

Endgame 1921: Towards Truce and Treaty in Ireland

1.

The moment was marked by a minor act of defiance in a Manchester courtroom. Here, a large group of Irishmen were standing trial on charges of treason and felony and when the clock struck noon, Patrick O'Donoghue, Officer Commander of the Manchester IRA, uttered an instruction in Irish and the men in the dock, to the surprise of the trial judge and almost everyone else, leapt to their feet to 'salute the truce'.¹

Back in Ireland, midday on 11 July 1921 was also being marked.²

At Dublin Port, for instance, American and British steamships signalled support for the truce by sounding their sirens, while many workers, including over 300 corporation labourers and 1,600 men at the Inchicore railway works, were let off from their workplaces, released to enjoy a Monday afternoon in the midst of a July heat wave.³ Some Dublin schoolchildren were similarly indulged.

As if to underline the easing of political tensions and relaxation of the general atmosphere, about forty unarmed members of Auxiliary force, returning from a trip to the seaside – towels slung around their necks – turned into Grafton Street aboard three Crossley tenders in the middle of the afternoon. A number of them casually dismounted and went shopping in the street's popular drapery stores. A short distance away, outside the gates of Dublin Castle, photographers captured another previously

¹ BMH WS 847: Patrick O'Donoghue
<http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0847.pdf#page=14> ; Skibbereen Eagle, 16 July 1921

² Although the truce had been agreed a couple of days beforehand and publicised in the press, the men in Manchester appeared to be better informed of developments than at least some those in the front line of fighting back in Ireland. It was an hour and half later, at 1.30 pm, before a despatch arrived with a message to Patrick Luddy, an IRA commandant in Castletownroche in Cork, with details of the 'date, hour and conditions' of the Truce. The despatch rider who delivered the message was subsequently arrested and released after Captain Webster, the local Military leader, read the contents of his despatch and returned it to its envelope with a slip note, the message on which acknowledged his mistake. "On His Majesty's Service Opened in error after Truce". See BMH WS 1151: Patrick J Luddy, Commandant IRA, Cork, 1921
<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1151.pdf#page=31>

³ Irish Independent, 12 July 1921

improbable scene: unarmed Auxiliaries smiling and chatting to a group of local Dubliners.⁴

The day of the truce brought bigger crowds onto the streets of Dublin than had been seen in months. Republican colours were openly displayed and that evening the air filled with singing and the music of several marching bands.⁵

‘A walk in the streets of Dublin or in any country road revealed the immense satisfaction and relief which the good news had brought to all hearts,’ the *Irish Times* observed. ‘The very air held a new lightness and was irradiated not only with sunshine but with hope.’⁶ This mood of hope, genuinely felt and widely shared throughout the country, was nevertheless tempered by wariness and, on the part of certain combatants at least, a hard-earned realism.

With bonfires blazing to herald the new political dispensation, Dan Breen, instrumental in events that would be said to have signalled the start of the Ireland’s war of independence in 1919, recalled that they were ‘promptly extinguished’ by Volunteers who saw ‘the necessity of restraining such premature manifestations of exultation.’⁷ As subsequent events would confirm, the impulses to celebration and caution would prove to be equally well-merited.

A truce was not a settlement and some within the IRA regarded it as little more than a ‘temporary respite’, a hiatus in a war that would resume with even greater ferocity when the negotiations following the cessation broke down – as some assumed they inevitably would.⁸ By the same token, the achievement of the truce was the culmination of months of public and private peace talk, political solo-runs, kite-flying initiatives and

⁴ Illustrated London News, 16 July 1921

⁵ In Limerick, a marching band of ex-soldiers from the First World War paraded through the city streets to cheers from the public.

⁶ Reported in the Irish Independent, 12 July 1921

⁷ BMH WS Ref: 1763, Witness: Daniel Breen, Quartermaster 3 Tipperary Brigade, IRA. Accessible online at <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1763.pdf#page=2>

⁸ BMH WS 1043: Joseph V Lawless, Member IV, Fingal, 1916; Officer IRA, Dublin, 1921. ‘The general feeling we had at the time was that the truce was most probably a temporary respite and that, when negotiations broke down, the war would begin with redoubled effort on both sides.’

indirect communications across the Irish Sea which had as its purpose the stopping of violence to allow space for politics and negotiation to take centre stage.

2. ***"I won't say that one cannot see a glimmer of light"***

None of these peace manoeuvres were successful and most were not welcomed.

In late 1920 and early 1921, the Sinn Féin leadership had deemed a lot of 'truce talk' to be damaging for the impression it promoted that republicans were on the cusp of surrender.⁹ And yet, it was republicans themselves who were often to the fore in pushing this type of talk. It was the Sinn Féin TD for north Wexford, Roger Sweetman who, aghast at the violence of Bloody Sunday and Kilmichael and opposed to the killing of policemen, called for an IRA ceasefire at the end of November 1920.¹⁰ Sweetman had been acting on his own initiative and without party support, yet his impatience at the drift of events – he would end up parting ways with Sinn Féin on the matter – was not entirely unique. Galway County Council would pass a 'peace resolution' on 3 December which also urged moves towards a negotiated truce.¹¹ The local IRA in Galway was dismissive of the Council's 'white feather resolution', while Michael Collins looked upon actions of both the Council and Fr Michael O'Flanagan, the acting Sinn Féin president who had entered into a telegram exchange with Lloyd George in December, to be little more than counterproductive meddling. Pointedly and publicly, Collins warned of the 'grave danger that the country may be stampeded on false promises, and foolish ill-timed actions.' Such actions needed to be resisted, Collins continued. 'My advice to the people is 'Hold Fast'.¹²

⁹NAI DE 4/8/8: Dáil Éireann Report on Propaganda, 18 Jan. 1921. Accessed online, 17 Feb 1921, at <https://www.difp.ie/books/?volume=1&docid=57>

¹⁰ Charles Townsend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (2013) p. 304; Pádraig Ó Ruairc, *Truce: Murder, Myth and the Last Days of the Irish war of Independence* (Cork, 2016) p. 26; Cork Examiner, 31 Jan. 1921

¹¹ Ó Ruairc, *Op. Cit.* p. 27

¹² DE/2/234/1: Extract from *Irish Independent*, 7 Dec 1920

The truce efforts led by the Clare-born Archbishop of Perth, Patrick Clune (his nephew Conor had been killed in custody in Dublin Castle on 'Bloody Sunday') were a different matter: throughout December 1920, Clune acted as an intermediary between Dublin and London and met with Lloyd George on a number of occasions before a curtain was drawn on their discussions.¹³ De Valera, having been briefed by Michael Collins on developments on his return from the United States at the beginning of January 1921, attributed the abandonment of Clune's efforts to 'Die-Hard' members of the British cabinet such as Bonar Law who had demanded an 'absolute surrender of all arms'.¹⁴ This had indeed been the case and the Clune episode exposed tensions within the British cabinet as to whether coercion or conciliation was the preferred policy direction towards Ireland.¹⁵

At the beginning of 1921, it was clear that coercion had won out: the new year was less than a week old when the number of counties placed under martial law was doubled to eight.¹⁶ From then until the summer, there was little serious engagement with the idea of peace on the part of the British government. Which is not to say these months didn't see notable political developments: there were and they included changes of personnel and gestures of conciliation. Not only was there an instruction not to arrest Éamon de Valera after his return from the United States, there was also a decision taken to replace as Viceroy, in April 1921, the hawkish Lord French with the more conciliatory Lord FitzAlan, an opponent of Britain's counter terror policy and the first Catholic to be appointed to the office of Lord Lieutenant. Coincident with these developments was a change to the internal dynamics of Britain's coalition government when illness led Andrew Bonar Law to resign his leadership of the Conservative Party. By personality

¹³ See *Irish Independent*, 11 Dec 1920; and David Lloyd George, *Hansard*, 10 Dec 1921, 10 December 1920; and Pádraig Ó Ruairc, *Truce: Murder, Myth and the Last Days of the Irish war of Independence* (Cork, 2016) pp. 26-36; Updating Michael Collins on developments with Archbishop Clune, Art O'Briain informed him that he had warned the Archbishop to be 'careful of L.G.'s trickery'. DE/2/234/1, A O'B to MC, 9 Dec 1920

¹⁴ Dáil Éireann debate, 25 January 1921. Accessible online at <https://www.dail100.ie/en/debates/1921-01-25/2283>; See also UCDA P150/1900, Arthur Griffith to Michael Collins, 17 Dec 1920. Accessible online at https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/1921_treaty_correspondence.pdf

¹⁵ In his damning judgment on the 'incoherence' of the British government approach to Ireland during these years, Joe Lee wrote of decision-makers being 'out of their depth' and of a cabinet that couldn't 'make up its mind on either a war policy or a peace policy... In December 1920, for instance, it refused a truce on terms it accepted in July 1921, apparently because Sir Hamar Greenwood, the Chief Secretary, believed the IRA to be on the verge of collapse and felt that Irish public opinion supported the British government!' See J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (1989) p. 43

¹⁶ In early December 1920, four counties were placed under Martial law - Cork, Kerry, Tipperary and Limerick. Then, on 5 January 1921, Counties Clare, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford were also proclaimed.

and political background, his replacement Austen Chamberlain would prove, in Ronan Fanning's assessment, a 'more malleable instrument in Lloyd George's hand when he finally decided the time was ripe to seek an accommodation with Sinn Féin.'¹⁷

That time was not yet, however.

In April a prominent unionist peer, Lord Derby, travelled to Ireland – he came incognito and using a pseudonym, 'Mr Edwards' – to meet separately with de Valera and Cardinal Logue and encourage them towards negotiations. Although insistent that he acted on his own initiative and not as a government emissary, he did cross the Irish Sea with the knowledge of Lloyd George and would report back to him on his return. Important though it was as a first point of formal contact between the British and Irish sides, in public at least, Derby proffered a downbeat, if not quite fatalistic, assessment of the prospects of peace. 'I won't say that one cannot see a glimmer of light,' he told a meeting of unionist women in Liverpool on his return from Ireland, 'but one does not see sufficient light to proclaim that the dawn is at hand.'¹⁸

When the British Cabinet met to discuss Irish policy later that same month – April 27 – it reached a broadly similar conclusion.

Opinion divided at that meeting on whether or not the time for truce was right with several ministers supporting the idea of securing an armistice prior to holding the May elections to the new northern and southern parliaments, the establishment of which had been provided for by Government of Ireland Act that Westminster had approved the previous December. In the end, it was decided against this course, Lloyd George's attitude swayed by military reports, not exactly accurate, which indicated that the IRA was on the retreat.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (2013) p. 250. As early June 1920, Chamberlain had cast doubt on the British policy of coercion in Ireland - he considered policy impractical as "our people won't give it the time necessary for it to achieve its end". Quoted in John D. Fair, The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921: Unionist Aspects of the Peace, *Journal of British Studies*, Nov., 1972, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Nov., 1972) p. 135

¹⁸ Irish Independent, 26 April 1921. For more on the De Valera and Derby meeting and their subsequent exchanges, see David McCullagh, *De Valera: Rise, 1882-1932* (Gill, 2017) p.204

¹⁹ Pádraig Ó Ruairc, *Truce: Murder, Myth and the Last Days of the Irish war of Independence* (Cork, 2016) p. 40

This belief in the imminence of the IRA's demise – alongside a reluctance to confer recognition upon the IRA – was only part of the calculation on the British side. British decision-making was also informed by a hierarchy of priorities which, as Ronan Fanning observed, placed the appeasement of Ulster unionist concerns and the 'copper-fastening of partition' above the imperative of peace.²⁰

The result was that real momentum change towards a truce only came after the May elections had been held and King George V had travelled to Belfast for the formal opening of the new Northern Parliament.²¹ In London for the Imperial Conference, the South African statesman General Jan Christian Smuts saw the potential of the King's attendance at Belfast to chart a new direction in Ireland and he wrote to Lloyd George to advise him so. Smuts railed against the policy of reprisals and the damage it had done to Empire relations and the Imperial reputation. What's more, he suggested that with the establishment of a northern parliament, concerns about the possible 'coercion of Ulster' could be set aside and an opportunity seized 'to deal on the most statesmanlike lines with the rest of Ireland.'²² The King's speech in Belfast on the occasion of the formal opening of the Six-County parliament duly attempted to deliver on that opportunity. At Belfast City Hall on 22 June 1921, the monarch spoke of his affection for Irish people and he offered not a word of criticism of either Sinn Féin or the IRA. His message instead was mollifying and forward-looking: it appealed to all Irishmen 'to forgive and forget' and to forge a 'new era of peace, contentment and goodwill'.²³ It also stressed that the future of Ireland lay in the hands of its own people, the King expressing a hope that the opening of the Belfast parliament would serve as a prelude to the day when

²⁰ Fanning, *Op. Cit.* p. 256

²¹ Those elections, held on 24 May 1921, saw unionist secure 40 of the 52 seats to the new Six County Parliament, with Sinn Féin and Nationalists dividing the remaining 12 seats equally between them. Sinn Féin dissolved the First Dáil and took these elections as a vote for the second Dáil. Of the 128 seats allocated to the proposed Southern Parliament, none were contested and so no poll took place. 124 seats were claimed by Sinn Féin who boycotted the southern parliament. Indeed, when the first meeting of that Parliament was held at the Council Chamber of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction on Upper Merrion Street, the only four members to attend were those representing the constituency of Dublin University. The *Irish Independent*, 29 June 1921, described the proceedings in Dublin as a 'farce'. The parliament adjourned and was dissolved the following year.

²² Fanning, *Op. cit.* p. 257

²³ David McCullagh, *De Valera: Rise, 1882-1932* (Gill, 2017) p.207

‘Irish people, north and south, might be united under one Parliament or two, as those parliaments might themselves decide’.²⁴

Within days, and citing the ‘spirit’ of the King’s words, Lloyd George was sending invitations to James Craig and Éamon de Valera as the representatives of Northern and Southern Ireland – the two men, encouraged by Dublin Castle, had come together for a short, inconclusive meeting at a house on Dublin’s Howth Road in early May – to go to London for talks to ‘explore to the utmost the possibility of a settlement’. To underline his sincerity, several leading Sinn Féin TDs including Arthur Griffith had already been released from prison and de Valera was promised that should he accept the Lloyd George invite, he would be allowed to travel to and from the London conference without fetter.²⁵

De Valera would travel, though not immediately.

First, he decided to convene a conference in Dublin with representatives of the ‘political minority’, of which Sir James Craig and Lord Midleton were among the invitees. The *Cork Examiner* prematurely trumpeted that the Irish Conference, to be held at the Mansion House, would be ‘as momentous as ever was held in the history of this country.’²⁶ While the big billing would prove unfounded, not least because Craig declined to come to Dublin, the Mansion House gathering on 4 July did accelerate a momentum towards peace. It started a flurry of political activity on both sides of the Irish Sea, with Lord Midleton, who did attend at the Mansion House, conveying to Lloyd George the necessity of agreeing to an armistice before de Valera would consider travelling to London. General Smuts, acting as an unofficial intermediary, also met Sinn Féin leaders in Dublin on 5 July and he too reported back to the British cabinet on the need for a truce as a precondition to a conference. When Lord Midleton returned to the Mansion House on 8 July he did so with the British Prime Minister’s agreement to an unconditional truce – something to which the British government had been unwilling to

²⁴ Irish Independent, 23 June 1921, 29 June 1921; also Charles Townsend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (London, 2013) p. 303

²⁵ The five Sinn Féin leaders released from Mountjoy jail were Arthur Griffith, Prof. Eoin MacNeill, Michael Staines and Eamon Duggan - they had been detained in Mountjoy Jail without charge for 8 months. Robert Barton TD was also released from Portland Prison - after serving 16 months of a 3 year sentence for penal servitude.

²⁶ Cork Examiner, 29 June 1921

accede to the previous December. A measure of the mood of expectancy and relief can be gauged by the reception given to General Macready as he arrived by car at the Mansion House that evening – the commander of the British forces in Ireland was actually cheered by the vast, hopeful crowds that had gathered on Dawson Street. The sheer incongruity of the scene was remarked upon by the *Daily Express* newspaper, which optimistically reported that it seemed that the ‘last chapter of bloodshed and misery has at length been closed.’²⁷ After lauding the efforts of de Valera, Griffith, Lord Midleton and other unionist representatives at the Mansion House, Ireland’s largest-selling daily newspaper, the *Irish Independent*, was similarly buoyant. ‘The nation has undergone a period of travail and agony,’ the paper editorialised on 9 July, ‘but given a really satisfactory settlement which can be accepted with honour, lasting reconciliation, accompanied by domestic contentment and prosperity, will follow.’²⁸

No single agreed truce document was signed by both sides.

Instead, what the press published were two separate lists of terms and conditions, one applying to the British army and the other to the IRA. For the former, at least in the version published by the *Irish Bulletin*, there were to be no more incoming troops or police and ‘no movements for military purposes of troops or munitions except for maintenance’. In addition, there was to be ‘no provocative displays of forces’; no use of special agents and no interference with the movements of Irish persons, military or civil (a commitment that supposed the abandonment of curfews); and no pursuit of messengers or lines of communication or connection. All of these conditions were to apply equally across the island, including areas theretofore subject to martial law – and from early 1921 this encompassed all six counties in Munster, as well as Kilkenny and Wexford in Leinster.²⁹ As for the IRA or ‘Irish Army’, attacks on Crown forces were to cease; there were to be ‘no provocative displays of forces, armed or unarmed; there was to be ‘no interference with Government or private property’; and there was an

²⁷ Reported in *Irish Independent*, 9 July 1921

²⁸ *Irish Independent*, 9 July 1921

²⁹ John Ainsworth, *British Security Policy in Ireland, 1920-1921: A Desperate Attempt by the Crown to Maintain Anglo-Irish Unity by Force*. *Australian Journal of Irish Studies*, January 2001. Eprint accessed online, 1 March 2021, at https://eprints.qut.edu.au/6/1/British_Security_Policy_in_Ireland.pdf

agreement to 'discountenance and prevent any action likely to cause disturbance of the peace which might necessitate military interference.'³⁰

By its nature, of course, the truce delivered neither military victory nor defeat to either side.³¹ This did not, however, prevent partisan characterisations as to how it had come about or what it meant. Depending on which side of the conflict divide you stood, the truce could be construed as a vindication of the repressive measures that had been deployed or recognition of the status that had been sought. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Chief of Police in Ireland chose to interpret it as the former. On the day before the truce took effect, he issued a circular praising the 'splendid discipline' of his forces and crediting them with bringing an end to the violence. 'It is fully recognised by the Government,' the circular stated, 'that the relentless pressure exercised by the Police on the rebels during the last twelve months is the main factor that has brought about these negotiations.'³² Simultaneously and in total contradiction to this analytical framing, the truce was greeted by the IRA as a 'triumph'. If the politicians considered the terms of the truce to have conferred a de-facto recognition upon the Dáil and the status of the republican government as a 'co-equal' of its British government interlocutors, then the IRA, according to Dan Breen, viewed those same terms as an acceptance of their status as 'soldiers of an opposing army' and not, as Lloyd George and much of British propaganda would have it, as a 'band of assassins'.³³ This was of more than immediate consequence. For even if the truce were to unravel, propagandist value could still be drawn from what the British had conceded. Writing to P.J. Little, the Dáil's representative in South Africa at the end of July, Robert Brennan admitted as much. 'We have assured the position at least that if there is a resumption of hostilities they cannot well deny a state of war and they cannot use the old label 'murder gang' to such advantage'.³⁴

³⁰ Cork Examiner, 11 July 1921

³¹ Historian David Fitzpatrick contends, however, that 'On July 11th, 1921, both sides acknowledged defeat by agreeing to a Truce.' Quoted in Irish Times, 18 July 2001 <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-truce-of-1921-should-have-taken-gun-out-of-irish-politics-1.318353>

³² UK National Archives, CO 904_178 RIC Circulars 1921-1922. Circular dated 10 July 1922.

³³ BMH WS Ref: 1763, Witness: Daniel Breen, Quartermaster 3 Tipperary Brigade, IRA. Accessible online at <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1763.pdf#page=2>

³⁴ UCDA P150/1897: Robert Brennan to Patrick J. Little (South Africa), 28 July, 1921. Accessed online, 17 Feb. 2021, at <https://www.difp.ie/books/?volume=1&docid=144>

3. ***‘Anything moving, man, woman, or child, was fired on.’***

The slow march from talks about peace to the achievement of a truce came at a massive human cost.

The numbers killed in the first six months of 1921 was estimated at 999, and that figure uncomfortably surpassed the thousand mark in the frenzy of violence that immediately preceded the truce. Indeed, it transpired that the bloodiest day of the Irish war of independence would be its last. *The Dead of the Irish Revolution*, Daithí Ó Corráin and Eunan O’Halpin’s brilliant chronicle of violence and loss during the revolutionary era, itemises the cases of thirty-four people killed on 10 July, the day before the truce. Three counties account for thirty of these deaths: Antrim, Cork and Kerry. Seven were killed in Castleisland when an attack on a curfew patrol by the IRA’s Kerry No. 2 Brigade went awry. Of the five killed in Cork, four were members of the South Staffordshire Regiment who were blindfolded and shot at Togher having been kidnapped while out walking in the city.³⁵ Later, in his memoir, Connie Neenan, officer commanding the Cork brigade of the IRA, expressed regret for these soldiers’ deaths, describing the ‘killing of these poor young fellows’ as ‘a most senseless, and a deeply regrettable incident, something that did considerable harm to the image of the IRA’.³⁶

But the worst of the pre-truce violence occurred in Belfast. 10 July would deliver the city its own grim ‘Bloody Sunday’ when thirteen people were killed on a single day and twenty-two would die across a week that extended beyond the onset of the truce. The incident that ignited the Belfast violence was an IRA ambush on a police patrol – RIC and ‘B’ Specials – at Raglan Street on the Falls Road in which Thomas Conlon, an RIC officer from Roscommon was killed. However, what followed was less reprisal than, in the words of one IRA officer in the city, an attempted ‘massacre’ of the nationalist population.³⁷ Civilians were fired upon and Catholic homes looted and burned: the

³⁵ For a discussion around the circumstances of the Togher killings, see Cairogang website <https://www.cairogang.com/soldiers-killed/cork-jul-21/cork-executions.html> and Ó Ruairc, op. cit. pp. 165-70. The details of the soldiers killed and the circumstances of their death are also dealt with in killings are documented in Eunan O’Halpin & Daithí Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution* (Yale, 2020) pp. 516-517

³⁶ Eunan O’Halpin & Daithí Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution* (Yale, 2020) p. 516

³⁷ BMH WS 389: Roger McCorley, OC Antrim Brigade, IRA 1920

Bishop of Down and Connor, Dr MacRory, would compile a list of 144 homes in one small area between the Shankill and Falls Roads which were either destroyed, looted or had their furniture smashed. All the houses belonged to Catholics, the Bishop maintaining that not a single non-Catholic home had been touched.³⁸ 'The British, especially the Special Constabulary seemed to be completely out of hand and were bent of massacre,' Roger McCorley, officer commanding the Antrim Brigade of the IRA, recalled. 'Armoured cars passed through all our areas and kept a continuous fire into the houses. Anything moving, man, woman, or child, was fired on.'³⁹

The day of the truce would see more killing.

On 11 July, about ten more names were added to the register of the dead, the youngest among them a 13-year-old Catholic girl in Belfast, Mary McGowan, who was killed by a gun-shot fired by a member of the Ulster Special Constabulary from an armoured car as she crossed the street with her mother.⁴⁰ Among the others killed were two RIC men and a soldier based in Tipperary. Another was a 23-year-old farmer from Portarlinton, John Poynton, who, having previously boasted that he'd 'shoot every member of the IRA for £1 per head', was taken from his home in the early hours of the morning and shot by two masked men.⁴¹ Eunan O'Halpin has suggested that the targeting of Poynton – and suspected spies and informers like him – 'may have arisen partly from a desire to fire a fatal shot for Ireland while there was still time to do so'.⁴² Indeed, the wave of pre-truce killings, particularly those carried out by the IRA, has been the source of much heated scholarly and popular debate, with a number of academics and journalists ascribing a sectarian or opportunistic motive to at least some of these events. The research of Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc has nevertheless contested this narrative, systematically

<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0389.pdf#page=40>

³⁸ Irish Independent, 19 July 1921

³⁹ BMH WS 389: Roger McCorley, OC Antrim Brigade, IRA 1920

<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0389.pdf#page=40>

⁴⁰ O'Halpin & Ó Corráin p. 520. One of the ten dead listed for July 11th is William Shields, and ex-serviceman who joined the Kanturk Battalion IRA and became a suspected informant. It is uncertain, however, whether Shields was actually killed or not. O Ruairc claims that he fled Ireland after the ceasefire. For a further discussion of Shields case, see <http://www.bloody sunday.co.uk/castle-intelligence/thomson/shiels/shiels.html>; and for an account of his suspect spying activity, see the BMH Witness statement of Jeremiah Murphy, <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0744.pdf#page=15>

⁴¹ Freeman's Journal, 11 July 1921; Evening Herald 12 July 1921 ; O'Halpin & Ó Corráin p. 519

⁴² Quoted in Ó Ruairc, p. 76

challenging allegations that the announcement of the truce had been exploited by the IRA 'to commit unjustified and morally questionable attacks'.⁴³ Ó Ruairc likewise turned a focus on British military pre-truce operations, which were responsible for multiple deaths, including that of 'ardent Irish-Irelander' Margaret Keogh at her home in Irishtown in Dublin and the detonation of mine at Kilgobnet, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford – set by members of Royal East Kent Regiment – which resulted in six fatalities, civilians among them.⁴⁴

Much of the immediate pre-truce activity, however, was of the non-fatal kind. Raids and searches by the military continued as did IRA attacks on property, including private residences, businesses and coastguard stations.⁴⁵ In Co. Tyrone, the Pomeroy and Carrickmore companies of the IRA set fire to the night mail train that ran from Belfast to Derry and followed this with the destruction of Doon's Creamery in Cookstown, a late reprisal, it claimed, for the torching of a hall used by the IRA in Dunamore.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, John Caffrey, a member of the Active Service Unit in Dublin, would later recall that one his 'last jobs' on the morning of the truce was 'to seize a motor bicycle at Westland Row and motor tyres from Dunlops' on Abbey Street.' Why and what for he did not say.⁴⁷ According to Dublin Castle, however, the last attack before the truce took place at Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, where at 11.55 am – five minutes before the truce was due to take effect – one of three Volunteers travelling in a Ford car fired a number of revolver shots at a passing police patrol.⁴⁸ Nobody was hit.

4. *'...no longer a hunted fugitive ... but a schoolboy at play'*

⁴³ Ó Ruairc, op. cit. p. 17

⁴⁴ Ó Ruairc, op. cit. pp. 227-240

⁴⁵ Irish Independent, 12 July 2021

⁴⁶ BMH WS 458: Sean Corr <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0458.pdf#page=15> and BMH WS 893: William J. Kelly. <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0893.pdf>

⁴⁷ BMH WS 569: John Anthony Caffrey, Member ASU, Dublin, <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0569.pdf#page=15>

⁴⁸ Irish Independent, 13 July 1921

Three days after truce, on 14 July, Éamon de Valera met with David Lloyd George at 10 Downing Street.⁴⁹ The sense of history and expectancy was everywhere evident. For the occasion, the streets outside the Prime Minister's residence filled with republican well-wishers, some flying Irish tricolour flags, while inside, an excited Lloyd George paced the building beforehand, stopping to admire the large map he had hung on the wall of the Cabinet room to impress upon the Sinn Féin leader the sheer scale of the British empire.⁵⁰ Over the course of a week, the two men met on a number of occasions and though they parted without reaching agreement they did commit to the maintenance of the truce and to keeping open the lines of communication between them.

Those July meetings laid the foundations for the negotiations proper that commenced in October 1921. They also saw the British lay out its own initial proposals for an Irish settlement. Set out in letter to de Valera on 20 July, who swiftly rejected them, the British offered 'dominion status' within the empire where the Irish had sought full self-determination outside of it.⁵¹

Ominously, perhaps, on same day as Lloyd George was effectively dismissing the demand for an Irish Republic, a horse named 'Irish Republic', a 6-1 shot in the pre-race betting, was finishing last in the Irish Oaks 2,000 guineas at the Curragh racecourse.⁵² The event was photographed extensively for newspapers and magazines and film from the day was captured by the British Pathé newsreel company. The Pathé footage emphasised less the sport than the crowd watching. 'Everybody enjoying the truce,' read the title frame on the newsreel. 'Free from war restrictions,' viewers were further informed, 'a huge crowd which included thousands of British troops, see race for Irish Oaks.'⁵³

⁴⁹ De Valera led an Irish delegation that arrived in London on July 12, staying at the Grosvenor Hotel. The delegation included Ministers Arthur Griffith, Count Plunkett, Austin Stack and Robert Barton, as well as Erskine Childers, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Laurence O'Neill. Kathleen O'Connell, de Valera's private secretary, also travelled, as did his friend Robert Farnan and his wife, Nora. Much to his annoyance, Michael Collins was not included in the delegation.

⁵⁰ Irish independent, 15 July 1921; Ronan Fanning, *Éamon De Valera: A Will to Power* (2015) p. 101

⁵¹ *Official correspondence relating to the peace negotiations June-September 1921* (Dublin, 1921) David Lloyd George to Eamon de Valera, 20 July 1921. Accessed online, 23 Feb 2021, at <https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1921/david-lloyd-george-to-eamon-de-valera/141/>

⁵² Freeman's Journal, 21 July 1921

⁵³ See Pathé Newsreel on youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxyINEXKTnw>

There was a clear, if unstated, message in this presentation: whatever about the high political stakes to be played out between Dublin, London and Belfast and whatever the military management of its terms, the truce had given license for ordinary Irish people – combatants included – to go about their daily lives in a peaceful and more politically tranquil atmosphere. Evidence of this calmer normality was easy to discern. It was apparent in the restoration of Dublin street-lighting at night, in the lifting of restrictions on fairs and markets in the martial law area, and in the granting of permission for previously closed creameries to reopen.⁵⁴ It was likewise apparent, as coverage of the Curragh races had shown, in the experience of sport. Indeed, writing in advance of the annual Horse Show at the RDS – scheduled for mid-August 1921 – one reporter observed how, not long before, the odds had been stacked against staging the Horse Show with the country in a ‘state of war’ and communications by road and rail was severely impaired. The truce had, nonetheless, ‘worked wonders’.⁵⁵ It not only ensured the Horse Show could go ahead, it ensured a ‘lively and cheerful’ public mood, with the ‘prospects of an Irish peace’ reported to have been the ‘chief subject of conversation.’⁵⁶ Not everybody associated with sport was convinced the peace was real or would last. GAA officials in Cork, fearing a return to violence, decided against a return to play and, following their lead, the Munster Council would later opt to cancel all fixtures under its control.⁵⁷ This course of action was decided upon in spite of urgings from the GAA’s Central Council that Munster take advantage of the ‘altered political situation’ to run off their inter-county championships.⁵⁸ In the absence of official competition, the hurlers of Limerick and Tipperary took matters into their own hands and met for a ‘friendly’ fixture at the Market Fields with a return a game promised afterwards. ‘Personally,’ the journalist ‘Carbery’ (who later commentated on Irish radio’s first live sports broadcast) wrote in his account of the day, ‘I do not think that hurling practice interferes seriously with other activities’.⁵⁹ Carbery didn’t need to spell out what those other activities might be.

⁵⁴ Freeman’s Journal, 20 July 1921; Irish Independent 19 July 1921. Patrick Doyle, *The co-operative movement, development and the nation-state, 1889–1939* (Manchester University Press, 2019) p. 152 Accessible online at <https://www.manchesteropenhive.com/view/9781526124579/9781526124579.00011.xml?chapterBody=PDF>

⁵⁵ Skibbereen Eagle, 13 Aug. 1921. View a digital version of the Programme for the 1921 Horse Show on the RDS Archives website at <https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/files/show/3744>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Marcus de Búrca, *The GAA: A History* (1980) p. 152

⁵⁸ GAA Archives, Central Council Minutes, 11 Sept. 1921; 27 Sept. 1921; 2 Oct. 1921

⁵⁹ Evening Echo, 24 Sept. 1921

In GAA terms, however, Munster was an outlier.

Throughout ‘most parts of the country’, the announcement of the truce had been followed by a quick resumption of GAA activity and the three other provincial councils set about running off their championships.⁶⁰ The month after the second Dáil had held its first public meeting at the Mansion House, an advert for the Leinster hurling final clash of Dublin and Kilkenny at Croke Park alerted prospective patrons that the match would be started by none other than Michael Collins, TD and Minister for Finance in the Dáil administration.⁶¹ A crowd of 17,000 spectators turned up and while they would have seen Collins and Harry Boland pose for pictures with the teams and observe Collins in conversation with the players prior to the throw-in, they would have had to wait to the following day to see in print of what words were passed between them. Those newspaper reports told of Collins telling the players that they represented a force in Irish life that had always distinguished between the Gael and the Gaul. ‘You are not only upholding the great game,’ he said, ‘but you are also upholding one of the most ancient traditions of Ireland.’ Indeed, according to Collins, had it not been for the GAA, England during the Great War would have ‘annexed much of the finest bone and muscle that were saved to Ireland’ – a claim that was easily belied by the large numbers of Irishmen who did see service in khaki during that war.⁶²

But more striking than anything Collins said was the ease and openness with which he and Harry Boland knocked about with each other prior the match, pucking the ball to and fro with an ease and confidence that demonstrated their familiarity with the sport. Of the two, Boland was the more accomplished hurler – he had won back-to-back Dublin hurling championships with the Faughs club in 1914 and 1915 – yet it was the sight of an exuberant, seemingly carefree Collins that elicited most comment.⁶³ What spectators saw in Collins, one newspaper reported, was ‘no longer a hunted fugitive or a Minister of Finance, but a schoolboy at play.’⁶⁴

⁶⁰ De Búrca, *ibid.* p. 152

⁶¹ Collins also had a strong GAA background. He had served as a Secretary of the Geraldine’s club in London.

⁶² Irish Independent, 12 Sept. 1921

⁶³ See Faughs 125th Anniversary Celebration: Souvenir Program. Accessible online at

<https://www.faughs.ie/uploadDocs/125clar.pdf>

⁶⁴ Irish Independent, 12 September 1921 <https://www.gaa.ie/centenary/illustrative-docs/1921-lei/>

Collins was not the only fugitive who'd now come into the open and nor was he alone in being afforded previously denied opportunities for leisure and recreation. Collins' concern, however, was that the fruits of the truce might equally provide a pretext for a slackening of 'national discipline'. 'Mick was worried about too much rejoicing going on all over the country ...and too much relaxation,' Eamon Broy would recall in his witness statement to the Bureau of Military History. Broy would himself observe an increase in drinking once the truce had been called and the pressures of the conflict lifted. 'I was disagreeably surprised to see many fine and highly strung young Irish Volunteers, who had been teetotallers when I had last met them, drinking whiskey neat. It was bound to have a bad effect on them especially after the long struggle they had endured.'⁶⁵ The allure of alcohol was not just recreational. For some, as historian Anne Dolan has highlighted, it clearly afforded refuge and a release after months of stress and pent-up emotional pressure. Amongst others, Dolan pointed to the testimony of Harry Colley who had confirmed that there had been 'heavy drinking in Dublin' and said of Charlie Dalton, the teenager who had been involved in the traumatic killings of Bloody Sunday morning, that he had 'never drank till the truce. Reaction from strain.'⁶⁶

If the truce allowed for a measure relief and rest for many Irish Volunteers, it didn't mean they would spend this period of hiatus in a state of idle distraction.

The fighting may have stopped, but activities continued – too much of it and with too little interference for the liking of some senior officers at British GHQ, many of whom had resented what they considered to be the concession of a truce in the first place.⁶⁷

Drilling, allowed for under the terms of the truce, was widespread and Volunteer training camps were set up – some within days of the truce – to maintain discipline and a military preparedness in the event of violence resuming.⁶⁸ These training camps could

⁶⁵ BMH WS 1280: Eamon Broy, IRA Intelligence Agent in British Police, Dublin Castle

⁶⁶ Quoted in Anne Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday, November 1920', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Sept., 2006), p. 790

⁶⁷ DE/2/304/6/2 'The Military Situation in Ireland at the end of Sept. 1921', Circular signed by Col. Brind on 1 Oct. 1921. Brind highlighted the efforts of the IRA to organise, recruit and re-arm and train during the truce. Document can be accessed online at <https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/vd678k383> ; for British military and intelligence hostility towards the truce, see Paul McMahon, British Intelligence and the Anglo-Irish Truce, July-December 1921, *Irish Historical Studies*, Nov., 2007, Vol. 35, No. 140 (Nov., 2007), pp. 525-527

⁶⁸ Dan Corkery recalled that 'within a matter of days, training camps were established in each battalion area, and selected men from the various companies were called up to undergo special courses of training.' BMH WS 1719: Dan Corkery, Member IRB Cork, 1913 - 1916 <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1719.pdf#page=27>

run for a week or two and a Volunteer might attend more than one. Bernard Brady, an IRA Commandant in Cavan, recalled attending two truce-time training camps, the first a two-week exercise run by IRA divisional staff at Dunboyne, Co. Meath.⁶⁹ In Cork, a select group of men from various IRA companies were chosen to spend a fortnight receiving an 'intensive course of training' – in musketry and the use of revolvers, machine guns and bombs – before returning to set up similar camps in their own company areas.⁷⁰ Separate camps were also established for the training of people engaged in special services like engineering and signalling. After spending eleven days at an officers training camp at Crusheen, Co. Clare, Thomas Reidy, elevated to a Battalion Signal Officer in the wake of the truce, spent 'nine weeks' attending signal courses at Kilbocanty, Kiltartan and Derrybrien – all situated at the southern end of county Galway.⁷¹

Using the truce to rebuild the Volunteers and develop basic skills and military understanding was, given the uncertain fate of the negotiations and the fragility of the peace, an understandable decision. It also had the virtue, as Ernie O'Malley acknowledged, of keeping IRA officers busy and out of sight. 'We had to give the officers sufficient work to keep them busy and do our best to prevent them from entering towns and cities where they would become known to enemy intelligence agents.'⁷²

Alongside the drilling and training, the IRA actually bolstered its membership during the truce.

The influx of new recruits was widespread and significant: tens of thousands of new entrants into the IRA's ranks were recorded in the second half of 1921, climbing to as high as 75,000 by December and continuing that upward trajectory into the following

⁶⁹ BMH WS 1626 Bernard Brady, Commandant IRA, Cavan, 1921

<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1626.pdf#page=6>

⁷⁰ BMH WS 1719: Dan Corkery, Member IRB Cork, 1913 - 1916

<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1719.pdf#page=27>

⁷¹ BMH WS 1555: Thomas Reidy, Officer IRA, Galway, 1921. Accessed online at

<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1555.pdf#page=14>

⁷² Quoted in Charles Townsend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (2013) p. 313

year.⁷³ Not all the new additions were welcomed and some suspicion attached to those who, for whatever reason, had been absent during the fighting phase of the independence struggle. In Belfast, where recent recruits had necessitated with the creation of a new, third battalion, Joseph Murray, who became officer commander of that battalion, says precautions were taken to ensure against infiltration, against 'enemy agents getting in too deep'. For that reason, according to Murray, it was 'Very seldom' that a post-truce entrant would be afforded a position of trust and 'all important information was withheld', including the location of various IRA headquarters and the movements of all officers.⁷⁴

Of course, quite a number of the new recruits were simply too young to have played any part in the fighting of the 1919-21 period and many too had served their youth apprenticeship in the Fianna before reaching the age of acceptance into the Volunteers proper. However, there were others for whom the 'Trucileer' or 'Truce Warrior' laurel hung heavy on their service record. Michael O'Donoghue, an engineer with Cork No. 1 Brigade at the time of the truce and much later a President of the GAA, would cast a contemptuous judgement on those whom he believed had jumped on the 'bandwagon' once the guns had fallen silent and the Black and Tans threat had been quashed. Basking in the achievements of others and exploiting the modesty and self-effacement of the vast majority of IRA servicemen, these 'slick clever chancers' were able 'to pose in an exaggerated patriotic light' and use their ill-gained status and profile to 'feather their own nests' in the years that followed the establishment of the new state. More immediately, however, O'Donoghue contended that rather than strengthen the

⁷³ Ibid. p.317. Townsend notes that the GHQ assessment - possibly optimistic - put the army's strength at 34,000 in July 1921 and says that its 'paper strength' soared to 50,000 by October and 75,000 by December; Kieran Glennon has also noted the increase in post-Truce membership of the IRA Third Northern Division, in *The Boys of the Old Brigade - The IRA Third Northern Division*, Irish Story website, 5 June 2018. Accessible online at <https://www.theirishstory.com/2018/06/05/the-boys-of-the-old-brigade-the-ira-third-northern-divsion/#.YEenRmj7T4Z>.

⁷⁴ BMH WS 412: Joseph Murray, Officer IRA, Antrim, 1921 <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0412.pdf#page=23>

republican position throughout the truce, the Trucileers only served to lower 'the character and status and fighting potential of the IRA.'⁷⁵

The British view was somewhat different. For Colonel Brind, senior member of the GHQ staff on Parkgate Street, the truce had helped resuscitate an IRA where morale was believed to have been at a 'low ebb'. Writing at the end of September 1921, Brind noted that the preceding months had seen the IRA organise, drill, re-arm and recruit without hindrance and that should truce break down and fighting resume, the British would face a more 'formidable' foe. In such circumstances, Brind assessed, the IRA would, notwithstanding its increased numbers, continue to deploy the methods of guerrilla warfare and his advice to his own military and political masters was that the British forces needed to be prepared to act – and to do so in a swift and decisive manner. 'When armed rebels are met,' Colonel Brind advised, 'they must be relentlessly pursued and no opportunity must be neglected for the effective use of every weapon.' The game-plan, should it be required, was summarised in a sentence: 'no stone must be left unturned to break it [IRA morale] completely in the shortest possible time.'⁷⁶

5. *'...men on both sides who were working against peace'*

The experience of truce was not felt the same everywhere.

A week after its 11 July commencement, the Dublin correspondent of the *Sunday Express* described the condition of Ireland as being 'as peaceable as a pastoral English shire'.⁷⁷

An exaggeration certainly, but still, this was not an unreasonable characterisation. Tom Barry, his own truce frustrations aside, would recall the summer of 1921 as being the 'longest and most brilliant...in living memory', and Frank O'Connor, the novelist, did much the same when remembering days of dances and concerts and commandeered cars 'tearing up and down little country roads with girls, all the hot days of summer'.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ BMH WS 1741: Michael V O'Donoghue, Engineer Cork 1 Brigade IRA, 1921
<https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1741%20PART%201.pdf#page=2>

⁷⁶ DE/2/304/6/2 'The Military Situation in Ireland at the end of Sept. 1921', Circular signed by Col. Brind on 1 Oct. 1921 The Irish delegation had come into possession of a copy of Brind's document and referred to it during at the start of the fifth session of Anglo-Irish negotiations in London on 17 Oct. 1921

⁷⁷ Irish Independent, 18 July 1921

⁷⁸ Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (1949) p. 223; Frank O'Connor quote appears in Diarmaid Ferriter, *A Nation and not a Rabble: the Irish Revolution 1913-1923* (2015) p. 246

The situation in Belfast inspired no such dewy-eyed recollections. Instead of ushering in a period of peace, the truce was followed by continued violence and killing instead.⁷⁹ Between 12 July – the day after the truce – and the end of 1921, Ó Corrain and O’Halpin detail 145 killings, more than half of which occurred in Belfast or the wider Antrim area with non-combatants accounting for the vast majority of the victims.⁸⁰

Notwithstanding these deaths, across most of the country, the six months of truce could be considered to have been well-handled. The peace, to a point, was preserved. Although not without strain or occasional rancour, the system of appointing liaison officers to ensure the oversight and smooth operation of the truce did work. On the British side the Chief Liaison Officer was Colonel Brind and his republican counterpart was lawyer Éamonn Duggan who, given a stipend of £50 per month, oversaw a network of local liaison officers who were appointed with responsibility for a county or electoral division.⁸¹ Rather than rush to arrest and risk inflaming matters, it was to these Sinn Féin officers that RIC constables were instructed to consult in the event of obvious local breaches of the truce terms.⁸²

And breaches there certainly were. Within weeks of the truce taking effect, Tom Barry, appointed the main liaison officer for the martial law area, was writing to Éamonn Duggan to complain about Crown forces’ activity in Cork City, including the carrying of arms by soldiers and the armed patrol of the city by armoured cars. Barry, who would leave his own liaison role in October, had gotten off to a testy start in his relationship with Colonel Commandant Higginson of the 17th Brigade, the latter going so far as to refuse to meet with Barry if he came in military ‘uniform’.⁸³

⁷⁹ ‘The only spot in Ireland where the truce has not brought peace is in Belfast’, the Sunday Express reported. Quoted in Irish Independent, 18 July 1921

⁸⁰ Eunan O’Halpin & Daithí Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution* (Yale, 2020) pp. 521-542

⁸¹ DE/2/255: Anglo-Irish Truce, 1921: liaison arrangements. Accessible online at <https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/0g35j1458> ; see instructions to local liaison officers at <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0883.pdf#page=173>

⁸² UK National Archives, CO 904_178: Circulars to RIC, Instructions re Breaches of Conditions of Truce, 23 July 1921

⁸³ DE/2/255 - Anglo-Irish Truce, 1921: liaison arrangements. T.B. Barry, 15 July 1921 - Turner’s Hotel, Cork. Higginson also made it clear that he had ‘no order preventing his troops from carrying arms while on duty’.

Truce tensions were not confined to Cork nor were they limited to those mid-to-late July days when the new and awkward reality was taking hold.

Despite efforts on both sides to honour the terms that had been outlined, it was perhaps unsurprising that suspicions remained and indeed claim and counter claim of truce transgressions would continue to a point where they impinged upon the Anglo-Irish negotiations that commenced in London in mid-October 1921. At one plenary session in Downing Street, on 17 October, the Irish delegation would cite examples of truce breaches and acts of bad faith on the part of the British side: Éamonn Duggan, who added the responsibilities of a plenipotentiary to that of his Chief Liaison Officer role, complained that reports had been received that the movements of Sinn Féin people were being tracked, a charge supported by Michael Collins who informed his interlocutors that an English agent had followed him to Mass in London the previous morning. An official British military circular, written by Colonel Brind, was also produced by the Irish negotiators, who alleged that its purpose had been to incite soldiers to break the truce.⁸⁴ Lloyd George, who led the British negotiating team, sought to soothe the Irish delegates by assuring them that while there were ‘men on both sides who were working against peace’ General Macready was not one of them. Macready was, Lloyd George confidently asserted, ‘loyal to the spirit of the truce’.⁸⁵

When the delegations met again four days later, there was further a truce breach charge from the Irish side as they directed attention towards the British military’s commandeering of the local council offices in Sligo. On this occasion, however, Lloyd George retorted that the Irish complaints were trivial against the ‘unmistakable proof’ the British had gathered of Irish efforts to import arms and ammunition to equip the IRA for ‘defensive and offensive purposes’.⁸⁶ The real purpose of the British Prime Minister’s sharp riposte had less to do with the operation of the truce than with refocusing the conversation on the big questions that the negotiations had been established to address. The British Prime Minister had already presented his proposals for a future settlement and now he wanted the Irish to do the same and in a way that took account of Britain’s three red line concerns – allegiance to the King; relationship to the British empire; and access to facilities in Ireland for the purposes of British defence.

⁸⁴ DE/2/304/6/2 Treaty negotiations, 1921, truce file. Irish Peace Conference, 10 Downing St., 17 Oct. 1921

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ DE/2/304/6/2 Treaty negotiations, 1921, truce file. Aide Memoire: Conference on Ireland - Sixth Session of Conference, Downing Street, 21 Oct. 1921

This British setting of both the agenda and the parameters of the negotiations was significant, as was the Irish delegation's failure to present counter-proposals at the outset of the October 1921 negotiations, a tactic that, according to Ronan Fanning, served only to expose their 'naivety and inexperience'.⁸⁷ It put them on the back foot, in reactionary mode, and shaped the subsequent discussions in a way that British and Imperial considerations assumed a precedence over the principal Irish preoccupations around sovereignty and unity.

6. ***"...we created in the minds of the people an idea that we were going to make a bargain with the British Government"***

The operation of the truce neither dominated nor derailed the negotiations in London. Whatever about the occasional tensions it created or the problems presented by its policing, the truce held.

It did what it was intended to do. It created the space and, Belfast and its environs aside, a relatively peaceful backdrop against which negotiations could be progressed and a settlement ultimately reached.

That settlement conferred a dominion status, similar to Canada, upon a new Irish Free State; it made provision for an oath of allegiance to the Irish Free State with an added pledge to be 'faithful' to the King and his successors; it allowed for British use of three ports in the south of the country; and, in the event of Northern Ireland opting out of the Irish Free State (within a month), it provided for the creation of a Boundary Commission to consider the 'boundaries between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland'.⁸⁸

The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London on 6 December 1921 and its terms would become a source of deep division and heated debate when, over a period of nine days, they were presented before public sessions of Dáil Éireann.

⁸⁷ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (2013) p. 279

⁸⁸ Read the full text of the Anglo-Irish Treaty online at <https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1921/final-text-of-the-articles-of-agreement-for-a-treaty-between-great-britain-and-ireland-as-signed/214/>

That the plenipotentiaries had signed the treaty under a threat of ‘war within three days’ if they didn’t was understood, as was the obvious question that arose on the Irish side as it contemplated this possibility.

Was the IRA ready or equipped for a return to guerrilla warfare?

As the the IRA’s Chief of Staff, Richard Mulcahy saw it, the answer was no: Mulcahy calculated that even a numerically strengthened and efficient IRA would have had difficulty in sustaining a war beyond a short period of time.⁸⁹ He wasn’t alone in that assessment. The IRA’s deputy chief of staff, Eoin O’Duffy, was of a similar mind. As to the obvious charge that the treaty delivered less than the democratically mandated Irish Republic, there was an acknowledgement on the part of some pro-treaty TDs that this was where the logic of the truce had been always been likely to lead. ‘When we agreed to a truce with the British Government,’ Seán Hayes, the Cork Sinn Féin TD, remarked, ‘we created in the minds of the people an idea that we were going to make a bargain with the British Government, and we cannot get away from it.’⁹⁰ The anti-treaty complaint, sincerely and often emotively made, was that the bargain reached did not only fall short of the ideal, but was of a kind that betrayed the effort and sacrifice that had gone into its attainment. A ‘Treaty of terror’ was how Wexford TD, Seán Etchingham, chose to characterise it, while accusing pro-Treatyites in the Dáil of having succumbed to a truce-induced softness. Rubbishing the idea that in a year or two or ten that the country might enjoy a greater degree of freedom than the one they had just secured, Etchingham added that ‘if the iron of the truce has entered your souls, after six months of it, and you are not prepared to fight, you will not do so after one year, two years, or ten years, when you have Colonial or Free State fat in your bodies.’⁹¹

The treaty shattered the unity of the broad post-Rising Sinn Féin movement and exposed schisms in personality and politics that are often too easily caricatured as a straightforward divide between pragmatic nationalists and fundamentalist republicans,

⁸⁹ Charles Townsend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (2013) p. 232

⁹⁰ Dáil debate, 20 Dec 1921. Accessible online at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-20/2/>

⁹¹ Dáil Debate, 20 Dec 1921. Accessible online at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-20/2/>

or hard-headed realists versus romantic idealists. There was undoubtedly something of this to the split that followed, but as the distinctions drawn (significant to some, immaterial to others) between de Valera's 'external association' model and dominion status demonstrated, there was also considerable nuance involved in the Dáil's deliberations on the treaty.⁹²

The question for the writer, revolutionary and Kerry TD Piaras Beaslaí was whether this nuance – the 'sophistries and legal quibbles' and the 'theoretic dialectics' as he chose to describe it – were worth jeopardising the 'lives and happiness of the people?' And that, as Beaslaí saw it, was what acceptance or rejection of the treaty ultimately came down to – a choice between 'Truce or War'.⁹³ In the end, of course, Ireland would get both. The Dáil would vote – by a narrow margin of 64 votes to 57 – for a permanent truce, yet the country still careered towards a renewed state of war – just not with Britain.

⁹² According to historian Charles Townsend, the 'real argument around the treaty was not about absolute independence against subjection, but about determining the minimal criteria for 'substantial' independence'. Townsend, *Op. cit.* p. 356

⁹³ Dáil Éireann, 3 Jan. 1921. Accessible online at <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/E900003-001.html>