

De Valera, Éamon ('Dev')

by Ronan Fanning

De Valera, Éamon ('Dev') (1882–1975), teacher, revolutionary, taoiseach, and president of Ireland, was born 14 October 1882 in the Nursery and Child's Hospital, Lexington Avenue, Manhattan, New York, the only child of Juan Vivion de Valera and Catherine ('Kate') Coll (1856–1932); he was christened Edward (although recorded as 'George' in the baptismal register) at St Agnes church, 141 East 43rd St., on 3 December 1882. Catherine Coll was born 21 December 1856 in Bruree, Co. Limerick, eldest among four children of Patrick Coll and Elizabeth Coll (née Carroll); aged 17 when her father died, she had already been working as a maid for neighbouring farmers and on 21 September 1879, aged 22, she emigrated to Brooklyn, New York. While working there for a French family in 1880 she met Vivion de Valera, who had been born (1853) in Spain's Basque country, where his father was an army officer who later brought his family to Cuba; Vivion moved to New York in the 1870s to advance his career as a sculptor. According to de Valera's own account, his parents' marriage took place on 19 September 1881 in Greenville, New Jersey, where his mother was then working; they then returned to New York, where they lived first in Brooklyn and then at 61 East 41st St., Manhattan (UCDA P 150/1). That there is no documentary evidence of the marriage fuelled rumours of de Valera's illegitimacy sporadically disseminated by political opponents; other local rumours that he was the son of a Limerick farmer named Atkinson, for whom his mother had worked as a maid before emigrating, must be discounted on chronological grounds. Vivion de Valera had suffered from bronchial illness before he was married, and when it recurred (1884), he took medical advice to go west to a drier climate. Edward de Valera, who was not yet two years old, never saw his father again. His notes on a bible he won as a school prize indicate that his father died in November 1884, in Denver or in Minneapolis: 'he was 5' 7" or 5' 8" [1.7–1.73 m] in height & could wear mother's shoes' (Farragher, 8). His mother did not learn of his father's death until the spring of 1885, when financial necessity dictated her return to domestic service as a nursemaid with a Dr Dawson in Fifth Avenue; as a temporary expedient she put her own child out to nurse with a Mrs Doyle, another Bruree immigrant, of Grand St., Manhattan. 'My mother had to surrender me in order to earn her living', recalled de Valera seventy years later, and he claimed to remember a 'woman in black . . . a rather slim woman, pale face, with a handbag', visiting him (UCDA P150/87).

The return to Ireland on medical advice of his mother's brother, Edward ('Ned') Coll, then working in Connecticut, provided an enduring expedient, involving the permanent separation of mother and son: Uncle Ned brought the infant Edward back to Knockmore, Bruree. De Valera, although then only two and a half, later claimed that his arrival at 'Cove' on the SS *City of Chicago* on 18 April 1885 was 'the second event clearly recorded in my memory' (UCDA P150/1). The other members of the

Coll household were his 49-year-old grandmother, Elizabeth Coll, and his 15-year-old Aunt Hannie, of whom he became very fond but who also went to America in 1887; shortly afterwards his mother briefly visited Bruree before returning to New York, where she married Charles E. Wheelwright (1857–1927), a non-catholic Englishman, who worked as a coachman for a wealthy family in Rochester, New York; they lived over the stables in the grounds of the estate and had two children, both reared as catholics: Annie (1889–97), and Thomas (1890–1946) who was ordained as a Redemptorist priest in June 1916.

Early life and education When de Valera arrived in Bruree the Colls were moving into a new government-built, three-roomed, slate-roofed labourer's cottage with a half-acre of land; asleep in the old pre-famine, one-room, mud-walled, and thatched family home he recalled 'waking up in the morning and screaming . . . alone in a strange place' and being told that his uncle was in 'the new house' (UCDA P150/87). He also remembered saving hay, picking blackberries and mushrooms, and avoiding the police while grazing cows on the 'long acre' by the roadside. There was very little fresh meat, only bacon; no electricity, but candles and paraffin lamps; water was usually drawn from open wells; hay and corn were cut with scythes. There were few books and the first novel he read was Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Edward de Valera received his primary education at Bruree national school (7 May 1888–9 October 1896), where he was known as Eddie Coll. He regarded his grandmother's death, on 31 July 1895 when he was only 12, as 'a definite milestone'; she had hoped that he might become a priest; his uncle wanted him to become a monitor in the local school. De Valera, who had thought of joining his mother in America, felt he must plan his own future, and he emulated another boy from Bruree who had won a scholarship to the CBS at Charleville. Although it was seven miles away and the only train left Bruree at 7.40 a.m., he started school there on 2 November 1896; he often walked home as there was no evening train and a bicycle was beyond his means – he sometimes rode into Charleville on a donkey. When he learnt in 1898 that he had won a junior grade exhibition worth £20, he felt his 'life's ambition had been realized' and that he 'was now . . . on the road to success'. A chance encounter on holiday in Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare, between the local curate and the then president of Blackrock College, led to an invitation to go there on the understanding that the amount paid in the exhibition would be accepted in lieu of fees (£40) (UCDA P150/13, Farragher, 13).

Admission to the Holy Ghost Fathers' secondary school for the catholic elite was a giant step up the ladder of social mobility. 'From the time I heard that I was to go to Blackrock', he recalled, 'I was really walking on air. No more trudging over the interminable distance, as it seemed, from Knockmore to Charleville or from Charleville to Knockmore. No more chopping of turnips for the cows, or the drawing of water, or the attempts to do my lessons in the intervals . . . I remember well how happy I was on that night – my first night in the College. I could not understand why boys coming to such a place should be weeping. I had heard some sobbing; but for me this coming was really the entry into heaven' (P150/22). That a child whose

father had died and whose mother had 'surrendered' him before he was three should have so immediately identified with Blackrock College as home was unsurprising. He spent his first Christmas as a boarder there rather than returning to Bruree, and chose to live most of his life, and to die, in close proximity to the college.

De Valera's standing as a scholarship boy in Blackrock depended on repeating his success in public examinations, and he duly won middle grade and senior grade exhibitions in 1899 and 1900. The best student in his class, John D'Alton (qv), the future cardinal and archbishop of Armagh, later described him as 'a good, very serious student, good at mathematics but not outstanding otherwise'. De Valera's own recollections show that what he 'relished from the start were the long uninterrupted hours in the study hall in the early morning before class and again throughout the evening'; in his textbooks, which he preserved and later presented to the college, he wrote his name 'Edward de Valera, French College, Blackrock . . . several times even on the same page . . . staking out what were his most cherished personal possessions, and perhaps asserting a new identity' (Farragher, 35, 17). That identity was shaped by a religious and Victorian ethos: the prize books he won included Walter Scott's *The lady of the lake*, Macaulay's *Essays and lays of ancient Rome*, and Isaac Disraeli's *Miscellany of literature*. Unlike Blackrock contemporaries such as Pádraic Ó Conaire (qv) he did not attend Irish-language classes and showed no interest in the language revival; nor was he among the handful of more nationalist-minded boys who refused to raise their caps and cheer when Queen Victoria's carriage passed the college en route from Kingstown in April 1900.

Williamstown Castle had been acquired by Blackrock as a civil service college in 1875, and from 1881 it also housed a department to prepare students for the examinations of the Royal University, offering a four-year degree in arts which de Valera entered in the autumn of 1900. He also participated in the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society and visited the patients of the nearby Linden Convalescent Home, where he lived his last days. In 1903–4 de Valera accepted an appointment as a replacement teacher of mathematics and physics in Rockwell, the Holy Ghost Fathers' sister college near Cashel, Co. Tipperary. He remembered his two years there as the happiest of his life – it was there that he was first nicknamed 'Dev'. The toils of teaching were relieved by rugby – he was captain of the combined team of masters and boys in 1904 – and what he later laughingly described as "'totty twigging'" excursions to Stewart's Hotel in Cashel, where he 'played the gallant' with the proprietor's daughter (Farragher, 64, 77–8; Edwards, 37). Despite returning to Blackrock outside teaching term to study, such distractions – coupled with the grind of teaching in both Blackrock and Rockwell – may have contributed to his failure to achieve the honours to which he aspired in the Royal University's BA examination in mathematical science in October 1904. 'He was thoroughly disgusted and was to regret it all his life' (Farragher, 83). De Valera had been so comfortable in the constant company of priests and would-be seminarians that he had intermittently considered entering the priesthood; and it was also in 1904, after a weekend retreat with the Jesuits in Rathfarnham Castle, that he claimed to have abandoned all ideas

of a religious vocation – although he again raised the subject with the president of Clonliffe College in 1906 (Coogan, 37–8).

His real vocation seemed to be teaching, and there followed a string of temporary, part-time appointments that included Belvedere College (1905–6); Dominican College, Eccles St., Dublin (1906–8); Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin; St Mary's College, Rathmines, Dublin; and, most significantly, the Teachers Training College of Our Lady of Mercy, Carysfort, Blackrock, where he was grandiloquently described as professor of mathematics from September 1906 until October 1912, and where he claimed to have trained over 1,000 women as teachers. His reluctance to sever his almost familial ties with Blackrock was reflected in his obtaining permission to live in the Castle, which was only ten minutes' walk to Carysfort, where he taught from 9.00 to 11.00, leaving him time to cycle around the city to his other teaching engagements but little time for postgraduate research, despite his attending courses in TCD and UCD.

1908 – the foundation year of the NUI, which made Irish a compulsory subject for matriculation and created pressure for its inclusion in the Carysfort syllabus – was a pivotal year in de Valera's life. He determined to learn Irish and moved into lodgings in nearby Merrion View Avenue, where his landlady was a native Irish-speaker from Mayo. He also joined the Gaelic League, where he was immediately smitten by his Irish teacher, Sinéad (Jane) Flanagan (Sinéad de Valera (qv)), who was four years older and a primary school teacher and amateur actor. Their engagement was short – 'we hardly knew each other until we were engaged' recalled Sinéad (de Valera, 107) – and they married (8 January 1910) in St Paul's church, Arran Quay, Dublin; after a short honeymoon at a hotel in Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, they lived briefly at Vernon Terrace, Booterstown, Blackrock, before moving into 33 Morehampton Terrace, Donnybrook. Although de Valera had insisted on being married through Irish, he still signed his 1911 census return as 'Edward' rather than as 'Éamonn' (transmuted to 'Éamon' in the late 1920s), the name by which he was always henceforth known – he entered his languages on the census form as 'English and Irish' and Sinéad's as 'Irish and English'. In 1910–13 de Valera brought the zeal of the convert to his work in the Gaelic League; he became a delegate to the ard fheis, and when the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) thwarted his nomination to the executive committee he wrongly blamed Sinn Féin. He was also appointed a director of the summer school in Tawin, an Irish-speaking island in Galway Bay, for a three-year term in 1911.

His pass degree and lack of postgraduate qualifications (other than his 1910 higher diploma in education from the NUI) blighted his hopes for a permanent academic appointment in the NUI: in April 1912 he applied for the chair of mathematical physics in UCG but withdrew in favour of a better qualified candidate; and in May 1913, despite strong canvassing on his behalf by priests and by members of the Gaelic League, he was defeated in a contest for the same post in UCC, whose president, Bertram Windle (qv), resisted the chair's becoming 'a fief of insurgent

linguistic nationalism' (Edwards, 42). But in October 1912 he was appointed temporary lecturer and head of the department of mathematics and mathematical physics in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, a recognised college of the NUI, for which he had been invited to apply by Daniel Mannix (qv), then about to relinquish the presidency of Maynooth for the archbishopric of Melbourne, Australia.

Revolutionary nationalist, 1914–1918 Like many Irish-speaking nationalists, de Valera's political horizons were confined to a full measure of home rule, but that changed dramatically when he joined the Irish Volunteers at their inaugural meeting in Dublin's Rotunda Rink (25 November 1913). Believing that the upshot would be armed conflict, he overcame the inhibitions of a married man with three children under three years old. His commitment was unqualified, and diligent attendance at weekly drill meetings and more advanced military exercises led to his promotion as captain of the Donnybrook company. He bought his own Mauser pistol for £5 and participated in the Howth gun-running (26 July 1914), ferrying rifles around Dublin in the sidecar of the motor-cycle he had bought to get to and from Maynooth. He rebuilt his much depleted company after siding with the small minority who opposed the call of John Redmond (qv) in September 1914 for the Volunteers to enlist in the war against Germany. In March 1915 he was appointed commandant of the 3rd Battalion, comprising the companies in the south-east of the city, after he had satisfied Patrick Pearse (qv) of his willingness to participate in a rising; he then became adjutant to Thomas MacDonagh (qv), the brigade commander. Disconcerted to discover that others in his battalion knew more than he did about the impending rising, he complained to MacDonagh, who explained that this was because he was not a member of the IRB, the secret oath-bound organisation that had infiltrated the Volunteers and effectively controlled its executive. De Valera, who identified with the catholic church's opposition to secret societies, demurred about taking the required oath. He resolved his dilemma by a fudge characteristic of other pedantic compromises that studded his political career. He agreed to be sworn in by MacDonagh on the understanding that his oath only involved accepting the orders of the Volunteers' executive, and that he would attend no meetings and know no secrets (including the names of other members) of the IRB, which he left after the rising of Easter 1916.

During the rising de Valera's battalion occupied Boland's Mill, commanding the south-east approaches over the Grand Canal; isolated and without scouting parties, they knew little of what was happening elsewhere. Understandably unsure of how best to deploy his hundred-strong force, which saw so little fighting that its casualties were in single figures, de Valera's military leadership was indecisive but hyper-active, and he went without sleep for five days. But what he did in the rising mattered little when set against the iconic stature he acquired in its aftermath as the only surviving commandant, when his sentence of death on 8 May by a military court was commuted to life imprisonment. Although his wife got the American consul to intervene – 'I had his baptism certificate showing that he had been born in America and . . . [as] he had never taken out naturalisation papers here . . . he was an

American citizen' (Farragher, 113) – his escape owed more to luck. When General John Maxwell (qv) decided to proceed with the execution of James Connolly (qv) on 12 May (notwithstanding a telegram telling him to stop the executions from Asquith, the British prime minister), he asked the crown prosecuting officer, W. E. Wylie (qv), whether de Valera, who was next on the list, was important. 'Wylie made the immortal reply: "No. He is a school-master who was taken at Boland's Mill"' (Coogan, 78) and de Valera's life was spared.

De Valera's imprisonment, first in Mountjoy jail and then in four English prisons (Dartmoor, Lewes, Maidstone, and Pentonville), massively enhanced his standing among revolutionary nationalists. Age and education (he was older and much better educated than most fellow prisoners), military seniority, and schoolmasterly authority contributed to his meteoric emergence as leader. So, too, did his self-sufficiency, intelligence, capacity for independent thought, communication skills, and readiness to confront the prison authorities. He was initially opposed to Sinn Féin's participation in electoral politics which began to gather momentum after the release of all untried political prisoners at Christmas 1916, arguing that 'as soldiers' Irish Volunteers 'should abstain *officially* . . . and no candidates should in future be *officially* recognized as standing in our interests or as representing our ideals' (Longford & O'Neill, 56–7). He drafted the letter from a Lewes prisoner, Joseph McGuinness (qv), refusing nomination in the Longford by-election in May 1917, but 'never mentioned the word "republic"', referring instead to ' "Ireland's freedom", "absolute independence" and "the independence position"' (Laffan, 242); but his opposition was disregarded by the leadership in Ireland, and McGuinness won the seat. When all the convicted prisoners were finally released, it was de Valera who paraded them before boarding the boat on their triumphal return from Holyhead on 18 June 1917.

He had been selected as the candidate for a by-election in Clare East before his release and he now abandoned his reservations about running on the Sinn Féin ticket. He campaigned in his Volunteer uniform, telling audiences that they 'must be prepared to fight against England' and that every vote was 'as good as the crack of a rifle' (Laffan, 210); but he denied that he was an anarchist or an atheist, saying that 'all his life he had been associated with priests, and the priests knew him and were behind him in this election'. While he insisted that the 1916 rising 'had saved the soul of Ireland', he also declared that 'another Easter week would be a superfluity'; but 'he and his friends' 'would not altogether eliminate physical force from their programme' when that 'would mean that John Bull could kick as much as he liked' (Miller, 393–4). This tightrope act between the poles of clerical and revolutionary support fashioned a two-to-one majority that began forty years of uninterrupted election victories in Clare and signalled de Valera's emergence as a popular hero. His leadership was endorsed by his election as president of Sinn Féin on 25 October 1917, a post he held until 1926; on 27 October he was also elected president of the Irish Volunteers (more generally known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) from 1919). When the Sinn Féin ard fheis had split between republicans

and those, like Arthur Griffith (qv), who opposed proclaiming the party's aim as a republic, it was de Valera who formulated the unanimously accepted compromise: 'Sinn Féin aims at securing the international recognition of Ireland as an independent Irish Republic. Having achieved that status the Irish people may by referendum choose their own form of government.' It was 'not the time for discussion on the best forms of government', he told the ard fheis; they all wanted 'complete and absolute independence. Get that and we will agree to differ afterwards' (Moynihan, 7–8). As president of Sinn Féin, de Valera was voted an annual salary of £500 a year that enabled him to improve the material circumstances of his family he was to see so rarely before 1925 – they now had five children – by renting a house in Greystones, on the railway line fifteen miles south of Dublin.

The campaign against the British government's threat to impose conscription further enhanced de Valera's stature. Nationalists of every hue came together at the Mansion House conference on 18 April 1918. De Valera impressed older nationalists such as William O'Brien (qv) (1852–1928) who wrote of how 'his transparent sincerity, his gentleness and equability captured the hearts of us all. His gaunt frame and sad eyes buried in their sockets had much of the Dantesque suggestion of "the man who had been in hell". His was that subtle blend of virility and emotion which the Americans mean when they speak of "a magnetic man". Even the obstinacy (and it was sometimes trying) with which he would defend a thesis, as though it were a point in pure mathematics, with more than French bigotry for logic, became tolerable enough when, with a boyish smile, he would say: "You will bear with me won't you? You know I am an old schoolmaster?"' (Longford & O'Neill, 72). The conference coincided with the spring meeting of the catholic hierarchy. De Valera, already in communication with Archbishop William Walsh (qv), proposed that they send a deputation, on which he played a key role, to seek their support; 'I have lived all my life among priests', he reassured Tim Healy (qv) who was apprehensive about bearding the bishops in their den. When the hierarchy received de Valera at Maynooth, they conferred on Sinn Féin 'the moral sanction of a legitimate political party and removed it from the realm of theological and moral suspicion' (Miller, 404, 413). The bishops' proclamation that the people had the right to resist conscription, by every means consonant with God's law, set the seal on his emergence as the leader of nationalist Ireland. Although the British government eventually shrank from the consequences of extending conscription to Ireland, de Valera was among the seventy-three Sinn Féin leaders arrested on 17 May on trumped-up allegations of plotting with German agents.

After a brief spell in Gloucester jail, he was sent to Lincoln jail in early June. Imprisonment meant that de Valera remained cut off from the party leadership in Ireland for eight months that spanned both the general election of December 1918 (when he was returned unopposed for Clare East, and when Sinn Féin ousted the Irish parliamentary party) and the inaugural meeting of Dáil Éireann on 21 January 1919. The terms of confinement for unconvicted internees, which included freedom of association, were lenient and he spent much of his time reading and writing in

his cell; his appreciation of Machiavelli dates from this time. Although he exercised regularly, his aloofness and the awe he inspired among his fellow-prisoners was eloquently symbolised by his playing handball alone. His escape from Lincoln jail on 3 February 1919, engineered by Michael Collins (qv) and Harry Boland (qv), won him headlines worldwide. De Valera felt he could best advance Ireland's case for self-determination by going to the US and bringing Irish-American pressure to bear on President Woodrow Wilson. His colleagues were dismayed that he planned again to absent himself from Ireland, and Cathal Brugha (qv), the temporary president of Dáil Éireann, went to Manchester where he was in hiding and persuaded him to return; he was smuggled back to Dublin on 20 February and secreted in the gate lodge of Archbishop's House in Drumcondra with the connivance of the archbishop's secretary.

President of Dáil Éireann, 1919–22 De Valera was preoccupied with his family during his three months in Ireland – a sixth child had been born in his absence in August 1918. The political highlight was his first attendance on 1 April at Dáil Éireann, of which he was elected president. On 10 April the dáil unanimously passed his motion later interpreted as legitimising the IRA's guerilla war: 'that members of the police forces acting in this country as part of the forces of the British occupation and as agents of the British government be ostracised socially by the people of Ireland . . . They are spies in our midst. They are England's janissaries. The knowledge of our sentiments and feelings and purposes, which they derive either from their own hearts, because they are of our race, or from intercourse amongst us, they put liberally at the disposal of the foreign usurper in order to undo us in our struggle against him. They are the eyes and ears of the enemy' (*Dáil Éireann deb.*, i, 67). When it became clear that the Irish delegation sent to Paris would not be received by the peace conference, de Valera's resolve to go to the US hardened and he left Ireland on 1 June.

The objectives of de Valera's American mission were threefold: to seek official recognition of the Republic, to dissuade the US government from pledging to maintain Ireland as an integral part of the UK, and to spearhead the launch of an external loan. He failed in the first two but succeeded in raising nearly \$6 million – more than was raised in Ireland. His first public appearance (23 June), at New York's Waldorf-Astoria before excited crowds, foreshadowed the shape of things to come. Deluged with invitations, he employed Kathleen O'Connell (qv), who continued to act as his personal secretary until her death in 1956. Criss-crossing the country, he addressed public meetings and state legislatures and received a plethora of honorary doctorates. Such was his eminence during his American mission that he was frequently, albeit incorrectly, described as 'president of Ireland'. But there were hazards in such adulation, and a travelling companion, Patrick McCartan (qv), detected 'an unconscious contempt' for the opinion of others. The Chief, as he was now commonly addressed, 'presides and does all the talking. Has a habit of getting on to side issues and shutting off people who want to speak and thus makes a bad impression if not sometimes enemies. Tends to force his own opinions without

hearing from the other fellows and thus thinks he has co-operation when he only gets silent acquiescence' (Fanning, 3). This authoritarian streak compounded his entanglement in Irish-American factional disputes and he made enemies of John Devoy (qv) and Judge Daniel Cohalan (qv), who bitterly criticised as inconsistent with Irish sovereignty his so-called 'Cuban' declaration – in the course of a press interview de Valera had asked why Britain would not do with Ireland as the US had done with Cuba and declare a Monroe doctrine stipulating that an Irish government must never enter into a treaty with any foreign power.

Although de Valera, stung by Irish-American criticisms, abandoned the Cuban analogy thereafter, it remains the classic example of the prescience, originality, and sophistication of his thinking about international relations. 'With a free Ireland, *the preservation of its independence* would be as strong a moving force as *the recovery of its independence* has been a moving force in every generation since the coming of the Normans. An independent Ireland would see everything to lose in losing its independence – in passing under the yoke of any foreign power whatsoever. An independent Ireland would see its own independence in jeopardy the moment it saw the independence of Britain seriously threatened. Mutual self-interest would make the people of these two islands, *if both [were] independent*, the closest possible allies in a moment of real danger to either . . . Ireland, deprived of its freedom by Britain – in dependence, and persecuted because it is not satisfied to remain in dependence – is impelled by every natural instinct and force to see hope in the downfall of Britain and hope, not fear, in every attack upon Britain. Whereas, in an independent Ireland, the tendency would be all the other way' (author's emphases). De Valera reiterated his understanding that foreign policy must be conducted on the basis of realpolitik in the open letter to Woodrow Wilson on 27 October 1920 that accompanied his abortive petition, as president of the Republic of Ireland to the president of the United States, seeking Ireland's recognition as a sovereign, independent state: 'Ireland is quite ready by treaty to ensure England's safety and legitimate security against the danger of foreign powers seeking to use Ireland as a basis of attack against her' (Moynihan, 34, 41).

The imminent enactment of the government of Ireland bill that partitioned Ireland and satisfied Ulster unionist demands – coupled with the IRA's spectacular successes on Bloody Sunday (21 November 1920) and at Kilmichael (28 November), which made nonsense of British army claims that they were on the verge of a military victory – triggered the first indications that the British premier, Lloyd George, might negotiate with Sinn Féin. It also prompted de Valera to return to Dublin. He arrived on 23 December, the very day the government of Ireland bill was enacted, and immediately made plain his distaste for guerilla warfare to a bemused Richard Mulcahy (qv): 'You are going too fast. This odd shooting of a policeman here and there is having a very bad effect, from the propaganda point of view, on us in America. What we want is one good battle about once a month with about 500 men on each side' (Coogan, 198). This attitude, based on his innate conservatism, his anxiety to mute episcopal criticism and, perhaps, his lingering nostalgia for

the set-piece modalities of 1916, found expression in the destruction of Dublin's Custom House (23 May 1921); the only armed action discussed and approved by the dáil cabinet, it was a military disaster resulting in the capture of some hundred members of the IRA's Dublin brigade and the deaths of several others. But it was his stature as a political negotiator rather than as a military leader that interested the British, who ordered that he should not be arrested: 'speculation has been rife as to the whereabouts of de Valera', recorded an intelligence report for the week ending 4 January 1921; 'several of our raiding operations have been viewed by the public as searches for him, whereas the policy is to leave him alone' (NAUK W.O. 35/90/2). Although he remained in hiding – first in Loughnavale (on Strand Road, Merrion) and, from 18 May, in Glenvar (another house in its own grounds off Mount Merrion Avenue in Blackrock) – when he was inadvertently arrested (22 June) he was promptly released on the instructions of Alfred Cope (qv), Lloyd George's go-between in Dublin Castle. It was Cope who had arranged de Valera's clandestine but pointless meeting on 5 May with James Craig (qv) who was in Dublin visiting the lord lieutenant, which unsurprisingly came to nothing, given that both Craig and de Valera thought the meeting had been requested by the other.

The king's speech appealing for reconciliation when he opened the Northern Ireland parliament on 22 June was the platform for a truce, which came into effect on 11 July. A series of four meetings in 10 Downing St. between de Valera and Lloyd George began on 14 July and ended inconclusively on 21 July, when de Valera rejected an offer of what was in effect dominion status with safeguards for British defence interests. A prickly correspondence between the two men continued until 30 September, when de Valera accepted an invitation to a conference in London 'with a view to ascertaining how the association of Ireland with the community of nations known as the British empire may best be reconciled with Irish national aspirations' (Moynihan, 53).

De Valera's refusal to participate as one of the Irish plenipotentiaries, in the conference that began on 11 October and culminated with the signing of the treaty in the early hours of 6 December, annoyed his colleagues and has earned him enduring obloquy for shirking the responsibilities of leadership. His many retrospective explanations suggest that he himself 'seems to have felt he had a serious case to answer'. These included 'that he remained at home to avoid compromising the Republic, as a reserve against the tricks of Lloyd George, to be in a better position to rally a united nation . . . to oblige the delegates to refer home before taking decisions . . . [by creating] through himself, a final court of appeal to avert whatever Britain might attempt to put over' (Murray, 50–51). De Valera knew from his own talks with Lloyd George in July of the extreme difficulty of the negotiations that lay ahead, yet, as he admitted to the dáil on 14 September, 'negotiations were necessary because we held one view and the British another' (*Dáil Éireann deb. (private session)*, 90). He knew, too, that any Irish negotiating team would be callow and inexperienced compared with their British counterparts, who would also enjoy the advantage of playing at home. In

theory, de Valera's seeking to diminish the significance of whatever happened in Downing St. by insisting that the final decision be taken in Dublin made perfect sense. In practice it proved fatally flawed. First, because de Valera failed adequately to explain his reasoning to the plenipotentiaries in advance of the negotiations; so unquestioned was his authority that he probably saw no need for explanation, and so deferential were the plenipotentiaries (at least to his face) that they accepted his decision. Second, the personal chemistry and bonding that took place between the plenipotentiaries on their wearying journeys by sea and rail and during their sojourns in London silently corroded de Valera's authority; this culminated in their chairman, Arthur Griffith, effectively setting himself up as an alternative source of authority when he threw the delegation into disarray by announcing, in front of the British, that he would sign the treaty irrespective of whether his fellow plenipotentiaries would follow suit.

The dramatic collapse of the extraordinary deference unreservedly accorded de Valera as leader since 1917 accounts for his reaction when told that the treaty had been signed without his authority: initial disbelief was swiftly succeeded by outrage and anger that led him publicly to oppose it before he had even discussed its terms, and their reasons for signing it, with the plenipotentiaries.

The most significant variations between the treaty and what de Valera now proposed in his so-called 'document number 2' were, first, that the treaty provided that the Irish Free State would not be an independent republic but a self-governing dominion within the British empire; de Valera posited a constitution in which the source of all authority would be the Irish people. And, second, the treaty laid down that the king's representative as head of state in Ireland would be a governor general, and that members of the parliament of Irish Free State would swear an oath of allegiance to the constitution of the Irish Free State and fidelity to the king 'in virtue of common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of . . . the British commonwealth of nations'. De Valera proposed 'external association of this independent Ireland with the major states of the British commonwealth for certain affairs of common concern . . . i.e. association on a basis of equality of right' and the recognition of the king only 'as head or president, so to speak, of the association'; he also proposed 'an oath to *obey* this constitution (very different from the constitution in the treaty, which includes the British king as head of Ireland), to *abide* by the treaty of association, and to *recognise* the British king as head of the association' (Moynihan, 96). Although de Valera's self-confidence was such that he believed he would win majority support, the dáil approved the treaty by 64 votes to 57 on 7 January 1922. He resigned as president of Dáil Éireann but stood for reelection and was even more narrowly defeated, by 60 votes to 58, on 10 January.

Civil war and opposition De Valera's refusal to accept those votes as a final verdict ensured that the treaty split became the great divide in the party politics of independent Ireland. Although he did not inspire the repudiation of Dáil Éireann by extremist elements in the IRA, neither did he condemn their occupation of the

Four Courts in Dublin; his more incendiary utterances, such as his St Patrick's day prediction that, if the treaty were accepted, the IRA 'would have to wade through Irish blood, through the blood of the soldiers of the Irish government, and through, perhaps, the blood of some of the members of the government in order to get Irish freedom' (Fanning, 12), enhanced the likelihood of widespread violence. De Valera was never part of what had by now become the fount of real power: the provisional government set up under the chairmanship of Michael Collins on 14 January to prepare for the establishment of the Irish Free State. The electoral pact he agreed with Collins before the general election of 16 June 1922 was a vain attempt to evade a democratic decision on the treaty by freezing the balance of power encapsulated in the dáil vote on the treaty. In effect, that election affirmed and enlarged the pro-treaty majority and conferred a democratic mandate on the provisional government. De Valera was pushed even further into the sidelines when the outbreak of the civil war on 28 June heralded the shift of power among the opponents of the treaty into the hands of the militarists. Although he reenlisted in his old unit (the 3rd Battalion of the IRA's Dublin brigade), that he did so as a private symbolised his powerlessness for as long as the civil war continued.

'Reason rather than faith has been my master . . . I have felt for some time that this doctrine of mine unfitted me to be leader of the republican party', de Valera despaired to Mary MacSwiney (qv) in September 1922. 'I must be the heir to generations of conservatism. Every instinct of mine would indicate that I was meant to be a dyed-in-the-wool tory or even a bishop, rather than the leader of a revolution' (UCDA P 150/657; Ferriter, 91). In February 1923 he was still fretting at his own impotence: 'I have been condemned to view the tragedy here for the last year as through a wall of glass, powerless to intervene effectively. I have, however, still the hope that an opportunity may come my way' (UCDA P 150/1800). It came with the defeat of the militarists when, on 27 April 1923 in close coordination with a ceasefire declaration by Frank Aiken (qv), de Valera simultaneously published a proclamation of his political principles, notably: '(1) that the sovereign rights of the nation are indefeasible and inalienable; (2) that all legitimate governmental authority in Ireland . . . is derived exclusively from the people of Ireland; (3) that the ultimate court of appeal deciding disputed questions of national policy and expediency and policy is the people of Ireland' (Moynihan, 113). The primacy of a democratic mandate in his thinking led him to insist that Sinn Féin contest the general election of August 1923, although purist republican logic demanded the rejection of the election machinery as well as all the other institutions of the Free State; they won 44 of the 155 dáil seats. By then he had decided upon the only policy 'with a chance of success' and had drafted the blueprint that he was to implement so successfully when he returned to power: '(a) maintaining that we are a sovereign state and ignoring as far as possible any conditions in the "treaty" that are inconsistent with that status – a policy of squeezing England out by a kind of boycott of Gov General [sic], etc. (b) breaching the "treaty" by the oath, smashing thro' that first and then compelling England to tolerate the breaches or bring her to a revision which lead to something like the Doc. 2 position' (UCDA P150/1807). Even before the 1923

election he was already pondering entering the dáil; but the enforced interlude of another jail term (he was arrested by Free State troops on 15 August 1923 and not released until 16 July 1924) interrupted his sinuous efforts to wriggle out of what he was by then describing as 'the straightjacket of the republic' (UCDA P150/1584).

De Valera's breach with Sinn Féin was further postponed when the party's ard fheis in 1925 evaded the issue, but an IRA convention in November – adopting a new constitution, freeing the IRA from political control – sharpened the divide. De Valera grasped the nettle when he convened an extraordinary ard fheis on 9 March 1926 to discuss his motion that, once the oath of allegiance had been removed, entering the dáil became 'a question not of principle but of policy'; when it failed to win majority support he resigned as president of Sinn Féin. A month later he announced the formation of a new republican party, Fianna Fáil, with the first objective of 'securing the political independence of a united Ireland as a republic'; its other objectives were the restoration of the Irish language, a social system of equal opportunity, land re-distribution designed to maximize the number of families on the land, and economic self-sufficiency. The ensuing election (June 1927) marked a decisive step in de Valera's quest for a majority: Fianna Fáil won 44 seats while the government party slumped from 63 to 47. The issue of how de Valera might finesse entering the dáil came to a head after the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins (qv), when the government introduced an electoral amendment bill providing that candidates must henceforth declare before nomination their intention, if elected, to take the prescribed oath. De Valera advised Fianna Fáil's national executive that they must choose between entering the dáil or giving up political action. He devised a characteristically self-righteous fudge to sugar the pill of the oath in the form of a press statement stating that 'the required declaration is not an oath; that the signing of it implies no contractual obligation, and that it has no binding significance in conscience or in law; that, in short, it is merely an empty political formula which deputies could conscientiously sign without . . . obligations of loyalty to the English crown' (Moynihan, 150). Well might de Valera's opponents ask why what could be treated as an empty formula in 1927 could not have been so treated in January 1922; but what mattered was not the ritual of reservation but the reality of participation. De Valera had achieved his objective: mainstream republican opposition was henceforth conducted within parliament; the abstentionism of Sinn Féin and the IRA was no longer significant, and parliamentary democracy was no longer seriously flawed. There followed a tied vote of confidence in the government and (15 September) another election, when Fianna Fáil increased their seats to 57. Although Cumann na nGaedheal, with 61 seats, retained office, they were soon seen as a 'lame duck' government, increasingly under siege after the worldwide economic collapse of 1929.

De Valera devoted much energy in opposition to raising money for a national newspaper to sustain Fianna Fáil's bid for power. He went twice to the US to raise funds (December 1927–February 1928, December 1929–May 1930) and, having established a limited liability company in Dublin with himself as controlling director,

invited Margaret Pearse (qv), the mother of Patrick and William (qv), to press the button that started the presses rolling for the first edition of the *Irish Press* on 5 September 1931. He also burnished his republican credentials in opposition: in May 1928, by a vain attempt to present a petition under article 48 seeking a constitutional amendment to abolish the oath of allegiance, and in February 1929, when he defied an exclusion order in Northern Ireland and was detained for a month in Belfast jail. He struck a different populist chord with his promise to retain for the Irish exchequer the land annuities (the repayment of loans made by the British government to Irish tenant purchasers under the pre-independence land acts). This, together with the promise to abolish the oath, took pride of place in Fianna Fáil's 1932 election manifesto that also undertook to reexamine other payments (notably for RIC pensions) negotiated under the Anglo-Irish financial agreements of 1923–6. De Valera 'had played his hand superbly . . . Promises of larger and more comprehensive doles, of protection and industrialisation, coupled with repudiation of the British debts, constituted a nice amalgam of nationalism and democracy. They clinched the wide and durable support which Fianna Fáil enjoyed among the poorer classes' (MacDonagh, 109).

Rewriting the treaty On 9 March 1932 the dáil elected Éamon de Valera president of the executive council by 81 to 68, a majority dependent on Labour Party and some independent support in addition to the 72 Fianna Fáil deputies. More than any other incoming head of government in independent Ireland, de Valera knew exactly what he wanted to do with power: expunge the repugnant elements in the treaty and loosen the British connection so as to win the independence he had argued for since 1922. He took on the external affairs portfolio in conjunction with the presidency of the executive council (taoiseach after 1937) because he believed that foreign policy was too sensitive to be entrusted to other hands; the post-traumatic stress of the treaty split hardened his resolve to run his own Anglo-Irish policy. His style of chairmanship was benevolent but authoritarian. He allowed interminable discussion but no votes in marathon cabinet meetings; liberty to discuss never meant liberty to decide if de Valera wished to decide otherwise. On 14 March his ministers meekly agreed that he would make press statements on policy and 'that no such communication should be made by any member of the executive council without previous consultation with the president' (NAI, CAB 1/4/7). Yet his innate conservatism made him resistant to change for the sake of change. One of his first acts, on 10 March (the day after he took office), was to advise all the official heads of government departments that he had no intention of dismissing any of them. To the chagrin of his many supporters who wanted a spoils system, he sought only to bend the machinery of government to his purpose, not to dismantle it. He made particularly effective use of a troika of senior officials in the Department of External Affairs he had inherited from the previous government: Joe Walshe (qv), secretary of the department 1922–46; John Hearne (qv), the department's legal adviser who provided many of the first drafts for de Valera's constitutional revolution; and John W. Dulanty (qv), the Irish high commissioner in London.

De Valera's first task was the abolition of the oath; he so advised the British government on 22 March and introduced the necessary legislation on 20 April, but the Constitution (Removal of Oath) Bill was not enacted until 3 May 1933 because of the senate's opposition. His government also embarked on a campaign of degrading the office of Britain's governor general by humiliating the incumbent, James McNeill (qv). Using the constitutional device that the king must act on the advice of his ministers, de Valera then advised the king to dismiss McNeill, which he did on 1 November 1932; he used the same device to secure the appointment of a nondescript supporter, Domhnall Ó Buachalla (qv), whose only function was to sign acts of the oireachtas and who further degraded the office by refusing to live in the viceregal lodge and by never appearing in public.

De Valera's cautious, crablike approach in regard to the governor-generalship was characteristic of his conduct across the broader spectrum of Anglo-Irish relations and was designed to minimise the prospect of British retaliation. His insistence that he was acting constitutionally was underpinned by the statute of Westminster, enacted by the Westminster parliament in December 1931, which provided that no law of the UK should extend to any of the dominions without their consent; he obtained numerous legal opinions to the effect that the statute 'leaves it open to the Irish Free State to amend the [1922] constitution in any way it pleases' (NAI, T/D S. 4469). But the British did retaliate when he refused to transfer the land annuities, notwithstanding his having received a legal opinion in 1929 that there was no legal reason why he should do so. After de Valera had refused an offer of commonwealth arbitration and two fruitless meetings with the British premier in London on 10 June and 15 July, the British imposed a 20 per cent duty on about two-thirds of Irish imports, and the Irish government replied in kind.

De Valera had no interest in seeking a financial solution to the economic war of 1932–8, because for him the essence of the problem was political. If the British prevailed, he told the Fianna Fáil ard fheis in November 1932, 'then you could have no freedom, because at every step they could threaten you again and force you again to obey . . . What is involved is whether the Irish nation is going to be free or not' (Moynihan, 227). The economic war was a godsend to de Valera because at a time of worldwide economic recession it enabled him to introduce protectionism under the guise of patriotism. National prosperity, moreover, had no place in his thinking for, as he had told the dáil in July 1928, an independent Ireland that preferred freedom to the luxuries of empire must accustom itself to 'frugal fare' (Moynihan, 154); he now portrayed the economic austerity of his first years in government as the price demanded for freedom. He was sufficiently confident of the electoral appeal of this strategy to call a snap general election in January 1933, despite the misgivings of most ministerial colleagues. Fianna Fáil's success – 49.7 per cent of the vote and 76 seats – gave him an overall majority and forced the British government to recognise that he would be in power for the foreseeable future.

His strategy, he told an Easter rising commemoration in 1933, was to 'yield no willing assent to any form or symbol that is out of keeping with Ireland's right as a sovereign nation' but to 'remove these forms one by one, so that this state we control may become a republic in fact' (Moynihan, 237). In November 1933 he enacted three constitutional amendments – abolishing the right of appeal to the privy council and the governor general's right to withhold his assent from bills, and transferring his function of recommending money bills to the executive council. He instructed John Hearne to begin work on the heads of a new constitution at the end of April 1935, and on 29 May told the dáil of his intention 'to bring in a new constitution which, so far as internal affairs are concerned, will be absolutely ours' (Moynihan, 264). In August 1936 he 'mentioned' – the wording of the cabinet minute is redolent of his absolute control of Anglo-Irish policy – to his ministers that he intended so to advise the new king, Edward VIII (NAI, CAB 1/6/315). Nothing happened during de Valera's absence in Zurich from March to May 1936 for treatment for his deteriorating eyesight, a cause of 'great anxiety' to his family since 1933 (de Valera, 57). But the abdication crisis gave him the chance to put in place the key feature of his new constitution. His reaction reflected what his wife described as his 'capacity for making a grave decision with astonishing speed if he thought this was vital' (ibid., 165). On 10 December, the day of abdication, the cabinet agreed to delete all mention of the king and of the governor general from the 1922 constitution and 'to make provision by ordinary law for the exercise by the king of certain functions in external matters' (NAI, CAB 1/7/35–6). By 12 December he had rushed through the oireachtas two bills, the Constitution Amendment (No. 27) Bill and the External Relations Bill, giving effect to the abdication and recognising the crown for the purposes of diplomatic representation and international agreements. This surgical strike accomplished the most sensitive element of his constitutional revolution. The British were unlikely to risk controversy about the relationship between monarchy and the dominions in the immediate aftermath of the abdication scandal, so again, as with his previous amendments, they chose not to retaliate.

The paradox inherent in the 1937 constitution is that its architect designed it more as an end than as a beginning: its purpose was not to inaugurate a brave new world but to drop the curtain on the old world of the Irish Free State. Published on 1 May, approved by the dáil on 14 June, endorsed by referendum on 1 July, it came into effect on 29 December 1937. It affirmed the Irish nation's 'inalienable, indefeasible, and sovereign right to choose its own form of government, to determine its relations with other nations, and develop its life, political, economic, and cultural, in accordance with its own genius and traditions' (art. 1) and declared that 'Ireland is a sovereign, independent, democratic state' (art. 5) whose head of state would be a president elected by direct popular vote to hold office for seven years (art. 12). Again de Valera shrank from the strait-jacket of the republic, preferring to name the state 'Éire' ('Ireland') rather than 'Poblacht na hÉireann' ('The Republic of Ireland'). This ambiguity, like the external relations act of 1936, wreathed Ireland's relationship with the commonwealth in a haze of uncertainty designed to deter British retribution that might entail the loss of rights of Irish-born citizens in Britain or, even worse,

their enforced repatriation and the closure of the safety valve of emigration. When the name of the state was changed to 'The Republic of Ireland', moreover, as de Valera explained to the 1937 Fianna Fáil ard fheis, he wanted 'to see it in operation, not for twenty-six counties alone, but for the whole thirty-two counties' (Moynihan, 331). He also hoped that even a vestigial commonwealth link might make it easier to end partition in order that, as he naively explained to the British, 'when Northern Ireland came in, the contact with the crown which they valued so highly should not be entirely severed' (Fisk, 63).

De Valera kept tight control of drafting the new constitution through a committee of four officials (he excluded ministers) working directly to him – John Hearne, Maurice Moynihan (qv), Philip O'Donoghue (qv), and Michael McDunphy (qv). He held the religious article (44), omitted from the first three drafts, in an even firmer grip, drafting it himself although his eyesight was by then so bad that 'he could only write by using a pen with a very large nib, which meant that vast amounts of paper overflowed from his desk on to the floor' (de Valera, 51). The wording of that article was not revealed until the text of the constitution went to the cabinet on 27 April, and it went unchanged for final printing next day. De Valera's catholicism had remained unshaken by the hierarchy's joint pastoral of October 1922 excommunicating those who persisted in the war against the provisional government. He never fulminated against the church, but instead sought support from countervailing forces within the church – such as Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne and the Irish College in Rome – and he never behaved as if he himself had been excommunicated. Once in office, Fianna Fáil asserted their catholic credentials: a cabinet meeting in April 1932 favoured suspending sittings of the oireachtas on church holidays, opening dáil sittings 'with an appropriate form of prayer' and displaying a crucifix in the dáil chamber (NAI, CAB 1/4/47–8); the eucharistic congress of June 1932, when de Valera and his ministers paraded cheek by jowl with bishops and cardinals in front of vast crowds, set the seal on the process. But de Valera rejected the demands of leading catholic churchmen such as Cardinal Joseph MacRory (qv) and John Charles McQuaid (qv), then president of Blackrock College and later archbishop of Dublin (1940–72) for a wording more fully consonant with catholic teaching, and he circumvented the prospect of their public criticism by sending Joe Walshe on a secret mission to secure the Vatican's tacit acquiescence. From a liberal perspective the 'special position' conferred on the catholic church under article 44 was clearly offensive, but from de Valera's perspective it was a compromise, and its explicit references to protestant denominations and to the Jews denied the catholic church the exclusive recognition it would have preferred.

The end of de Valera's quest to reconcile sovereignty with majority rule marked the end of ambiguity in his attitude to the IRA, with whose rejection of the 1922 constitution and withholding of allegiance to the institutions of the state he had at first identified. But now that he had secured the legitimacy of the state to his own satisfaction, those who took up arms against it could expect no mercy. 'The moment the constitution was enacted by the people', he told the dáil when introducing the

treason bill (providing for the death penalty for treason as defined in article 39) in February 1939, 'treason had a new meaning . . . Once the constitution was passed, treason was defined as an act of treachery against this state, and nothing else.' Now the Irish people 'had established a state in accordance with their wishes, those who tried by violent means to overthrow that state should be held here, as in other countries, to be guilty of the most terrible crime of a public character which is known in civilised society' (*Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxxiv, 966–7).

In November 1937, against a back-drop of looming war-clouds in Europe and with Ireland on the verge of becoming an independent republic in all but name, de Valera sought to enter into negotiations with Neville Chamberlain's government. His purpose was to address the only remaining restriction on Irish sovereignty: Britain's retention of the harbour defences at Berehaven, Cobh (Queenstown), and Lough Swilly under the defence annexe to the 1921 treaty. That restriction, unlike the restrictions de Valera had demolished in 1932–7, could not be dismantled unilaterally: he could not force the British to leave the treaty ports but would have to persuade them to depart if he were to achieve his objective of Ireland's remaining neutral in the event of a European war. When the presidency of the council of the League of Nations had fallen by rotation to the Irish Free State in 1932 he had argued in his presidential address that 'smaller states, whilst being given a voice, have little real influence in the determination of the league's action' (Moynihan, 221), and the league's subsequent inability to protect smaller states from attack by stronger neighbours prompted de Valera to link the imperative necessity for Ireland's remaining neutral with the league's deficiencies. 'We want to be neutral', he told the dáil on 18 June 1936, but he also reassured the British that they would not 'be attacked through foreign states that might attempt to use this country as a base . . . that the full strength of this nation will be used to resist any attempt by any foreign power to abuse our neutrality' (Moynihan, 277). His commitment to neutrality likewise explained his unwavering refusal to declare for Franco in the Spanish civil war, notwithstanding intense pressure from the *Irish Independent* and other newspapers, from opposition spokesmen in the dáil, and in the pastorals and sermons of catholic bishops and priests.

Persuading Neville Chamberlain that Ireland would never be used as a base for attacking Britain in the event of war was fundamental to de Valera's conduct of the negotiations that began on 17 January and, punctuated by the German occupation of Austria in March, ended on 25 April 1938 with three separate agreements: on finance, trade, and defence. The financial agreement resolved all disputed financial claims in return for an Irish lump-sum payment of £10 million, and the trade agreement provided that Anglo–Irish trade should be freer, if not as fully free as it had been before 1932; taken together, they ended the economic war. But in the context of independence the defence agreement, providing that all defence facilities retained by the British should be handed over to the Irish government, was incomparably the most important. Its effect, de Valera told the dáil, was 'to hand over to the Irish state complete control of those defences, and it recognises and

finally establishes Irish sovereignty over the twenty-six counties and the territorial seas' (Moynihan, 346).

Éamon de Valera's pledge to prevent Germany using Irish territory in a war with Britain bore first fruit on 31 August 1938, even before the ports had been formally transferred to Irish control, at a secret meeting in London between Joe Walshe, Dulanty, and a British intelligence officer, which inaugurated the close cooperation between MI5 and Irish military intelligence on counter-espionage and other security matters. Further talks in October 1938 resulted in the establishment, at the request of de Valera's government, of a regular channel of communication between Irish military intelligence and MI5 which ran by diplomatic bag through the Department of External Affairs and the Irish high commissioner's office in London and was in place before the war began. When the IRA, as the self-styled 'government of the Irish Republic' declared their own war on the UK and launched a bombing campaign in England, de Valera reinforced the Treason Act with the Offences against the State Act, 1939. When IRA overtures to Hitler's Germany threatened to give Britain the excuse to infringe Irish neutrality, he enacted in 1940 even more ruthless emergency powers legislation. IRA prisoners were interned without trial; some were executed after trial by military tribunal; he allowed others to die on hunger-strike. His government had 'been faced with the lesser of two evils', he told the dáil, 'the lesser evil is to see men die rather than that the safety of the whole community should be endangered' (Moynihan, 421).

The second world war and its aftermath 'Life will never be the same again', a 'glum and sad' de Valera said softly to his sons after they listened to the broadcast of Neville Chamberlain's declaration of war on 3 September 1939 (de Valera, 191). He saw neutrality, now duly proclaimed as his government's policy, as a means to an end, not as an end in itself, which is why it had found no place in his constitution. He also understood that neutrality was also the outer limit of independence for, as he had explained to the dáil in his speech on the defence agreement, 'once we were free and wanted to maintain our freedom, we would be anxious to see that Britain was strong and that Britain was not attacked – through us as the backdoor at any rate'; an independent Ireland was 'interested in seeing a strong Britain as a shield and a barrier between her and the dangers of the Continent' (Moynihan, 352). Hence the twin themes in de Valera's conduct of an independent foreign policy throughout the war: the first expressionist, the second preservationist. The apparent maintenance of an even-handed neutrality was the ultimate and public expression of absolute sovereignty. The substantial but secret assistance given to Britain and to the US was dictated by the preservationist impulse to protect Irish independence from a German victory that would have destroyed it. De Valera's government, as the bitterly anti-Irish British dominions secretary, Viscount Cranborne, was constrained to admit in February 1945, 'have been willing to accord us *any* facilities which would not be regarded as *overtly* prejudicing their attitude to neutrality' (author's emphasis). And he appended a remarkable fourteen-point list that included permission for over-flights of Irish territory, transmission of coast watching and meteorological reports,

staff talks between British and Irish officers to facilitate cooperation in the event of a German invasion of Ireland, facilitating free movement between Ireland and Britain of those wishing to serve in the British armed forces, and agreeing to the establishment of a radar station for use against German submarines (Fanning, 124–5).

Public opinion knew nothing of this, thanks to a draconian emergency powers act that came into effect with the outbreak of the war. De Valera's appointment of the anglophobic Frank Aiken as minister for the coordination of defensive measures ensured a rigid regime of censorship; neutrality appeared to be administered impartially, as de Valera's notorious courtesy call on the German minister in Dublin to pay his condolences on the news of Hitler's death most notably demonstrated. The Americans, even more than the British, were outraged, but behind closed doors (and de Valera was a firm believer in shrouding his conduct of foreign policy in secrecy to the point where not even his cabinet colleagues knew of the full extent of Ireland's cooperation with the allies) things were very different; so much so that the Pentagon naively recommended awarding the American Legion of Merit to three of the highest-ranking officers in the Irish defence forces for 'exceptionally meritorious and outstanding services to the United States' (Fanning, 124). Although Ireland was a lucky neutral because geographical accident made her much less vulnerable to invasion than most European states, de Valera's diplomatic skill 'in convincing all parties that he would oppose by force the first power that tried to interfere with Irish neutrality' persuaded both warring blocs that 'the advantages to be derived from any attempted occupation were not greater than the costs, moral and military, involved in such an operation'. There was an intrinsic merit in 'the secrecy within which de Valera shrouded his ultimate intentions and wishes' because it enabled both belligerent blocs to interpret his statements 'according to their desires and in a sense favourable to themselves. De Valera in fact appears never to have told any one, even in his cabinet, everything that was in his mind' (Williams, 25–6). The consistency of his foreign policy and his reputation for meaning what he said were also important; 'queer creature as he is in many ways, he is sincere, and . . . he is no enemy of this country', Neville Chamberlain had concluded in January 1938 (Martin, 95). His successful resistance to the pressure to abandon neutrality applied by both Churchill's and Roosevelt's governments enhanced his stature as a statesman both at home and abroad. Neutrality 'has become a question of honour', noted Elizabeth Bowen (qv) in 1942; 'it is something which Ireland is not ashamed of, but tremendously proud' (Fanning, 127). All-party support for neutrality reinforced de Valera's authority and renewed his claim to the mantle of national leadership he had lost in 1922, a perception cast into sharp relief by his celebrated exchange of radio broadcasts with Churchill when the war ended in Europe in May 1945. De Valera's dignified rebuke, in response to Churchill's self-congratulation at not having reoccupied the treaty ports and his sneering references to Irish neutrality, caught the public imagination and sealed the identification of neutrality with independence.

His refusal to compromise independence also underpinned de Valera's rejection of the feelers put out both by Chamberlain in 1940 and by Churchill in 1941 purporting

to offer a united Ireland in return for the abandonment of neutrality. Ireland's sovereign right to determine its relations with other countries was embodied in the first article of his constitution, and in February 1939 he had gone on record, in a senate speech distributed as a white paper, that he would not sacrifice that right for a united Ireland: 'although freedom for a part of this island is not the freedom we want . . . this freedom for a portion of it . . . is something that I would not sacrifice, if by sacrificing it we were to get a united Ireland' (Moynihan, 373). This subordination of reunification to the imperatives of sovereignty was always intrinsic in de Valera's thinking and explains why the Ulster clauses in the treaty and in his 'document number 2' do not differ significantly. He saw 'no solution' to the problem of partition, he told the Fianna Fáil ard fheis in 1931. 'Force is out of the question. Were it feasible, it could not be desirable. The only hope that I can see now for the reunion of our country is good government in the twenty-six counties, and such social and economic conditions here as will attract the majority in the six counties to throw in their lot with us' (Fanning, 138). The irredentist claims embodied in articles 2 and 3 of his constitution – claiming that the 'national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland' and asserting the right to exercise jurisdiction over that territory – merely paid lip service to that Augustinian aspiration while seeking to protect his republican flank against IRA accusations of betrayal. While he retained rigorous control of northern policy for as long as he was taoiseach, his response to approaches from the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland was always cautious and often cool, and in 1933 and 1937 he blocked proposals that Fianna Fáil become a thirty-two-county party. But not until he had left party politics, in a *New York Times* interview in 1963, did he reveal the essence of his thinking: 'Ireland is Ireland without the North' (Bowman, 312).

The preoccupation with sovereignty, coupled with de Valera's jaundiced view of Ireland's experience in the League of Nations, also explains his unenthusiastic reaction to the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. The key question, he told the dáil in July 1946, was 'in what way, either by joining or not joining, are we most likely to preserve the independence of this country?' In the short term, the Soviet Union's veto of the Irish application to join, first presented in August 1946, rendered such questions redundant; but de Valera's ambivalence resurfaced in New York in April 1948 when he admitted that he was 'rather glad' that Ireland had not been admitted to the UN (Moynihan, 486, 504).

Marking time, 1945–59 By 1945 de Valera had accomplished his primary objectives. His last terms as taoiseach – 1944–8, 1951–4, and 1957–9 – were a mere coda to the high drama of his political career, as even his official biographers, who give it a mere twenty-one of their 500 pages, acknowledge. In 1946 his government was tainted by a charge of corrupt business practices levelled against a junior minister, Con Ward (qv). De Valera lanced the boil quickly: although a tribunal of inquiry, which reported a mere month after it was established in June 1946, exonerated Ward on most counts, his income tax returns were incomplete and he resigned. Cocooned against industrial unrest since 1941 by a wages standstill

order, de Valera's government was now afflicted by a rash of strikes as the trade unions began flexing their muscles. A teachers' strike in Dublin from March to October was especially damaging: disenchanted teachers provided recruits and organisational skills for Clann na Poblachta, a new republican party with a left-wing social programme, founded by Seán MacBride (qv) in July 1946 around a nucleus of committees formed to help republican prisoners and internees released at the end of the war; it also caused a breach in de Valera's close relationship with Archbishop McQuaid (who showed sympathy for the strikers). The Clann's first electoral success came in October 1947 when they defeated Fianna Fáil in two out of three by-elections, putting MacBride into the dáil. De Valera decided to deny the Clann the chance of building on their success and called a snap election for 4 February 1948. The stratagem worked, insofar as the Clann won only half the seats they had expected. But although Fianna Fáil won the same percentage vote and one more seat than in 1943, this time all the opposition parties were united by a common purpose to put de Valera out, and they formed an inter-party government under John A. Costello (qv) as taoiseach and with MacBride as minister for external affairs.

De Valera reacted to loss of power after the 1948 election with determination; 'he'll not get my left flank', he said of MacBride to his son on the day the dáil reassembled (de Valera, 269). As leader of the opposition, in response to Clann na Poblachta criticisms of Fianna Fáil for having no plan to end partition, he launched a spectacular worldwide propaganda campaign to put an anti-partition girdle round the earth. Accompanied by Frank Aiken, he left Ireland on 8 March and, after a month in the US, moved on to Australia and New Zealand (27 April–11 June) and then to India (14–16 June); there followed anti-partition tours of Britain in October and November. The fantasy of reunification loomed larger as the appetite for independence was finally satiated by the Republic of Ireland act in December 1948; it repealed the external relations act and provided for a declaration, in de Valera's phrase, that 'the state that exists under the 1937 constitution is a republic' (*Dáil Éireann deb.*, cxiii, 410). Publicly, de Valera welcomed the end of controversy about Ireland's constitutional status, but privately he questioned the wisdom of the inter-party government's interpretation that the act marked a final breach with the commonwealth. Asked by Churchill in 1953 if he would have taken Ireland out of the commonwealth, he answered 'no': 'he had no objection ever to Ireland being a member of the commonwealth. What he had an objection to was an oath of allegiance to the king as king of the commonwealth . . . he had come to the conclusion that the commonwealth was a very useful association for us because the commonwealth countries (especially Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) had a strong interest in Ireland' (Keogh, 190–91). The inter-party government's rejection of the invitation to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in January 1949, like the Republic of Ireland act, affirmed their inability to escape from de Valera's agenda. He endorsed MacBride's explicit linkage of partition with neutrality when he told a press conference in March 1949 that, if he were in power and 'if the partition business were out of the way', he, too, 'would advocate entrance into the pact if Ireland was united' (*Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1949). The unanimous if futile demand

for reunification had also found expression in the all-party, anti-partitionist Mansion House committee on 27 January, and two of de Valera's future biographers, Frank Gallagher (qv) and T. P. O'Neill (qv), were among the civil servants seconded to participate in what proved to be no more than a propaganda exercise churning out anti-unionist bombast.

But de Valera had no illusions about the prospects of reunification, and told the dáil on his return as taoiseach in 1951: 'If I am asked, "Have you a solution for [partition]?", in the sense "Is there a line of policy which you propose to pursue which you think can, within a reasonable time, be effective?", I have to say that I have not and neither has anybody else' (Moynihan, 543). Now that he had nothing left to prove in regard to sovereignty, he relinquished the external affairs portfolio to Frank Aiken, the most absolutist of his ministerial colleagues on neutrality. In August 1952 his eyesight again deteriorated when he suffered a detached retina; it was only after six operations in Utrecht that the retina was reattached and he did not return to Dublin until December; thereafter he had only peripheral vision, restricting all his movements except in places he knew well. In June 1954 he again went into opposition on the return of a Costello-led coalition government.

De Valera was never at ease with the politics of economics that increasingly characterised party politics, and his near-total blindness – he could now read nothing – well symbolised a lack of economic vision for which he was unapologetic in the dáil in 1956: 'We have to tighten our belts . . . I am against external loans . . . The policy of self-reliance is the one policy that will enable our nation to continue to exist.' He even reiterated what he had told the people in 1917 of the choice between independence and continued incorporation in the British empire: 'We have the choice of the humble cottage instead of [being] lackeys partaking of the sops in the big man's house' (*Dáil Éireann deb.*, clix, 1614). The resonance with his notorious St Patrick's day broadcast of 1943 and its Arcadian dream of an Ireland which 'would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort' (Moynihan, 466) are unmistakable; but, with emigrants now fleeing to the bright lights of British and American cities in their hundreds of thousands, it was a measure of how out of touch he had become. His conservatism and concern for stability were also revealed by his shelving a 1955 report by a Fianna Fáil committee arguing for a more proactive policy on partition that included a proposal to appoint a minister for national unity, and in 1956 he opposed a proposal that northern nationalist elected representatives be admitted to the dáil.

The March 1957 general election inaugurated de Valera's last term as taoiseach and, although none then knew it, another sixteen years of Fianna Fáil government. When the IRA campaign in Northern Ireland that began in December 1956 intensified in July 1957, he reintroduced the Offences against the State (Amendment) Act of 1940, again providing for internment without trial. It was also in July 1957 that he denounced the Fethard-on-Sea boycott, directed against

protestants after Sheila Cloney, the protestant wife of a catholic farmer, Seán Cloney (qv), refused to send her children to a catholic school and fled with them to Belfast, as 'ill-conceived, ill-considered, and futile . . . unjust and cruel' (*Dáil Éireann deb.*, clxiii, 731); and he worked covertly with Jim Ryan (qv), whom he appointed minister for finance in 1957 and who came from Wexford, to end the boycott. He firmly rejected criticism, strongest in the US, of the non-aligned policy, most notably in regard to the recognition of communist China, pursued by Frank Aiken at the UN, to which Ireland had been admitted in 1955. The major historical landmark of 1958 was *Economic development*, the revolutionary policy document that emanated from the Department of Finance; that such a dramatic new departure also bore his imprimatur as the then taoiseach copper-fastened its immunity to criticism within Fianna Fáil. But socio-economic change lay in the future and, notwithstanding the success of his political revolution, 'when Éamon de Valera departed from active politics in 1959 he left Irish society very much as he had found it' (Murphy, 9).

Lap of honour, 1959–75 Despite de Valera's success in the presidential election of June 1959, his five-to-four majority over Seán Mac Eoin (qv), and his failure to carry the referendum held on the same day, proposing the abolition of proportional representation, showed that he was still a divisive figure in Irish politics, as did a narrower election victory over Thomas F. O'Higgins (1916–2003) in 1966. But he acquired increasingly iconic stature during his fourteen years in *Áras an Uachtaráin* when he hosted formal and informal visits from many foreign dignitaries including Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco (1961); US presidents John F. Kennedy (1963) (whose funeral in Washington he also attended) and Richard Nixon (1966; October 1970 as president); the presidents of Pakistan, India, and Zambia (all in 1964); the king and queen of the Belgians (1968); U Thant, the secretary general of the UN (1968); and former French president Charles de Gaulle (1969). He also attended the coronation of Pope Paul VI in 1963 and paid a presidential state visit to the US in 1964 as well as attending the reinterment of the remains of Roger Casement (qv) in 1965 and a host of celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter rising in 1966. Although he scrupulously avoided all comment on party politics, he was strongly supportive of Jack Lynch (qv) during the arms crisis of 1970 and confided in Desmond O'Malley (who, as minister for justice, had to attend when judges received their seals of office in the Aras) that 'the disloyalty which Lynch had to suffer is appalling . . . the worst ever . . . I had disagreements and ministers disagreed with me but none of them were ever disloyal to me' (author's interview with Desmond O'Malley, 16 Jan. 2008). While publicly he silently acquiesced to Ireland's entry into the EEC, which he saw as 'inevitable', privately he still harboured 'very strong reservations regarding loss of sovereignty' (de Valera, 228).

When he and his wife left *Áras an Uachtaráin* for the last time (24 June 1973) they took up residence in Talbot Lodge, Linden Convalescent Home in Blackrock, where de Valera had visited the patients when a student at Blackrock College. Such was his lack of interest in material wealth (he had refused to accept an increase in his allowance as president when ministerial salaries had been last increased) that his

doctor advised the taoiseach, Jack Lynch, that he was suffering from depression because of fears that his pension would be inadequate to cover the constant nursing care his wife now required, and his allowance was subsequently adjusted (Ferriter, 364–5). Sinéad de Valera died 7 January 1975 on the eve of their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary. Éamon de Valera died aged 92 after a brief illness on 29 August 1975, and, after a state funeral at which his grandson (an tAthair Shan Ó Cuív) celebrated mass, was buried on 2 September in a simple grave adjoining the republican plot in Glasnevin cemetery. He was survived by six of his seven children: Vivion de Valera (qv), Máirín de Valera (qv), Éamonn de Valera (1913–86; professor of obstetrics & gynaecology at UCD), Ruairí de Valera (qv), Emer Ó Cuív (wife of Brian Ó Cuív (qv)), and Terry de Valera (1922–2007), taxing master of the supreme and high courts (1969–92); his third son, Brian, had been killed, aged 20, in a riding accident in Phoenix Park in 1936.

Assessment ‘Éamon de Valera is the most significant figure in the political history of modern Ireland. This is a statement of incontrovertible historical fact, and it does not necessarily involve a laudatory judgment . . . If there were no other reasons for de Valera’s importance, he was at the centre of political life in this country for forty-three years, not including the fourteen-year period as president. We have here a span of political power and influence virtually unparalleled in contemporary Europe and in Irish history’ (Murphy, 1–2). He is also the most controversial figure in the history of modern Ireland. The burden of his past, the resentment and the hatred which for so many was the enduring legacy of his actions in 1921–2, have had the effect of denying him due credit for his later achievements. De Valera’s cardinal sin was, of course, his rejection of the treaty and his consequent culpability for the civil war. That charge is incontrovertible. If de Valera had been prepared to swallow his pride, and with it his legitimate complaint that the plenipotentiaries had broken their word not to sign the treaty without first referring it back to Dublin, the treaty split might have been contained. He opposed the treaty not because it was a compromise but because it was not *his* compromise – not, that is, a compromise that he had authorised in advance of its conclusion. Would there have been a civil war if de Valera had denied his support to those who fought against the treaty? Perhaps there would have been violence from IRA extremists not susceptible to his control, but there was a fair chance that what turned out to be such a devastating split might instead have been only a splinter. De Valera, in other words, was largely responsible for the dimensions, if not for the fact, of the civil war. By allowing those who took up arms against the treaty to draw on his authority, he conferred a respectability on their cause it could never have otherwise attained. His behaviour in the immediate aftermath of the treaty, in sum, was petulant, inflammatory, ill judged, and profoundly undemocratic. Part of the explanation for his intemperate reaction lies in the depths of the deference accorded him since 1916. Although there is no evidence that de Valera demanded such unquestioning compliance, he accepted it as a matter of course. ‘An Irish immigrant mother – a Spanish-American father dying while he was very small – a return to Ireland, his mother remaining in America – an upbringing by an uncle in what he himself has called a labourer’s cottage’, even his official

biographers acknowledged that 'no psychiatrist could forecast the outcome of such an inheritance and early environment' (Longford & O'Neill, 471–2). Add to that an amalgam of his separation from his senior colleagues during his many months in jail and his eighteen-month absence in America, an aloof and ascetic temperament, a sense of distance reinforced by his profession as a schoolmaster and by his elevation (on the eve of the treaty split) to the chancellorship of the NUI (a post from which he was separated only by death), even perhaps by his height (6 ft 1 in. (1.85 m) – hence his sobriquet 'the Long Fellow'): the end result was a carapace of extraordinary self-sufficiency and self-confidence that also later served him well in enduring the affliction of blindness.

But however lamentable de Valera's failure in 1921–2, it must be reconciled with his subsequent greatness. The case for ascribing greatness to de Valera rests on his conduct of foreign policy, which gives him a larger claim than any other twentieth-century Irish politician to the title of statesman. He was the kind of statesman who, like Churchill and de Gaulle, portrays 'his country's inner image of itself and of its character and history' and who 'has no doubts or hesitations and by concentration of will-power, direction, and strength . . . is able to ignore a great deal of what goes on outside him. This very blindness and stubborn self-absorption occasionally, in certain situations, enables him to bend events and men to his own fixed pattern' (Isaiah Berlin, *Personal impressions* (1982), 9, 27). De Valera understood the importance of vision in politics: that, as John A. Murphy has argued, 'when a small nation has been placed by the facts of geography and history in uncomfortable proximity to a great power, the people of that small nation scarred by such a history, crave not only material progress, not only political sovereignty, but a psychological independence as well' (Murphy, 14), and he translated his personal vision of sovereignty into a political reality. He also demonstrated extraordinary diplomatic skills for, while the British resented and resisted his constitutional changes, the clarity with which he telegraphed his intentions ensured that resentment and resistance never turned into retaliation. De Valera was the architect of the independent Irish state, and his blueprint was a constitution which also 'brought much needed stability after the hectic constitutional changes of 1922–37; a constitution which, on the whole, has operated as a salutary check on the other branches of government and which has promoted the protection of individual rights' (Hogan, 320).

De Valera's Ireland: the phrase is too often used only in a pejorative sense; as a catch-all term for all that was socially, economically, and culturally backward about Ireland in the 1950s. Many historians and political scientists, preoccupied with social and economic history rather than with political history, focus less on his achievements than on what he did not try to achieve. In this version of history de Valera stands condemned not for what he did as for what he never tried to do, a cast of mind well captured by the title of Tom Garvin's book, *Preventing the future: why was Ireland so poor for so long?* (2004). A no less apposite question is *Creating the future: why was Ireland independent so soon?* Nor are suggestions that prosperity would have come if de Valera had bowed out earlier well founded – if, say, he rather

than Seán T. O'Kelly (qv) had gone to Áras an Uachtaráin in 1945 and allowed Seán Lemass (qv) to become taoiseach. It is far from certain that Lemass, who was never popular in certain quarters of Fianna Fáil, would have secured the party leadership in 1945 when O'Kelly was tánaiste. The postwar period would also have been a much more difficult and testing time for any other Fianna Fáil taoiseach than it was for de Valera. Ireland's wartime neutrality had left an enduring residue of resentment – especially among the British and the Americans – and the prevailing economic climate was much harsher than during the Lemass years. The defining characteristics of the 1950s – Britain's chronic sterling crisis and its implications for Ireland, high unemployment, the haemorrhage of emigration – these were but some of the circumstances outside the control of any taoiseach, as John A. Costello's two terms of office well testify. Indeed, there is a case to be made that at such an economically depressed and volatile time de Valera's continuance as taoiseach provided an important element of stability.

Ireland's entry into the EEC in 1973 signalled that by then independence had long been taken for granted. Yet without Éamon de Valera Ireland might never have achieved independence, and certainly would not have achieved it before the second world war, the only international crisis that has so far threatened to engulf its shores. For de Valera's Ireland also means a truly independent Ireland, an Ireland spared further decades of corrosive and sterile debate on the pros and cons of the British connection, an Ireland whose people were consequently self-confident enough about their own sovereignty by 1972 to dilute that sovereignty by voting massively in favour of joining Europe. There is a fine symmetry, which might have appealed to de Valera as mathematician, about the timing of the joint admission of Ireland and Britain to Europe in 1973 – the same year that British–Irish interdependence in regard to Northern Ireland found first expression in the Sunningdale agreement: for the last year of his presidency was the moment when the doctrine of interdependence he had first dimly delineated in 1920 became the core of national policy.

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