at the start of war to 5,700 by the end. Half a million British soldiers were in the Royal Artillery. British production had trebled in three years and shell production was thereafter always ahead of consumption.

Allied Generals, Haig, Pétain and Pershing possessed not only more powerful weapons but many more that could sustain an onslaught to force the enemy into submission, capitulation or even obliteration. The scale of provision now was immense. A British battalion of 500 men had 30 Lewis guns, 8 mortars and 6 tanks, compared with just 4 Lewis light machine guns and 1,000 men at the Somme. The final attack at Amiens on 8 August 1918 was referred to by General Ludendorf as "the black day of the German army." The pressure was proving too great and by September he had cracked completely. So had German morale. The end was close.

It was as a republic that Germany signed the Armistice. On 11 November Lloyd George addressed the House of Commons. "Thus at 11 o'clock this morning came to an end the cruellest and most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind. I hope we may say that thus, this fateful morning came to an end all wars." It was a vain hope for bitterness in defeat would reap its revenge.

On 5 January 1919 Lloyd George addressed a conference of trade union leaders, saying this was not a war of aggression against Germany, or an attempt to destroy old empires, but to see the restoration of national independence and democracy that included languages, customs, cultures and religions. Human nature often intervenes in idealistic intentions as the fate of the Armenians showed. Reasons were attributed to aiding and abetting Russia and disproportionate wealth and influence. Few sources outside the Turkish government put the slaughter at less than 800,000. A grisly precedent had been set, repeated at various points in the 20th century and into the present century too with the short Arab Spring and aftermath.

The spirit of nationalism and pride was reflected in President Woodrow Wilson's dream of peace, cheered by an independent Poland. Unstated were the feelings and reactions of German-speaking populations of Stettin and Danzig, to become an independent city, and Upper Silesia, formerly a major supplier of coal, zinc and lead to Germany. An independent Lithuania was split by German, Polish and Russian ambitions. The Bolsheviks drove the Poles out of Vilna in 1920 whilst Lithuania took over the Baltic port of Memel with a 92% German population. Simmering resentment made it inevitable Germany would seek to take it back that meant by force. In uniting a nation, history shows that independence has to be earned, rather than assigned. Underlying grievances become a furnace, stoked up by ethnic tensions.

Britain, France and the USA were the arbiters of peace and had grown into political entities over centuries. In contrast, Poland, an ancient kingdom, had for years been subsumed or threatened by even greater kingdoms or empires. Germany and Italy were a conglomeration of states, duchies and kingdoms, not nation states. Faced with this melange, the turbulence of history, scores to settle and defining a national identity was beyond democratic structures, goodwill and co-operation.

Nationalism would require imposition from within through autocratic regimes. In Austria, Slovenia and a new Czechoslovakia there were many cities and areas where German speakers were in the majority. Nationalism would mean a desire to extend imposed and restricted territories, to regain what was seen as rightfully theirs. In Germany the call would soon be for a *Grosse Deutschland*, a breeding ground for a self-imposed dictator. Once nationalism had been defined where would this leave minorities? Turkey had one answer in mass culling of the Armenian population. Germany would devise its own policy and methods.

The legacy of Versailles

As the victorious allies gathered in Paris on 18 January 1919 only Woodrow Wilson, President of the USA, saw the Conference as providing a basis for peace. For John Maynard Keynes, the UK's Treasury representative, he was a "blind and deaf Don Quixote" with "no plan, no scheme and no constructive ideas whatsoever" on how this was to be accomplished. George Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France, wanted a guarantee that Germany could never again march west of the Rhine and occupy Alsace-Lorraine as it had done since 1870.

Wilson was a moderating influence in restraining Clemenceau who sought revenge and a punitive settlement that would leave Germany embittered, humiliated and emasculated. The USA President set a high moral tone, had a genuine concern for the dispossessed but was intoxicated by his own grand vision and speeches. The Conference venue was the splendid surroundings of Versailles, rather than bland Geneva. Britain, the USA, France and Italy dictated the preliminary terms.

Ten days before, Wilson outlined to Congress what became known as the 14 points, dismissed by Clemenceau, saying "The Good Lord himself required only 10." Wilson envisaged open treaties, freedom of the seas, no trade barriers, reduced armaments, unhampered Russia, Austria and Hungary, improved Balkan relations, an independent Poland, colonial claims respecting the rights and interests of indigenous peoples, protection of Belgium, righting the wrong done to France over Alsace-Lorraine, respect for Italy's frontiers and world peace under a new League of Nations.

This was an impressive tick-list – idealistic and unrealistic. The Conference gave the 14 points a muted and lukewarm reception. The prime concern was lack of pragmatism, underplaying of national interests, and unease at a dominant role exercised by the USA over European matters. Only Germany gave a ringing endorsement, having spotted chinks and practical weaknesses and the opportunity to play the trump card of conciliation, rather than payment of heinous reparation.

The final Treaty reflected the fears of France with the potential to be threatened once again by a more vastly more populated Germany. German troops were to withdraw from the west bank of the Rhine within 31 days, with the Allies occupying the east bank. France insisted the Rhineland would be occupied by French forces for 15 years. What would then happen was left vague.

France regained Alsace-Lorraine and wanted the coal-rich Saar region that was now placed under League of Nations trusteeship. That was a guarantee of ineffectual custodianship. The blockade was retained to ensure compliance with terms of the Armistice. This included handing over all artillery, machine guns and aircraft to the Allies with submarines and ships under their control. The German fleet was heavily reduced. An army of 100,000 volunteers was permitted on condition each person served for 12 years at least.

Heavy reparations were exacted by the French with German taxpayers footing the bill. For many French people the Treaty didn't go far enough. For many Germans this looked like an agenda for a future war. Two questions arose immediately. What were the mechanisms to implement the Treaty and who would police it to ensure Treaty intentions were carried out to the letter, not least payment of war reparations?

A sombre Field Marshal Haig outlined the penalty and price of defeat. "Germany pointed out that if rolling stock and supplies of the Army are given up, then Germans east of the Rhine will starve." The response of Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Supreme Allied Commander, was blunt, brutal and uncompromising; "That was their affair." Berlin warned US President Wilson "Starvation of millions of men, women and children would result and German people would react badly to such harsh and vengeful terms being imposed." Resentment would lead to inevitable retribution.

In addition to return of territories lost to Prussia in 1870, Clemenceau sought an independent state west of the Rhine, an expanded Poland and reparations so severe as to leave Germany incapable of military resurgence. The collapse of the Hapsburg Empire enabled Romania to expand with the creation too of Yugoslavia, as well as Czechoslovakia. Ethnic tensions would continue to simmer, including hostility by Germany to inclusion of the German speaking Sudetenland. Added to this potent concoction were legacies of 1916. The Turks were driven out of Arabia, the Sykes-Picot agreement enabled France to control Syria, with Britain handed Mesopotamia. What was then Tsarist Russia was to be given to Armenia but the Tsar had been overthrown by the Bolsheviks.

Reflecting in late March 1919, Lloyd George sought to prevent France from a settlement so brutal it might drive Germany into the hands of Bolsheviks, intent on spreading revolution. "Our terms may be severe. They may be stern and even ruthless. But at the same time they can be so just that the country on which they are imposed will feel in its heart that it has no right to complain," adding it was pointless to cripple Germany financially. Whilst protracted discussions continued, the War Office received a telegram from General Plummer, Officer Commanding the British Forces of Occupation. "The mortality amongst women, children and the sick is most grave and sickness is spreading. The attitude of the population is becoming one of despair and the people feel an end by bullets is preferable to death by starvation."

The General was concerned about discipline too as, against orders, British troops were giving food to civilians from army stores. The intention was to lift the blockade and allow for the importation of food and raw materials for which Germany was to pay. The only available source was Berlin's gold reserves. Clemenceau vehemently protested as these reserves were earmarked for war reparations, not sustenance to the German people. After two months of further delay, and more deaths, Lloyd George insisted the embargo on gold reserves be lifted. Estimated deaths from disease and starvation alone during the entire wartime blockade varied from 424,000 to 763,000. Following the Armistice, at least 100,000 deaths occurred until the release of supplies.

The final settlement was motivated by pride, greed, vengeance and not least self-protection in the face of public dissent – and history. Article 231 of the final Treaty stated: “The Allied and Associated Powers attest, and Germany accepts, the responsibility of Germany and its allies for causing all the loss and damage to which they and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of war, imposed on them by the aggression of Germany and its allies.”

Senior diplomat, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau led the German delegation. On 7 May 1919, he responded. First, he referred to German impotence in negotiations and the hatred directed at Germany. He drew a distinction between a struggle for victory “in the heat of passion which blunts the conscience of nations” and “hundreds of thousands of non-combatants killed with cold deliberation after victory had been won and assured to our adversaries.”

On 28 June 1919, faced with the prospect of hostilities resuming if the Treaty was not signed, German reluctance evaporated. Before the draft Treaty was shown to the Germans, John Maynard Keynes warned Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austin Chamberlain, that it contained “much that is unjustified and much more that is expedient.” The sum was originally 226 billion Reichsmarks, later reduced to 132 billion. This equated to about £22 billion, or roughly ten times the maximum figure proposed by Keynes.

Keynes had already resigned from the Treasury “in misery and rage.” In a letter to Duncan Grant, fellow member of the Bloomsbury Group, six weeks before the Treaty was signed he said, “The peace is outrageous and impossible and can bring nothing but misfortune.” Germany was to be starved of its working capital and ability to expand its economy and grow exports, the means by which reparation over years could be made. Germany would default by an inability to meet these outrageous demands, or otherwise refuse. Keynes predicted bitter resentment, warning correctly that the Treaty was stoking the fires for another war.

The *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, written by Keynes, was published on 12 December 1919 and became a best seller. A central theme was “how the war had damaged the delicate economic mechanism by which the European peoples had lived before 1914, and how the Treaty of Versailles, far from repairing this damage, had completed the destruction.”

The Treaty of Versailles came into force on 10 January 1920, without USA support as the Senate had rejected the terms two months before on 19 November 1919. Even Wilson’s dream-child of the League of Nations was rejected in a further reposte to his foreign policy. The American public vented its feelings. The Republicans took every State outside the south and even took Tennessee. The presidency passed to Warren Harding, a nondescript, rather idle Ohio senator. The American electorate had pulled down the shutters.

An angry Clemenceau wrote to Wilson. Not only had the USA rejected Versailles but had drawn up a Treaty with Germany in what he called a ‘separate peace.’ America had adopted an isolationist policy, except where it suited them. He cited the Philippines, “where you do not belong geographically.” Whilst every economy in Europe was in ruins, the USA did well financially out of the war.

In 1922 Arthur Balfour, Lord President of the Council, was requested to send a polite note reminding European allies of their debts, in all £1.3 billion from Russia and France and nearly £1.5 billion from Germany. There was minimal prospect of payment and Balfour gingerly suggested all these debts be cancelled. An unimpressed Calvin Coolidge, the new President of the USA, merely replied, “they hired the money didn’t they?” A debt is a debt!

Voting equality at last

Conservatives were largely against voting equality but some had sympathy with propertied women and their stabilising influence on society. The Liberal Party was deeply divided for reasons of losing voters and altering electoral outcomes, worried that women were influenced by tradition, hierarchy and religion, associated with Conservatism. Henry Asquith was against voting equality whereas David Lloyd George was, on the whole, favourable.

The suffragist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) allied with the Labour Party in 1912 that sought universal adult suffrage. The NUWSS was more focused by the war effort but Millicent Fawcett saw an opportunity. "Let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship, whether our claim be recognised or not."

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) ceased militant campaigning and Emmeline Pankhurst placed the organisation and funds at the government's disposal, causing divisions. Some members resented dictatorial decision-making and the WSPU's unflinching support offered to a government that authorised the forcible feeding of suffragettes on hunger strike. The Home Secretary's response was release of all suffrage prisoners. The WSPU action created splits and in 1917 it disbanded and became The Women's Party.

From 1916, with no end to war in sight, the government via the war office began to accept the offer of assistance. Nina Boyle, from the Women's Freedom League, started the Women's Police Service and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, formed in 1917, helped in munitions factories. At all levels of society, women were heavily involved in supporting troops and those thrown out of work in need of support. There was a gradual realisation that women had a lot to offer, especially in helping to secure victory but not for all jobs. Reginald McKenna, Home Secretary, insisted the public wouldn't have confidence in women taxi drivers, despite their driving ambulances. Over 1.5 million women came into employment between 1914 and 1918.

Lloyd George replaced Asquith as prime minister in December 1916. He received a deputation from suffrage societies the following March. Millicent Fawcett stated, "We should greatly prefer an imperfect scheme that can pass, to the most perfect scheme in the world that could not pass." About 40% of men were not entitled to vote, lacking residential and property qualifications. It became clear the next general election could not use the pre-war electoral register as serving men had not been resident in their constituency for at least a year. Also there had been no general election since 1910.

An electoral cauldron was brewing and it was clear that female suffrage was not the only or indeed prime consideration. It would be an electoral disaster to deny the vote to those who had served their country so well and who had seen their comrades killed. In solving that predicament it was inevitable that female suffrage would have to be addressed too. The only issue was how.

Conservative MPs argued for a 'soldier's vote.' Liberal and Labour politicians argued this had to be extended to other workers and, following pressure from women's suffrage campaigners, it was axiomatic to consider women too. After all they had contributed to the war effort and eventual victory. A cross-party conference discussed electoral reform, agreeing by 15 votes to 6 there should be some measure of women's suffrage. A motion to give the vote on the same terms as men was lost by 10 votes to 12. A proposal for the vote to occupiers or wives of occupiers was carried 9 to 8 with a specified age of 30 or 35. That was left for further debate. Full enfranchisement was rejected.

The Commons was given a free vote on the Bill that was passed by a majority of 385 to 55 in June 1917 and in the Lords by 134 to 71 votes. The Representation of the People Act 1918 enfranchised 8.4 million women and 12.9 million men. In addition to attaining the age of 30, women had to be the head woman of a household or occupy property to the value of £5 or more. This meant 22% of women of 30 years and over were ineligible to vote.

Women made up 40% of the electorate but just 17 female candidates stood from a total field of 1,623. Only one was successful, Countess Markievicz, but as a member of Sinn Féin she did not take her seat. The Act, only one page long, stated that women were not disqualified by sex or marriage from sitting or voting as members of the House of Commons if aged 21 or more, not 30 as applied to female voters.

In 1919, a Bill for full equality failed as not enough Parliamentary time was allocated, given the weight of post-war legislation. In 1926 Stanley Baldwin was more sympathetic. Together with Nancy Astor and other campaigners they managed to convince the Cabinet but not Winston Churchill. He opposed it to the bitter end, even asking for a note to be put in the Cabinet record. His reasoning was it would be the downfall of the Conservative Party but on what grounds is not entirely clear.

Full equality was finally achieved in 1928 but voters had to wait for the 1929 General Election that resulted in a hung Parliament. About one million of the Conservative Party were women. Labour had 300,000 members with the Liberals at 100,000. Herbert Asquith was still leader which gives some reason why the Liberals were less popular. Whilst incorporated within Party structures, women were subordinate partners rather than equal. Politics remained a largely masculine world with only 37 female MPs before 1939.

By way of contrast the Nordic countries of Finland, Norway and Denmark had voting equality by 1915 with Canada, Germany and Poland in 1918 and the USA in 1920, though some States had already given women the vote. Although the First World War was the key in accelerating the enfranchisement of women in many countries, it did not guarantee that women would gain the vote. French and Italian women had to wait until 1945 and women in Switzerland until 1971.

Nancy Langhorne was the daughter of a wealthy USA businessman who had made his fortune in construction, rail and tobacco. A New York finishing school education equipped Nancy with the social skills for high society. After an unsuccessful marriage she moved to England where she was feted by the aristocracy, enraptured by her glamour and repartee. She soon caught the eye of Waldorf Astor, son of Viscount Astor, owner of the Independent newspaper. By coincidence both were born on 18 May 1879. On marrying they moved into lavish Cliveden where Nancy became a prominent society hostess. After his father's death in October 1919, Waldorf succeeded to his father's peerage, inheriting the title 2nd Viscount Astor with Nancy becoming a Viscountess.

The first three women Members of Parliament were all elected for seats held previously by their husbands. As Viscountess Astor (Conservative), Nancy stood for Plymouth Sutton and was elected following a by-election on 15 November 1919. She was joined in the House of Commons in 1921 by Margaret Wintringham (Liberal) who was returned for the marginal constituency of Louth. It was a remarkable achievement. As a mark of respect to her dead husband, she did not speak in public throughout her campaign. Mabel Philipson was then elected in 1923 after her husband was unseated following allegations of electoral fraud made by his election agent.

Nancy was at her best on the hustings. Her natural wit and charm, and flair for the dramatic, endeared her to voters of all classes. "If you want an M.P. who will be a repetition of the 600 other M.P.s don't vote for me. If you want a lawyer, or if you want a pacifist, don't elect me. If you can't get a fighting man, take a fighting woman. If you want a Bolshevik, or a follower of Mr Asquith, don't elect me. If you want a party hack don't elect me. A feisty Nancy Astor enthralled and inspired voters. When the result was announced on 28 November 1919, she had polled more votes than the Labour and Liberal candidates combined.

On 24th February 1920 Astor stood alone amongst an audience of over 500, mainly hostile, male MPs to deliver her maiden speech. Her subject was close to her heart - the need for restrictions on the sale of alcohol. Her speech emphasised the damage it caused to women and children as well as the economic cost to the country. Of particular concern was men spending their wages on drink and not bringing home the full family wage. Nancy Astor won seven elections and retired from Parliament in 1945.

Early women MPs were instrumental in achieving changes to the law that affected women's rights. In some cases, this was a direct result of introducing a Bill to Parliament, or supporting and working with male colleagues to achieve change. As well as equal franchise in 1928, there were laws which equalised property inheritance rights and improved training for nurses and midwives, reforming the marriage and divorce laws, raising the age of marriage to 16 and introducing equal guardianship. In 1923 Nancy Astor was responsible for the first female Private Members' Bill. The principle that alcohol cannot be sold to anyone under the age of 18, outlined in the Intoxicating Liquor (Sale to persons under Eighteen) Bill 1923, remains to this day.

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1923 gave women the same rights as their husbands, enabling either husband or wife to petition for divorce on the grounds of adultery which formerly only a husband could do. It also removed the condition that a wife had to prove additional faults against the husband. The Guardianship of Infants Act 1925 introduced the principle of equal guardianship between mothers and fathers in event of a court order. It made the welfare of an infant the prime consideration of any court, including a magistrates court where working-class women were more likely to attend. Before this Act, parental authority of a legitimate child was vested in the father. These were huge social changes.

Whilst equality to sit in the Commons was achieved, but not without a struggle given blatant sexism, the House of Lords, comprising mainly hereditary peers, proved much more obdurate. Viscountess Rhondda, former suffragette, successful businesswoman and feminist leader, was the daughter of a Peer who died in 1918. Only the eldest son of a deceased hereditary peer could sit in the Lords.

Viscountess Rhondda brought her case to the House of Lords itself, basing her claim on the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919. This stated that "a woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function." The Lord Chancellor argued that existing legislation did not permit this. In the aftermath, various attempts were made by male peers to reform legislation to enable women to sit in the House.

Women were finally allowed to sit as life peers, only after the Life Peerages Act 1958, coming 40 years after the partial enfranchisement of women in gaining the vote. Entitlement to sit in the Lords as hereditary peers was approved by the Peerage Act 1963. Electoral equality had been a long, relentless and arduous battle.

Forming an Irish free state

In the summer of 1914 the unfolding crisis in Europe had overtaken the Amending Bill, to be replaced by a Suspensory Bill that delayed Home Rule indefinitely, pending the end of likely war, whenever that would be. John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, pledged support to Protestants and Nationalists collaborating against a foreign enemy, but voiced concerns about postponement. Redmond's support was crucial as otherwise the government of Asquith could not continue in office. The price was eventual Home Rule.

Britain capitulated to Ulster Unionists in agreeing partition for northern Counties. This raised fears that Home Rule would continue to ignite tensions on an unpredictable scale, even to the point of civil war. Irish nationalists insisted on a commitment in principle to justifiable claims, not only for independence but a united Ireland. In their defying subservience to the British Government, tensions erupted in the Easter Rising of 1916. Ringleaders, shown no mercy, were quickly court-martialled and executed. Discontent and resentment magnified.

Redmond saw anarchy "when every blackguard who wants to commit an outrage will simply call himself a Sinn Féiner and thereby get the sympathy of the unthinking crowd." At the Sinn Féin conference in October 1917 the incorruptible and scheming Éamon de Valéra was elected President. The conference agreed to legitimate and effective means to achieve Home Rule. The amalgamated volunteers' meeting held at the same time sought to "complete by force of arms the work begun by the men of Easter week." The view was endorsed enthusiastically by Michael Collins who, aged 24, was appointed director of operations.

Ireland descended into violent anarchy, exacerbated by de Valéra becoming President of the Volunteers too and his appointment of Cathal Brugha as chief of staff. Gone were those moderate nationalists and home-rulers who formed the backbone of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the Commons. The post-war election in December 1918 produced an overwhelming majority for Sinn Féin. Redmond, who died nine months earlier, was spared the indignity of his Party's annihilation at the polls.

The first meeting of the Dáil Éireann was on 21 January 1919, one day after the Versailles conference opened. Membership comprised mainly the 73 successful Sinn Féin candidates at the 1918 general election. A declaration and constitution were agreed and position of prime minister determined, with de Valéra appointed. At the time he was incarcerated in Lincoln Prison but not destined to stay there long.

The escape of de Valéra was remarkable. As a server at Mass he noticed the priest always left his keys in the vestry. Impressions were made using the remains of wax alter candles secreted in a tobacco tin. A drawing of the keys, with exact dimensions, was inserted into a Christmas card and, in return, a set of keys and a file were smuggled in. On 13 February 1919, Éamon de Valéra brazenly opened a gate at Lincoln Prison and exited through a hole made in the barbed wire fence surrounding the prison. Michael Collins was waiting. Various cars took him to Worksop, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool. De Valéra was in Dublin within a week.

Michael Collins set up "The Squad;" assassins dedicated to the murder of policemen. In late 1919 the Royal Irish Constabulary set up G-Division to combat this new threat but soon it was infiltrated and its members identified. They were then singled out and shot. Members of G-Division were numbered amongst the 13 policemen killed that year but worse was to follow. In 1920 a total of 182 officers were assassinated. On 20 March 1920 a policeman was shot dead and the Lord Mayor of Cork. The RIC then decided to recruit in Britain and 4,400 ex-

servicemen joined. Enlisted at speed, there were insufficient black uniforms so the RIC resorted to army surplus, including khaki trousers, coining the expression Black and Tans. Suppression would soon turn into intimidation.

In June 1920 Lieutenant-Colonel Smyth DSO, a one-armed Great War hero, was appointed as divisional commander of the Royal Ulster Constabulary after some Sinn Féin violence. He did not mince his words in a speech written up in the Irish Bulletin, a Republican broadsheet. "Now men, Sinn Féin has had all the sport up to the present, and we are going to have the sport now. The police are not sufficient in strength to do anything to hold their barracks. This is not enough, for as long as we remain on the defensive, so long will Sinn Féin will have the whip hand. We must take the offensive and beat Sinn Féin with its own tactics."

"If a police barracks is burned, or if the barracks is already occupied, then the best house in the locality is to be commandeered, the occupants thrown into the gutter. Let them die there; the more the merrier. Police and military will patrol the country at least five nights a week. They are not to confine themselves to the main roads, but make across the country, lie in ambush and, when civilians are seen approaching, shout "Hands Up!" Should the order not be immediately obeyed, shoot and shoot with effect. You may make mistakes occasionally and innocent people may be shot, but that cannot be helped, and you are bound to get the right parties some time. The more you shoot, the better I will like you, and I assure you that no policeman will get in trouble for shooting any man."

By summer 1920, Sinn Féin courts had been established in 21 of 32 Irish counties and during the first two weeks their police made 80 arrests. The Irish Times commented, "The King's government has virtually ceased to exist south of the Boyne and west of the Shannon." Soon a Restoration of Order Act was introduced with increasing severity to combat insurrection.

After two constables were murdered in an ambush in Taum, the village was ransacked and town hall burned down. In Limerick, after assassination of a police inspector, a young Sinn Féin supporter was hauled out of bed, dragged into the street and shot. Twenty people were killed in Belfast in a week but Cork took the brunt of the violence, triggered after the arrest of Lord Mayor, Terry MacSwinney. After various placements he ended up in Wormwood Scrubs where died on hunger strike on 25 October.

The government intensified its efforts to restore peace and suppress Sinn Féin violence by force. A network of agents was established, known as the 'Cairo Gang' for the café they used and for military association with Egypt. In Dublin on 21 November 1920, IRA volunteers shot dead 18 soldiers, mostly Cairo Gang members. Later that day at Croke Park 12 spectators at a football match were shot dead by Black and Tans after a shot rang out. A government convoy was attacked in Cork by republican gunmen on 11 December in tit for tat retaliation.

Black and Tans decided on punitive action. Later that night they imposed a curfew one hour prior to the official time. City Hall was set alight. Shops in St Peter's Street were looted and burned down with many incidents elsewhere in the city. Two convenient culprits, the Delaney brothers, were shot in their beds. Findings of an official inquiry were withheld. Retaliation provoked even greater retribution in an orgy of violence and destruction. In the nine months to December, 125 people were killed and 235 injured. Martial Law was imposed on Cork, Tipperary, Kerry and Limerick, provoking greater violence from IRA volunteers. By June 1921 the death toll had risen by about 400 with 700 injured. The most desperate measure to quell the civil war was considered and rejected. There was no government appetite to deploy 100,000 troops and impose martial law.

A Sinn Féin delegation, headed by de Valéra, met with Lloyd George on 14 July 1921. The offer of dominion status was rejected. Ireland demanded "amicable but absolute" separation. Despite tetchy correspondence, a conference was to take place in London on 11 October with the Sinn Féin delegation led by founder Arthur Griffiths, aided by Michael Collins. De Valéra didn't attend for reasons still not entirely clear.

Sticking points were partition and the position of the 26 counties, excluding the 6 in the north. At a later 'informal' meeting, held on 12 November, Lloyd George persuaded Griffith to sign a document. This endorsed partition along a line to be determined by a Boundary Commission in accepting the formal association of Britain with a Free State. A draft Treaty followed. Sinn Féin was appalled as allegiance to the Crown meant British sovereignty with dominion status.

The delegation traipsed back to London. Lloyd George produced two letters, one enclosing what was the agreement and the other saying that Sinn Féin rejected terms already agreed. There was a sting in the tail as the second came with a warning. "If I send this letter it is war and war within three days. Whichever you choose travels by special train to Holyhead tonight and by destroyer to Belfast. The train is waiting steam-up at Euston. We must know your answer by 10 pm tonight."

A little before midnight, Arthur Griffith returned to Downing Street. "Mr Prime Minister, the delegation is willing to sign the agreement." A disconsolate Michael Collins returned to his hotel and wrote: "I tell you, early this morning I signed my death warrant – a bullet might as well have done the job five years ago." At a Dáil Éireann meeting on 14 December 1921 de Valéra drafted an alternative statement. After the Treaty was narrowly agreed by 64 votes to 57 he resigned, leaving Griffiths and Collins to form a provisional government.

The large anti-Treaty lobby sought rebellion. Civil conflict started in earnest on 28 June 1922. On 12 August Arthur Griffith died of a cerebral haemorrhage and ten days later Michael Collins was assassinated by former associates. By the spring of 1923 the Republican campaign had switched mainly to the destruction of property, including railway lines. When Liam Lynch, the anti-Treaty IRA leader, was killed in action a ceasefire was called by Republican Leader, Liam Deasy.

Fighters were instructed to 'dump' their arms and return home. There was no surrender; neither was any formal ending to hostilities negotiated. An election held in August was won by the pro-Treaty party. The 12,000 or so anti-Treaty prisoners were not released until mid-1924. In 1937 the Free State formed a new constitution with a president as its head. No mention was made of allegiance to the British monarch but a territorial claim was made to Northern Ireland. A united Ireland remained the goal.