

‘The two leaders stood defiant, looking deeply moved and facing one another’

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It was during the speech of Deputy James Burke, of Tipperary, for the Treaty, that the really dramatic events of yesterday occurred as in a flash. The deputy was speaking of Document No. 2 [Eamon de Valera's proposed alternative to the Anglo-Irish Treaty], when Mr de Valera, with flashing eyes, arose and literally swept the chamber with the driving force of his personality. "I protested before, and I protest again," he declared, "about a misrepresentation of my position. I stand as a symbol for the Republic. Neither publicly nor privately have I lowered that position. It would be a matter for impeachment if I did."

One sensed the coming scene. Said Mr de Valera: "I didn't go to London because I wished to keep that symbol of the Republic pure even from insinuation, or even a word across the table that would give away the Republic."

"And I also protest," said Michael Collins, springing to his feet, "that I have in any way given away anything."

And then when the adjournment was moved Mr de Valera again intimated his intention of moving his amendment, today. Arthur Griffith, pale but determined, faced him across the table in front of the Speaker. A document had been put in their hands. It differed from another document.

"You are quibbling," said Mr de Valera, with flaming emphasis. Dan McCarthy interposed: "The President is a very touchy man, but there ought to be some decency in debate."

Arthur Griffith, persistent, kept on his feet and said that six clauses had been omitted from the document now submitted.

Then Mr de Valera spoke with every fibre of his long body tense and his head and shoulders bent forward. He uttered his words authoritatively. "I am responsible for the proposals, and the House will have to decide upon them. I am going to choose my own procedure."

Arthur Griffith spoke coldly but intently: "The President has said he is going to choose his own procedure. This is either a constitutional body or it is not. If it is an autocracy, let us know and we will leave it."

With these pregnant words he ceased speaking.

Thus the two leaders stood defiant, looking deeply moved and facing one another. A murmur of voices arises from the body of the Hall. The Speaker, who had sat silently whilst the sharp interchange was in progress, now arose and said the only motion before him was that for the adjournment. It ended for the day, leaving an anxious feeling over the commencement of today's proceedings.

And representatives of the world's press watched the scene silently and anticipated doubtless further developments that they can telegraph and cable to the ends of the earth.

Divisions in the Dáil were a portent of the darkest days to come

Conor Bolger



While the debates on the Anglo-Irish Treaty were lively, they did little to reconcile the deep differences that had grown between both sides

The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty ignited some of the most monumental debates in Irish history.

The Irish delegation was immediately called back from London on the news of the agreement. A private meeting was held on December 8, with ministers joined by Éamonn Duggan and Gavan Duffy (the other plenipotentiaries), Kevin O'Higgins and Erskine Childers. A long day concluded with the cabinet split four to three. Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith, Robert Barton and WT Cosgrave supported passing the treaty, while Eamon de Valera, Austin Stack and Cathal Brugha opposed it. This division was a portent.

Much of the debate centred on how much independence Ireland would have from Britain. Both sides laid out their opinions at the first post-treaty Dáil session on December 19.



Pledge refusal: Constance Markiewicz
PHOTO: HULTON ARCHIVE

Collins famously said he felt the treaty "gives us freedom, not the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it".

Erskine Childers responded that while he had listened to a "most able and eloquent speech" he was in "profound disagreement with the conclusion". In his opinion, ratifying the treaty would mean the Dáil was "relinquishing deliberately and abandoning" the principle of an independent Ireland that it was founded upon.

These viewpoints were irreconcilable and represented the fundamental rupture that would split the Dáil and the nation. These feelings continued to be clear throughout the series of debates until January 7, 1922, the day of the Dáil vote on the treaty. When Harry Boland spoke before the vote, his chief objection was that he was being "asked to surrender the title of Irishman and accept the title of West Briton", and that the treaty represented "the very negation of all that for which we have fought".

Longford-Westmeath TD Seán Mac Eoin, on the other hand, said the treaty "gives me what I and my comrades fought for". This view was vehemently opposed by one Tomás de Barra, who asserted in a letter to the *Irish*

Independent that it was a "misrepresentation of every fighting man" he had stood alongside. Divisions in the Dáil were clearly reflective of the divisions in society.

There was also much debate over the oath to the king. Those who supported the treaty insisted that this was sworn to the Crown in symbol only. Éamonn Duggan, on December 21, stressed his view that the oath was to the Free State and reference to the Crown was simply to "recognise the king as head of the Commonwealth you are in". Those who opposed referred to the republican oath they had taken.

Constance Markiewicz, on January 3, reminded the Dáil that, in contrast to the oath to the king, they had taken the republican

oath under no duress and they had taken it meaning to see the fight for an independent republic through to the death. She maintained that she would not pledge an oath to any empire or commonwealth "treading down the people of Egypt and of India".

DEFINITE MANDATE

Various members spoke about the perceived mandates from their constituents and how this influenced their decision. Many of these viewpoints were shared after the Christmas adjournment ended on January 3, 1922, after TDs had the opportunity to speak with members of their constituencies.

Kildare-Wicklow TD Art O'Connor said that his constituents gave him a "definite mandate"

Differing positions: Harry Boland, Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera
PHOTO: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND



in 1918 and 1921 to "support the republican government in this country". For him, this meant voting against the treaty.

Such claims of public mandate were roundly rejected by Arthur Griffith when he spoke on January 7. He asserted that the people of Ireland had elected not "doctrinaire republicans" but rather men and women "looking for freedom and independence". He wanted to dispel any notion that the plenipotentiaries had gone to London with a mandate for a republic and come back with less.

Some TDs had been met by overwhelming support for the treaty in their constituencies. JJ Walsh believed "that nine out of every ten people in Cork city" were in favour and that the Dáil was "bound in conscience... to follow and execute the will of the people". Eoin O'Duffy claimed that "only one or two out of the 35,000 people I represent are against it".

The *Irish Independent* of January 7 also reported that 361 "elected and other bodies" supported the treaty, including county councils, labour bodies, farmers' associations and urban and rural district councils.

Some TDs questioned the reasons behind such public support. Liam Mellows offered his opinion on January 4 that people were being "stampeded" into supporting the treaty because they feared the only alternative was "terrible, immediate war". Public support represented "the fear of the people" rather than willing support, he argued. A day earlier, Frank Fahy expressed similar sentiments, arguing that "the great majority of the people are in favour of acceptance, lest worse befall".

These points raised two other key questions about the treaty: what were the viable alternatives and what lasting impact would the vote have on the unity of the government and country? From today's vantage point, Ernest Blythe's suggestion that ratification

Harry Boland said he was being 'asked to surrender the title of Irishman and accept the title of West Briton'

would not "be followed by anything like the split... like the split that would follow rejection" may appear ridiculous. Yet at the time one must ask how valid this viewpoint was and whether TDs could envisage the prospect of a harrowing civil war.

On December 19, de Valera made it clear that he opposed the treaty because it would "not end the centuries of conflict between the two nations of Great Britain and Ireland" and that it would not "reconcile our own people, much less reconcile Britain and Ireland". Tragically, he was to be proven correct. It was clear that whatever topic was discussed, the divisions in the Dáil would be stark. A truly conclusive settlement did not appear possible.

In the end, the treaty was passed by 64 votes to 57. After the vote, Collins spoke in unifying terms. He did not "regard the passing of this thing as being any kind of triumph over the other side" and that the goal of the Dáil now was to "do our best to preserve the public safety".

Mary MacSwiney was less conciliatory. Despite insisting that the nation could not "descend to the faction fights of former days", she stated that accepting the treaty was a "gross betrayal" worse than even the Act of Union.

While the Dáil debates were lively, they did little to reconcile both sides. De Valera ended his contribution to the session on January 7 by breaking down in tears, while Brugha concluded by saying he would ensure that discipline was kept in the army. Civil war broke out six months later.

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