

ANSWERING THE IRISH QUESTION: WINSTON CHURCHILL AND THE FORMATION OF THE IRISH FREE STATE

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Introduction

Sir Winston Spencer Churchill is almost universally recognized as a great man. As Prime Minister of England during World War II, he played a leading role in defeating Nazi Germany. It was this victory that earned him the immortality of glory and the universal praise of contemporaries and historians. He was the free world's savior in their darkest hour. Though he earns the praise of many today, few attempts have been made to understand his political philosophy or his statesmanship outside of the context of World War II. By many, Churchill's "Finest Hour" is seen as redemption for his earlier political and social missteps. Those who praise him for his wartime leadership, however, blame him for earlier political endeavors they fail to understand.

Recently, Boris Johnson, mayor of London, penned a biography praising Churchill. At an event, speaking about what made Churchill the ultimate British statesman, Johnson asserted that "Churchill's greatness was to stick to his guns, even when everyone else thought he was wrong and to never, never, never give in...it was his absolute determination to stick to what he had decided, rightly or wrong. I am afraid

quite often it was wrongly."¹ This is the opinion of the day. Churchill was a great man for World War II, but without that, he would have been forgettable. Such opinions discredit the prior 40 years of work and the innumerable accomplishments he achieved as a preeminent British statesman. Most egregiously overlooked in his long list of accomplishments, was his role in the passage of Home Rule for Ireland and formation of the Irish Free State.

From the Norman Conquest in the 12th Century until the early 20th Century – a period of over 700 years – the British ruled the Irish. Their rule at times was benevolent, but at other times harshly oppressive – as during the attempt to rid the nation of the Gaelic language, native to its Irish inhabitants. These latter events remained imprinted in the minds of all Irishmen and acted as the spark to kindle the flames of Irish nationalism that burned – ever so dimly – throughout their 700 years of servitude as part of the vast British Empire.

The "Irish Question," as it came to be termed, posed a serious problem to English Peace. Churchill remarked that the Irish votes in Parliament, who all pushed the issue, "poisoned nearly forty years of our public life."² By the time he entered the political stage, it had already been long debated and dreaded by all. The "Unionists" – those who wanted to keep Ireland within

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¹ Boris Johnson, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTyCri6XSVc>

² Winston Churchill, Herbert Henry Asquith, *Great Contemporaries*, pg. 146-47

the Empire – always were at odds with the more liberal among them – those who believed that a separate Irish Parliament to govern purely Irish affairs was consistent with justice. At the dawn of his political career, Churchill sided strongly with the Unionists. This was not surprising given the great admiration for his father, Lord Randolph Churchill. “The greatest and most powerful influence in my early life was of course my father.” Churchill wrote, “I took my politics almost unquestionably from him.”³ Lord Randolph led the Conservative opposition against the first Irish Home Rule Bill, in 1886, famously declaring in response to the bill that “Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right!”⁴ The threat of rioting and rebellion in Ulster was enough to stifle any possible discussion of Irish Home Rule. Undoubtedly, the father’s view heavily biased the son’s in his early political career.

Due to his father’s political setbacks, Churchill spent much of his childhood in Ireland with his grandparents – the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. There, at an early age, the seeds of prejudice against the Irish were sowed into his mind by his beloved nanny, Mrs. Everest, who would often entertain him with frightening stories of the “wicked Fennians” – referencing that sect of Irish rebels dedicated to the establishment of an independent Irish state. “I gathered these were wicked people,” Winston later wrote reflecting on his youth, “and there was no end to what they would do if they had their way.”⁵ Winston’s son, Randolph, in his biography of his father, recounted a story that captured just how far Mrs. Everest’s fear had extended “One afternoon when Winston was riding a donkey beside her she saw some soldiers in the distance and mistook them for Irish rebels;

she screamed and frightened the donkey, which reared up, unseating its young mount.” Upon his fall, his brain was concussed. Churchill described the event as his “first introduction to Irish politics.”⁶ From this harsh introduction, Winston derived a view of the Irish as unruly and uncivilized. These experiences undoubtedly affected his early views on their capacity to govern themselves and helped lead him to the opinion that they could not be relied upon as an ally, should they, in fact, receive independence.

The question of Home Rule, however, was always more to Churchill than simply a matter of prejudice. It was closely tied to a question of self-defense for the British. Britain’s greatest military asset was its unique position in Europe – an island apart from the continent. An independent Ireland, hostile to Great Britain, would pose a severe security threat, as it would allow enemies a base right at Britain’s backdoor. Churchill, an ardent patriot, could never consent to a policy that came with such risks. This fact, coupled with the influence of his father and the prejudices ingrained in him, led to his early position on Irish Home Rule: “On the Policy of administrative Home Rule – as my father said in 1890 – I do not look forward to the day when there shall be created a separate Parliament to be a rival, and perhaps an enemy of the central government here at home.”⁷ For Churchill, the welfare of Great Britain always remained the first of his concerns.

Churchill, throughout his political career, was forced to balance conflicting concerns and steer a moderate course. He sought to accomplish all that was possible while remaining faithful to his principles. This often resulted in a number of seeming contradictions, but he always remained resolute in his purpose, unflinching in his pursuit of the just. In order to fully understand the

³ Winston Churchill, *Personal Contacts, Thoughts and Adventures*, pg. 48

⁴ Randolph Churchill, <http://cas.umt.edu/english/joyce/notes/020071ulsterfight.htm>

⁵ *My Early Life*, Winston Churchill, pg. 2

⁶ *The Last Lion, Visions of Glory*, pg. 119

⁷ *Young Statesmen*, pg. 442

doctrine that motivated him, it becomes necessary to understand his overarching purpose throughout his political career and to examine how that doctrine manifested itself in particular circumstances. In examining his political philosophy, broadly understood, and his role in the formation of the Irish Free State, we will gauge whether the term “statesman” could fairly be applied to Winston Churchill.

CHAPTER ONE

Churchill's Political Philosophy

Churchill's role in the passage of Home Rule, highlights the power of his statesmanship. In confronting a problem that had been considered the third rail of British politics for well over a century and which had plagued the Imperial Parliament for decades, Churchill employed every weapon in his arsenal to ensure passage of a Home Rule Bill. Like any statesman, Churchill was guided by a coherent doctrine, which informed his decisions. He held justice as his ultimate end, an understanding of what he could accomplish at the time he was operating in, and the courage to use the means available to him to pursue it. Central to his statesmanship, was his understanding of the British Empire. It stood as the engine through which the blessings of peace and civilization could be spread throughout the world.

Through his efforts, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed ending a struggle centuries old in English politics. A permanent government was established in Ireland and peace reigned. Ireland remained loyal to the Crown and was able to manage its own affairs. None of this would have been possible without Churchill's involvement.

Churchill's Empire

Churchill was an imperialist. Before analyzing his actions in Ireland, the beliefs that motivated him must be understood. Without a proper understanding of how he saw the Empire, one might have difficulty distinguishing the British Empire from the tyranny that characterized the Athenian Empire. The Empire was essential to his view of world order. In his very first political speech, he urged his countrymen to “continue to pursue that course marked out for us by an all-wise hand and carry out our mission of bearing peace, civilization and good government to the uttermost ends of the earth.”⁸ He never failed to acknowledge its goodness. The success of Britain was partially due to the fact that it was strong, but was mostly due to the fact that it stood for what was right. “To Churchill,” one author notes, “principle and power were related because good principle was a source of power and because power was necessary to survival and to civilization.”⁹ Churchill believed that right made might; the proper principles – forged over centuries of bitter struggle – gave legitimate authority to the British Empire to carry its principle to other parts of the globe. Not only were they empowered to do so, but Churchill believed it was their duty as well. Providence had marked out a destiny for the British; within their nation rested the union of might and right. This union imposed duties upon the nation that it would be immoral to ignore.

In dealing with the colonies, like Ireland, he believed that Britain was responsible for cultivating free institutions and preparing the countries for self-government. Shortly after World War II, Churchill gave a speech regarding “those countries, torn and convulsed by war.” “It would be unreasonable to ask or expect that liberal government – as spelt with a small ‘l’ – and

⁸ Winston Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 4

⁹ Larry Arnn, *Churchill's Trial*, pg. 97

British or United States democratic conditions,” he declared, “should be instituted immediately.” These countries needed authoritative government, as reprehensible as such a fate was to a man of liberty, like Churchill, to prevent anarchy. There he stated the bold fact that the ideal of the British government, echoing America’s great souled man, was “government of the people, by the people, for the people – the people being free without duress to express, by secret ballot without intimidation, their deep-seated wish as to the form and conditions of the Government under which they are to live.”¹⁰ While authoritarian government was inconsistent with how free individuals ought to live, he recognized that some nations were better off under authoritarian regimes.

Churchill was motivated by a belief that free institutions can only grow in certain conditions. “The politics of a weak and threatened state,” he asserted, “cannot achieve the standards open to those who enjoy security and wealth.”¹¹ The Empire provided her colonies with security and a greater degree of wealth than they would otherwise enjoy, creating an environment within which free institutions could grow. When nations are plagued by civil war or anarchy the discussions necessary to sustain a free people cannot take place. Britain’s presence allowed the dialogue and the roots of good government to grow.

Churchill’s conception of Empire was rooted in the supremacy of the English-Speaking Peoples. Their advanced status was not a result of the color of their skin, nor a result of some natural superiority, but merely their superior historical development, which led them sooner to those perennial truths of justice. In one of his literary projects, Churchill mapped out that historical development in his four-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. The devel-

opment of free institutions and liberty enshrined into law took place over the course of over a thousand years and culminated in the greatest struggle for right: World War II, where the English-Speaking Peoples joined together and repelled the forces that threatened to plunge the world “into the abyss of a new Dark Age.”¹² He understood the purpose of the Empire was to create a more civilized world by spreading the institutions of Britain. In 1939, Churchill remarked to an American that should Britain fail in holding off the Nazis that “it will then be for you, for the Americans, to preserve and to maintain the great heritage of the English-speaking peoples. It will be for you to think Imperially, which means to think always of something higher and more vast than one’s own national interests.”¹³ The Empire, if it only existed to benefit the mother country, would be unjust and bereft of legitimate power. The vast amount of benefit was felt by the colony, which the Empire existed to assist, making its use of force just. When Churchill made sweeping declarations such as “The British nation is the foe of tyranny in every form,”¹⁴ it was this understanding that dominated his mind. By virtue of the union of power and principle, Britain was responsible for protecting susceptible nations from tyranny.

Churchill emphasized that the Empire’s power was rooted in more than simply conventional strength. If that were the case, then nothing, save the practical limits of man, could prohibit Britain from inflicting whatever they wished upon their colonists. Legitimate authority, however, can only remain legitimate if it is exercised within its proper limits, for its proper purposes. In April of 1919, when a British general, Reginald Dyer, ordered a squad of Indian sepoy to fire upon a large crowd of men and boys, Churchill stood with the Indian

¹⁰ Winston Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 409

¹¹ Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, Volume I, pg. 72

¹² Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 229

¹³ Larry Arnn, *Churchill’s Trial*, pg. 100

¹⁴ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 77

people against Dyer and the military men who backed him. “Our reign in India or anywhere else has never stood on the basis of physical force alone,” he proclaimed to the House of Commons, “and it would be fatal to the British empire if we were to try to base ourselves only upon it.”¹⁵ The authority of the Empire would be baseless if it was only upon physical force.

The peaceful purposes of Empire always remained in cultivating habits of self-government in the colonies. Speaking on Saudi Arabia he explained that the Empire’s purpose was “to set up an Arab Government, and to make it take the responsibility, with our aid and our guidance and with an effective measure of our support, until they are strong enough to stand alone, and so to foster the development of their independence as to permit the steady and speedy diminution of our burden.”¹⁶ Some nations posed larger obstacles to overcome than others. In nations like India, Churchill stressed that Britain should not recognize the “claim to the title-deeds of democracy” of people who “keep sixty millions of fellow countrymen perpetually and eternally in a state of sub-human bondage.”¹⁷ Self-government was the aim, but in some instances Churchill acknowledged that it may not be until “our children’s children will have passed away before that is complete.”¹⁸ No matter how long it took, however, it was the Empire’s job to guide nations along the path to that final end of “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

The Virtues of Democracy

Churchill believed that democracy should be the ultimate aim of the Empire. Shortly after America entered World War II,

Churchill traveled to address a joint session of the US Congress. Beginning the speech, he sought to remind all in attendance that he was a fervent supporter of democracy. “I am a child of the House of Commons,” he proclaimed, “I was brought up in my father’s house to believe in democracy.”¹⁹ Attempting to remind the audience of their shared principle and common cause, he declared, that he had been in “full harmony all my life with the tides which have flowed on both sides of the Atlantic against privilege and monopoly, and I have steered confidently towards the Gettysburg ideal of government of the people, by the people, for the people.”²⁰ These were not new found principles for him, nor was it an attempt at employing a rhetorical device to strengthen a weak alliance. Britain and America, in Churchill’s mind, were united in principle and purpose. As a rising star in English politics, he was sharply critical of Aristocracy’s claim to rule, which he declared amounted to:

that we should maintain in our country a superior class, with law-giving functions inherent in their blood, transmissible by them to their remotest posterity, and that these functions should be exercised irrespective of the character, the intelligence, or the experience of the tenant for the time being and utterly independent of the public need and the public will.²¹

He was steadfast in his belief that government could not be left to individuals, who the people could not check.

The genesis of Churchill’s belief in democratic government is not entirely clear, but can be deduced from many of the themes he promoted throughout his life. He made many contributions to history. His studies

¹⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Power of Words*, pg. 155

¹⁶ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 83

¹⁷ Churchill, quoted by Larry Arnn, *Churchill’s Trial*, pg. 105

¹⁸ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 80

¹⁹ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 315

²⁰ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 315-316

²¹ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 37

convinced him that British institutions – including those in America – were best suited to man’s nature. On a practical level, these institutions fairly checked both the government and the majority. English history had been a case study in competing claims to rule, and the efficacy of different types of rule. Those who relied alone on blood, force, or an abstract “divine right” often proved detrimental. Those who were rose to positions of prominence based on merit proved glorious for England. In principle, Anglo-American institutions, forged through experience, successfully allowed the human spirit to flourish. They provided the best protection for rights of individuals.

Churchill understood that government existed to create an environment within which man could thrive, by protecting him from those who might try to harm his life or liberty. Democratic government, as envisioned in Anglo-American institutions, protected all men and their rights. If men are truly equal what form of government could be more conducive to their nature than the one that allows nature’s best to rise? As he offered a critique of the aristocracy, specifically the defense of the institution by Lord Curzon, he noted that “It is quite clear from the argument of his speech that he did not mean Nature’s aristocracy, by which I mean the best and most gifted beings in each generation in each country, the wisest, the bravest, the strongest, and the most active. If he had meant that I think we should probably agree with him.” These men, Churchill found, are deserving of governing. “Democracy properly understood,” he charged, “means the association of all through the leadership of the best.”²² The “best” are chosen by the people who judge their qualifications. In a nation where all men are recognized as equal, a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” is the only kind equipped to govern the people.

²² Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 38

Democracy’s Pitfalls

Churchill, a philosophical conservative, understood that democratic governments were not necessarily good. He was aware of the pitfalls that accompanied popular rule. “Democratic governments drift along the line of least resistance,” he observed, “taking short views, paying their way with sops and doles, and smoothing their path with pleasant-sounding platitudes.” They tend to lack a desire for greatness, seeking instead to satiate themselves with those things pleasant at the moment. “Never was there less continuity or design in their affairs,” he wrote, “and yet toward them are coming swiftly changes which will revolutionize for good or ill not only the whole economic structure of the world but the social habits and moral outlook of every family.”²³ Democratic governments failed to act with foresight. Occasionally a man might rise, reminding the people of the importance of acting with continuity, but these moments are fleeting and the people soon return to their short sighted ways.

Rather than seek great men, democracy too often remains suspicious of any who might be above the people, preferring a base equality instead. In wars, the differences become clear. Generals once led their soldiers on the field of battle, eyeing the armaments and battle formations and adjusting to advance toward victory. Now, however, such decisions are made by men in nowhere near the front lines. “The heroes of modern war,” Churchill explains, “lie out in the cratered fields, mangled, stifled, scarred; and there are too many of them for exceptional honors. It is mass suffering, mass sacrifice, mass victory.”²⁴ Abandoning great men and the pursuit of glory, democratic nations run the risk of losing greatness.

²³ Churchill, *Fifty Years Hence, Thoughts and Adventures*, pg. 293

²⁴ Churchill, *Mass Effects in Modern Life, Thoughts and Adventures*, pg. 277

In spite of their pitfalls, however, Churchill still finds democratic government least objectionable form of rule. Democracy as some abstract theory was not necessarily more preferable than a kingship in theory, but the latter – crafted by the proper institutions – proved superior in practice. History had proven the superiority of democratic governments over their counterparts. Yet, history also had demonstrated that not all peoples could govern themselves at will. “Democracy is no harlot,” he explained, “to be picked up in the street by a man with a tommy gun.”²⁵ A student of history, he understood that self-government could not be imposed upon a people, but must grow in a healthy environment. England was a result of years of struggle between the aristocracy and the monarchy, which eventually led to a strengthening of the people. The basic equality among them made democratic government possible and advantageous. “Whatever one may think about democratic government,” he explained, “it is just as well to have practical experience of its rough and slatternly foundations.”²⁶ Churchill was far less interested in the political theory than in the reflected political practice. He cared little about what might work in the abstract, preferring the tried and tested forms, which had guaranteed freedom to millions.

Churchill's Consistency

An important mark of a statesman is whether he remains consistent. A politician, who bends to public opinion like a reed bends to a spring breeze, is undeserving of the praise of posterity. While Churchill's role in Ireland has been eclipsed by his defense of the free world, it is worth noting that he was considered a political opportunist for much of his career, especially for his evolving views on the Irish question. The

charge levelled by some like Ulster leader Edward Carson, charged that Churchill “really degrades public life more than anyone of any position in politics.” Carson went so far as to “doubt if he will ever mature into the kind of serious and reliable politician the majority of people have confidence in.”²⁷ These charges were not totally without a basis. Churchill's position on Ireland changed through the beginning of his political career. He started out a Unionist, deriding those who supported Home Rule as “radicals.” By 1922, he had become a central figure in securing the Irish Free State. His position in 1922 was a *volte face* from the views he held when he was a young man. On the surface, it was a blatant contradiction - two irreconcilable positions supported by the same politician that seemingly were motivated by different principles. His evolution seemed to correspond to the needs of his political interest: he believed what was necessary in order to climb the ranks of the Liberal Party. The fundamental question raised by Churchill's involvement in Irish affairs is whether or not he was motivated by a coherent doctrine, or whether he allowed his political future to dictate his positions.

Churchill was aware of the tensions between consistency and politics. In 1925, he wrote an essay, *Consistency in Politics*, in which he extrapolates upon the challenges of statesmen and how posterity ought to judge them. “A Statesman in contact with the moving current of events and anxious to keep the ship on an even keel and steer a steady course,” he wrote, “may lean all his weight now on one side and now on the other.” In politics, situations are fluid and circumstances often change to such a degree that “the only way a man can remain consistent amid changing circumstances is to change with them while preserving the same dominating purpose.”²⁸ Leading a demo-

²⁵ December 8, 1944

²⁶ Churchill, 1929, October, quoted in Churchill By Himself.

²⁷ Quoted in Mary Bromage, Churchill and Ireland, pg. 15

²⁸ Consistency in Politics, pg. 33-34

cratic people, he knew, required persuading them to choose what is best. A tyrant is able to simply declare his will and use force to see it is carried out. Where the people rule, however, they sometimes need a statesman to lead them to what is right. The most salient case study of Churchill's statesmanship was his leadership during World War II, but in Ireland we see the nascent statesman work to forge consensus and to end a perennial problem in English politics, no small feat. The statesman's art lies in his ability to discern what the best course of action is given the circumstances; he is prudent. A political opportunist – or a mere politician – will jump at the chance to abandon principle in pursuit of personal gain. Statesmen place themselves above mere politicians because they act in pursuit of a higher end – they pursue justice. In this pursuit, their positions may change, but if they do, it is out of a sincere belief that changing circumstances require new means to accomplish their goal.

Politics requires action. In the realm of action “it is inevitable that frequent changes should take place.” Equipped with an overarching purpose, statesmen attempt to find the best means for accomplishing their ends. “A policy is pursued up to a certain point;” Churchill explained, “it becomes evident at last that I can be carried no further. New facts arise which clearly render it obsolete; new difficulties, which make it impracticable. A new and possibly the opposite solution presents itself with overwhelming force.” He credits Ireland, “with its mysterious and sinister influence,” as being “responsible for many changes of this kind in British politics.” This *volte face*, he describes, could be done by a man, by a party, or even the same government! Such a decision, he continued, could only be excusable for two reasons: “it may be their duty to do so because it is the sole manner of discharging their responsibilities, or because they are the only combination strong enough

to do what is needed in the new circumstances.” It is the responsibility of those abandoning the old policy for that of the new, however, to state bluntly that in failure to coerce, “we have now to conciliate.”²⁹

To better illustrate the consistency of politicians, who on the face of it seem to contradict themselves, Churchill invokes William Gladstone's attempt at answering the Irish question. Gladstone, believing that the Conservatives were “meditating a solution of the Irish problem on Home Rule lines,” felt “it impossible for the Liberal Party to march any further along the path of coercion and a denial of Irish claims.”³⁰ Facing extinction, Gladstone steered the Liberals toward a Home Rule Policy that resulted in a fractured Party and led to the Conservatives holding the government for 20 years. Yet, history, Churchill argues, “will probably declare that Mr. Gladstone was right both in his resistance to Home Rule up to a certain point and in his espousal of it thereafter.” After all, “the change which he made upon this question in 1886, for which he was so much condemned, was in every way a lesser change than that which was made by the whole Conservative Party on this same question thirty-five years later in 1921.”³¹ It is the duty of the statesman, “taking a just view of the governing facts of different periods,”³² to make decisions about what a situation calls for in order to best accomplish a given end.

Churchill recognized that when a politician's change of heart marched in tune to a change in the public opinion, his motivation should be more closely examined and scrutinized. “If it can be shown that he swims with the current in both cases,” he argued, “his titles to a true consistency must be more studiously examined than if he

²⁹ Consistency in Politics, pg. 37

³⁰ Consistency in Politics, pg. 38

³¹ Consistency in Politics, pg. 38

³² Consistency in Politics, pg. 40

swims against it.”³³ Churchill’s evolution on the Irish question appeared to march in tune, if not with public opinion, at least with private fortune. As he climbed the ranks of the Liberal Party, his views slowly moved closer to aligning with the Party elders on the issue. Upon crossing the floor in 1904, Churchill remained a Unionist. The party of Gladstone was far friendlier to the proposition of Irish self-government than the Tories. In 1904, he declared himself in favor of limited Home Rule. By 1911, he was leading the charge for a Home Rule Bill. In the same time, he rose from a suspiciously unprincipled backbencher to the First Lord of the Admiralty, one of the most important offices in the government. Some years after he helped secure the passage of the Home Rule Bill, he would be leading the charge to establish the Irish Free State. Undoubtedly, the accusation of opportunist was leveled at him. The charge was that he changed his views to fit what was best for the advancement of his future in politics. To support the charge, his critics presented his changing view of Ireland with his precipitous rise to higher cabinet offices. Unfortunately, Churchill never met his critics point for point, but through a close examination of his words and deeds, it becomes clear that he was motivated by a coherent doctrine.

Churchill’s Prudence

Prudence is practical wisdom. A statesman must both understand what is the Good and what is best to pursue it in light of the particulars. He desires to move those he is leading closer to what is good, but recognizes that doing so requires him to work with those who do not agree with him. Compromise, therefore, is encouraged by him. He never allows the perfect to be the enemy of the good. He recognizes the merits of compromise and seeks to act in a way that

advances his end. The statesman both understands when compromise is necessary and when doing so would be detrimental. Necessary to this prudence, is a desire for moderation. When the extremes on both sides come into conflict, chaos often ensues. Urging compromise and moderation at every turn, the Statesman appeals to the better angels of our nature to devise solutions to problems that are most consistent with justice.

Books could be written upon Winston Churchill and compromise. He was involved in almost every major event for the greater part of the 20th Century and in almost each case he urged moderation and compromise. Upon first endeavoring to tackle the question of Home Rule, he was adamant – like the Irish Nationalists – that Ireland must remain whole. Yet, as a bill became closer to a reality, he recognized the impracticality of such a scheme, while Ulster maintained its fervent opposition. As the circumstances changed, he realized that dividing the nation between North and South, would still allow both sides to accomplish most of what they desired. Even compromise, however, has to be carried out prudently. If the people would not accept a proposal, then the proposal would never be implemented. When FE Smith proposed excluding Ulster from the Home Rule Bill, Churchill sought to insure it was carried out moderately. “Leaders might be prepared but parties were not.” He explained, “Public opinion had got to have a shock. Both sides had to make speeches full of party claptrap and no surrender, and then insert a few sentences at the end for the wise and discerning on the other side to see and ponder.”³⁴ This was the duty of statesmen, to recognize what was possible given the circumstances and to move toward it bringing the people along with him.

Accompanying Churchill’s penchant for compromise was a magnanimous soul,

³³ Consistency in Politics, pg. 40

³⁴ Young Statesman, pg. 482

which encouraged him to show mercy upon those he defeated. In his first speech in Parliament, he reminded the House of Commons that they ought “to make it easy and honourable for the Boers to surrender, and painful and perilous for them to continue in the field.”³⁵ This seeming paradox summed up Churchill’s idea of compromise: play the extremes and promote a moderate course that insures the most just outcome for all. When South Africa eventually was defeated, Churchill was tasked with drawing up a constitutional settlement for them. The Boers did not surrender and were soundly defeated, but Churchill still extended a hand of friendship and gave them a generous constitution that he called the “Gift of England.”³⁶

Churchill was active in discouraging a British settlement with India, despite mass protests led by Gandhi. He predicted that India was not yet ready for the title deeds of democracy and such a grant bestowed too early would result in a war between the Muslim and Hindu populations.³⁷ In the eyes of many Churchill supporters, this opposition remains indefensible and is a mark of his more eccentric opinions that are to be overlooked because of his role in World War II. After such a grant was given, however, Churchill reached out to Ghanshyam Das Birla, a Gandhi supporter, saying “I do not care whether you are more or less loyal to Great Britain. I do not mind about education, but give the masses more butter. ... Tell Mr. Gandhi to use the powers that are offered and make the thing a success...I have got real fears about the future...but you have got the things now; make a success and if you do I will advocate your getting much more.”³⁸ Defeat for Churchill meant little as long as he could continue to advocate for his overarching purpose, good government for

all. The Churchill who fiercely opposed Indian independence was the same Churchill who hoped for its success. He had no quibbles compromising to do so because it contributed to his hopes for India.

The statesman differentiates himself from the pragmatist by the end that he pursues. The pragmatist looks at what can be done and operates based upon those facts and his own self-interest. He does not allow moral implications to influence his decisions. He pursues action and conciliation, not for a higher purpose, but for the sake of action. The pragmatist compromises because he sees that a middle ground could be found that was possible. If he is guided by anything, it is only the possible and his self-interest. The statesman, in contrast, pursues the greater good in light of the particular. He is guided by justice to only compromise where the greater good can be advanced. The statesman and the pragmatist will both compromise, but the statesman has his limits. He does not value compromise as intrinsically good, but as a tool that can be wielded for good. As a result, he will not act contrary to his end. If a compromise fails to be productive to his end, then he will not support it.

Churchill compromised on India, Ireland, and South Africa, but it often proved unpalatable for him. While Churchill extolled the virtues of prudence and moderation, he did not hold compromise to be intrinsically good. Churchill abhorred war, but knew that sometimes it was unavoidable. Wars traditionally were fought over petty causes, rather than being matters of principle and good vs. evil they often boiled down to the selfish pursuit of self-interest: land disputes or a question of rightful claims to the throne. In Churchill’s day, however, wars were no longer motivated by offenses to honor, but were driven by ideology. Bolshevism, Socialism, Kaiserism, and Nazism posed existential threats to the world because they turned a radical ideology into a

³⁵ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 9

³⁶ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 23

³⁷ This turned out to be the case, resulting in the schism of India into India and Pakistan in 1947

³⁸ Churchill quoted in article Found at <https://richardlangworth.com/indiarascals>

pretext to conquer the world around them. Churchill sought at every turn to avoid wars against these ideologies. Their rise had coincided with the advent of new tactics of warfare that made easier “the indiscriminate slaughter of civilian inhabitants as the inevitable commonplace of the routine of war.”³⁹ When it became clear that war was inevitable, however, he embraced resorting to arms to defend the world against these unconscionable evils.

Churchill watched as socialism sprouted up in England. He recognized why many of the British people found it appealing, but also knew that it was a dangerous ideology. When Russia fell to Bolshevik revolutionaries – inspired by Communist ideology – he spoke out. “Behind Socialism,” he warned his countrymen, “stands Communism.” This, as evidenced by the Russian example, was a great threat to British liberty. “Behind Communism stands Moscow,” he explained, “that dark, sinister, evil power which has made its appearance in the world – a band of cosmopolitan conspirators gathered from the underworld of Europe and America – which has seized the great Russian people by the hair of the heads and holds them in a grip, robbing them of victory, of prosperity, of freedom.”⁴⁰ Communism obfuscated the purpose of government, attempting to create a centralized government responsible for planning the lives of all citizens, stifling freedom. “Tyranny presents itself in many forms,” Churchill reminded his countrymen, but “The British nation is the foe of tyranny in every form.”⁴¹ A tyrannous ideology excluded the possibility of compromise because there was no way a favorable compromise could be found with something inimical to the ends of justice and good government.

Churchill summed up the statesman’s view of compromise in a speech at his

old school, Harrow. “Never give in, never give in,” he advised, “*never, never, never, never* – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.”⁴² At this time, he was leading the resistance against the darkest forces ever assembled against all that is Good, True, and Beautiful. He was relentless in his attacks against them. He had stood alone in the wilderness calling for their defeat for almost a decade now and had only recently been entrusted to see to their end. While Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from Berlin waving a peace agreement, Churchill pleaded with his country to recognize the dangers the Nazis posed. Compromise was acceptable, but how could one compromise with evil?

The rise of Nazism offers a unique development in the history of the world. Few, if any, movements in history have evoked such a response from the entire world – free and enslaved by tyrannies alike – such that they joined together to oppose its ascension. Given their rise, Churchill, seemingly in contradiction to earlier positions, formed an alliance with the socialist Soviet Union.

In politics circumstances constantly change and, when they do, it is natural that positions be reassessed. It is necessary that even evils, that one may want scourged from the face of the earth, be rank-ordered. If statesmanship is the pursuit of the good, in light of the particulars, then knowing what the good in any particular situation to be attained is allows him to better assess what needs to be done. Churchill quickly identified the dangers of Nazism and shortly thereafter had concluded that Hitler was a fitting leader for such a religion of destruction. “Hitler is a monster of wickedness,” Churchill declared, “insatiable in his lust for blood, and plunder.”⁴³ Nazism not only threatened Europe, but the world. “The Nazi

³⁹ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 154-155

⁴⁰ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 89

⁴¹ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 77

⁴² Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 307

⁴³ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 290

regime,” he explained, “is indistinguishable from the worst features of communism. It is devoid of all theme and principle except appetite and racial domination.”⁴⁴ In the face of such a threat, humanity had only one choice: resistance. “We have but one aim and one single, irrevocable purpose,” he resolved, “We are resolved to destroy Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi regime. From this nothing will turn us – nothing. We will never parley, we will never negotiate with Hitler or any of his gang.”⁴⁵ The dangers the Nazis posed a grave enough threat that compromise and alliances with communists and socialists were permissible. What good would opposition to Communism be, if a more pestilent, prominent ideology rose up and crushed those who were opposing it? Temporary alliances must be permitted to defend the world against the greatest pending danger. “If Hitler invaded hell,” he quipped, “I would at least make a favorable statement about the devil.”⁴⁶ Nothing could stand in the way of repulsing this evil, whatever compromises needed to be made for a temporary time to unite the world against Nazism were justified.

Following the victory in World War II, when the alliances had served their purpose, Churchill returned to reminding the world about the new threat to human freedom: Socialism and Communism. As socialists, threatened to gain control of Britain’s government, Churchill sought to remind the people “that a Socialist policy is abhorrent to the British ideas of freedom.”⁴⁷ Regarding the Soviet Union, he had even stronger words warning against ignoring the growing power. “What they desire,” he charged, “is

the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines.”⁴⁸ Once the Nazis had been defeated, the rank-ordering of evils returned to their “normal” standings. Then compromise with such regimes could not be tolerated.

Churchill’s Courage

A statesman must be courageous. His fidelity to principle earns him many admirers, but his willingness to compromise makes him vulnerable to criticism. While his resolve to stand for his beliefs can make him appear more fanatical to some, his penchant for compromise makes those on the extreme ends to view him as an apostate. Those who do not fall in line with the party are often seen to be self-serving political opportunists. The man who stands for principle often finds himself standing alone, attacked from all sides and the constant object of scorn. In short, courage is necessary to stand for principle in an unprincipled political realm.

Churchill proved his courage repeatedly throughout his political career. While a Conservative, he stood before the House and suggested that military expenditures be reduced. In 1904, he took the drastic step of crossing the floor to join the Liberal Party because the Conservatives had abandoned their support of free trade. Standing for principle over party earned him great animosity from many members who derided him as a political opportunist, as he rose the ranks of the Liberal Party. He was willing to involve himself with Home Rule, which was the death of many MPs before him, including the great William Gladstone. He stood tall during the threat of civil war in Ireland in the early 1920s. He led the opposition to government’s military disarmament as the Nazis rose to prominence. He articulated principled opposition to the government’s Indian policy, though most of the major

⁴⁴ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 291

⁴⁵ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 292

⁴⁶ To his personal secretary John Colville the evening before Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. As quoted by Andrew Nagorski in *The Greatest Battle* (2007), Simon & Schuster, pp. 150-151

⁴⁷ Churchill, “Back to Party Politics,” *Never Give In*, pg. 396

⁴⁸ Churchill, “An Iron Curtain Has Descended,” *Never Give In*, pg. 422

political parties supported it. During his career, he often found himself standing alone and mistrusted.

Even compromise takes a great amount of courage: facing the extremists on both sides of an issue and rebuking them for their imprudence. Many who are fond of compromise view it favorably for the wrong reasons. The statesman's view of compromise does not invalidate or contradict his principles, but works to advance them. It is not conciliation for the sake of consensus building. On matters of principle, the statesman cannot waver; he cannot compromise. He must stand strong. Those who charge Churchill with being a political opportunist, ignore the many quixotic campaigns he undertook. During his time out of office following his tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, now termed his "Wilderness Years," he stood before the House of Commons repeatedly arguing against disarmament and Indian independence. In both fights, he led the opposition against the Conservative, Liberal, and Labour Parties, who stood together on these issues. It was assumed at this time that Churchill's "fanaticism," was the knell of his career. His campaigns made him seem more like a bewildered old man, struggling to revive an age that history had advanced beyond, than a statesman. Yet, Churchill, in spite of the criticisms, remained outspoken, refusing to yield to any force other than the righteousness of cause. He recognized the dangers that the government's policies contained and refused to be silenced in speaking out about them.

It was his courage and fixity of purpose, universally recognized – thought not universally admired – that made him the natural choice for prime minister after Neville Chamberlain's resignation. Only Churchill could strengthen the resolve of a despairing nation and inspire her to victory over the world's greatest evil because only he was courageous enough to draw clear lines of distinction between good and evil.

Standing up to evil requires fortitude and resilience. Refusing to give in to evil – and only giving in to convictions of "honour and good sense" – was characteristic of Churchill's entire career.

Politics is a realm of action with constantly changing circumstances. Crafting and advancing a coherent doctrine, amidst the tumult of politics, is a challenge. It requires foresight, wisdom, moderation, and prudence. A politician equipped with such skills has the power to use them for good or ill. The statesman distinguishes himself from the mere politician by using them to pursue a just course.

CHAPTER TWO

History of Churchill and Ireland

Churchill's Early Views

Having examined the attributes of the statesman and how Churchill exemplified them at various points throughout his career, it is necessary to examine his participation in a great political event. The Irish Question plagued Ireland for generations. In England, it led to the death of many political careers and few thought pursuing it was worthwhile. Churchill, however, played a principal role in its resolution. Yet, he has long been charged with acting out of selfish political motivations, rather than a coherent political doctrine. In order to fairly judge these claims, his actions in dealing with Ireland must be examined.

Questions surrounding Churchill's consistency on Irish Home Rule emerged early on. At the beginning of his political career, Churchill made his Unionist sympathies well known. During an election address in 1899, he set forth his views:

I am a Unionist. The question of a separate Parliament is now withdrawn from the political arena. The Radical party, however, will profess

their devotion to the cause of Home Rule. All true Unionists must, therefore, be prepared to greet the reappearance of that odious measure with the most strenuous opposition.⁴⁹

In 1901, following a declaration from Herbert Asquith, prominent member of the Liberal Party, that the Liberals would not form a government if it depended upon an agreement with the Irish Nationalists, Churchill celebrated the announcement declaring, “Home Rule has been kicked out of the sphere of practical politics.”⁵⁰ He saw Asquith’s position as an affirmation of the Unionist position and a victory for the Conservative Party, which would surely benefit from a Liberal Party divided over the Irish question. At the turn of the century, neither Conservative nor Liberal Parties believed there was an advantage in courting the Irish vote. Consequently, no solution was pursued.

While Churchill remained in the Conservative Party, his Unionist views went unchallenged. Conservatives had long been opposed to Home Rule; it was the Liberal Party who had intermittently flirted with the idea since the end of the 19th Century. In 1904, upon crossing the floor to join the Liberal Party – because of his views on free trade – Churchill was forced to be more thoughtful – and political – about those views that conflicted with his new party.

In putting himself forward as the Liberal candidate for his seat in North-West Manchester, Churchill reiterated that he was “against a separate Parliament for Ireland.” He softened his language, however, suggesting that “the continued if gradual extension of wider powers of local self-government, and perhaps the creation of provincial coun-

cils”⁵¹ for Ireland could open the door to the possibility of new grants of self-government. This new position remained distant from an endorsement of Home Rule. “I remain of the opinion that the creation of a separate Parliament for Ireland,” he reminded, “would be dangerous and impracticable.”⁵² His party had changed, but Churchill’s opinion had not. The dangers of Home Rule remained too grave.

Churchill’s early views on Ireland were informed by the traditional necessities of the Empire. “The relations of Britain and Ireland,” he later reflected, “were established during centuries when the independence of a hostile Ireland menaced the life of Britain. Every policy, every shift, every oppression used by the stronger island arose from this primordial fact.” Ireland was controlled by Britain out of a concern for the security of British subjects. Since those early days, the population of Ireland shrunk, while that of Great Britain grew; the British were no longer sandwiched between a formidable enemy, in France, and Ireland; “the situation was transformed.” The balance of power had shifted from the continent to the island of England. France and Britain were no longer rivals. France was now almost wholly concerned with Germany. Great Britain was afforded a much greater degree of security. The new developments, however, did not affect the parties “with their organized structures, interests, prejudices, and passions” that “persisted on the old basis and judged and fought as their fathers had done before.”⁵³

Churchill rose above his narrow prejudice, the views of his father, and his party. The more he reflected upon the Irish question, the more he realized the changing facts surrounding it. “Ireland is much more

⁴⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol I, pg. 36

⁵⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol I, pg. 96

⁵¹ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol I, pg. 279

⁵² *Young Statesman*, Randolph Churchill, pg. 442

⁵³ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: Volume 4*, pg. 188

prosperous than she was [in 1886],” he explained, “Local government institutions are established and at work. The land of Ireland is redeemed or in the process of redemption by British credit – a solid foundation of small landowning farmers has been created...”⁵⁴ For democratic government to flourish, these local institutions must be present as the foundation. The circumstances permitted a greater degree of autonomy to be safely given to the Irish without jeopardizing the Empire’s security.

In 1906, during the newly elected Liberal government, John Redmond, the leader of the Irish party, introduced a Home Rule resolution in the House of Commons. After it was amended to recognize Imperial supremacy, securing the support of those who admired the Empire, it passed. The Irish now had what amounted to a promise that a Home Rule bill would follow. Shortly after the election of 1906, however, Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman passed away and was replaced by Herbert Asquith. Asquith, in contrast to his predecessor, was largely apathetic to the question of Home Rule. Taking the lead of his party, Churchill did not pay much mind to the Irish question either. He declared, maintaining his opposition, that he would “support no Irish legislation, which I regard as likely to injure the effective integrity of the United Kingdom, or to lead, however indirectly, to separation.”⁵⁵ The security of England and the integrity of the Empire remained his paramount concern, but he soon began to realize the possibility for compromise.

Churchill and the Home Rule Bill

In a by-election in 1908, Churchill began to court the Irish vote aggressively. “Your countrymen,” he wrote to Redmond, “will make a mistake if they fail to support me now [...] My vote for your resolution

will undoubtedly expose me to considerable attack, as it will rightly be interpreted as being another step forward on my part towards a full recognition of Irish claims to self-Government.”⁵⁶ Churchill’s acknowledgement that his vote was a step toward a “full recognition of Irish claims to self-Government” appeared to be a *volte face* on the Irish question. He sought to convince Redmond of his newfound devotion, promising that:

any action they [Irish voters] may take – however injurious and as I think miscalculated – will not prevent me from doing my best as opportunity may offer to serve the interests and sustain the hopes of the Irishmen and from promoting that effective recognition of their national claims to the management of purely Irish affairs which I believe to be right in itself, and entirely compatible with the interests of the British people.⁵⁷

In an election address, days after writing this letter, Churchill revealed his desire to run strongly on the Irish question proclaiming his “acceptance of a new and advanced position on the Irish question.” A position which he claimed had ripened over two years while he governed with the Liberals. “I have become convinced that a national settlement of the Irish difficulty on broad and generous lines,” Churchill explained, “must be indispensable to any harmonious conception of Liberalism.” He went even further in this speech, speaking for his entire Party saying, “At the next election I am strongly of the opinion that the Liberal party should claim full authority and a free hand to deal with the problem of Irish self-government without being restricted to mea-

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Young Statesman*, pg. 450

⁵⁵ *Young Statesman*, Randolph Churchill, pg. 442

⁵⁶ *Young Statesman*, Randolph Churchill, pg. 445-6

⁵⁷ *Young Statesman*, Randolph Churchill, pg. 446

tures of administrative devolution.”⁵⁸ This was a clear reversal of policy and raises the question of what changed Churchill’s mind. His political maneuvering, however, proved futile as Redmond advised Irish voters not to support Churchill, who went on to lose the election, but was later returned by a different constituency.

When Churchill began his tenure as President of the Board of Trade, the “Irish question” once again retreated into obscurity. It reemerged as a question of public concern in 1910 when the “Parliament Bill” that was intended to restrict the veto of the House of Lords was proposed. It was widely accepted that any attempt at a Home Rule bill would be quickly vetoed by the Lords. The Liberal Party, anxious to enact a number of reforms, introduced the “Parliament Bill” to circumvent the reactionary upper chamber. During an election address in 1910, Churchill proclaimed, “The hour is coming for the reconciliation of the English and the Irish people. The sky is already brightening and there is the promise of that dawn for which Mr. Gladstone waited so long, but which he did not live to see.”⁵⁹ The apprehensive politician, who relied upon the political opinions of his father, seemed to have been a memory of the past. Churchill now seemed to openly embrace the prospect of an Irish Home Rule bill.

Churchill’s support of the bill did not extend to the fullest extent that the Irish Nationalist Party would have approved. Scorning the extremes, and desiring that imperial obligations be fulfilled, he opted for the moderate course. In 1910, he proclaimed:

The system of self-government which would be set up in Ireland by a Home Rule bill for which the Li-

beral Government would be responsible would give the Irish people the power of dealing with purely Irish affairs through an Irish Assembly, and with an Irish executive responsible to that Assembly, but that would not include Imperial matters. It would not include matters which affect the United Kingdom as a whole, and the Imperial Parliament would, in Mr. Redmond’s words, possess an overriding power which would effectively secure its supremacy.⁶⁰

This version of Home Rule was clearly an evolution from the early views he held. He had now become an active supporter of a Home Rule that would allow for the Irish to have a separate parliament, though he still would not tolerate that parliament being one “to rival” the British parliament, which must continue to reign supreme. This position satisfied most of the leadership of the Irish, who finally would acquire tools of self-government, and the staunch supporters of the Empire, which would not be weakened by the new scheme.

In his first major Home Rule speech, Churchill laid out his principled reasons for its adoption. He sought to convince people of three major points: Ireland had changed since 1886 (when the first Home Rule bill had been introduced), the success of South Africa, and the advantage to the Empire.

Churchill believed that the Ireland of 1911 was not the same Ireland of 1886. Churchill believed that the changing facts about Ireland made it a place much better suited for self-government in the early 20th Century. He understood that democracy generally did not spontaneously emerge among a people, long accustomed to government by force or by tribe. If a people were given the title-deeds of democracy too early, the risk that they might devolve into a

⁵⁸ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol I, pg. 982

⁵⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol II, pg. 1605

⁶⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol II, pg. 1638

tyranny was great. Ireland's gradual development indicated that they were prepared to shoulder the responsibility of limited self-government. Churchill recognized this and adjusted his position accordingly. He believed that this was proper, but also provided an opportunity for the Empire to secure a willing ally.

The biggest threat to Churchill's Home Rule position was the Unionists, which he once considered himself a part of. The Ulster Unionists despised the younger Churchill because of his support for placing them under a parliament based in Dublin. They were adamant that "Home Rule" meant "Rome Rule!" The Protestants of Ulster much preferred imperial parliament ruling them, than the Catholic majorities of Southern Ireland. Churchill was not blind to these concerns. He always recognized that granting self-government did not mean bestowing a power upon the majority to oppress the minority. He believed his plan provided a number of safeguards for the Protestants in the Ulster counties against the Catholic majorities in the South. First, the monarch of the empire retained a veto on all Irish legislation passed by the Irish parliament; secondly, the imperial parliament would be able to block any harmful legislation; thirdly, the Home Rule bill contained "provisions safeguarding religious freedom and fair play for both Protestants and Roman Catholics;"⁶¹ fourthly, if any bill passed by the Irish parliament was considered in violation of the Home Rule bill, then the privy council could veto it; fifthly, the Imperial parliament, which was overwhelmingly Protestant, would still reign supreme over any Irish legislative body; and sixthly, all military forces were under imperial control and the authority of the imperial Parliament to interfere if any persecution was taking place, remained unquestioned. The position was a compromise and Chur-

chill held that it would benefit all sides to enter into the agreement. He believed that through Home Rule, relations between Ireland and England could be strengthened. "We look forward to a time which has long been retarded and which we believe is now," he explained, "when this island – instead of being a disruptive force in the British Empire – shall be transformed into a new centre of Union."⁶²

Ulster Unionists remained dissatisfied with the proposal. The safeguards for minority rights were seen as paper barriers that would be quickly discarded by the Catholics once the British left. "The opposition of three or four counties [Ulster] is the only obstacle," Churchill wrote Redmond, "which now stands in the way of Home Rule."⁶³ Their opposition was fierce. Bonar Law, new leader of the Conservative opposition, instigated the Ulster Unionists. "I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go," he declared, "in which I should not be prepared to support them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people."⁶⁴ Law was assisted in his schemes by prominent Ulster politician Edward Carson. The two politicians led the Unionist resistance to Home Rule employing every means at their disposal, teetering dangerously close to endorsing armed rebellion.

As the debates surrounding Home Rule continued, Churchill's political fortunes continued to rise. In October 1911, he was made First Lord of the Admiralty. This position was the most important for the security of the small island. Britain had long survived by remaining the world's finest naval power. Churchill had long been concerned with having an enemy at Britain's backdoor. He saw before him his political fortune and the well-being of the Empire

⁶¹ Young Statesman, pg. 467

⁶² Young Statesman, pg. 467-8

⁶³ Young Statesman, pg. 470

⁶⁴ Young Statesman, pg. 469-70

align. Securing Ireland's friendship could help to strengthen Britain's wartime strategy. Conversely, if Home Rule could not pass and civil unrest in Ireland resulted, then the security of the Empire would be severely compromised. It was now Churchill's duty to insure the Empire's security.

By 1913, Home Rule had already passed the House of Commons two times. The Parliament Bill of 1911 dictated that if it was read and passed one more time, it would become law. "Nearly half a million Ulster men and women had signed," Churchill's son later wrote, "under the exhortation of Carson and other Unionist orators, the 'Solemn Covenant' which pledged them to use 'all means' to defeat Home Rule and, if a Home Rule Parliament were forced on them, to refuse to recognize its authority."⁶⁵ Churchill remained keenly aware of the situation and feared the outbreak of civil war; he remained vigilant and sought opportunities to avoid it. The Conservatives, in addition to inciting rebellion, also appealed to the King to step in and dissolve Parliament. Asquith refused to stand for such an unprecedented action and authorized Churchill to relay his dissatisfaction to His Majesty.

Churchill engaged in informal talks with Law in order to find an area for compromise; none was found. Churchill was informed that "as soon as the Bill was passed Carson would take control of Ulster and allow no other authority in that area."⁶⁶ Law then provided Churchill with an image of Civil War breaking out and asked him whether he really trusted the Army would obey commands to restore order in Ulster. Churchill doubted whether they could be and recognized that the original plan for Home Rule might not be practical given the circumstances before him. He concluded that some allowance ought to be made for

Ulster, which Asquith stated he believed would be the case all along.⁶⁷

When F.E. Smith put forward the idea of excluding Ulster from any Home Rule bill, Churchill proved amenable. He cautioned moderation at every turn, but was resolute in his belief that should the unrest turn violent, that the full weight of the Empire would be brought to bear upon the Unionists. He was never fully comfortable with using force to make Ulster submit and always held that he was open to a scheme that allowed them some flexibility. Austen Chamberlain, a Conservative friend of Churchill, recounted Churchill's attitude in the matter: "he said more than once that tho' he was prepared to put down disorder ruthlessly, he did not consider that they 'had the right' to coerce men in the position of Ulstermen into submission to Home Rule."⁶⁸ This account provides an insight into Churchill's desire to exercise their legitimate claim to rule responsibly. The best plan was compromise, but he doubted whether or not any could be had at the time. Churchill urged Chamberlain to be moderate and stressed that each man must be willing to do what he could to bring his party to a reasonable solution. "Leaders might be prepared but parties were not. Public opinion had got to have a shock." He reasoned, "Both sides had to make speeches full of party claptrap and no surrender, and then insert a few sentences at the end for the wise and discerning on the other side to see and ponder."⁶⁹ Churchill's analysis appeared correct; compromise seemed unattainable. Conversations between Asquith and Law went nowhere. Yet, he also recognized that as tensions increased the necessity of compromise would as well.

The minds of Englishmen were preoccupied with the prospect of armed quarrel. The moderate Unionist, Sir Horace Plunkett,

⁶⁵ *Young Statesman*, pg. 474

⁶⁶ *Young Statesman*, pg. 475

⁶⁷ *Young Statesman*, pg. 476

⁶⁸ *Young Statesman*, pg. 481

⁶⁹ *Young Statesman*, pg. 482

wrote to *The Times*, “If the Home Rule Bill passes through Parliament, without substantial modifications, there will break out in Ireland either civil war or unpremeditated and uncontrolled sectarian outrages.”⁷⁰ Churchill sought to avoid this at all costs. Asquith, responding to these fears, introduced a compromise that would allow “each of the Ulster counties to decide by a plebiscite in favour of exclusion for six years from the enactment of the Home Rule Bill.” Carson summed up the sentiments of Ulster Unionists, denouncing Asquith’s proposal, he declared it a “sentence of death with a stay of execution for six years.”⁷¹

In the aftermath of the thickening conflict, violence no longer seemed a puerile threat. Ulster Unionists had formed a militia known as the “Ulster Volunteers.” Reports from the Ulster counties showed that there were plans being made to disarm the police. Asquith took these reports seriously, reporting them to the King on March 13, 1914. Churchill was slated to speak in Bradford on March 14. Lloyd George urged him to issue a strong statement against violence and to warn Ulster of the consequences. The speech provided Churchill with an opportunity to set the tone of the discussion and to frame the position of the government. He rose to the occasion, warning the Volunteers, “We are not going to have the realm of Great Britain sink to the condition of the Republic of Mexico...If all the loose, wanton reckless chatter we have been forced to listen to these months is in the end to disclose a sinister revolutionary purpose, then I can only say to you ‘Let us go forward and put these grave matters to the proof.’”⁷² His speech rallied the Cabinet and supporters of Home Rule. One supporter wrote him saying, “I should say it’s probably the best speech you ever made.”⁷³ Churchill’s prose

were able to unite his side and to stake out a clear position for the government to promote, but they could not halt the escalating situation.

Asquith rewarded Churchill for his speech by granting him more of a leading role in the developing Irish situation. He had earned a reputation for seeking reconciliation, working especially close with Tories like Austen Chamberlain and F.E. Smith. These relationships provided him with the capitol to take on a leading role combatting the treasonous activities of Carson and the Ulster Unionists. Churchill’s increased responsibilities placed him in the public eye, receiving praise when the government acted rightly and blame as the situation worsened. Critics of his Irish policy sought to paint him as a ruthless strongman, going as far as to accuse him of plotting a pogrom against the Protestants. Tensions continued to thicken. After the Ulster Unionists began to move weapons into more aggressive positions, public opinion swung to the side of the government. Churchill saw an opportunity for a final shot at conciliation. He appealed to Carson to ease tensions: “Give me the amendments to the Home Rule Bill I ask for, to safeguard the dignity and the interests of Protestant Ulster, and I in return will use all my influence and good will to make Ireland an integral unit in a federal system.”⁷⁴ His Liberal friends were uneasy with this offer. Some believed that he had “betrayed the Irish Cause.”⁷⁵ Churchill, however, had the foresight to recognize the benefits of compromise at this time.

As the Irish question continued to complicate itself, tensions between nations on the continent grew and with them the prospect of war increased. Churchill watched as both situations worsened, but saw an opportunity to strengthen the Empire’s position by settling the Irish question amicably. When World War I broke out in the summer

⁷⁰ Young Statesman, pg. 485

⁷¹ Young Statesman, pg. 486

⁷² Young Statesman, pg. 488

⁷³ Young Statesman, pg. 491

⁷⁴ Young Statesman, pg. 503

⁷⁵ Young Statesman, pg. 503

of 1914, Asquith pushed the Suspensory Act through the House of Commons for the King's approval. This Act delayed the implementation of Home Rule until the conflict with Europe ceased. Churchill opposed this measure, believing that it squandered an opportunity to put to rest the Irish question by enforcing a solution and allowing the necessity of unity to force an alliance that could mend petty grievances. Both the Irish and English united to fight against the German threat to Great Britain. Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, turned his full attention from Home Rule to the defense of the free world.

Before the war's conclusion, the noxious Irish problem reemerged, demanding increased attention from the government. Ulster Unionists remained organized to fight against any attempt to impose a Home Rule solution that would place them under the rule of the Catholic counties. The Catholic South, on the other hand, was composed of warring factions, unable to determine the best path forward to independence. John Redmond and the Irish Nationalists had fought for the Home Rule Bill that had passed through the Parliament in 1914. The more radical citizens back in Ireland resisted the measure, believing it "did not give Ireland the independence that was her right."⁷⁶ They pushed a more fundamental change to the governing structure, demanding a republican form of government free from imperial control.

Civil War and the Anglo-Irish Treaty

Following the Easter Rising of 1916, civil war remained a constant threat. Great Britain, focusing their efforts on the Great War, allowed the problem to fester. The aftermath of the Great War afforded a plethora of problems for the British to face. Churchill played a role in many of these challenges, but began taking an increased

role Ireland beginning around 1919. The Liberals had, in some form, been trying to provide the Irish with a degree of self-government for over a decade, but now, in light of growing unrest, the question assumed a greater necessity.

The Sinn Fein Party had seen its influence in the Imperial Parliament grow. When the new British Parliament was set to meet, the Sinn Fein MPs resolved themselves to boycott the Imperial government, opting instead to form an Irish parliament that would sit in Dublin. Their party leaders rejected the compromise of the Liberal Party – that resulted in providing Ireland with a measure of self-government. They refused to accept an Ireland that was divided or under the rule of the king. They demanded to be a nation once again. They sought to seize what they believed was rightfully theirs: the authority for all of Ireland to govern itself. As Sinn Fein, and the more radical elements of the Irish Nationalists gained power, the situation in Ireland turned increasingly violent.

While the Imperial Parliament met, the Sinn Fein MPs began recruiting volunteers for an armed force, which they called the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The MPs formed a cabinet of their own – the Dail – and elected Eamon De Valera their President. Michael Collins, the Finance Minister, assumed the responsibility of Adjutant-General of the IRA. Under his direction, the IRA began to employ guerilla tactics to drive the British out of Ireland. "Several policemen, were killed," Churchill biographer, Martin Gilbert, explained, "moderate Home Rulers were threatened and British Rule was challenged throughout Ireland."⁷⁷ The Royal Irish Constabulary, RIC, which were the police officers of Ireland, employed by the United Kingdom, were the chief targets of IRA acts of aggression. The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, John French, in response to these heinous deeds appealed to

⁷⁶ The Stricken World, Martin Gilbert, pg. 443

⁷⁷ The Stricken World, pg. 446

Churchill, who at this time was the Secretary of State for War, for more troops to protect Ireland from deteriorating into open rebellion. Churchill sent him some, but the violence continued. By the end of 1919, a total of eighteen government officials had been killed in Ireland.

Lord French believed that restoring order would require a great use of force by the British. In the closing months of 1919, he outlawed Sinn Fein in several counties and suppressed the Sinn Fein parliament, but to no avail.⁷⁸ The Cabinet devoted much of their time to planning how to subdue Ireland. The religious division between the Catholics and the Protestants seemed insurmountable. Both sides were willing to take up arms against the other and die if necessary for the righteousness of their cause. Churchill remained committed to the policy of 1914, which provided a “measure of self-government” to the Irish. He asked that the Irish Catholics accept the offer of the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, allowing the exclusion of the Ulster counties. He recognized the burden of the great military presence in Ireland – which both the Protestants and Catholics objected to – but believed that its presence was necessary because of the unrest. If self-government were to be successful, it must have peace for the proper institutions to grow. He was firm in his belief that if an Irish government proved itself responsible, that the excluded counties would gladly join it in the future: “The day would also come when after a few years of successful administration by an Irish Parliament on College Green dealing with the affairs of three parts of Ireland, the fourth part of her own free will would come in and associate herself with you.”⁷⁹ Churchill’s ability to look ahead, however, was not common to the parties involved. Both Southern and Northern Ireland were unable to look past their entrenched prejudices to a

day when they might join together in service of justice instead of selfish interest.

Policemen and soldiers remained targets of the IRA. In March of 1920, Churchill expressed his growing worries to his wife, Clementine, saying “The Irish murders are really getting very serious. What a diabolical streak they [the Irish] have in their character! I expect it is that treacherous, assassinating, conspiring trait which has done them in in the bygone ages of history and prevented them from being a great responsible nation with stability and prosperity.”⁸⁰ These barbarous acts had no place in a free nation that was aiming for self-government. More frustrating than the heinous acts perpetrated by the IRA, however, was the inability of the police to find the guilty parties. “It is shocking,” Churchill wrote, “that we have not been able to bring the murders to justice.”⁸¹ As the year dragged on, Churchill continued to push Lloyd George to bear down upon these violent rebels. In turn, Lloyd George increasingly turned to Churchill for assistance. “We cannot leave things as they are.” Lloyd George wrote to Churchill in May of 1920, “De Valera has practically challenged the British Empire, and unless he is put down the Empire will look silly.”⁸² The government’s reaction to these rebels would have a lasting effect on the rest of the colonies within the British Empire. If they looked “silly” they could lose the respect of their other colonies and the world. They had no choice, but to assert their strength. Churchill believed swift justice was in order: “After a person is caught he should pay the penalty within a week.”⁸³ He had scant patience for the sluggish nature in which the few conspirators who had been caught were being processed. The religious conflict was so deeply ingrained in the Irish, however, that

⁷⁸ The Stricken World, pg. 447

⁷⁹ The Stricken World, pg. 448

⁸⁰ The Stricken World, pg. 449

⁸¹ The Stricken World, pg. 449

⁸² The Stricken World, pg. 450

⁸³ The Stricken World, pg. 452

it was deemed nearly impossible that a Catholic jury would convict conspirators accused of harming the Protestant British.

Churchill was determined not to allow Sinn Fein victory over the Empire. Throughout 1920 the murders and reprisals continued. In June, Austen Chamberlain suggested that negotiations begin with Sinn Fein, but the Cabinet rejected this proposal as accepting defeat. Churchill, sought to rouse the ire of the British people against the rebels, writing that:

No nation has ever established its title-deeds by a campaign of assassination. The British nation, having come grimly through the slaughter of Armageddon, are certainly not going to be scared by the squalid scenes of sporadic warfare which are being enacted across the Irish Channel. They may be alienated, they may be irritated; but they will certainly not be terrorized by such proceedings.⁸⁴

Churchill failed to see how a bloody campaign to earn democracy could end in any other way than a bloody democracy. He worried for the future of the Irish. He recognized that in the aftermath of the Great War that most British subjects did not wish to bother themselves with Ireland, but to focus on the improvement of their own lives. If the Irish, however, wished to bother the good British subjects, Churchill asserted, “it will not be in any mood of sentimental sympathy, still less of panic, that he will rouse himself to action.” Yet, forever seeking moderation, coupled with these threats against the Irish, Churchill continued to offer conciliation: “No course is open to the Government but to take every possible measure to break the murder campaign and to enforce the authority of the law, while at the same time pressing forward the Home

Rule Bill.”⁸⁵ If the Irish chose to resist, they would be defeated. If they chose to work with the British government, then they would find a path toward self-government.

Churchill was soon placed as the chairman of a Cabinet Committee tasked with resolving the Irish unrest. He was prepared to bring the might of the British Empire down upon the Sinn Fein and their murderous tactics. In a letter, he outlined his proposal, saying that if the government received information that a group of Sinn Feiners were drilling somewhere that the government ought to go in “with definite orders in each particular case to disperse them by machine gun fire or bombs, using of course no more force than is necessary to scatter and stampede them.”⁸⁶ Such a display of force, he hoped, would deter the Sinn Fein from continuing their attacks. Lloyd George, however, had a different plan. He sought to equip General Tudor with the power to set up an anti-Sinn Fein organization – employ the same tactics of murder and reprisal – in order to defeat the rebels. While they developed the proper plan to subdue the unrest, the violence continued to take its toll on Ireland.

Churchill believed it was necessary for the government to support the British soldiers and keep morale high. Chaos persisted, however, and the British appeared incapable of restoring order. Churchill believed that Home Rule could no longer go forward until a solution had been devised and the murder gangs ceased to operate. By November 1920, Churchill was “prepared to support and to defend a policy of reprisals within strict limits and under strict control in certain districts in which it should be declared that conditions approximating to a state of war exist.”⁸⁷ He believed it was the only efficacious means of reinstating order. The situation continued to escalate, the cab-

⁸⁴ Quoted by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, pg. 453

⁸⁵ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 454

⁸⁶ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 455

⁸⁷ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 463

inet received intelligence that there was an award being offered for the kidnapping of Lloyd George, French, Law, Churchill, and other high ranking ministers. Shortly after the murder of six plain clothed British officers in Southern Ireland, the Cabinet determined it necessary to declare martial law in four counties: Cork, Kerry, Limerick, and Killkenny. The murders continued.

The never-ending violence against the police and soldiers proved too great a barrier to overcome for Churchill. He valued peace and believed that the stronger nation ought to make it painful for their adversaries to continue and easy for them to surrender. "No one desires more than I do a cessation of the conditions of strife which are ruining the happiness and the prosperity of the Irish people," he wrote to the Archbishop of Tuam, "[...] but the murders of the police and military must stop. Until they stop there can be no recovery and things will go from bad to worse."⁸⁸ He desired peace above all else, but the necessity of force seemed ever present in Ireland. When the benefits of self-government and peace failed to persuade them, Churchill had no choice but to resort to the punishment of force.

Churchill made his views clear. He desired Home Rule for Ireland, but would not consent to its pursuit until order was restored. "Let murder stop, let constitutional dominion begin," he exclaimed, "let the Irish people carry the Debate from the squalid conditions in which it is now being pushed forward by the Irish murder gang."⁸⁹ Only then could they attain any measure of self-government. Throughout the unrest he remained confident that the Irish people did not want violence and would welcome a truce. In another letter to the Archbishop of Tuam he explained the difficulty the British confronted in dealing with the Irish was attributable to the fact that "no body is in corporate and continuous existence which

has the power or even the constitutional right to speak for Ireland." As long as the Irish people, however, did not stand up against the violence of their fellow subjects, the British would have no choice but to continue using force to keep order. He sincerely desired for Ireland to enjoy the title-deeds of democracy, but could not allow their reckless pursuit of self-government to trump the security of the Empire. "Britain will never consent," Churchill ended, "while life and strength remain, to the destruction of the integrity of the British Empire."⁹⁰ Sinn Feinn and the IRA continued perpetrating acts of violence, and the reprisals from the British continued in turn.

The policy of organized reprisals continued for over four months, but proved ineffective. By April, it was clear that the Government now had to choose between enforcing martial law to crush Sinn Fein or negotiating a truce and settlement with the Sinn Fein leaders. Churchill now believed negotiating a truce was the proper course of action, but the cabinet disagreed. In May, elections took place in Ireland and Sinn Fein won great majorities – 126 seats in total - in the South, while in the North, Unionists won 40 seats and Nationalists and Sinn Feiners won 12. Sir James Craig became Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and the promised partition of Ireland became reality.

The situation continued to worsen in Ireland and civil war seemed unavoidable. King George V believed that he could play a role in curtailing the violence. He took the unprecedented step of traveling to speak at the opening of the Belfast Parliament. There, he asked that all Irishmen "pause, to stretch out the hand of forbearance and conciliation, to forgive and forget, and to join in making the land which they love a new era of peace, contentment, and goodwill."⁹¹ The King avoided all references to the heavy handed tactics that the government had been

⁸⁸ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 467-468

⁸⁹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 469

⁹⁰ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 470

⁹¹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 665

employing and focused solely on the need for conciliation. Churchill praised him for doing “a duty in Ireland of such great importance to the whole Empire.”⁹² His Majesty’s speech was received, much to the surprise of the cabinet, favorably by the Irish Nationalist press as well. The Cabinet met to determine how they could capitalize on the King’s speech. They decided that it was appropriate to begin testing the waters for negotiations with Sinn Fein. They were informed that Sinn Fein leaders believed they would get their republic, but were not completely dismissive of the possibility of accepting Dominion status – within the British Empire. Their main demands were that any agreement “should not contain limitation which showed distrust of the Irish people” and that it “must be an everlasting peace.”⁹³ Churchill saw an opportunity in opening communication.

In light of the news of the Sinn Fein leaders, Lloyd George called a truce and began to pursue a treaty with the Irish. July 14, Lloyd George met with De Valera at 10 Downing Street. Almost a week later, Lloyd George gave De Valera the British Government’s proposal for a treaty. If accepted, Southern Ireland would be “offered Dominion Home Rule, with complete control of finance, taxation, police and army;” Britain, on the other hand, would “retain control of imperial defence, and would prohibit any protective tariffs on trade between the two countries.”⁹⁴ To the surprise of Lloyd George, De Valera rejected the proposal and demanded complete independence.

Following De Valera’s rejection, hostilities seemed imminent. The Government had to proceed gingerly to avoid war. The Cabinet determined that easing the tensions between both sides was necessary. De Valera was invited to a conference to decide “how the association of Ireland with

the community of Nations known as the British Empire can be best reconciled with Irish National Aspirations.”⁹⁵ Churchill was placed on a committee charged with dealing with the Irish situation. This insured, he wrote to his wife, that he would be a negotiator of any treaty that might arise between the British and Irish.

Churchill, recognizing that he would soon have a major role in treaty negotiations, began formulating a policy. He was determined that Britain should never accept an Irish Republic. In an address to his constituents at Dundee, Churchill asked, “How could they agree to the setting up of a separate foreign Republic in Ireland?” He had, however, been asking himself the same question and had a response quick at hand, “No peace, but certain war – real war, not mere bushranging would follow from such a course. Great Britain would always live in apprehension [...]”⁹⁶ The only option for Ireland, he declared, was for them to agree to Dominion Home Rule.

When treaty negotiations were set to begin, Churchill was chosen to help in the drafting of it. On the British side, he was joined by Lloyd George, Austen Chamberlain, Lord Birkenhead, Worthington-Evans, Hamar Greenwood, and Attorney-General, Sir Gordon Hewart. Opposite the British, the Irish delegation was headed by Arthur Griffith (President of the Sinn Fein Party) and Michael Collins.

It was Churchill’s hope that a very generous offer could be made to the Irish. He desired that they should have Home Rule and self-government, but there were some issues on which he could not compromise: defense of the Empire and loyalty to the King. “We must have free use of the Irish coasts,” Churchill explained, “in peace or war for Imperial defence.”⁹⁷ When the Sinn Fein delegates put forth a memorandum

⁹² Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 664

⁹³ *The Stricken World*, pg. 666

⁹⁴ *The Stricken World*, pg. 666

⁹⁵ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 667

⁹⁶ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 668

⁹⁷ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 670

declaring that control of naval defence would be handled by the Irish, Churchill responded bluntly that any such concession would “shorten the task of this committee, in fact will bring it to an end.” Churchill argued that the principle such a compromise would promote was that “Ireland is a foreign Ireland.”⁹⁸ As he maintained from the beginning, Ireland must remain a part of the British Empire and would not gain complete independence with the consent of the Imperial Government. The Irish delegates eventually acquiesced. Next, they had to tackle the issue of a united Ireland and her status within the Empire.

When the debate arose upon the partition of Ireland, the British delegation took a laissez-faire approach. Lloyd George informed the Irish delegates that “Britain would not stand in the way of legitimate persuasion by you to induce Northern Ireland to join the South.” Churchill added to Lloyd George’s statement, interjecting his favorite example of South Africa, that they were then “offering to Rhodesia inducements to come into the Union, customs etc.”⁹⁹ The issue seemed settled, but when the question of allegiance to the crown was raised, Griffith declared that they could not accept allegiance to the Crown “unless they got the unity of Ireland.”¹⁰⁰ Churchill was torn on the issue. On the one hand, he had long held that there should be a compromise for the Ulster counties, but he did not necessarily see how inclusion would be damning to the Ulster counties. Reasoning on the latter point, he argued, “she gets her own protection, an effective share in the Southern Parliament and protection for the Southern Unionist.”¹⁰¹

By November, the debates had become so tiring that Lloyd George considered resignation, but Churchill talked him out of

such a rash decision. Lloyd George simply did not have the energy to fight with Southern Ireland, but Churchill assured him that “it is our duty to carry forward the policy about Ireland in which we believe, until we are defeated in the House of Commons, and thus honorably relieved from our duty to the crown.”¹⁰² Lloyd George, as a result, remained in his post and continued to broker an answer to the Irish Question.

On November 29, a draft treaty was presented to the entire committee. The Irish delegation returned to Ireland to discuss it with the government. The Irish Cabinet was divided on whether or not to accept the terms laid out by the British; De Valera opposed it. The Sinn Fein delegates returned to London and explained that the necessity of allegiance to the King would be problematic to any treaty. A compromise, however, forged by Harry Laski – a political philosopher and historian – diffused the tension and permitted both sides to proceed. The oath, required by all Members of the Parliament of the Irish Free State, now read:

I.....do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established and that I will be faithful to H.M. King George V., his heirs and successors by law, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.¹⁰³

Once this was settled, Lloyd George had determined that no more could be conceded. In *The World Crisis*, Churchill described the Prime Minister’s attitude, “they must settle now; they must sign the agreement for a Treaty in the form to which after all these weeks it had attained, or else quit; and

⁹⁸ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 671

⁹⁹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 670

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 673

¹⁰¹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 673

¹⁰² Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 674

¹⁰³ Anglo-Irish Treaty, 6, December 1921, clause 4

further, that both sides would be free to wage whatever warfare they could wage against each other.”¹⁰⁴ The Irish requested leave to consider the ultimatum. Griffith and Collins returned and informed the British delegation that they would support it, after some minor drafting changes, which they completed that evening. The treated determined that Southern Ireland would be granted Dominion Status within the Empire and pledge allegiance to the King.

When the Irish delegates returned to Dublin and presented the Treaty before the Sinn Fein Cabinet ministers, they were met with great resistance from De Valera, who steadfastly opposed Dominion Status for Ireland. When a vote was taken, however, the Treaty received the approval of the Cabinet and proceeded to the Dail for ratification. Across the sea, the British also turned to the Parliament for approval of the Treaty.

The Parliament saw the Treaty as too conciliatory. They believed that Britain had lost too much, but Churchill challenged this charge. He stood before them and explained that going into the negotiations, Britain demanded “allegiance to the Crown, membership of the Empire, facilities and securities for the Navy, and a complete option for Ulster.”¹⁰⁵ All of those conditions had been met. He urged those who had been extremists on the issue to moderate themselves to avoid war. He had an immense amount of faith in the people of both Ireland and Great Britain to moderate themselves and recognize that it would not be “justifiable to lay the land of Ireland waste to the scourge of war, or to drag the name of Great Britain through the dirt in every part of the world.”¹⁰⁶ It was clear that Irish Home Rule was necessary to preserve the Empire’s integrity. While he could not deny the fact the Treaty conceded more to Ireland than England “has as a nation ever been willing

to concede before,” it was done in order to “end a period of brutal and melancholy violence.”¹⁰⁷ Peace, therefore, was the principle objective of the treaty and it accomplished that end without compromising the security or integrity of the Empire. The Treaty was a great sign of magnanimity on the part of recent victors of the First World War. The accusation that this Treaty was a “humiliation” to the Empire held no weight in Churchill’s mind. It effectively protected her name, preserved her security, and created the possibility for an ally that had long been hostile.

The Treaty, with Churchill’s eloquent defense, was approved in the Parliament. While the Dail continued to deliberate, Lloyd George placed Churchill at the head of a committee tasked with arranging the details of the Provisional Government in Dublin. In the first week of the new year, 1922, the Dail, by a vote of 64 to 57, approved the Treaty. The Cabinet determined that once the Treaty passed, British troops would begin to be withdrawn from Ireland. De Valera, still opposed to the Treaty, resigned as President immediately. It appeared that after over a century of turmoil, the Irish question had been answered. The war over Home Rule, however, was far from over. When the negotiations ceased and votes had been cast, the difficulties of creating a new government emerged front and center.

Churchill was placed at the head of a committee tasked with insuring the implementation of the Treaty in Ireland. Though De Valera had lost the vote in the Dail, he was not done rousing Irish anger against the treaty. He urged the Irish people to reject the treaty and to continue demanding a republic. Northern Ireland looked upon the growing unrest in the South with anxiety, believing that if the South ultimately rejected the treaty, their territorial sovereignty might be at risk. Civil war, once again, threatened the small island nation.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in the Stricken World, pg. 676

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 678

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 679

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 680

In light of the possibility of hostilities, Churchill determined that it was not prudent to remove troops and ordered their withdrawal to be stopped. Churchill and the Irish Committee were encouraged by assurances from Collins and Griffith that they were prepared to begin enforcing some of the treaties provisions. Prime Minister Craig, of Northern Ireland, also appeared willing to stay the moderate course. He wrote to Churchill informing him of his willingness to attend a conference between the British and “the delegates of Southern Ireland... so as to ascertain clearly whether the policy of Southern Ireland is to be one of peace or whether the present method of pressure on Northern Ireland is to be continued.”¹⁰⁸ Craig’s principle fear was that the constant denunciation of the Ulster border would put pressure on the British to concede territory to the South, particularly the counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone – both within Ulster – which had predominantly Catholic populations.

Churchill maintained the belief that if the two sides could be brought together, that compromise could be had and crisis averted. He attempted to keep the British out of the affairs of the Irish as much as possible, without jeopardizing their advance toward self-government. The Dail met January 15 and established a Provisional Government with Michael Collins as the Prime Minister. On January 16, after Collins assumed his position, Churchill ordered the evacuation of all British troops to begin immediately. January 17, Churchill informed his committee that it was imperative that Collins or Griffith come to London for a conference with Craig. On January 21, at Churchill’s residence, such a meeting took place. The meeting supported Churchill’s suspicion that common ground could be found, by the end, Churchill wrote, “We three then joined in the best of all pledges, to

wit, ‘To try to make things work.’”¹⁰⁹ Following the meeting, the Irish Provisional Government ended the economic boycott of Ulster, allowing free trade to begin between the North and South. Additionally, they offered full amnesty to “all members of the Naval, Military, Police or civil services of the British Government and all other persons by whom acts of hostility against the Irish people were committed, aided or abetted.”¹¹⁰ Churchill, in turn, pushed Lloyd George to pardon a number of Sinn Feiners who had been imprisoned.

In early February, fighting broke out along the Ulster border, causing many to fear that the British government would cede territory to the South. Craig, however, reasserted the North’s unwillingness to compromise on the border of Northern Ireland. The border skirmishes risked throwing all of Ireland into chaos. Churchill recognized the growing problems, and his role in facing them, writing to his wife, Clementine, saying, “Ireland is sure to bring us every form of difficulty and embarrassment, and I expect I shall have to bear the brunt of it in the House of Commons.”¹¹¹ Yet, he recognized that devising a solution was his duty and he was to pursue that end tirelessly.

In Southern Ireland, Collins pushed for an election, in the hopes of bolstering the treaty by giving it the force of popular approval. All the while, he continued working closely with the British to insure the security of the nascent Irish government. Churchill believed that it was necessary for the British parliament to give formal sanction to the Provisional Government to insure that it had legitimacy. To this end, he urged the adoption of the Free State Bill, which would effectively add the force of law to Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922. “If you want to see Ireland degenerate into a meaningless welter of lawless chaos and confusion,” he warned

¹⁰⁸ The Stricken World, pg. 685

¹⁰⁹ Churchill, *The World Crisis*, pg. 210

¹¹⁰ The Stricken World, pg. 686

¹¹¹ The Stricken World, pg. 688

Parliament, “delay this bill.” Pass this bill, he pleaded:

[i]f you wish to give a fair chance to a policy which Parliament has pledged itself, and to Irish Ministers to whom you are bound in good faith, so long as they act faithfully with you, to give fair play and a fair chance, if you wish to see Ireland brought back from the confusion of tyranny to a reign of law, if you wish to give logical and coherent effect to the policy and experiment to which we are committed, you will not be impeded, even for a single unnecessary week, the passage of this Bill.¹¹²

Churchill was forced to placate the Conservative’s fear that Ulster had been betrayed and that the Irish Free State would become a perpetual threat to the North. The “whole force and power, if necessary, of the British Empire” would be brought down upon the South, if Ulster was attacked. As recent history had proven, only through an autonomous South could any part of Ireland hope to enjoy a period of peace.

Discussions continued to surround the border disputes specifically in the counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone. Churchill recognized the likelihood that majorities in both counties would prefer to join the Irish Free State, but he knew the anger such a declaration, publicly stated, would arouse. Churchill knew the importance of the border issue, but did not believe that it was a sufficient reason to hold up the bill. The biggest threat to the Bill’s passing were those Conservatives who believed that the Irish were seeking “an all-Irish Republic, and who were convinced that the British Government would not, in the last resort, defend Ulster against either border changes or direct attack.”¹¹³ Churchill dismissed the notion of

an all-Irish Republic as “a delusion” and declared that Britain should “defend every inch of Ulster soil under the Treaty as if it were Kent.”¹¹⁴ Before Parliament, he continued to defend the Treaty, in its original form, and urged its approval.

Fears continued that pro-Republican sentiment would prevent the South from having a peaceful settlement with Ulster. In the final reading of the bill, Churchill ended by explaining the practical benefit the bill would provide Great Britain. Churchill proclaimed:

if you strip her [Ireland] of the accusation against Great Britain of being the oppressor, if you strip her of her means of exciting and commanding the sympathy of almost the whole world [...] if by acting in strict, inflexible, good faith you place Ireland in the position that if she breaks the Treaty she is in the wrong and you are in the right, that she is absolutely isolated in the whole world – then, I say, the strength of your economic position emerges in its integrity.¹¹⁵

The principled argument was important to Churchill, but there was also a very practical need for the passage of the Free State Bill. The Empire had been losing a war of public relations with their allies and with their own subjects! Churchill saw the Free State Bill – the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty – as a chance to show the world that Great Britain was acting in good faith. If the Irish, through their own actions, violated the treaty, then the “English-speaking world” would be behind Great Britain in taking action against Southern Ireland. He ended his speech, reminding the House of Commons that they had before them the opportunity to recognize “that Irishmen are cap-

¹¹² Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 690

¹¹³ *The Stricken World*, pg. 693

¹¹⁴ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 693

¹¹⁵ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 696

able of producing a Government in their own country, and for the life of their own country, which is not markedly below the standard of the civilisation of Western Europe.”¹¹⁶ His performance, ushering the Free State Bill through the Commons, earned him the praise of prominent Conservative MP, Austen Chamberlain, who wrote to the King saying that Winston had “shown parliamentary talent of the highest order.”¹¹⁷

When he was not debating the Irish Free State Bill on the floor of the Commons, Churchill was working to lend support to the Provisional Government. His Committee went as far as to provide Collins with weapons and armored cars to bolster their defenses. Collins and Griffith had assured the Cabinet that they could control Ireland, but their pledge seemed increasingly unrealistic. The first weeks of March proved unsettling to the Provisional Government. Factions within the IRA rejected Collins’ calls for moderation. Some invaded Limerick and others began wreaking havoc in Belfast. Yet, Collins maintained his position, and Churchill remained optimistic, that Ireland would vote pro-treaty in the election. The violence surrounding the border, however, proved irksome for the relations between North and South. Churchill appealed to Collins and Griffith directly, explaining “an explosion would be disastrous, and even a continuance of the present tension tends to stereotype the border line and make it into a fortified military frontier, which is the last thing you want.”¹¹⁸

Churchill believed the surest way to avoid a breaking out of hostilities was to conference with Collins and Craig. He explained that this meeting may yield no result at all, but he relied upon his sincere belief that “it rests with Irishmen who care for Ireland to try to bring about a better state of things.” It was his opinion that by

bringing together a few such Irishmen, that they might begin that process of bettering Ireland. He opened the meeting, by remarking that “one would have to search all over Europe to find instances of equal atrocity, barbarity, cold blooded, inhuman, cannibal vengeance,”¹¹⁹ which, he asserted, were taking place by both sides in the conflict. He appealed to their common national pride for them to rise above these acts and to embrace just action. His pleas worked and he soon began drafting an agreement between the North and South that included a solution to the boundary question and “the furtherance of Irish unity;” the suspension of IRA activities; and a police force consisting of Catholics and Protestants to keep peace in Belfast. It took a healthy amount of convincing, but it was signed by both sides, leading Churchill to exclaim before the House of Commons, “PEACE is today declared.” Churchill’s biographer, Martin Gilbert, described the sentiment in the aftermath of the agreement as “wide-spread euphoria.” The agreement had the effect of advancing the “Irish Treaty from the stage of hopeful declaration to that of positive action.”¹²⁰ Churchill’s efforts held Ireland together at a pivotal moment.

On March 31, the Irish Free State Bill went into effect. That weekend Belfast saw a sharp increase in violence. April 2, a faction of the IRA marched through Dublin, in County Mayo Collins was prevented from giving a speech by protestors, and De Valera declared the Provisional Government and the Northern Government as illegitimate. Churchill grew worried at the increasing unrest. On April 4, he informed his cabinet colleagues. He had begun to lose faith in the leaders of the Provisional Government. Collins and Griffith were men of good faith and good intentions, but appeared to lack the ability to implement the Treaty. He declared that there was no doubt “that the Irish have a

¹¹⁶ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 696

¹¹⁷ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 696

¹¹⁸ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 697

¹¹⁹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 699

¹²⁰ *The Stricken World*, pg. 701

genius for conspiracy rather than for government. The Government is feeble, apologetic, expostulatory; the conspirators, active, audacious and utterly shameless.”¹²¹ Collins and the Sinn Fein delegates had promised that they could control the IRA, but it was clear that too many obstinate factions had formed within its ranks. The “delusion” of a republican Ireland was being spread, unchecked, throughout the 26 counties of Southern Ireland. “It is hard to imagine,” Churchill wrote, “that there is any principle which dominates the thoughts of the I.R.A. expect the Republican principle.”¹²² It poisoned their thinking and entrenched them in their anti-British prejudices.

Churchill, seeing a degenerating situation, determined to begin guiding events to insure that if Republicans seized power outside of Dublin, that Collins and Griffith would “fight together with the North” to uphold the Treaty. “I take it for granted, of course,” he wrote, “that we should not recognize or parley with a Republic in any circumstance, and that the mere fact of its being brought into being would constitute an act of war between it and the British Empire.”¹²³ Meanwhile, the violence in Ireland continued. Churchill informed the House of Commons that “Two months ago it was too soon to rejoice. It is still too soon to lament.”¹²⁴ He placed his hopes in the free southern elections, that he remained sure, would uphold the Treaty. His greatest fear was the possibility that Griffith and Collins would bend to Da Valera and postpone the elections: “This wd [sic] be disastrous & may confront us with grave but intangible & indeterminate issues.”¹²⁵

Churchill feared the weakness of Collins and his Provisional Government, but was placated by letters that told him they

would be putting “their foot down and assert their authority strongly.”¹²⁶ A letter from Alfred Cope on April 17, informed Churchill that both Collins and Griffith “are now alive to the moves of De Valera and I do not think they will consider any agreement for postponing the elections.”¹²⁷ On April 29, Churchill wrote to Collins and Griffith to congratulate them “on the spirit and personal courage which [they] have consistently shown in confronting the enemies of free speech and fair play.”¹²⁸ He explained to Collins the thin line he walked with his Provisional government and that “on both sides [the Northern government and the Republicans in the South] the wreckers dread any approach to the idea of a united Ireland as the one fatal, blow at their destructive schemes.”¹²⁹ He continued to give him some advice on how to proceed: “It is the business of statesmen not let themselves be moved unduly by these feelings, however, deep and natural, but to try as far as possible to steer away from these dangerous currents and preserve steadily towards the harbor which they have set out to gain.”¹³⁰ He hoped that Collins would act in a conciliatory manner towards Ulster and with a heavy hand against the republicans.

In early May, Churchill was informed that negotiations had begun between Collins and De Valera for an agreed election. The news infuriated Churchill, who wrote to Chamberlain, telling him “to tell Griffith on Monday that we will have nothing to do with such a farce, nor will we pass any act of Parliament creating the Free State or according a permanent status to the Irish Govt on such a basis.”¹³¹ He repeated his remarks to Collins shortly thereafter and informed him that this “agreed election” would “not be an election in any sense of the

¹²¹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 703

¹²² Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 704

¹²³ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 704

¹²⁴ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 707

¹²⁵ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 709

¹²⁶ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 710

¹²⁷ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 710

¹²⁸ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 711

¹²⁹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 712

¹³⁰ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 712

¹³¹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 714

word, but simply a farce.” He said that a government elected by this mode “would soon find itself regarded as a tyrannical junta which having got into office by violence was seeking to maintain itself by a denial of constitutional rights.” He continued by appealing to his sense of honor and duty to the Irish people:

The enemies of Ireland have been accustomed to say that the Irish people did not care about representative Government, that it was alien to their instincts, and that if they had an opportunity they would return to a despotism of an oligarchy in one form or another. If you were to allow yourself to be misled into such an arrangement as is indicated, such action would be immediately proclaimed as justifying to the full this sinister prediction.¹³²

Churchill’s hopes of Republican sentiment being eclipsed were shattered. He believed their fate, like that of the Russians, was to be decided by the few for the many.

In the face of the news, Churchill recommended to the Government that British troops not be withdrawn from Dublin, which he believed would result in the declaration of an Irish Republic. His opinion of the Irish leaders had fell significantly, he told the cabinet that they “had been men of violence and conspiracy and had hardly emerged from that atmosphere.”¹³³ He called for Collins and Griffith to come to London to discuss the compact. Griffith, arriving before Collins, made it clear to Churchill that he was opposed the agreement. When Collins arrived, however, both he and Griffith were in unison in explaining how impossible holding free elections would have been with the IRA running rampant throughout Ireland. “Small band of armed

men,” they argued, “could have seized and destroyed the ballot boxes, and in other ways prevented the free exercise of constitutional rights.”¹³⁴ Churchill and many in the Cabinet were impressed by their arguments. Collins urged the Cabinet for British support of the agreement. It had become clear during the discussion, that Collins was seeking a conciliatory solution within the bounds of the Treaty. “The idea was,” Collins explained, “to try and get a non-Party Government, so as to secure tranquility in Ireland, and at a later stage a proper Election on the main issue.”¹³⁵ Realizing he was wrong, Churchill became a defender of the Collins-De Valera, declaring it could lead to “a cessation of all attacks on Ulster or outrages from the Irish Republican Army within Ulster, to a cessation of the murder of ex-Servants of the Crown, or of Protestants in the South, or of British soldiers.”¹³⁶ Once Ireland had peace, he argued, she could draw up a Constitution that could link Ireland irrevocably to the British Empire and the British Crown.

Churchill recognized that Collins’ ability to bring the Treaty into permanent effect was “open to doubt.” In spite of this, he urged patience and faith. “We have transferred the powers of government and the whole of the revenues of Ireland,” he declared to the Parliament, “to the Irish Ministers responsible to the Irish Parliament.” This was done in good faith by the British and a failure to secure the blessings of self-government by the Irish, which he did not think would happen, would not be a bad reflection on the Empire: “This great act of faith on the part of the stronger power will not, I believe, be brought to mockery by the Irish people. If it were, the strength of the Empire will survive the disappointment, but the Irish name will not soon recover

¹³² The World Crisis, pg. 224

¹³³ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 716

¹³⁴ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 718

¹³⁵ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 718

¹³⁶ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 719

from the disgrace.”¹³⁷ His appeal for patience was met by the Conservative MPs with a declaration that patience on Great Britain’s part, meant victory for the Irish Republicans. There remained some across the aisle, however, he remained confident in Churchill’s ability. Chamberlain wrote the King the following day and told him “It was a masterly performance – not merely a great personal and oratorical triumph, though it was both of these, but a great act of statesmanship.”¹³⁸ By the end of May, Craig informed Churchill that Southern forces were forming on the border and appeared to be planning attacks on the North. Collins gave Churchill the “most unqualified assurance that they were in no way responsible,” and had “repudiated the action of these forces in the strongest possible manner.”¹³⁹ Churchill informed Collins that “if any part of the Irish Republican Army, either pro-Treaty or anti-Treaty, invaded Northern soil, we would throw them out.”¹⁴⁰ The Free State Constitution, proposed by the South, proved wholly unacceptable to Lloyd George, who declared it “purely republican in character,” providing provisions for granting complete control of foreign policy to the Dail. Debate surrounding the treaty was fierce and a compromise seemed unattainable. Churchill and Lord Birkenhead encouraged Lloyd George to meet with Griffith and Collins once again.

As he urged the Prime Minister to explore a compromise, Churchill assembled his Cabinet Committee at the Colonial Office and began to make contingency plans should the Irish repudiate the Treaty and declare a Republic. He suggested that in that instance, cutting off all revenue to Southern Ireland would be key, arguing that such a course would not “expose this country to any substantial re-entry into Ireland, nor

place upon it the responsibility for maintaining all branches of Irish Life.”¹⁴¹ The economic pressure, however, would exert the proper amount of pressure to bring them back in line. After receiving input from the members of his committee, he instructed them to draw up their plans in case they were needed.

By the middle of June, revised drafts of the constitution were being discussed between Churchill, Lloyd George, and Griffith. Churchill continued to argue for a peaceable compromise, arranging meetings between prominent Protestants and Griffith, to discuss the place of Protestants in the South. Soon an agreement had been reached and a Constitution was ready to be submitted to the electorate. On June 16, the proposed constitution was published throughout Ireland. It would establish the Irish Free State as “a co-equal member of the community of nations forming the British Commonwealth of nations,” with all power derived “from the people.” The King remained head of the legislature and power to declare war was vested in the Dail Eireann, now one of two houses in the elected bodies of Irish government, the other being the Senate. The people of Ireland traveled to the polls to cast their ballots on the approval of the Treaty on the same day the Constitution was published. Collins and the Pro-Treaty men won a great victory receiving 58 seats to De Valera’s 35. Collins, the Treaty and the new constitution, emerged victorious. The results helped to prove that Churchill’s faith in Collins and the Irish people was not misguided.

The Treaty’s adoption marked the end of the Irish struggle for recognition as a nation by the British Empire, but it also marked the beginning of hostilities between the new government and Republican forces. De Valera had been shut out and republicans were incensed. They controlled a great portion of the area surrounding Dublin,

¹³⁷ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 720

¹³⁸ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 722

¹³⁹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 723

¹⁴⁰ *The World Crisis*, pg. 227

¹⁴¹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 725

including counties Wexford, Sligo, Waterford, Limerick, Cork, and Tipperary. There the new government was despised on equal terms with the Crown. Churchill had hoped that Collins could suppress internal opposition, but resistance was strong. On June 21, just five days after the Treaty had been approved, as Sir Henry Wilson was climbing the steps of his house, he was shot by two men. Gilbert notes that his murder “was thought to be the signal for concerted Republican attacks on all prominent figures connected with the Irish Treaty, or Ulster.”¹⁴² Each cabinet minister was assigned protection immediately. His assassins were found with a letter from the IRA, which referenced the need for a vibrant operation in London. Given the evidence, the Cabinet concluded that Collins had to destroy his opposition and their army. Churchill drafted a letter to Collins, informing him that “the ambiguous position of the Irish Republican Army can no longer be ignored by the British Government.” The IRAs continued control of Courts of Justice must end. He concluded by reminding him that he now had the “declared will of the Irish people” and as such had a responsibility “to bring this state of affairs to an end.”¹⁴³ Collins’ administration delayed action, arguing they first needed to see the evidence and present it to the Dail.

When republicans began executing their nefarious plots within the Free State, Collins was prodded into action. After a General of the Free State Army was kidnapped in Dublin, Collins began forming plans to attack republican strongholds. At the Four Courts, a battle began at four in morning of June 28. After a day, Collins found he needed more supplies to earn a victory. He appealed to Churchill, but the British garrisons in the area needed to maintain their supplies, should the republicans be victorious, for their own

defense. Churchill warned the Cabinet that if help was not sent, Collins might be defeated. In response, the Cabinet provided Collins with shells, heavier guns, good gunners, and airplanes. On June 30, a corner of the Four Courts was capture. On July 2, the Republicans surrendered. July 6, the Provisional Government issued a proclamation declaring that it would deal drastically with anarchy, and calling for volunteers for the National Army. Churchill rejoiced, writing Collins “Ireland will be mistress in her own house, and we over here in a position to safeguard your Treaty rights and further your legitimate interests effectively.” Once order was restored, he urged, the sole objective of all involved, must be the unity of Ireland, saying “it is surely the goal towards which we must all look steadfastly.” He fondly pondered what the future might hold, explaining that “from the Imperial point of view there is nothing we should like better than to see North and South join hands in an all-Ireland assembly without prejudice to the existing rights of either.”¹⁴⁴ Churchill remained optimistic that a meeting between Collins and Craig might render a neutral zone between the two states, patrolled by the British, unnecessary.

July added to Churchill’s optimistic feelings. Collins worked vigorously to establish Free State control of the Southern counties, occupying Wexford, Waterford, Tipperary, and Limerick all by mid-July. By August, Churchill confidently told the Cabinet Committee on the Provisional Government of Ireland that “the establishment of a Republic would not be tolerated.”¹⁴⁵ Shortly after, republicans were driven from Cork. The advance of the Free State, however, was about to suffer serious setbacks. On August 12, Arthur Griffith suffered a heart attack and died, which Churchill described as a “serious blow.”¹⁴⁶ Two days later, Repub-

¹⁴² The Stricken World, pg. 733

¹⁴³ Quoted in Michael Collins, pg. 373-74

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 743

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 745

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in The Stricken World, pg. 745

licans executed their first successful attack and entered Dundalk, but thankfully were driven out just two days later. August 22, Michael Collins was assassinated in an ambush in Cork. “He was an Irish patriot, true and fearless.” Churchill later wrote, “[...] When in future times the Irish Free State is not only the home of culture and of virtue, not only prosperous and happy, but an active, powerful, and annealing force in the British Commonwealth of Nations, regard will be paid by widening circles to his life and to his death.”¹⁴⁷ He had been the leader of the Free State and the statesman, who fathered Irish independence. Shortly before his death, he sent Churchill one final message: “Tell Winston we could never have done anything without him.”¹⁴⁸

Fear grew as the Provisional Government began to wonder whether it could be sustained without Collins. The Cabinet worried that they would cut a deal with De Valera, which would embroil the Northern Counties into conflict with the Southern again. Churchill assured the Provisional Government that the deaths of Griffith and Collins did not jeopardize the standing of the Treaty in the eyes of the Cabinet. He then warned Cope that De Valera might “try to take advantage of the present situation to try to get back from the position of hunted rebel to that of a political negotiator.” He advised him that he should do everything he could to “frustrate this.” Churchill stressed that the fight to establish the Free State and defeat the Republican must continue. “The authority of the Irish people is still openly challenged,” he charged, “the Commander-in-Chief of the Irish Army and trusted leader has just fallen a victim to the enemy’s attack, and it is the duty of those who remain to draw closely together and carry his work to its conclusion.”¹⁴⁹ As it turned out, Churchill’s worries were misplaced. Collins’

death inspired the nation and made any compromise with the Republicans untenable. He soon turned optimistic again writing to a friend: “Ireland about wh[ich] you praise me is I think going to save itself. No one else is going to. They are a proud & gifted race & they are up against the grimmest fact. I do not believe they will succumb.”¹⁵⁰

Collins’ deaths ended all hope for conciliation between the Northern and Southern Counties. The battle for Irish independence continued through the summer and fall of 1922. In summing up Churchill’s service to the Irish cause, Gilbert writes:

He had worked for nearly a year to reconcile the conflicting passions of North and South. He had believed in, and sought to further, a United Ireland under the British Crown. He had guided complex legislation through a divided Parliament. He had stood firm against the extremists in both South and North. He had refused to be deflected from supporting the Treaty by terror by threat of war. At Lloyd George’s personal request, he had conducted delicate and prolonged negotiations with the Free State leaders. He had piloted the Treaty through the House of Commons, and had acted in Cabinet as the advocate and spokesman of political compromises, based upon a permanent constitutional link between Britain and Southern Ireland.¹⁵¹

On December 6, the Irish Free State became the official government of Southern Ireland. The work of Collins and Griffith had been realized. Churchill’s service to Ireland was inestimable. His affect was summed up best by Collins, who noted that it could not have been done without him.

¹⁴⁷ The World Crisis, pg. 229

¹⁴⁸ Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, pg. 745

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 746

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in *The Stricken World*, pg. 747

¹⁵¹ Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, pg. 749

CONCLUSION

When London's Mayor, a Churchill admirer, was asked to sum up what made Churchill great, he responded, "Churchill's greatness was to stick to his guns, even when everyone else thought he was wrong and to never, never, never give in...it was his absolute determination to stick to what he had decided, rightly or wrong. I am afraid quite often it was wrongly."¹⁵² It is this resilience, this great stubbornness that marked Churchill for distinction. When pitted against an evil too great for compromise, such as Nazi Germany, a man like Churchill could become a hero. Johnson errs in his estimation because he fails to fully account for the breadth of Churchill's guiding doctrine, a common mistake among many of his critics and even many supporters. In his answer, he paraphrases Churchill's famous quote: "Never give in, never give in, *never never never never* – in nothing great or small, large, or petty." Johnson is not alone in taking this advice and attributing all of Churchill's failures to his insurmountable stubbornness. In his career, however, Churchill preferred to emphasize the rarely quoted end to his famous quote that one should "never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense."¹⁵³ It is this qualifying statement that marks his career out for distinction and made possible his statesmanship. In leaving out his plea to give in to convictions of honor and good sense, Churchill's desire for moderation is overshadowed by his resolute stand against evil, which one can never find honorable or sensible. Fanatics never give in. Mere politicians only give in for personal political gain. The statesman, preferring a moderate course, gives in when it is wise to do so and when it does not violate his principles.

Churchill exemplified the virtues of the statesman in dealing with the Irish question and the formation of the Irish Free State. He sought to promote self-government, while strengthening the Empire's position. He sought to insure good government for the citizens of Ireland, while he oversaw the transfer of power. He used prudence to determine the course of action least suited to bloodshed and most conducive to justice, the ends of the Empire, and the well-being of the Irish. He battled against the extremes in favor of moderation and brought the people along with him. He was able to earn the praise of all English Parties and the respect of the Irish leaders. Through his statesmanship, a century long epoch of British-Irish tensions came to a close for the foreseeable future. Ireland for the first time in over 700 years saw an Irish Parliament sit.

Churchill did not become a statesman on May 10, 1940. The experiences he faced and obstacles he overcame allowed him to hone his craft of leading. His career must be understood as a whole. He was guided by the same coherent doctrine and dedicated to the same guiding principles. He acted with similar foresight and prudence and maintained the same courage necessary to stand up to fight for a just resolution to a contentious problem. The Churchill that brokered the formation of the Irish Free State was the same Churchill who defended the free world against Nazi oppression.

¹⁵² Boris Johnson,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTyCri6XSvc>

¹⁵³ Churchill, *Never Give In*, pg. 307

