

Ireland and the First World War



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Ireland and the First World War

Chapter 1



Germany



How to help English people understand that Ireland should have sided with Germany in the First World War?

Some Irish did, which ultimately was what led to Ireland's freedom from Britain. It led to the War of Independence and the freedom of Ireland. Siding with Germany was the right choice and but for a quirk of history Ireland would have sided overwhelmingly with Germany in 1914, and Britain would have lost World War One.

But for a quirk of history.

That quirk was Home Rule.

Ireland and the First World War

Chapter 2



Germany - Part II



Some Irish knew it

[Seachtar Na Cásca – End Scene – Aoife Scott sings Róisín Dubh](#)

They knew it was the right choice.

Ireland and the First World War

Chapter 3



Germany - Part III



*Should Ireland have fought alongside Germany in the
First World War? No.*

When I say that Ireland should have sided with Germany, I do not mean that.

Germany was an aggressor who invaded France without provocation. For this reason alone it would not have been right to fight alongside Germany.

Besides, historically the ties between Ireland and France have been strong. And good.

Let me explain.



*The Irish Republic is based on the French Republic.
The Irish flag is based on the French flag.*

The idea of nationhood in Ireland derives from two key sources. One is Ancient Greece. The other is the French Revolution. So let us consider France now.

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité

*The right to be free. The right of a people to self-determination. This is the basis of the Irish Republic. This ideal is based on the French ideal of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, which came from the French Revolution. It is from France that Ireland takes this concept of nationhood. It is from the French flag that the Irish flag was inspired. The Irish flag is a flag of peace. The white symbolises peace. Peace between the Green and the Orange. The Irish flag is also a flag of revolution. For within that flag is the ideal that it is *right* to take a stand against any that threaten that freedom.*

These are the ideals on which the Irish flag is based.



In 1796 the French sent a fleet of 43 ships and 14,000 men to help Ireland in her war against Britain

The Irish had sent an emissary by the name of Wolfe Tone to France to beseech Napoleon for aid against the English. Napoleon responded with this fleet under the command of General Hoche.

Unfortunately for Ireland a great storm blew up, driving back the French fleet before they could land in Bantry Bay, Co Kerry, on the South West of Ireland. That storm changed the course of history, because but for that storm Ireland would have driven out the English in 1796 with the aid of the French.

The French sent a second fleet in 1798, this time under the command of General Humbert. They landed in Killala Bay in Co Mayo on the West coast of Ireland, and with the support of the French Ireland rose once again in war against England. The combined armies of the French and the Irish were defeated, and Ireland's attempts to break free of the British Empire were once again thwarted.

1798 is known in Ireland as *The Year of the French*.

That Ireland could not break free is unfortunate, but what is important here is that when Ireland's need was great, France was there to help. France sent a fleet of 43 ships with 14,000 men in 1796, and two years later in 1798 a fleet with 2,000 men. When Ireland's need was great, France sent help. This is most important.



The Irish flag is based on the French flag

The ideals of the Irish Republic based on The French Republic. The Irish Revolution based on the French Revolution. (Actually we had many revolutions. But the ones after 1789 were inspired by the French Revolution.)

The ideal of Nationhood in Ireland based on French Nationhood. This ties Ireland very strongly to France.

So when I say that Ireland was right to side with Germany in the First World War, I do not mean that it was right to fight alongside Germany. And it most certainly would not have been right to fight against friends such as the French.

I do not mean that. I mean something else.

The Forging of Ireland

Chapter 1



France and Spain – Chapter I



To understand the Act of Union of 1800 between Britain and Ireland, understand The Year of the French

Because the Act of Union came in as a direct result of 1796 and 1798. Britain almost lost Ireland, and the ideals of nationhood and self-determination that were being introduced into Ireland threatened the basis of the British Empire. The Act of Union was therefore brought in by the English to crush Irish resistance and to ensure that Ireland could never again rise in rebellion. And to ensure that ideals of freedom and self-determination that could threaten the stability of the British Empire would not be able to take hold in any country that was a part of that Empire.

*To understand the Act of Union of 1800, understand the **French***

Because it came in direct response to Ireland's alliance with France.

If you understand this, you understand the reason for the Act of Union of 1800.

The Forging of Ireland

Chapter 2



France and Spain – Chapter II



To understand the Unionist Plantation of Northern Ireland, understand Ireland's alliance with Spain

In the late 16th century, the greatest stronghold of Irish resistance to English occupation came from Northern Ireland. This was the strongest bastion of the Irish language, for the English had very little control in the North of Ireland. Queen Elizabeth had tried for years to take Northern Ireland, but without success.

The Nine Years War to drive the English out of Ireland was led by the Ulstermen, for these held the strongest bastion of Irish language and forces, and were the least under the influence of the English.

The Ulstermen fought their way right down through Ireland with several notable victories, such as the Battle of Yellow Ford in 1598 (*Cath Bhéal an Átha Buí* in Irish.) While the Irish fleets under the command of Queen Gráinne Ní Mháille harried English shipping lines.

And then, in 1601, The Irish armies under the command of the Ulstermen met with their Spanish allies in Kinsale, Co. Cork, in the South of Ireland.

The Forging of Ireland

Chapter 3



France and Spain – Chapter III



The Nine Years War from 1593 to 1603 was to drive the English out of Ireland

To do this the Irish appealed to Spain for aid, for Spain was at war with Queen Elizabeth of England. The Spanish sent a fleet under the command of Juan Del Águila y Arellano to meet the Irish armies at Kinsale, in the South of Ireland. And there, from 1601 to 1602 at the Battle of Kinsale, the battle for the future of Ireland was waged. However the combined armies of the Irish and her Spanish allies were defeated by the English and once again the attempt to break free from the British Empire was thwarted.

With the defeat of the Ulstermen, the North of Ireland could now be taken by the English. But because the North of Ireland had been such a stronghold for the Irish, and the last bastion of freedom from the English, and the greatest stronghold of the Irish language, the English decided to crush that stronghold and eradicate the Irish language, culture and people from the North of Ireland. By the ethnic cleansing of the Irish people in the North and the settlement of a Plantation of Unionists in their place.

If you understand this, you understand the reason for the Unionist Plantation.

Ireland and the First World War

Chapter 4



Home Rule



After the Act of Union in 1800, there was nothing more important than getting our own Irish Parliament back

It was not considered possible that we could break free completely from Britain. Britain was too strong, and Ireland was an impoverished country. It wasn't just England. Not just the country of England. It was the British Empire. You see the Empire spanned the globe. Its economy was a global economy. Its wealth was global. It could pull armies and resources from many nations. It was a global superpower.

Ireland by contrast had nineteen famines in the nineteenth century. At the rank of famine. A famine almost every five years. The Great Famine of the 1840s killed over a million, but there were another eighteen famines that century. And in the early nineteenth century, education of the Irish was still punishable by death. A man could be hung if caught teaching a nursery rhyme to a child in Irish. For those who are familiar with the concept of "hedge schools" in Irish history, this is what I refer to.

Every attempt at rebellion had been crushed, and the last stronghold of Irish independence from Britain – Ulster – had fallen. What had once been the strongest bastion of resistance against the English was now the strongest stronghold of British, because of the Unionist Plantation of the North.

England's hold over Ireland was now very strong.

As such, getting full independence from Britain was not considered possible at the time. However getting our parliament back would be an important first step. It would give us some measure of autonomy. And it would be a stepping stone to push for greater independence again. This is why there was nothing more important than getting our own parliament back.



Particularly after the Great Famine of the 1840s

Ireland produced six times more food during the famine years than was required to feed the population. In fact exports of a number of foods increased to England during the famine years.

You see Ireland had bumper harvests during the famine years. Bumper harvests in wheat and other crops. Only one crop failed. The potato. But wheat and other crops had bumper harvests. There was also livestock. Cattle and sheep. But you see none of these were available to the Irish. These crops and livestock were for the English landlords, who ran their vast estates in Ireland from England. Many had never even visited these estates in Ireland. They were simply cash-cows. Ireland was a cash-cow, to generate wealth for England gentry. The steady stream of money from Ireland was used to build the great manor houses in England.

The Irish were not allowed access to the wheat and other crops, except to grow them for the English landlords. And so it was that shipload after shipload of food was shipped to England under armed guard while the Irish died by the million.

This made a very deep impact on the psyche of the Irish. It was to do with the sense of disempowerment, for there was nothing the Irish could do.

Hence the drive for Home Rule and our own parliament. It was imperative that Ireland take back a measure of power. Because of the Great Famine in particular. It was imperative that Ireland be able to make government decisions to protect our people from these famines, in a century where we were having a famine almost every five years. If you understand this, you understand the drive for Home Rule.



Charles Stewart Parnell, a Wicklow man, led Ireland's push for Home Rule in the 1880s

He was prominent in the *Irish National Land League*, trying to help poor tenants to own the land they worked on and to abolish landlordism – the conditions which had caused so many famines. This period of history is known in Ireland as the *Land War*.

And he led the *Irish Parliamentary Party* in its push for Home Rule. Undeterred by a stint in Kilmainham Gaol in 1882, he continued to push for Home Rule. And he almost, *almost* got it.

But the deal fell through.

It was close though. Ireland was close to Home Rule. People could feel it. Emotions were running high. This attempt came close. *Very* close.

The next attempt would win through. That was the sentiment.



The Irish Parliament buildings on the left (now Bank of Ireland), with Trinity College to the right

The Irish Parliament met for the last time in these buildings in January, 1800. This is what the Irish wanted back. Our own parliament.

And in 1914 we almost had it. For once again Ireland was pushing through a Home Rule bill. We had it – pretty much. It was all wrapped up. All sorted! After all the effort and push and drive we had it! Pretty much. England had said ok, fine, we can have Home Rule in Ireland. They just needed to sign off the forms. Do the paperwork. Have it signed off in the English Parliament. Put a few signatures to it. And then we had it.

Hurray! Finally, after all that work, we were going to have our own Parliament once again. A stepping stone to freedom.



*But then something happened. Something unforeseen.
Something catastrophic. Something disastrous.*

World War One broke out. Or rather *The Great War*, as it was called then. The term World War One didn't come in until later.

Why was this disastrous for Ireland? Because the English said that they were now putting Home Rule on hold until after the war.

The English refused to sign the Home Rule Bill. Because the Great War had just broken out.

Which was a bit of a problem for Ireland. Because there was nothing more important for Ireland than breaking free of the British Empire.

And Home Rule was a critical first step.



The Dublin Lockout of 1913

One must remember that in 1914 the English were hated in Ireland. We had a famine almost every five years in the nineteenth century and the Great Famine was within living memory. Tensions were high in 1913 with the Great Lockout strike in Dublin. Conditions were appalling.

England was the sworn enemy of Ireland. It is important to understand this historical background. For we need to understand why so many Irish chose to fight alongside our greatest enemy against a country that had done us no wrong. (Even though we wouldn't have been happy about them invading France. We'll come back to that one shortly.)



Opinions were divided. Some Irish saw this as a great opportunity, like these gun-runners on the Asgard.

The Asgard was a sailing ship that was used to smuggle in rifles from Hamburg in 1914. These weapons were used in the Easter Rising of 1916 and again in the War of Independence from 1919 to 1921.

The idea was to strike at England when she was at her weakest, engaged in war against another major power. Germany. Just as Ireland had sided with Spain and with France when England was at war with those countries.

The idea was not to send Irish troops to fight *alongside* Germany. But rather to ask for German aid in terms of weapons and to use the opportunity to strike at England while she was at war with another major power.

This was the philosophy of those who fought in the Easter Rising of 1916, and ultimately it is what led to Irish Independence. It is because of this that Ireland has a Tricolour flying over her now rather than a Union Jack.

This was the correct decision.



*Another faction however, led by John Redmond,
favoured the Home Rule approach*

Unlike those who advocated siding with Germany, many did not believe that Ireland could achieve full independence and a Republic. They believed that Home Rule was the best we could achieve at that point in time.

John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, was very influential. He said that Ireland's best course of action would be to side with England in the war. This would ensure that once the war was over we would gain Home Rule. It was believed that if we sent troops to aid England, then England would have no choice but to ratify Home Rule once the war concluded.

It was a crazy decision, which sent the bulk of our fighting manhood to fight for the enemy, rather than keeping our strength in Ireland to fight for our independence. It was as a result of this crazy decision that the 1916 Rising was defeated. Which set up the conditions for the War of Independence and the Civil War.

The War of Independence and the Civil War would never have happened if not for this crazy decision. And the North of Ireland would not have been partitioned.

And Ireland would have achieved her Republic far earlier. It was a crazy decision.



*One must remember that the Irish who fought in **WWI** did not fight for **England**. They fought for **Home Rule**.*

They were fighting *for independence from England*. Of which Home Rule was seen as a critical first step.

Those who fought in the Easter Rising of 1916 and those who fought in the Great War on the side of England were both fighting for the same thing. Irish independence.

It is simply that the approach differed on the best way to achieve this independence.

By going all the way for a Republic. Or by going for Home Rule as a stepping stone to a Republic.

Actually, many of those Irish would fought alongside England in the Great War fought against England in the War of Independence a couple of years later. Because once they had a chance to think about it, they realised that the approach taken by the men and women of the Easter Rising was the right course of action.

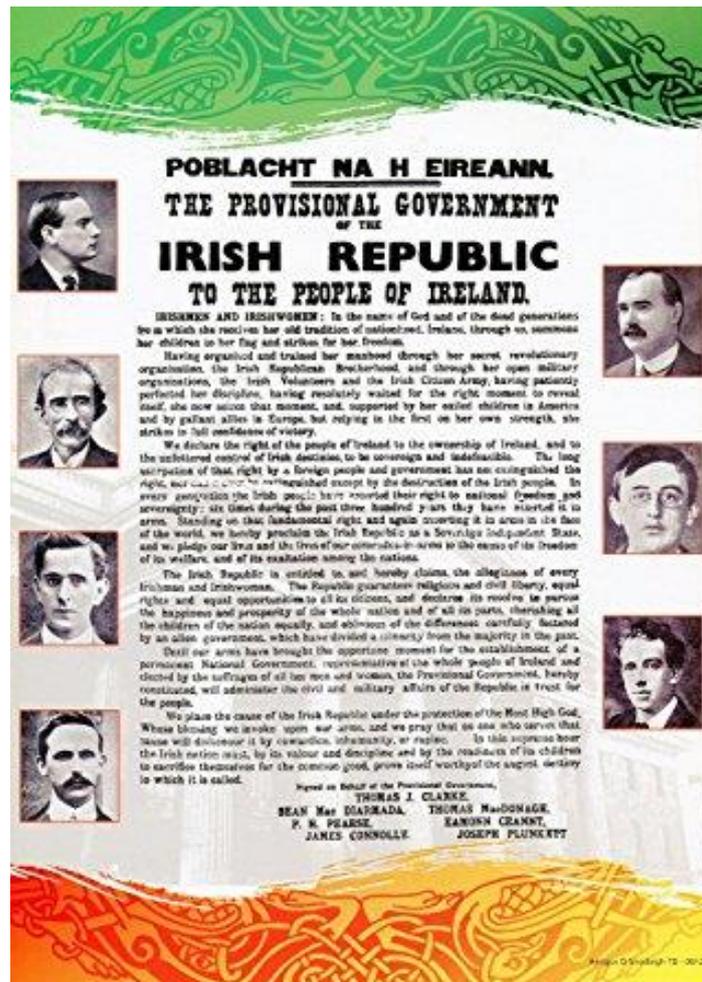


*That Ireland did not side en masse with Germany in the
Great War was a great tragedy for Ireland*

The Civil War would never have happened if we had sided with Germany. And the North of Ireland would not have been partitioned.

What of France? Could we have sent help to France as they sent help to us in 1796 and 1798?

If we had been in a place of strength, with an independent Ireland, then this could most certainly have been considered. But Ireland was already at war with England, and our first priority must have been to break ourselves free first. Only then could we have been in a position to help others.



To those who did go to war with England in 1916 with the aid of German arms, it was the right decision

It was all about Independence. If you understand that, you understand why it was right for Ireland to have sided with Germany in the Great War.

Not right to have fought against other countries, apart from England. But right to have sought German aid in our fight for Independence.

Ireland and the First World War

Chapter 5



Germany – Part IV



Richthofen's Flying Circus

Ireland and the First World War



End