

THE CAUSES OF THE IRISH CIVIL WAR

The Treaty

1. This must be regarded as the main cause of the Civil War. It was a decisive issue that divided Irish people into those who supported it and those who opposed it.
2. Those who opposed it believed it was a betrayal of their republican dreams.
3. Those who supported the Treaty argued that it was a "stepping stone to freedom" or "the freedom to achieve freedom".
4. The treaty had split the Dáil cabinet with Collins, Griffith, Barton and Cosgrave in favour and DeValera, Brugha and Stack opposing it.
5. The Dáil had voted 64:57 on the issue.
6. DeValera had resigned as President of the Dáil and sided with the anti-Treaty group.

The split in the IRA and the country

1. The IRA had operated in autonomous groups around the country and never really been under any civil direction. Most of the members had loyalty primarily to their local commanders.
2. Richard Mulcahy had hoped that they would form the basis of a new national army for the Free State - but this was not to be the case.
3. Some IRA commanders favoured the Treaty but a very sizeable group of officers - including Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Liam Lynch and Tom Barry opposed it.
4. Opposition was particularly strong in Munster.
5. An IRA Army Convention in March 1922 rejected the authority of the Dáil.
6. The anti-treaty forces came to be known as the Irregulars (or Republicans) whereas the pro-treaty forces were called the Free-Staters or Regulars.

Weakness of provisional government

1. It was only temporary, not permanent.
2. The process of taking over power from the British was to be done gradually, over a 12-month period.
3. The provisional government had no constitution or status and the Dáil government was still in existence.
4. This added to the impression of confusion and chaos.
5. The Free State government was to come into existence on 6th December 1922.
6. The lack of constitutional status was to be a handicap and gave the excuse to anti-treaty forces to act outside the law.

Actions of the anti-treaty IRA

1. The anti-treaty IRA made it clear that they had no intention of losing the initiative.
2. They disputed the takeover of RIC and British army barracks by attacking the barracks in Clonmel in a raid for arms and carrying out a similar attack in Limerick.
3. In April they seized the Four Courts and other strongholds in Dublin and issued a declaration in which they refused to recognise the Provisional government.
4. They declared the Four Courts to be the headquarters of the Republican government.
5. The anti-treaty forces were able to get considerable supplies of arms from RIC and British barracks.

Failure of the Collins/De Valera pact

1. Supporters and opponents of the treaty would not run against each other in the election but stand as Sinn Féin candidates with the aim of forming a coalition government in which the anti-treatyites would get some seats and places on the National Executive.
 2. Collins repudiated the pact just before the election.
 3. Lloyd George said that the pact violated the treaty by being an agreement with republicans.
- In the June 1922 election the pro-treaty side won 58 seats to the anti-treaty 36 seats.

The immediate trigger

1. The out break of hostilities came with the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson in London who was felt to be responsible for attacks on Catholics in the North.
2. This led the British government to inform Collins that they could no longer tolerate the situation in the Four Courts (they believed that the commanders there had ordered the assassination).
3. This led Collins to take his painful decision to attack the Four Courts on 28th June.
4. The immediate effect was to polarise the conflict and the Civil war had begun.