

Griffith, Arthur Joseph

by Michael Laffan

Griffith, Arthur Joseph (1871–1922), journalist and politician, was born 31 March 1871 in Dublin into a working-class family, son of Arthur Charles Griffith, printer, and Mary Griffith (née Whelan). He attended the CBS schools in St Mary's Place and Great Strand St., both in the north inner city, but his formal education ended before he was aged thirteen. An autodidact who devoted his spare money to books, he often spent his evenings in the National Library and read voraciously for the rest of his life.

**Policies and propaganda** After working as an office-boy, Griffith followed his father's profession and became apprenticed as a printer. He was employed as a compositor and copywriter in the Franklin Printing Works, the *Nation*, and the *Irish Daily Independent*. Like many printers he held radical views, and he belonged to societies and clubs such as the Young Ireland League and the Celtic Literary Society. He was present at the first meeting of the Gaelic League. As a young man he was a committed Parnellite, and later he reminisced about having been among those who bade farewell to their leader as he made his last political journey in September 1891, ten days before his death.

Despite his later association with monarchist ideas, Griffith embodied austere Roman republican virtues. He was an honest and unworldly man, and at times could be priggish – as in his hostility to J. M. Synge's (qv) 'Playboy of the western world' (1907). Taciturn and imperturbable, except in the last, stressful months of his life, he was persevering to the point of obstinacy. He was self-effacing, yet aggressive. He was a sociable man who was loyal to his friends, but could be a ferocious and unforgiving opponent; he was jailed for horsewhipping an editor whom he blamed for an attack on Maud Gonne (qv). In physical appearance he was a short, stocky man with a heavy moustache and thick glasses.

At least partly for reasons of health Griffith went to South Africa in January 1897 and he remained there for nearly two years. At first he worked as editor of the first of his many newspapers, the *Middleburg Courant*. Its British readers were alienated by his support for the Boers, while Afrikaners preferred to read papers in their own language, and the *Courant* soon folded. He moved to Pretoria and then to Johannesburg, where he was employed as a supervisor in a gold mine. While in South Africa he acquired a deep affection for the Boers and he was a sharp critic of British designs on their territory.

Meanwhile in Ireland plans were being made to launch a radical nationalist weekly newspaper, and Griffith's close friend Willie Rooney (qv) was invited to become the editor. Rooney already had a job in Dublin, and he generously proposed that the

post should be offered to Griffith as a means of luring him home. Griffith returned to Dublin in autumn 1898, and together they launched the *United Irishman* the following March. Griffith was devastated by Rooney's premature death in May 1901.

Despite later distractions and responsibilities Griffith remained at heart a journalist for the rest of his life. He was a lucid writer with a vivid turn of phrase, and – appropriately for an admirer of Jonathan Swift (qv) and John Mitchel (qv) – was often harsh in his treatment of his numerous opponents. R. M. Henry (qv) referred to his 'varied tones of appeal, denunciation, mockery and argument' (*Studies*, xi (Sept. 1922), 351). Although he wrote much of his newspapers' material, and often set the type himself, he could also persuade numerous gifted writers to contribute articles, stories, and poems. (James Joyce (qv) defended Griffith against the complaint that he accepted contributions from people such as Oliver St John Gogarty (qv), asking: 'How do you expect him to fill his paper: he can't write it all himself' (Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (1959), 246). His approach was didactic and he tried to educate the Irish people in the demands and opportunities of nationalism. He ranged widely in his search for illustrations and parallels; for example, the first issue of *Sinn Féin* in May 1906 contained articles on events in nine countries spread over four continents. He believed that it was 'from the little countries Ireland must learn the way to steer her course' (*Sinn Féin*, 13 Sept. 1913) and he studied them closely, inundating his readers with demographic, financial, and other statistics. He wrote ballads with titles such as 'Twenty men from Dublin town' and 'Little black coffins of different sizes' (an attack on British treatment of Afrikaner children during the Boer war).

A libel action brought about the end of the *United Irishman* in April 1906, but this newspaper was followed within weeks by another, *Sinn Féin*. From August 1909 to January 1910 it was published every day. Despite the generous support of friends and allies – such as the IRB and Clan na Gael – its circulation declined steadily, falling by more than half, and he was forced to resume weekly publication. It was characteristic of his habits and energy that when he was jailed in Reading in 1916, and later in Gloucester in 1918–19, he produced manuscript newspapers to entertain and enlighten his fellow prisoners.

Like many other nationalists, Griffith was a geographic determinist. Irrespective of their background or religion, all the people living on the island were Irish and were equal members of the Irish nation – whether they liked it or not. He believed in the rights of nations and the duties of their citizens; individuals should sacrifice themselves for the common good. But he was unusual in thinking of the state as well as the nation, and he wanted to develop an Irish counter-state so that British rule and influence would wither away.

He advocated a dual monarchy which would link the two islands through the person of a common sovereign, and believed that such a programme could be supported by all nationalists from home rulers to republicans. The Irish people and their

representatives should no longer recognise the act of union, and Irish MPs should withdraw from Westminster and establish an independent Irish parliament in Dublin.

Griffith supported his case by drawing two parallels. The first of these was based on an uncritical and unhistorical admiration of Grattan's parliament and the 'constitution' of 1782. His argument that the renunciation act of 1783 denied Britain the right to legislate for Ireland conveniently ignored the basic principle of the British constitution: any parliament can undo any actions of its predecessors. Believing that many Irish unionists would accept independence, and that they would be satisfied if the link with the crown were to be maintained, he proposed the creation of a fully independent Ireland which would be associated with Britain only through a shared king. Unionists never showed any interest in this scheme, home rulers ridiculed it as impossible, and republicans dismissed it as inadequate. Nonetheless Griffith persevered with his model, reviving it from time to time, and ultimately became an enthusiast for what had originated as a compromise proposal.

He also used a different analogy, which he hoped would evade the disapproval aroused in many quarters by the 'king, lords, and commons' of 1782. He held out as an example the revival of Hungary after its defeat by Habsburg forces in 1849, and its peaceful achievement of equal status with Austria in the *Ausgleich* of 1867. But he was a propagandist rather than a scholar and – as in his treatment of other topics – ignored aspects of Hungarian history that weakened his case. Between January and July 1904 he developed this argument in a series of weekly articles in the *United Irishman*, and at the end of the year these were reprinted in book form under the title *The resurrection of Hungary*. It was reported to have sold 5,000 copies on its first day of publication and it provoked widespread interest and controversy, but it failed to make significant numbers of converts. However, several of the ideas that Griffith put forward would be implemented in 1919–21.

If Irish MPs would not act as a parliament, Griffith suggested as an alternative the 'council of three hundred' – an idea that Daniel O'Connell (qv) had floated and then abandoned – which would consist of local government representatives. The new Ireland would be democratic. He despised the British electoral system and believed that proportional representation 'must appeal to every one who believes in real freedom' (*Sinn Féin*, 2 May 1908).

Originally a republican, he became more moderate in his views and left the IRB, while remaining on good terms with the organisation and many of its members. He was wary of physical force and convinced that independence could be achieved by political methods, but he was not a pacifist. He believed that although violence would be justified in an effort to get rid of British rule, in practice any rebellion would fail. The Boer war confirmed his certainty that Britain could not be defeated by force of arms.

Another distinguishing feature of his nationalism was his preoccupation with the economic aspects of Irish independence, his determination that Ireland should be a modern, prosperous state. He was a pragmatic man and was concerned with issues such as industrialisation, mining, afforestation, over-taxation, and the protection of Irish goods against foreign (specifically, British) competition. He overlooked the fact that Belfast, the only industrialised area in Ireland, depended for its wealth on free trade within the UK.

Griffith was a meritocrat who had no sympathy for the abuses of capitalism, and he outlined imaginative schemes for rehousing the Dublin poor – such as building cottages on municipal land. He attacked the idea of a ‘wealthy’ country which contained many impoverished and unemployed people. Although sympathising broadly with trade unionism, he campaigned fiercely against Irish links with British unions and against what he saw as internecine class conflict which would undermine Ireland's national interest. He criticised the welfare legislation of the prewar Liberal government, claiming that the new insurance scheme placed Irish mothers on the same level as English harlots; virtuous Ireland would have to pay for English bastardy.

His hostility to the tactics of James Larkin (qv) in the lock-out of 1913–14 has harmed his reputation in certain quarters. Even more damaging were his occasional racist and anti-Semitic remarks. While in South Africa, he opposed the exploitation of blacks by whites, and he rejoiced that Japan's defeat of Russia had shattered ‘the prestige of the white face’ in India. But he was also able to praise civilised Indians in contrast to the ‘Blackfellows’ of Australia, while his admiration of Mitchel led him to excuse his hero's support of slavery and to protest that no excuse was needed ‘for an Irish nationalist declining to hold the negro his peer in right’ (preface, Mitchel, *Jail journal* (1918), pp xiii-xiv). Although he supported Zionism, he attacked Jewish ‘cosmopolitans’ such as the ‘Jew-Jingo brigands’ of Johannesburg (*United Irishman*, 21 Oct. 1899). In general these were habits or prejudices of his youth and, with occasional lapses, he outgrew them.

Griffith never wavered from his demand for a fully independent Ireland, and everything else was subordinated to this one aim. He admired W. B. Yeats (qv) but felt that his work should be more populist; national drama should educate the people. His view of history was similarly utilitarian, and he believed that the past should not be recalled if it ceased to provide inspiration for the future. He backed the cause of women's suffrage but was concerned that this worthy aim might distract attention from the demand for independence. He was single-minded and narrowly focused.

His exceptional interest in foreign affairs was dominated by anglophobia. He approved of the dowager empress of China because she was hostile towards Britain; he switched his support from France to Germany after the Entente Cordiale; and he defended Leopold II's record in the Congo against ‘calumny and mud-

throwing' (*Nationality*, 16 Oct. 1915). He sympathised instinctively with every anti-British interest and individual, however unworthy they might be.

He had exceptional energy and persistence, and in the course of almost two decades helped keep alive the spirit of radical nationalism, denouncing what he saw as supine and demoralising 'parliamentarianism'. Erskine Childers (qv), who had been a victim of Griffith's belligerence, described him magnanimously as the greatest intellectual force stimulating the 'national revival' of 1916–19.

**The Sinn Féin party** Griffith was aware of his own limitations and was a reluctant political and party leader. When he founded his own organisation, the National Council, he intended it to be an intellectual pressure group rather than a party. He wanted to develop a policy that would unite nationalists, rather than form a new body which would further divide them; he hoped to win over home rulers rather than to supplant them. But in 1904 and 1905 the council contested and won seats in Dublin local elections. At the group's convention in November 1905, delegates from outside Dublin overcame resistance from Griffith and some of his colleagues, and ensured that it would become a political party with branches throughout the country. However, when a general election took place two months later, the National Council was unprepared and it decided sensibly not to run any candidates.

Griffith concentrated on his journalism, criticising the new Liberal government as relentlessly as he had attacked its Conservative predecessor. His party made little impact, and in its first ten months only twenty-one branches were founded. In April 1907 he was resentful when two other factions, Cumann na nGaedheal and the Dungannon Clubs of Bulmer Hobson (qv), merged as the Sinn Féin League – a name that was already associated with him, and which was by now the title of his weekly newspaper. But by the time the National Council joined the new body a few months later the apparent success of his policies had strengthened his position. Two nationalist MPs were disillusioned by the Liberals' failure to advance towards home rule and they resigned their seats. One of them, Charles Dolan (qv) of Leitrim North, had become convinced by the case for abstention from Westminster. Griffith was able to exploit this vindication when he merged his party with the Sinn Féin League; in effect he absorbed it and attached its name to his two-year-old National Council.

Dolan's determination to seek re-election in Leitrim North forced Griffith to overcome his distaste for fighting elections; he threw himself into the campaign and he wrote weekly articles in *Sinn Féin* addressed 'To the men of Leitrim'. The result was a clear defeat, and Dolan secured 27 per cent of the vote. The party advanced slowly, reaching a peak in 1909 with only 128 branches throughout the country, and it declined rapidly. But Griffith's priorities remained unchanged: he preferred to educate Irish nationalists through propaganda, argument, scorn and invective rather than through political organisation, and Sinn Féin did not contest any more parliamentary seats.

Two general elections in 1910 left John Redmond (qv) and the home rule party holding the balance of power in Westminster. In both campaigns Griffith announced that his party would stand aside. He explained that he wished to give Redmond one last chance, but everyone knew that the improved prospects of home rule denied Sinn Féin any opportunity of making an impact. He abused the parliamentary party, but he lacked the support or resources to challenge it.

1910 was an important year for Griffith in several respects. The failure to contest the elections was a setback comparable to the collapse of his daily paper. His tentative flirtation with William O'Brien (qv) (1852–1928) and his All-for-Ireland League resulted in the departure of radical IRB members, who formed their own newspaper, *Irish Freedom*. But as if to compensate for problems and failures elsewhere, he married (November 1910) Maud Sheehan, whom he had courted for years. Two children, Nevin and Ita, were born of their happy marriage. Griffith was a poor man who had no interest in money, and shortly after his wedding a large group of friends and admirers combined to buy him a house.

As the home rule party's problems increased, Griffith attacked it and the government with characteristic vigour. He denounced the inadequacies of the home rule bill and was appalled by what he saw as Redmond's weakness in the face of Liberal pressure and the unionists' intransigence. But their opposition to the government's measure won his respect, and he saw them as providing a paradoxical application of Sinn Féin policies. They forced him to examine the Ulster question seriously for the first time. Until then he had thought it unnecessary to make any concessions to the unionists, and like almost all other Irish nationalists saw them as foolish and misguided. Now he was prepared to make substantial concessions – provided that they accepted the principle of Irish unity. But he still failed to appreciate the ferocity of unionists' opposition to Irish nationalism, and his admiration for the Ulster Volunteers' defiance of the British government blinded him to their rejection of his aims.

**Rebellion and revival** The armed challenge to the cause of home rule precipitated another lurch by many nationalists towards radical measures, but in contrast to the pattern of 1907–9 the Sinn Féin party was not a beneficiary. It remained moribund, and in practice it consisted of little more than Griffith, his newspaper, and a small circle of followers. The formation in November 1913 of the Irish Volunteers, modelled on their Ulster counterpart, revived the prospect of a military struggle which Griffith had always believed would be futile. Nonetheless he welcomed the new force on the grounds that it strengthened the nationalist cause, that it created a public opinion with backbone, and that it made Irishmen 'more conscious of their duty as citizens, to associate the ideas of order and discipline with the idea of liberty' (*Sinn Féin*, 6 Dec. 1913). He joined the Volunteers and took part in the Howth gun-running of July 1914.

The IRB was closely associated with the Volunteers, and the Sinn Féin party was not. Nonetheless, since the IRB was obliged to act in secret while Griffith's newspaper and his party were widely known, if not widely supported, the new paramilitary force was often called 'the Sinn Féin Volunteers'. This title was resented by many Volunteers who rejected both Griffith's political methods and his moderate objectives, but it gave him (and later his policies) valuable publicity. The misappropriation of his party's name would prove to be a significant asset in the very different circumstances of 1917.

In the meantime Sinn Féin's decline continued until only a handful of branches remained. Griffith was unperturbed, and every week he attacked the home rule party, the British government and – after August 1914 – Irish involvement in the Great War. *Sinn Féin* was suppressed in November 1914, and it was followed by a short-lived publication which showed Griffith at his most imaginative: *Scissors and Paste*. This consisted largely of articles from newspaper and agency sources which had already been passed by the censor but which nonetheless managed to convey an anti-British message. For example, he juxtaposed two items from the same issue of the *Daily News*: Prime Minister Asquith's defence of small nationalities, and the announcement that Egypt had become a British protectorate. After ten weeks this paper, too, was banned. Finally in June 1915 he produced yet another weekly, *Nationality*, which survived until the Easter rising and was revived from February 1917 until its eventual suppression in September 1919. Like his earlier publications, these were subsidised by personal friends and by the IRB. Despite Griffith's conviction that a rebellion could not succeed, it has been claimed that he attended a meeting of separatists in September 1914 at which it was decided to stage a rising during the war. Subsequently his role was confined to journalism and – as a relatively minor interest – to politics.

In the crisis of Holy Saturday 1916, when Eoin MacNeill (qv) learned that he had been deceived by some of his Volunteer colleagues, and that an insurrection had been planned behind his back for the following day, Griffith was one of those whom he invited to discuss his response. It was decided to cancel Sunday's manoeuvres, which would provide cover for the rising, and Griffith carried the countermanding order to Bray.

According to some accounts he offered his support to the rebels in the GPO but was advised to keep his distance and remain free to write for the cause. Like many other nationalists who had not participated in the rebellion he was arrested in its aftermath, and on 3 May was interned in Richmond barracks; he was then sent to Reading jail, and remained there until Christmas Eve. He enjoyed himself in prison and followed events in Ireland closely. In his absence his Sinn Féin party experienced a modest recovery, reflecting the shift in nationalist opinion after Easter week.

He was released along with other internees who had not been court-martialled and sentenced, and in early 1917 he campaigned vigorously in the Roscommon North

by-election. The anti-home-rule candidate was Count George Plunkett (qv), father of one of the executed rebel leaders, and his supporters included former insurgents, disillusioned parliamentarians, and Griffith and the remnants of his party. After his election Plunkett announced his intention of following the abstention policy that Griffith had advocated for many years. But Sinn Féiners' jubilation was short-lived; Plunkett soon developed an unexpected taste for politics, and allied himself with radical republicans in an attempt to purge the movement of moderates such as Griffith. Michael Collins (qv) and other young IRB men were active on Plunkett's behalf.

Griffith fought back, strengthened by the growing support for Sinn Féin. He made speeches throughout the country, revived *Nationality*, and wrote much of its contents. Plunkett's attempt to form a rival political party soon collapsed, and his Liberty League merged with Sinn Féin; Griffith remained president and the party remained committed to its old aim of a dual monarchy.

Throughout late 1917 Sinn Féin continued to expand, but it was clear that many prominent members of the new mass movement still distrusted Griffith's moderation – even though some of them had supported home rule during the years when he had waged his lonely campaign against it. The idea of a dual monarchy seemed insufficient to those who had fought for a republic in Easter week, or who wished, or claimed, that they had done so. The release from prison of Éamon de Valera (qv) and his election as MP for Clare East in July 1917 provided them with a new leader. Eventually Griffith gave way. It was agreed that Sinn Féin should commit itself to the aim of a republic, and that after independence had been achieved the people could choose their form of government. At a private meeting Griffith agreed to stand down as president in favour of de Valera.

These changes were ratified at the party convention in October 1917, and Griffith was elected a vice-president. By now he had succeeded in one of his principal aims: winning over Irish nationalist opinion to the policy of abstention from Westminster. Sinn Féin had more than 1,200 branches throughout the country and probably at least 120,000 members. For the next four years, until the signature of the Anglo–Irish treaty in December 1921, he served loyally as de Valera's deputy.

When the British government tried to impose conscription on Ireland in March 1918, Griffith was one of its most determined opponents. After the house of commons approved the conscription bill, Irish home rule MPs left Westminster in protest and returned to Ireland, thereby fulfilling a demand that he had made constantly for nearly twenty years. He gloated at their reluctant, belated conversion.

Griffith was chosen as the Sinn Féin candidate for the parliamentary seat in Cavan East, and he and de Valera represented the party at the Mansion House conference in April, an ad hoc coalition of all nationalists opposed to conscription. Before the by-election could take place he was one of seventy-three Sinn Féiners who were



arrested on 17–18 May on the pretext that they had conspired with Germany. He spent the next ten months interned in Gloucester jail. His imprisonment cast him as a martyr who suffered to save the men of Ireland from the horrors of the war in France, and he was elected by 3,795 votes to 2,581 (20 June).

Griffith played no role in the events of late 1918, which climaxed in the general election when Sinn Féin gained seventy-three seats and the home rule party a mere six. He was returned unopposed for Cavan East, and also won Tyrone North-West by 10,422 votes to the unionist candidate's 7,696.

**Acting president of the dáil** The meeting of the first dáil on 21 January 1919 marked a symbolic implementation of Griffith's policies: a large majority of Irish MPs proclaimed themselves an independent Irish parliament and later approved a government which did its best to administer the country.

Along with other internees Griffith was released on 6 March, and the following month was appointed minister for home affairs in the 'rebel' Irish cabinet. On de Valera's departure for the US in June 1919 he became acting president of the dáil and its government, a position he held until after his final arrest at the end of 1920. He was in the happy position of presiding over the partial implementation of the 'counter-state' which he had advocated for so long. He was conscientious (for example, summoning cabinet meetings on average once a week) and was flexible (as in cooperating harmoniously with Collins, whose style and methods were vastly different from his own).

But in general Griffith was a chairman rather than a forceful or innovative leader, he was a part-time president who continued writing and editing. He gave his colleagues their heads, and while in private he expressed distaste and dismay at some of the IRA's acts of violence he did not seek to restrain its activities. He had always been prepared to contemplate the use of force against British rule, and since bloodshed had produced substantial results (contrary to his expectations) he acquiesced in further attacks on the British. He turned a blind eye to the activities of Collins's 'squad' and to the guerrillas in Munster – aware that he could not control them, and that their actions facilitated his government's political and administrative programme. In public he blamed all violence on the crown forces. Yet he helped to ensure that, at least in theory, the IRA was subordinated to political and parliamentary authority; for example, he supported the proposal of Cathal Brugha (qv) in August 1919 that all its members should swear an oath of allegiance to the dáil. He was always a firm defender of democracy and the principle of civilian control over the army.

Griffith responded to requests from Irish landowners that his government should establish courts to control agrarian violence in several parts of the country. Here, as elsewhere, he put his theories into practice. Nevil Macready (qv), the British commander-in-chief, was impressed that captured Irish documents revealed a policy

for government almost identical to that outlined by Griffith in *The resurrection of Hungary*, written sixteen years earlier.

In autumn 1920 tentative discussions with the British took place through intermediaries, but while the process was under way Griffith was arrested on 26 November in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. He spent the next seven months in Mountjoy jail – under far more pleasant circumstances than during his previous terms of imprisonment. When de Valera returned to Ireland at the end of the year he showed himself to be a more forceful head of government than Griffith had been during his long absence.

New general elections were held in May 1921 and Griffith headed the poll in the contested constituency of Fermanagh and Tyrone, while also being returned unopposed for Cavan. He was released on 30 June, having spent almost two of the previous five years in jail. He joined de Valera in meeting southern unionist representatives, and was one of the group which accompanied the president to London for his private meetings with Lloyd George.

On 26 August Griffith was appointed minister for foreign affairs in the new Irish cabinet, and the following month de Valera nominated him as the chairman of the Irish delegation which would negotiate with the British. There is no indication that he was dissatisfied with this role, although some fellow members of the cabinet were opposed to the concessions that he knew must be made if a settlement were to be reached. The dáil agreed unanimously that the delegates should be plenipotentiaries who would 'be given a free hand in [the] negotiations and duly to report to the dáil', but the cabinet privately limited their power and directed that *it* should have the final word on any agreement. Three cabinet ministers (Griffith, Collins, and Robert Barton (qv)) were among the delegates, leaving only four members remaining in Dublin.

**Negotiating the treaty** Long before the negotiations commenced on 11 October the British made it clear that they would not contemplate an Irish republic, and it soon became apparent that they also rejected de Valera's visionary but (at the time) unrealistic alternative of 'external association'. The new Irish state would be granted dominion status and would therefore have to take its place within the empire, rather than remain outside it.

The negotiations lasted nearly two months. At the beginning they took the form of plenary sessions, but these were replaced by private discussions in which Griffith and Collins met Lloyd George and other British leaders. The main contentious issues were 'Ulster', the crown, and British defence requirements. The Irish delegation was badly briefed; in particular the negotiations were already under way before de Valera revealed to Griffith what his policy on the Ulster question should be (and even then he had not shown it to his colleagues in Dublin). Not only were there internal divisions within the delegation, but as the talks continued a gap widened between the representatives in London and the rump cabinet in Dublin.

The Irish were determined that the negotiations should not collapse over the question of the crown, and the British were equally concerned to avoid a break over 'Ulster' where – as Lloyd George remarked to his colleagues – they had a very weak case. The Irish delegates demanded local plebiscites, but ultimately they were prepared to allow Northern Ireland to retain its existing area, parliament and government – provided that these would be subordinated to Dublin rather than to London. They sought 'essential unity' of the sort that James Craig (qv) and the unionists rejected. Lloyd George proposed the establishment of a boundary commission, and he secured Griffith's private agreement that he would not embarrass the British government by repudiating such a plan; the Irish would not 'queer his position' vis-à-vis his Conservative and unionist critics. Griffith believed, and was encouraged to believe, that such a commission would transfer large areas of Northern Ireland to the Free State. He informed both de Valera and his fellow delegates of this assurance, but not that he had also approved a written summary of what had been agreed in a private meeting with Tom Jones, secretary to the British delegation during the negotiations. With its leader neutralised in this manner, the prime minister could assume that a united Irish delegation would not break off negotiations over the Ulster question. Gradually the Irish shifted from a position of external to one of internal association with the empire, and concessions were made to satisfy Britain's defence interests.

The British insisted on 'allegiance' to the crown, while the Irish were prepared to accept some vague form of association – provided that other matters were resolved satisfactorily. Lloyd George offered to include any phrase that would ensure that the role of the crown in the Irish Free State would not be greater than in Canada or any other dominion, and shortly afterwards the Irish delegation was presented with a draft treaty. The boundary commission clause was amended to ensure that the 'wishes of the inhabitants' would be qualified by a new reference to economic and geographic conditions.

This document was discussed at an acrimonious cabinet meeting in Dublin. Griffith argued in favour of accepting the British proposals and declared that he would not take the responsibility of breaking on the crown, but de Valera and others rejected the draft; however, no one proposed alterations to the 'Ulster' clauses, revealing either carelessness or *naïveté* on the part of all the Irish leaders. It was decided unanimously that the document should not be signed and that the oath of allegiance should be rejected, and (once again) the delegates were ordered to refer any draft agreement back to the cabinet in Dublin.

On their return to London Griffith and some of his colleagues implemented the cabinet's directive and resumed the doomed argument in favour of de Valera's policy of external association. It was rejected once more. In private discussions he urged the inclusion of a formula, however vague, which would recognise Irish unity. But at a crucial meeting on 5 December Lloyd George produced the boundary commission document Griffith had agreed with Tom Jones three weeks earlier, and

after this Griffith felt that he would be unable to break on 'Ulster'. The discussions continued, and agreement was reached on various points such as coastal defence. In particular, the only oath of allegiance to be sworn by dáil deputies would be to the Free State constitution; they would be merely 'faithful' to the king. Lloyd George conceded fiscal autonomy, an issue close to Griffith's heart.

At this stage, unwisely and irresponsibly, Griffith declared to the British that he would sign the treaty even if his colleagues did not. Naturally Lloyd George insisted that all the Irish delegates must sign; otherwise, he warned, there would be no agreement, the truce would break down, and the war would be resumed. Led by Collins they eventually agreed to do so, in some cases with deep reluctance. They exercised the plenipotentiary powers granted by the dáil, ignoring both the cabinet's directive to refer back any agreement and their own commitment to do so. The ministers who remained in Dublin had given little help to the delegates in London.

Until the end of the negotiations Griffith had fought hard for a degree of independence greater than that which was ultimately obtained. But, although the term was not used in 1921, what he and his colleagues secured in the treaty was remarkably close to the dual monarchy which he had advocated in *The resurrection of Hungary*; Ireland would share a king with Britain but would otherwise be effectively independent. This achievement of his long-term aims had been brought about largely by the violent methods that he had always believed could not succeed.

**Defending the treaty** The Irish cabinet supported the treaty by four votes to three. In the dáil debates that followed, Griffith was the principal speaker in favour of the agreement, and – confident that it enjoyed overwhelming public support – defended it with force and passion. He insisted that although the terms were not ideal they were the best available, and that the interests of the people must take preference over ideals and abstractions. Like Collins, he saw the treaty as part of a process rather than as a final settlement; he declared robustly that the issue should be decided by 'the Irish people – who are our masters, not our servants as some think' (*Dáil Éireann official report. Debate on the treaty*, 20 (19 Dec. 1921)). His arguments and his style were characteristically blunt, and in later debates he lapsed into personal abuse.

Finally on 7 January 1922 the dáil ended its deliberations and ratified the treaty by sixty-four votes to fifty-seven. De Valera later ran for re-election and was defeated by only two votes, after which Griffith was elected president of the dáil and formed a new government.

However, the treaty had to be endorsed by the 'parliament of Southern Ireland', consisting of *all* the MPs who had been elected in May 1921 for the area of the future Free State, including four unionists from TCD. Griffith convened this parliament and it approved a list of ministers whose names had already been chosen by his dáil cabinet – yet his own name was not on the list. Collins became chairman

of the provisional government to which the British transferred their powers, and henceforth he was the dominant figure in the pro-treaty leadership. Griffith may have felt constrained by his earlier commitments that if elected president of the dáil he would occupy whatever position de Valera had held, and that he would keep the republic in being until the people voted for or against the establishment of the Free State. He may also have been content to make way for Collins, as he had done for de Valera in 1917. His dáil government remained in existence, useful mainly because it alone was recognised by opponents of the treaty.

Although in theory the two pro-treaty administrations worked in tandem, in practice there was considerable overlap between them. Griffith chaired twenty-two of the twenty-four meetings of the dáil cabinet, but he also attended most meetings of Collins's provisional government and he allowed his own government to disappear. It faded away at the end of April.

Griffith had little power but he retained considerable influence, and he used it to reinforce civilian and political authority. He wanted early general elections to prove that the treaty enjoyed public support, thereby confirming and legitimising the positions occupied by himself and his colleagues. He was impatient with the chaos and violence associated with the republicans' refusal to recognise the treaty, and was eager to begin governing the country in a normal fashion. He shared none of Collins's forbearance towards his old comrades, and demanded constantly that the pro-treaty authorities should act firmly against those whom he regarded as anti-democratic militarists. Ministers would be 'poltroons' if, having stood up to British tyranny, they now submitted to 'a tyranny just as mean and less supportable' (*Dáil Éireann official report 1921–1922*, 461 (19 May 1922)). In turn republicans regarded him as a warmonger, and even his supporters were embarrassed by his intemperance.

He was unhappy at the decision to postpone an election until after the publication of the Free State constitution. But because he was trusted by the British, it was Griffith who went to London to explain this change of plan, and he defended skilfully a decision with which he had little sympathy. He also accompanied Collins to a meeting with Craig and Winston Churchill, and later to a conference with anti-treaty representatives. However, when Collins and de Valera agreed on a 'pact' which laid down that the treaty would not be an issue in the forthcoming elections, and that rival pro- and anti-treaty Sinn Féin dáil deputies would run for re-election as a united 'panel', Griffith was one of many who feared that the voters would be denied a genuine choice. Once again, however, he went to London to explain the Irish position.

The provisional government (along with Griffith, who was present at the relevant meetings) attempted to outmanoeuvre both Lloyd George and de Valera by drafting what was in effect a republican constitution under the auspices of the treaty. When the British refused to accept this 'republic in disguise' it was Griffith who led an Irish

team to negotiate the changes that were considered necessary; he was a frequent visitor to London in 1922.

He enjoyed a final triumph in the June elections when, despite his earlier scepticism, the Collins–de Valera pact resulted in an election whose result was broadly representative of Irish public opinion. Candidates who supported the treaty obtained 78 per cent of the first-preference votes. Once again Griffith was elected for Cavan, receiving more votes than those cast for the other three candidates combined. He saw no need for further delay, and he urged Collins to confront those soldiers who continued to defy the government. But republican radicals urged the resumption of war against the British, and a series of events in late June pushed the two sides towards a military conflict. Less than two weeks after polling day the long-simmering violence boiled over into full-scale civil war.

Griffith was not a warrior, and despite his insistence that the government should act firmly against those whom he described as ‘gunmen’, he observed the fighting with dismay. He remained busy, and after his return from the constitutional negotiations in London attended forty-one of the forty-two provisional government meetings held between 23 June and 30 July. But his health broke down, and he was in St Vincent's nursing home, Leeson Street, when he died suddenly from a cerebral haemorrhage on 12 August 1922.

Although he was aged only 51 he seemed already a father-figure to the younger men around him, a relic of an earlier age. He died despondent, believing that many of his achievements were being undone and that his old suspicion of bloodshed had been vindicated at last. After the civil war he was almost forgotten by his ungrateful pro-treaty colleagues.

This was unjust. For over twenty years he had been a formidable editor and journalist, he was the founder of a party which (ultimately and briefly) dominated Irish politics, and he was a staunch champion of democratic values and institutions. Among Irish nationalists who fought against British rule he was unusual, if not unique, in one respect: by the time of his death he had achieved most of his objectives.

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