

Irish

Foreign Affairs

Volume 3, Number 4

December 2010

*“Every nation, if it is to survive as a nation, must study its own history and have a foreign policy”
- C.J. O’Donnell, The Lordship of the World, 1924, p. 145*

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My feeling, after investigating all of this, is that those who counterpose Redmondite Home Rule to republican Ireland owe the whole of Europe an apology for his part in the facilitation of the carnage that his support to Asquith made inevitable.

Perhaps, instead of Poppy Day, we should have our own day in which we remember the countless millions who died in Europe and beyond as a result of his failure to prevent the war policies of the British Government from coming to fruition. The day would also serve as an occasion of national atonement for generating such a phenomenon in our body politic.

Why is there not a special relationship between Ireland and Germany?

German national development was an influence on Irish development in the 19th century. The religious tolerance of Protestant Prussia was looked on as evidence that the strict Confessionalism of English rule in Ireland—the Penal Law system—was not a necessity of liberal statecraft but a bigoted aberration. The Prussian land reform that was part of the national resurgence against Napoleon after his victories at Jena/Auerstadt stimulated ideas of land reform in Ireland. The greatest influence that any British intellectual ever exercised on Irish national life was exercised by Thomas Carlyle, who seemed to be intent on developing the English language in accordance with its German roots. The Young Ireland leaders gave Carlyle a conducted tour of Ireland in the late 1840s, towards the end of the event that is officially known as The Famine. A generation later Carlyle's Germanic influence is evident in the writings of Canon Sheehan, along with a wealth of direct influence from Germany. James Connolly went to war as an ally of Germany and his paper, *The Workers' Republic*, has a strong German content. And of course *Sinn Fein* is a German idea.

So how did we become so remote from Germany? Did we cut ourselves off from it as a failure—because it failed to hold itself together in Britain's "*War Upon The German Nation*"? (That is Connolly's description of the Great War launched by Britain in 1914.)

Martin Mansergh, who combines the roles of Government politician and intellectual, tells us that Connolly got it all wrong about Germany in 1914. But he does not say why. He does not attempt to refute Connolly with facts and reasons. In fact he says little, but conveys by gesture and tone of voice, in a would-be ruling class way, that no heed should be taken of Connolly's views on the Great War. Or of Casement's views either.

Nicholas Mansergh, father of the politician and intellectual, certainly took no heed of the views of Connolly and Casement in a series of lectures on the causes of the Great War, which he delivered at Queen Alexandra College in Dublin during the Second World War. Mansergh senior was a British Imperial administrator who came to Dublin in order to make propaganda about the 1st World War. The propaganda was published as a book in London in the later 1940s and it appeared for a time on the University syllabus in Belfast. In recent years Mansergh senior has been hailed as one of the great Irish historians. (He was born on the remnant of a Cromwellian estate in Tipperary.) But it is a strange Irish historian of *The Coming Of The Great War* who could treat the writings of Connolly and Casement on the subject as if they did not exist.

Casement, as a member of the British diplomatic service, saw Britain preparing for the war, and began to write about it even before the actual outbreak of war. Connolly, when the strong socialist movements in Britain, France and Germany failed to live up to pre-War Resolutions to prevent war by socialist action, and supported their respective Governments in the War, re-assessed the situation. He saw conditions of working class life were much better in Germany than in Britain, that the German economy was

for that reason much more productive than the British, and that Britain decided to resort to competition by war.

Arthur Griffith too supported the Central Powers in the War, but his view was not quite the same as Connolly's or Casement's. He saw Austria as well as Germany, and his position was drawn from both. He aimed to establish between Ireland and Britain the kind of relationship that existed between Hungary and Austria in the Hapsburg State. It was not a realistic project. Britain would never accept Ireland as a partner in the Empire, sharing the same Crown with Britain but not in any way subject to the British Parliament.

A British/Irish Dual Monarchy was never on the cards. The essential idea of *Sinn Fein*, got from the German national economist, List, was very much on the cards.

World economy, in which the individual was an atom, was not a possible mode of existence. Something was necessary as an intermediary between the individual and the human race. That intermediary was the nation, conducting a national economy:

"Between the Individual and Humanity stands, and must continue to stand, a great fact—the Nation".

Here is an extract from Griffith's speech to a Sinn Fein Convention in 1905, issued as a pamphlet in 1907 under the title *The Sinn Fein Policy*:

"The Anglicisation of the Irish mind is best exhibited in its attitude towards economics. The system of economics which Adam Smith and his successors invented for the purpose of obtaining control of the world's market for England, is taught in our educational system and believed by the people to be the quintessence of wisdom. It does not matter that all Europe has rejected it. England still holds on, and because England holds on, Ireland, under the British system of education, perforce concludes the '*as-good-and-as-cheap*' shibboleth must be a gospel. Well, with the remainder of English impositions and humbugs, we must bundle it out of the country. I am in Economics largely a follower of the man who thwarted England's dream of the commercial conquest of the world, and who made the mighty confederation before which England has fallen commercially and is falling politically—Germany. His name is a famous one in the outside world, his works are the text-books of economic science in other countries—in Ireland his name is unknown and his works unheard of—I refer to Frederick List, the real founder of the German *Zollverein*—the man whom England caused to be persecuted by the Government of his native country, and whom she hated and feared more than any man since Napoleon—the man who saved Germany from falling a prey to English economics, and whose brain conceived the great industrial and united Germany of to-day ...

"With List—whose work on the National System of Political Economy I would wish to see in the hands of every Irishman—I reject the so-called political economy which neither recognises the principle of nationality nor takes into consideration the satisfaction of its interests, which regards chiefly the mere exchangeable value of things without taking into consideration

the mental and political, the present and the future interests and the productive powers of the nation, which ignores the nature and character of social labour and the operation of the union of powers in their higher consequences, considers private industry only as it would develop itself under a state of free interchange with the human race were it not divided into separate nations. Let me continue in the words of this great man to define the nation. Brushing aside the fallacies of Adam Smith and his tribe, List points out that

‘Between the Individual and Humanity stands, and must continue to stand, a great fact—the Nation.’

“The Nation, with its special language and literature, with its peculiar origins and history, with its special manners and customs, laws and institutions, with the claims of all these for existence, independence, perfection, and continuance for the future, and with its separate territory, a society which, united by a thousand ties of minds and interests, combines itself into one independent whole, which recognises the law of right for and within itself, and in its united character is still opposed to other societies of a similar kind in their national liberty, and consequently can only, under the existing conditions of the world, maintain self-existence and independence by its own power and resources ...

“In the economy of Adam Smith, there is no place for the soul of a nation. To him the associations of its past possess no value; but in the economy of the man who made out of the petty and divided States of the Rhine the great Germany we see to-day there is a place, and it is the highest. True political economy recognises that prompt cash payment, to use Mitchel’s phrase, is not the sole nexus between man and man ... When the German Commercial League sixty years ago exhorted all to stand together for a Germany such as we see to-day, it appealed to what the great economist had taught it was the highest value in economics—nationality. Can we imagine our manufacturers addressing our people as these German manufacturers did? Perhaps we can; but we can only imagine it as occurring at some distant period when they have realised the value of a national spirit ...

“We in Ireland have been taught by our British Lords Lieutenant, our British Education Boards, and our Barrington Lecturers, that our destiny is to be the fruitful mother of flocks and herds—that it is not necessary for us to pay attention to our manufacturing arm ... With List I reply: A nation cannot promote and further its

civilisation, its prosperity, and its social progress equally as well by exchanging agricultural products for manufactured goods as by establishing a manufacturing power of its own. A merely agricultural nation can never develop to any extent a home or foreign commerce ... : it will never acquire important political power or be placed in a position to influence the cultivation and progress of less advanced nations and to form colonies of its own. A mere agricultural state is infinitely less powerful than an agricultural manufacturing state. The former is always economically dependent on those foreign nations which take from it agricultural in exchange for manufactured goods. It cannot determine how much it will produce—it must wait and see how much others will buy from it ...

“The policy of Sinn Fein proposes ... to

bring Ireland out of the Corner

and makes her assert her existence to the world. I have spoken of an essential; but the basis of the policy is national self-reliance.

“No Law and no series of Laws can make a Nation out of a People which distrusts itself.”

*

All of this remains very much to the point, apart from the remark about colonies. Griffith was not opposed in principle to Empires and Colonies. He was opposed to British colonialism and imperialism in Ireland. He did not see all peoples as equal. He saw advanced and backward nations. His case against Britain was that it engaged in Imperial oppression of the advanced Irish nation instead of making it a partner in Empire. It is in that respect rather like the British case against Germany over the extermination of Jews. Britain was not opposed in principle to the extermination of peoples. It had itself exterminated many peoples, and felt good about it. A leading British Liberal of the late 19th century, Sir Charles Dilke, in *Greater Britain*, an immensely popular book published less than twenty years before Griffith’s *Sinn Fein Address*, boasted that the Anglo-Saxons were the greatest exterminating race the world had ever seen. The historic British case against Himmler can only be that he exterminated the wrong people—as Griffith’s case against Britain was that it oppressed and perverted the development of, and came close to exterminating, the wrong people.

The Irish never got their colonies. The British would not accept them as partners in Empire—only as raw materials. And the more vital element in the national movement proved to be the one that was anti-Imperialist on principle.

With that proviso, Griffith’s view of things remains to the point, and it is more relevant now than it was twenty years ago, when the European Union promised a development that it proved unable to realise when it submitted itself to British influence.

What has happened in the world since Griffith’s speech? Britain made war on Germany in 1914 and won.

Until Minister Mansergh, or somebody of his way of thinking, undertakes a refutation of the arguments of Connolly and Casement, let’s assume that they got it right. They are the Internationalists in our national Pantheon. If those who disagree

Irish Foreign Affairs is a publication of the *Irish Political Review* Group.
55 St Peter's Tce., Howth, Dublin 13

Editor: Philip O’Connor
ISSN 2009-132X

Printers: Athol Books, Belfast
www.atholbooks.org

Price per issue: € (Sterling £5)
Annual postal subscription: €8
Annual electronic subscription: €0

All correspondence, orders:
philip@atholbooks.org

with them on this great international issue do not undertake to refute their reasoned arguments on the Great War—or even to admit that their views on the War were what they were—it is reasonable to assume that the dismissal of them is based on other grounds than considered disagreements with their arguments.

So: Britain took Germany at a disadvantage, made war on it, and won. But the German resistance was unexpectedly strong and Britain damaged itself so badly in the course of winning (even though it got others to do the main body of the fighting) that it was unable to profit from this victory in the way it had profited from victory in its earlier Great Wars.

Britain constructed an alliance against Germany by encouraging French irredentism on the issue of Alsace-Lorraine, Italian irredentism on the southern Tyrol, and Tsarist Russian ambition to conquer and annex Istanbul.

The long resistance of Germany, Austria and Turkey put the aggressive Powers under such stress that all of them found themselves disabled, and in disagreement with each other, in the moment of victory. They were in no condition to make a workable Peace Settlement in 1919, as had been done a century earlier on the defeat of Napoleon. The evolutionary continuity of Europe was broken. The war-damaged victors bayed at the moon. They plundered Germany and then imposed further economic terms on it that could not be complied with, and damaged their own economies to the extent that they were complied with. And elemental political forces of a kind not seen for centuries arose within the war-damaged states of both the victors and the vanquished.

Britain refused to settle with Ireland on the basis of the 1918 Election result, even with the three-quarters of the country in which Sinn Fein had overwhelming support. Six months after deciding to strike down the Irish democracy, it presented the German democracy with a false Confession of War Guilt to sign under threat of a resumption of the War. The Government signed—and thereby discredited the new German Republic in the eyes of millions. The German military staff considered the possibility of resisting an Anglo-French invasion. Though it advised the government that resistance would fail to hold off an Anglo-Franco-Polish invasion, detailed consideration of the matter kept the Army functional in one of its vital parts, and brought home the vulnerability of Germany under Versailles conditions.

In 1923 Germany was invaded by France and Belgium for the purpose of plunder. There was no German attempt at resistance, but the fact of unresisted invasion naturally had an effect on German political life.

By this time Britain had begun to support Germany against France on the principle that the strongest Power in Europe was its natural enemy. France was now by far the strongest Power. It wanted to use its strength to insure itself against a German resurgence. It aimed to do this by advancing its borders and bringing about a Rhineland secession from Germany—a thing for which there was considerable support in the Rhineland. Britain would not allow this. It insisted that the German state should be kept intact against France.

The German Republic, in an indefensible position between France and Poland under Versailles conditions, began to break those conditions covertly and to engage in secret re-armament in

complicity with Bolshevik Russia. The secret was soon out, but Britain preferred not to know.

German breaches of Versailles, begun under Weimar, continued under Hitler. Britain connived at the Weimar breaches, but collaborated openly with Hitler when he broke them. It did not consider itself bound by the Versailles Treaty either in its own affairs—disarmament was supposed to become general—or in its relations with Germany. The operative international body in its view was not the League of Nations (formed as part of the Versailles Treaty) but the British Empire. The League and the Empire were incompatible in principle and practice. Britain disabled the League and then treated it as useless.

“*Appeasement*” is a false and misleading description of Britain’s relationship with Germany between the Wars, especially with Nazi Germany. As used, it suggests that Britain conciliated Germany as a Power in the hope that Germany would behave beautifully in response. In fact the power of Germany was negligible until the middle 1930s, and Britain collaborated with Hitler to increase it.

Germany was reduced to the status of a third-rate Power in 1919—weaker than Poland and Czechoslovakia, much weaker than Italy, and off the scale of comparison with relation to France and Britain. And it was without an ally—Austria having been even more thoroughly disabled by the Victors than it was, and specifically forbidden by Versailles to be its ally.

Yet Germany approached the status of a first-rate Power at the end of 1938.

This was not something it could have done by its own efforts. It could only have been done with the help of the hidden hand of a powerful patron.

In fact the hand was not hidden at all. Britain did it quite openly, while at the same time causing it not to be seen. And then, as Victor for a second time, Britain made up a different story for the history written after 1945. (But in Churchill’s own *History* the real story is told in a muted secondary theme.)

Britain did not allow the German and Austrian democracies to merge in the 1920s, but it allowed a merger of Fascist Austria and Nazi Germany in 1938. And then, at the end of 1938, it made a gift of the stronghold of the Czechoslovak Sudetenland to Hitler, and the Czech arms industry along with it. It was only then that Germany could be said to have become a major military Power, though still not equal to the French or the British.

Within months of making Germany a major military Power, Britain decided to make war on it.

It went to war on the issue of keeping the German city of Danzig formally within the Polish State, even though the Polish State had failed entirely to establish a political presence in Danzig. It formed a military alliance against Germany with France and Poland.

Six months before Britain gave the Military Guarantee to Poland, the German military staff reckoned that Germany could not hold out in a war with France over Czechoslovakia. Britain had deterred France from honouring its Treaty with the Czechs and made a gift of the Sudetenland to Hitler, but German strength had not grown so spectacularly as a result of the Munich Agreement that it could afford to look on the 1939 military encirclement with equanimity. Britain, by means of its Polish Guarantee, had

changed Poland from an ally of Germany (with whom it had signed a Treaty, and collaborated in the taking part of Czechoslovakia) into an enemy. Poland changed front with relation to Germany under the illusion of a dependable alliance with the two greatest military powers in the world (France and Britain). And Poland was the State in Europe which had most recently fought a war: it had defeated Russia in 1920.

Germany broke the encirclement by going on the offensive against Poland and defeating it. It saw that Britain was not making convincing preparations to deliver on the Polish Guarantee in the event that it precipitated war, and it gambled that France would not act unless Britain acted. And that is how Hitler got his first military victory. Britain left Poland in the lurch.

Britain declared war on Germany, but conducted that war at its leisure, without practical reference to Poland. It made no attempt to fight the limited war in September 1939 that it was committed to by Treaty and that would probably have stopped Germany in its tracks and deflated Hitler. What it did was slowly work up a World War against Germany for some purpose about which it is difficult to make any sense, except that it had nothing to do with defending Poland.

The attack on Poland was not such a clear-cut act of aggression as the British history which has saturated the world since 1945 presents it. It might be that Hitler wanted to make war on Poland anyway. There is no way of knowing such things as historical facts. They belong to the sphere of war propaganda—and Hitler admired Britain as the master of war propaganda. So, whatever Hitler would have done anyway, he made war on Poland under circumstances of military encirclement by superior power.

The Germany military staff had been dealing with the problem of how to cope with a war of military encirclement by superior powers ever since the Versailles ultimatum of June 1919 and the Franco-Belgian invasion of 1923. In 1938 they still saw little prospect of winning. What little chance there was lay in active defence.

Britain conferred a considerable increase of strength on Germany in the Fall of 1938, for a purpose which has never been disclosed. And then, in March 1939, it brought about the condition of active encirclement in a volatile situation which the Germany military had been thinking of how to deal with for twenty years. Something had to be done, and Britain's gift the previous Autumn had increased the possibility of doing something.

Minister Mansergh denies that Britain organised a military encirclement of Germany in 1939. He seems to think that would have been an evil thing to do. But, if the Nazi regime was evil and needed destroying, surely the forming of a military alliance to crush it would have been a good thing?

The South African Government was consulted by Whitehall about the contemplated Guarantee to Poland. On 23rd March General Herzog, the Prime Minister, told Whitehall that it

“can have no other result but that of war, not because Germany necessarily wants war, but because such policy of encirclement cannot be taken by her as meaning anything else than a declaration of hostilities differing but little, if at all, from a declaration of war” (see S. Newman: *March 1939, The British Guarantee To Poland*. Oxford 1976, p215).

The evil thing about the Guarantee which created the encirclement was that it was issued when there was no intention of honouring it.

And the issuing of the Guarantee means that the German action against Poland was not the pure and simple act of aggression that it is usually represented as being.

Success in the Polish War led to a further increase in German strength, but it was still far from equality with France and Britain, or even France alone.

An outstanding declaration of war lay against Germany on its western front. Its response to that declaration nine months later can hardly be called an act of aggression. During that nine months Britain tried to get itself invited into the Finnish-Russian War—either for the purpose of making war on Russia, or the secondary purpose of gaining control of Scandinavia and stopping Swedish export of iron ore to Germany. Finland made a settlement with Russia instead of inviting Britain to assist it—and a year and a half later it invaded Russia as an ally of Germany.

Britain then set about controlling Norway, breaching its neutrality in order to interfere with Swedish shipping. It planned a major move on Norway. Germany got wind of this and took a rapid gamble, with a pre-emptive invasion of Norway that came off. The contemporary military theorist, and later historian, Basil Liddell-Hart, wrote:

“One of the most questionable points in the Nuremberg Trials was that the planning and execution of aggression against Norway was put among the major charges against the Germans. It is hard to understand how the British and French Governments had the face to approve the inclusion of this charge and how the official prosecutors could press for a conviction on this score. Such a course was one of the most palpable cases of hypocrisy in history” (*The Second World War*, 1973 edn. p63).

While Britain was licking its wounds over Norway, Germany responded to the declaration of war in France, and won.

In all of this Britain acted at its leisure as the stronger force. Germany could not defend at leisure. It had to engage in the active defence which had been on its mind ever since 1919. Being the weaker force it had to be active and take risks. Through a mixture of luck, planning, and military insubordination by eager Generals it won a quick victory in France, which has been mythologised into a “*tactic of Blitzkrieg*”.

Italy joined Germany as an ally in the war in France on June 10th when it was clear that Germany had won. For this, Italy has been described as a jackal in British propaganda. But in other circumstances Britain has encouraged the way of the jackal. When it is winning it encourages others to join it and make a prudent accommodation with Power and bestow moral approval on it.

Italy prudently declared war on France when France was beaten, and took back some bits of Savoy that France had taken from it a few generations earlier.

Italy did not behave heroically in 1940. But in recent times in Ireland heroism has been much disapproved of. So let's at least acknowledge that Italy did its best to act prudently in June 1940 by aligning itself with the victor.

In 1915 Britain lured Italy into the war on Austria and Germany by supporting its irredentist ambitions on Austrian territory. Austria was willing to concede some territory to Italy to secure its continuing neutrality, but Britain drew it into the *Entente* war with a very big bid of Austrian territory. In 1919 however Britain withheld part of what it had offered in 1915. In the Autumn of 1940 it set about extending its territory in the Adriatic and it invaded Greece.

Britain wanted to help Greece in its war with Italy. Hitler—displaying his unfitness for world conquest—had allowed Britain to evacuate a big chunk of its Army from France, apparently because he saw the British Empire as being necessary to a civilised world order. Britain, therefore, had quite a big Army, and it still dominated the surface of the oceans of the world. It refused to join France in making a settlement with Germany, thereby making a final settlement in France impossible. It let its declaration of war stand, though it had no intention of engaging in serious battle. Its object was not to fight the war it had declared with a view to winning, but to spread the war to other countries by marginal use of its forces so that others would be led to do most of the fighting.

It wanted to invest a small part of its available force in the Greek war with Italy. The Greek Government of General Metaxas refused to let Churchill into his war. It wanted to keep its war with Italy separate from the World War being waged by Britain on Germany and Italy.

Metaxas had been Chief of Staff in 1914-16 when King Constantine declared neutrality and held to it despite strong British pressure to launch a war of conquest on Turkey. Metaxas supported the King on military grounds. Britain and France invaded Greece, overthrew the Government, and installed a puppet Government which did declare war on Turkey. When the Greeks in 1919 went to take possession of the Turkish territory awarded to them by Britain, they suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Turkish national resurgence, and were left to their fate by Britain.

In 1940 Metaxas refused to let Churchill into his war, in which Greece was holding its own, on the grounds that British engagement would oblige Hitler to engage in support of Mussolini. That was, of course, what Churchill wanted. What Metaxas wanted was to keep the Greek-Italian War separate from Britain's war with Germany, and ensure that Greece did not again become an incidental casualty in Britain's global ambitions.

Metaxas died in January of 1941. His successor gave into Churchill's pressing offer of help. And Greece became a plaything in the forces set in motion by British success in spreading the war until it became a world war in earnest.

The War between Italy and Greece, which Greece was winning, became an Anglo-Greek war against Italy and Germany which was lost in a few weeks.

Hitler made a Treaty with Yugoslavia allowing the passage of a German Army through the country. Yugoslavia was a concocted state, consisting of antagonistic nationalities hustled together by Britain when it decided to destroy the Hapsburg Empire because it refused to change sides, or at least desert Germany, in the Great War during the Winter of 1917-18.

The Greater Serbia movement precipitated the Great War by

assassinating the heir to the Hapsburg throne, who was suspected of being in favour of adding a Slav element to the formal structure of the Austro-Hungarian State and thus consolidating Hapsburg rule in Bosnia. Serbia was Orthodox and independent. A Greater Serb state would probably have been viable. A Serb-Croat state was not. The Croats were Catholic and were German-orientated. They fought for the Hapsburg state until the *Entente* destroyed it. When a great state is destroyed by external force, its abandoned subjects become manipulable. In 1918 the Croats were hustled into 'Yugoslavia' on the grounds of racial affinity: they, the Serbs and the Moslems were "*South Slavs*". But race, or alleged race, proved to be no secure foundation for a Balkan state, and national separatist movements began almost as soon as the state was thrown together.

In March 1941 Serbia revolted against the Yugoslav Agreement with Germany (urged on by Britain). The Government was overthrown and a new Government set up which repudiated the Agreement. Hitler therefore had to fight his way through Yugoslavia in order to consolidate his position in the Aegean, and this delayed his attack on Russia by more than a month, possibly causing it to fail through being caught by the onset of Winter.

But Germany only had to fight its way through part of Yugoslavia—the Serbian part. It was welcomed in Croatia and parts of Bosnia as a force of national liberation.

When the Serb Army was defeated in formal battle a guerilla resistance was launched. The Germans conducted reprisals in response to guerilla attack, as they were entitled to do under the 'laws of war'. The Serb resistance reduced its activity as the reprisals were undermining the civic structure of society, and only undertook actions that might have a discernible effect on the overall conduct of the War. The Communist movement took up a neutral stance at the time of the invasion, but after the invasion of Russia in June it launched the 'Partisan' resistance. The Partisans conducted a revolutionary class war within the war with Germany. The reprisals which deterred the Serb 'Royalists' encouraged the Communist Partisans because the civic structure they were destroying was a structure the Partisans wanted to be destroyed. Churchill encouraged the Partisan class-war actions, regardless of their consequences for the bourgeois order of things. The concern of the Serbian resistance to maintain the bourgeois civic order was depicted in the British black propaganda as virtual, or even actual, collaboration with Nazism. For a while Britain dropped arms to both Resistance movements, but in 1943 it boycotted the Royalist Serbs and increased arms supplies to the Partisans, thus enabling the Communist conquest in 1944.

The Government-in-Exile, based in London, was remade by Churchill at the behest of the Communists. The Serb Resistance leader, General Mihailovich, was branded a traitor. At the end of the War he was tried and executed as a traitor by the Communist regime that Churchill helped to power. Churchill then remembered what he was supposed to stand for in world affairs, indicated that the black propaganda against General Mihailovich had not been meant to be taken in earnest, and he set about working up the Cold War against the Communists—whilst wishing he had nuclear bombs before the Russians got them, so that the World War launched on the pretext of holding Danzig for Poland might be brought to a fitting conclusion with the destruction of the great ally (the main force of the Grand Alliance), and fundamental enemy, who had come into possession of half of Europe by winning the war that Britain started.

Within two years of Britain declaring war, Hitler controlled Poland, Finland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Luxemburg, France, Yugoslavia and Greece. His proposal for a final settlement with Poland, which Britain urged the Poles to reject by offering them an alliance with the two strongest military Powers in the world, was the transfer of Danzig to the adjacent region of Germany (East Prussia), and an extra-territorial road across the Polish Corridor so that there would be a land connection between East Prussia and the rest of Germany.

The conquest of Finland etc. came about through defensive actions in the World War launched by Britain (in preference to acting in accordance with its Guarantee to Poland in September 1939). Those conquests do not figure in any Hitler plans so far discovered.

It is virtually an Article of Faith that Hitler would have done all of these things anyway, even if Britain had not provided him with defensive reasons for doing them. That seems to be a belief that Britain finds necessary in order to ward off a self-destructive line of thought—a thing that it encourages in others but shuns itself.

Its conduct of world affairs from 1919, and especially from 1933, until world affairs passed out of its hands in the second half of 1941, was bizarre. It does not bear thinking about. Therefore it has constructed a fantasy in place of thought. It luxuriates in its mesmeric myth about saving the world. Good luck to it in its escapism. Unfortunately the myth is spun at our expense, and what good does it do us to be mesmerised by it? And not only us.

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“Wagstaffe shook his head. ‘The British Nation’, he said, ‘is quite mad. That fact, of course, has been common property on the Continent of Europe ever since Cook’s Tours were invented. But what irritates the orderly Boche is that there is no method in its madness. Nothing you can go upon, or take hold of, or wring any advantage from’...” (*Carrying On: After The First Hundred Thousand* by Ian Hay, 1917, p177).

Ian Hay was a major propagandist in the Great War and an official historian in the 1939 War. *The First Hundred Thousand* was the first mass army raised for the Great War. The *First* was used up quickly. *Carrying On* was about a second hundred thousand. Hay then wrote *The First Million*.

The unpredictability of British conduct to the orderly Continental mind is a recurring theme of British propaganda. The Continental wants to understand the British, so as to take their likely conduct into account when deciding what to do. The great British virtue in this regard is to be incomprehensible so that it can always take the orderly Continental by surprise. Germany was taken by surprise twice by capricious British conduct at critical junctures.

Continentalists try to calculate their interests and take the

interests of others into account in order to act rationally. The British view is that the attempt to understand what its view is, so that account can be taken of it, is immoral.

British caprice has two conditions of existence: a Navy that rules the waves, and moral conscience of an impenetrable kind.

Because of its Navy Britain needed never to prepare for war in advance of war because the Navy meant that it was always sufficiently prepared for whatever war it chose to have.

Though always sufficiently prepared for war, it was not “*militarist*”, as the Continentals were, because its military power that dominated the world floated on water. Military action is action on land, so Navalism cannot be Militarism!

Because of its Naval dominance of the world, Britain could make war with impunity without having made adequate land preparations before the event. It could launch a war and then, made secure by the Navy, set about constructing an Army for the land war.

Continental states, which foolishly neglected to be islands with powerful Navies, had to maintain large armies in peacetime. Therefore they were “*militarist*”. And they had to be prepared to wage all-out war from the moment war was declared, and therefore lay themselves open to the charge of being aggressive and not believing in the virtue of perpetual peace.

Britain was never the aggressor because it did not maintain a land army capable of waging Continental war. It could manipulate Continental conflicts to its advantage, go to war ‘unprepared’, and then make whatever preparations it deemed appropriate.

But the aggressiveness of continental states is a function of the fact that their Armies are their borders. The Continent could only approach British conditions of security through the establishment of a Continental State, or at least by the establishment of the hegemonic power of one of its States across the Continent. But that is what Britain was, and is, determined should not happen. Its policy for over three centuries has been to keep the continent sharply divided and in conflict with itself. That is the meaning of “*Balance-of-Power*”—one of whose earliest formulators was John Toland, a Donegal Gael who saw the light in Londonderry in the 1680s and became a fanatical Whig propagandist.

When two states, which have to maintain large standing Armies for lack of natural frontiers, go to war, the issue of aggressor and victim is rarely clear-cut, so Britain could always present the State it chose to support for its own purposes as the victim.

The clearest instance of Continental aggression in recent centuries is the French attack on Germany in 1870. The German State did not actually exist at the time, but a German national movement was in the course of development. The French declared war on Prussia as a pre-emptive strike against the formation of a German State. Prussia was not a Great Power at the time and was not allied with any Great Power against France (as Poland was against Germany in 1939). The big French Army went into lumbering action in the expectation of crushing Prussia and preserving Germany as the politically ineffectual land of poets and dreamers. But it was destroyed in detail by the small but mobile Prussian Army, with the result that the German State was founded in 1871. The development of the German State during the next 40 years led Britain to see it as the European

obstacle to its domination of the world, and to make an alliance with France against it. The moral British propaganda then performed the marvellous feat of transforming the clear French aggression of 1870 into Prussian aggression.

Erratic conduct of world affairs by Britain, which seems to the outsider to be caprice made possible by insular security through Naval dominance, is presented within Britain as an expression of moral conscience. Consideration of the meaning of British moral conscience must be left for a later occasion.

After 1945 there was an intellectual stratum on the Continent, particularly in France and Germany, which saw things much as they have been described here, and was determined that a serious effort should be made to carry Europe out of the reach of Britain's moral mischief-making. That tendency combined with the Christian Democracy that came to the fore to lay the foundations of what became the European Union. Christian Democracy—which was not merely a Catholic movement—had kept itself free of both Fascism and the globalist capitalism fostered by Britain. Britain was just as bewildered by it as Continentals had previously been bewildered by British conduct. But it was necessary for Britain to get a grip on Europe and damage it in order to maintain its own self-respect.

Britain will not be European, and its boast is that it lies beyond European understanding. But neither can it do without Europe. It cannot be itself unless it has a grip on Europe.

***Casement As Traitor-Patriot
The Crime Against Europe***

Editor: Brendan Clifford, 2002

This pamphlet republishes Casement's indictment, showing that Imperial Britain, in launching a World War on Germany in 1914, was motivated by trade considerations and a desire to protect its world hegemony. Included is W.J. Maloney's "Casement As Traitor-Patriot" which shows the double standards in Britain in 1914, when 'traitors' on the enemy side were lionised.

***Traitor-Patriots In The Great War
Casement And Masaryk***

Editor: Brendan Clifford, 2004

The Crime Against Europe

By Roger Casement

Editor: Brendan Clifford, 2003

This is the first reprint of Roger Casement's only published book for almost half a century. Its subject is the British foreign policy which brought about the First World War.

Connolly And German Socialism

Brendan Clifford, 2004

Conversations With Carlyle

Reprint Of The 1892 Classic

By Charles Gavan Duffy

Editor: Brendan Clifford, 2006

That Gavan Duffy's Conversations With Carlyle has been out of print since its first edition in 1892 shows how modern Ireland is losing touch with its political origins. In this book it is reproduced in full, along with related texts. There is a substantial extract from Carlyle's Irish Journey, as well as shorter excerpts from his Sartor Resartus, Past & Present and Chartism.

Thomas Carlyle is now much forgotten, but his work went

into the making of England. What is not widely appreciated is that his condemnation of Manchester capitalism struck a chord in mid-nineteenth century Ireland. The backdrop to Carlyle's association with Young Ireland and to his journeys in Ireland was the Great Famine of 1847, itself an indictment of laissez-faire. Young Ireland found in Carlyle's demands for political intervention in the production process an inspiration for remedying the ills of Ireland.

Brendan Clifford's introduction, Stray Thoughts About Young Ireland, considers the dynamics of the strange relationship between Irish revolutionaries and the English imperialist prophet, in the context of the views of Professor Maurice O'Connell, Conor Cruise O'Brien and Professor Roy Foster.

Ireland In The Great War

Charles James O'Donnell

Editor: Brendan Clifford, 1992

The establishment of a sovereign state in Ireland occurred as a direct consequence of Irish participation in Britain's war on Germany which was launched in August 1914. Nationalist Ireland was in 1914 in process of being secured as a region of the United Kingdom and the Empire under the form of Home Rule. The Nationalist leaders joined with the Unionists in giving unquestioning support to Britain's war against Germany, Austria and Turkey. The alliance of Britain, France and Russia failed to achieve the rapid victory which its great superiority of men and arms had caused it to anticipate. The prolongation of the war and the unprecedented scale of the casualties created the conditions in which nationalists opposed to the British war effort, many of them in sympathy with Germany, organised the Insurrection of 1916, which caused a fundamental change in the dynamic of Irish affairs. Despite this intimate connection between the Great War and the Easter Rising, no history of the War from an Irish viewpoint has been published for half a century—not since Charles James O'Donnell's "The Irish Future And The Lordship Of The World" in the 1920s. O'Donnell, born in Donegal and educated in Galway, served for thirty years in the Indian Civil Service before retiring to contest the 1906 Election on an old-fashioned Liberal platform opposed both to Curzon's Tory Imperialism and Asquith's Liberal Imperialism. Some Chapters from his history of the Great War are reproduced here. In an introductory chapter Brendan Clifford shows how, in the course of the Home Rule conflict (1912-14) the Home Rule movement was drawn into the web of Asquith's Liberal Imperialism, and how in August 1914 Home Rule journalists, such as T. M. Kettle, T. P. O'Connor and Robert Lynd supplied Asquith with the frenzied war propaganda which he needed. And he shows how Roger Casement and James Connolly did not act out of narrow nationalist considerations. They saw Britain's declaration of war on Germany as a barbaric attempt by a world empire in decline to destroy a civilised and progressive European state, and acted accordingly. This book is intended to dispel the deadening West-British influence of recent decades and to restore the European orientation which characterised Irish thought in earlier centuries, but which has been lost in recent times. 116 pp.

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The EU vacuum

by Jack Lane

“Chancellor Angela Merkel returned to her roots as a physicist yesterday to explain European politics to students of the College of Europe in Bruges.

At a speech opening the institution’s 61st academic year, she cited Marie Curie, Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr as great minds whose work showed that it was “difficult but possible” to move from a familiar world view to a new one.

“When one is able to think, act and research in the new space, everything seems easy and one finds it hard to understand why something remained closed to previous generations,” she said.

“This is how it is when we talk of Europe. We can hardly understand how a Europe of nation states can exist that for centuries were at war with each other.” (*Irish Times*, 3 November 2010).

This is a startling admission from a German Chancellor. She is saying in effect that she cannot understand the history of Europe and how the present situation has come about. Because the nations of Europe are not at war with each other at the moment she seems to conclude that the past wars were some sort of crazy aberration.

The fact that she is a physicist may give a clue. Things are discovered in physics and as she says the object in question cannot be looked at in the same way again. Hence that must be the way we have arrived at an EU – someone or some people had a Eureka moment in 1956 and that was it. Hers is a common conception nowadays. Something new was created and being successful it became regarded as crazy that it did not happen earlier and looks a very easy project.

However, politics is not like physics. One is animate and the other is not. Politics is a series of decisions by people about how to live and are therefore subject to everything that is humanly possible, good, bad and indifferent. It is man made and therefore can be man unmade. It is always dependent on people acting in time, place and context.

In the era of nations, conflict of one sort or another is inherent between them and it takes as many forms as there are forms of human behaviour. Germany is the most powerful nation in the EU and it bodes ill if its leader has any misconceptions about this. The founders of the EU and her predecessor Chancellor and Party Leader, Adenauer, had no misconceptions on that front when he and others set out to construct an integration of nations in Europe. They were able to discriminate between the various conflicting elements in relations between the nations of Europe. They had experienced the worst of conflicts, twice, and learned how to minimise them and possibly overcome them. Hence the original Treaty and creation of the EEC among the six nations to the strict exclusion and hostility of another, the UK. This for the good reasons that the latter had taken advantage of conflicts among the others to virtually destroy them.

It was also an effort to survive against, and be independent of, another nation, Russia, that rose to a world power to fill the vacuum caused by the destruction of the European nations in the two wars.

The second war that ruined Europe was caused by the UK again playing the balance of power game but this time they

misjudged it badly. Firstly, they put down the French after WWI when it was stronger than Germany and when the latter became powerful with Britain’s help, Britain found itself faced with two strong powers in Europe – Russia and Germany. How to play the game with these two was a new problem. Initially they supported Germany against Russia but then the Churchillian fixation on the ‘Hun’ won out. Stalin played the balance of power game against them with the Nazi- Soviet Pact. Britain then formed a most unnatural alliance with Russia to destroy Germany. But Russia won the war and Britain was essentially a spectator. A ruined Europe was the result and Russia now dominated Europe. Which had to put itself in hock to America to survive.

Those who experienced all this could not forget it - or its cause. They founded the European project and resolved not to fall into Britain’s balance of power trap again. But the lessons were later unlearned and without the original purpose the European project is reduced to concocting new reasons for its existence.

It may seem absurd to Merkel to talk about national conflicts in Europe today but if she does she should have a word with Mr Van Rompuy who is the President of Europe, no less. He is a worried man on the issue and he may not be an idiot.

“EUROPEAN COUNCIL president Herman Van Rompuy has expressed his concern about increasing nationalism in the EU, saying Euroscepticism was no longer “the monopoly” of a few countries.

In a speech last night in Berlin in which he argued against protectionist tendencies, he made the case that there were people in every member state who believed their own countries could survive alone in the globalised world.

“It is more than an illusion: it is a lie,” he said as he cited Franklin Roosevelt’s expression that the only thing to fear was fear itself.

“The biggest enemy of Europe today is fear. Fear leads to egoism, egoism leads to nationalism and nationalism leads to war.” (*Irish Times*, 10 November, 2010).

Ms. Merkel may think he is talking through his hat but is he? He is not imagining all this and no doubt the situation in Belgium is strongly impressed on his mind where nationalist conflict is increasing and preventing the establishment of a government at the present time.

Ms Merkel wants to tackle one of the strongest forces in Europe and the world – finance capitalism, currently known as ‘bondholders.’ At Seoul G20 meeting she said: “Let me put it simply: in this regard there may be a contradiction between the interests of the financial world and the interests of the political world.” She wants to tame them and make the market subordinate to political necessities. Quite correct, but easier said than done. The ‘bondholders’ did not like what they heard and decided to teach her and the EU a lesson and made Ireland a whipping boy to prove their point.

Only a clear and powerful political force can tame the markets. That means a clear and powerful political purpose. The EU does not have it as they have lost sight of the original and real political purpose of the project. The problems for the EU are only beginning.

“The ‘pocket superpower’ facade”.

by Feergus O'Raghallaigh

I was quite taken by Philip Stephens' piece in the *Financial Times* on Friday 22 October, "Austerity spells the end of Britain's post-imperial reach". It seems to me that, ironically, Cameron is undoing in effect all that Blair put together as a foreign policy stance for Britain – the Blair-Broon vision of Britain in the world (as well as Broon's fiscal stance in the domestic arena).

Stephens uses a phrase in his piece that to me sums it up, “the ‘pocket superpower’ facade”. The phrase ‘pocket superpower’ is not that of Stephens; as far as I can make out it is now in wide usage and is also being definitively attributed to an American commentator, Stryker McGuire, coined in an article in *Newsweek* last year (2009), ‘Forget the Great in Britain’.

What the phrase sets out to capture is a British self-image (and indeed the pursuit of this self-image as a driver of policy) based on its maintenance of an extended military capacity in the world (including a large army with overseas presence and range and a nuclear capability as well as an enormous military-industrial complex); its cultivation of its relationship with America (Atlanticism); and its role in global finance capital as that evolved.

I would add also the status of the English language in the world. Even with the end of the Cold War, which provided a rationale for the maintenance of the global capacity even in the context of imperial ‘withdrawal’ (effective disintegration), the global posture was maintained – and found a capacity for renewal, particularly during the Blair-Broon years. There is to my mind at least one cross-over or interconnection here between Broon's fiscal stance and Blair's foreign posture (and posturing). The expansive fiscal stance of the Chancellor as he was during these years was an undermining of the traditional ‘Treasury view’ (parsimoniousness in relation to public spending) as it has been called and enabled the pursuit and achievement of the ‘pocket superpower’ status (as well as on the domestic front, funding increased spending on the welfare state in the broadest sense of the term).

There was also the maintenance of the defence industry including its capacity in the international arms trade but also its critical role from the employment point of view. And there was the sycophancy of both Blair and Broon towards the City in the expansion of global finance capital as a phase in the development of globalism and globalisation. High-level strategic comment has identified in all of this another aspect, a rebirth of an old military strategy, an approach to defence policy based on maintaining an ‘expeditionary’ capacity. Here is the description of one Defence Ministry official, Stephen Petrie, writing in July of this year (2010):

“Since the end of the Cold War, expeditionary warfare has been presented as an essential and characteristic component of the British contribution to international security. It has been adopted as an approach to power projection, which allows Britain to intervene militarily beyond its territory within its limited means. Britain's desire to punch above its weight in international affairs

militarily led one observer [Stryker McGuire] to describe Britain as a “pocket super-power”, while questioning its ability to sustain its status in this way. The description appears to be consistent with the role of Defence, which was developed in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR). Significantly, this would have to be achieved within the resources left following the post-Cold War peace-dividend, which had been taken as savings in the early 1990s.”

Here is how McGuire's piece opens:

“Even in the decades after it lost its empire, Britain strode the world like a pocket superpower. Its economic strength and cultural heft, its nuclear-backed military might, its extraordinary relationship with America—all these things helped this small island nation to punch well above its weight class. Now all that is changing as the bills come due on Britain's role in last year's financial meltdown, the rescue of the banks, and the ensuing recession. Suddenly, the sun that once never set on the British Empire is casting long shadows over what's left of Britain's imperial ambitions, and the country is having to rethink its role in the world—perhaps as Little Britain, certainly as a lesser Britain.”

Petrie's rather amazing piece (and to my mind it is amazing) is a paper prepared for and published by the Royal College of Defence Studies, "Britain's expeditionary approach 1997 - 2010: the failure to maintain pocket superpower status".

Petrie concludes his paper as follows

“Significant reductions in Defence expenditure will leave Britain with two choices. Firstly, it could retain current headline requirements, while the capabilities needed to meet these requirements are progressively hollowed out. Under this approach, Britain might initially maintain the appearance that it retains something close to its current suite of capabilities; however, growing levels of risk would be lodged within a programme which would be increasingly unfit for purpose. The alternative is a radical revision of Britain's Defence requirements, within a wider review of Britain's national security arrangements. While there are significant obstacles to achieving this, one thing is clear: Britain's current approach to expeditionary warfare, as a means to maintain its pocket superpower status, is no longer sustainable.”

My own view is that both McGuire and Petrie are right but also that the outcome of the defence review and the spending review is for the moment short of the radical recasting recommended by Petrie. It is on the face of it neither fish nor fowl although it is implicitly inclined towards the radical. Ark Royal and the Harriers are (immediately) gone with the relevant Naval and RAF workforces to be made redundant. Destroyers also are to be mothballed and very deep cuts in armed forces numbers generally and defence ministry numbers and budgets implemented. The two new carriers are to be built but then one is to be mothballed and the other sold on current plans – and of course there is the hilarious prospect of carriers without planes. Trident is to be replaced, but critically, to maintain the ConLib coalition pact, this will not happen until the next Parliament at the earliest. My own

view or hunch is that this means that Trident is unlikely to be renewed: the nuclear capacity will be retained but trimmed down in some way yet (but not yet) to be decided. The Army will withdraw from Afghanistan within the next 24 months as promised by Cameron – nothing for it at this point but to cut and run though as far as possible not too ignominiously while also trying to keep in with a worried US. It is interesting that Washington called Downing Street and Cameron talked to Obama at the height of the review processes. Also interesting is one outcome of the spending review, the decision to ring-fence overseas aid and to meet the 0.7 per cent target: this fits in with the idea of ‘soft power’ as an expression of the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.

The British know on current calculations and trends their game is up as a ‘pocket superpower’. I thought it interesting that almost as soon as he became PM Cameron took off to India bringing a chunk of his cabinet with him, to cuddle up to India-as-an-emerging-global power. He also ‘put his foot in it’ (i.e. told the truth) when in relation to the US he acknowledged it as the dominant force in the ‘partnership’. Hague is not a warmonger in the style of Miliband or his poodle predecessors as Foreign Secretary in the Blair-Brown years. There is no answer to China whether as a super power with a rapidly expanding naval presence and its economic and financial power.

‘Austerity’ objectively stands for something real in terms of foreign policy and of course domestic, taking the ‘Great’ out of Britain and shrinking (and privatizing) the state.

My point in all of this is that the revisionist agenda in respect of its foreign policy/affairs agenda, to as it were, ‘re-Anglicise’ Ireland, is again being asserted at the point when the Anglophone world is in decline. Even if one believed in it one would not pursue it at this point for what is there to gain? What is in it other than a ‘readmission’ to the ‘Home Counties’ and a right to participate in ‘Round Britain Quiz’ on Radio 4? But who then would represent Eire, toggling out against Polly Devlin and Brian Feeney in Northern Ireland? And of course the capacity to accept gongs without blushing. Is that it?

Petrie’s paper is at:

<http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/1DD72000-6713-4431-B023-6A06570737BC/0/SHP2010PETRIE.pdf>

Stryker McGuire’s piece is at:

<http://www.newsweek.com/2009/07/31/forget-the-great-in-britain.html>

Philip Stephens is at:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/38e2d16e-dd45-11df-9236-00144feabdc0.html>

With an earlier piece at:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9c624af6-9e63-11df-a5a4-00144feab49a.html>

Attali’s idea of changing identity seems radical. It might be the case that a State’s strong sense of itself enables flexibility without changing its values or principles, but too much flexibility could undermine the State’s fundamental values. Of course, in the long term it should be appreciated that civilisations come and go just as nations and states. On a more prosaic level the world changes. Technology moves on. In order to cope with this and prosper the individual/company/State must be prepared for revolutionary change.

This is a light, entertaining and provocative read. However, it is largely apolitical. The emphasis is to adapt to existing political and social phenomena rather than to change them. Such a book is not without value, but it is nothing more than a palliative; and certainly not a cure for the current crisis.

Book Review: *Survivre aux Crises [Coping with a Crisis]* by Jacques Attali

by John Martin

Jacques Attali is best known for being François Mitterrand’s economics advisor from the late 1960s until the latter’s retirement from public life in 1985. Attali also founded the European bank for Reconstruction and Development and would be considered an intellectual heavyweight on the French left.

However, if the reader was expecting some brilliant insights into the current world economic crisis he will be disappointed. In fairness the book doesn’t pretend to be anything more than what it is: a playful look at the world, which will provide quite entertaining holiday reading. It reads more like a self help book than a political or economic analysis.

He discusses survival in the context of the individual; the company; and the State. For an individual he outlines seven principles which are as follows:

- a) Know yourself. Define your values. Have respect for yourself.
- b) Use your time well. Plan your time. Understand time.
- c) Have empathy with the outside world. Understand your environment and its risks.
- d) Plan to resist attacks. Be resilient.
- e) Turn every threat into an opportunity.
- f) Do not be content with a sole identity. Be flexible.
- g) Be prepared to think in a revolutionary way.

For a company and a State similar principles apply. For example in b) above understanding time might mean for a company accepting the necessity for change. For a State it could mean keeping a historical perspective and understanding that change is inevitable.

The above might sound banal but when reading the author’s discussion of these points this reviewer found himself thinking about how those principles could be applied to his personal, business life and politics.

Attali’s discussion on the State is particularly interesting. Some of his ideas could definitely be usefully applied by the Irish State. When reading this part I found myself thinking about the proposed visit to this country by Queen Elizabeth II. What should our attitude be to this visit?

To apply Attali’s principles we should know who we are. A country that does not know who, or what it is, is incapable of acting purposefully in the world. Does Ireland know who she is and what she wants? Attali makes the point that understanding who you are and what you want enables you to understand who your friends are and who are your enemies.

It is rarely necessary to go to war against enemies. However, it is important to understand that enemies have different interests. Denying this doesn’t make an enemy a friend. A State can be friendly to an enemy where in particular cases their interests coincide. But this does not mean that it should forget that there may be vital interests which are in conflict. A State should seek allies at all opportunities but good alliances can only be made when there is empathy (an emotional and intellectual understanding) with the outside world.

I was amused at some of Attali’s medical analogies. For example, a healthy dose of hypochondria enables protection from threats within. On the other hand it is also necessary to be paranoid in order to understand the threats from without.

Britain's Great War on Turkey - an Irish perspective.

An address to the International Strategic Research Organisation of Turkey (USAK), on 26th October 2010, Ankara

by Pat Walsh

Thank you for inviting me here today. It is a very good thing that the links between the common struggles of the Turkish and Irish peoples should be remembered, especially in the week of 'Republic Day.'

I will structure my talk today around ten themes or questions and will stop for any questions after each. These themes are:

- **Why did Ireland become involved in the war on Turkey?**
- **What was the view of Atatürk in Ireland?**
- **Why did Britain make war on Turkey?**
- **How did Turkey come to be involved in the war?**
- **What were Turkey's intentions in 1914?**
- **What were Britain's objectives in relation to the Ottoman Empire?**
- **Why did Britain produce so much propaganda against the Turk?**
- **Who was responsible for the Armenian disaster?**
- **How and why did the British set the Greeks against the Turks?**
- **What was positive about the Great War on Turkey?**

First I should point out that the book I have written was originally called *Ireland's Great War on Turkey*. It was called that to raise interest in Ireland about why Ireland participated in war on Turkey and what the results of that war were. But on the suggestion of Turkish people who read the book the title was replaced by the more accurate one of *Britain's Great War on Turkey – an Irish perspective*, which reflects better what the book is actually about.

The battle for Gallipoli is virtually the only thing remembered in Ireland about the Great War on Turkey. For many years in Ireland after the independence struggle it was felt that the Great War should be forgotten as an unfortunate episode in which many Irishmen were duped into fighting, killing and dying for nothing – or worse, for the Imperialist ambitions of the British Empire. Gallipoli became an isolated and disconnected event in the Irish memory as the Great War on Turkey became a forgotten event in Irish history. That is despite the fact that it was probably the most significant thing Ireland ever participated in – and undoubtedly the most disastrous, in terms of its effects on both the Middle East and Europe.

In recent years in Ireland there has been a movement, in both academia and politics, which seeks to commemorate Ireland's participation in the Great War and to give this event equal status with the struggle for Irish independence. Some have even gone to the lengths of trying to discredit Ireland's struggle for democracy in this pursuit in order to give the Great War a higher status.

What my book seeks to do is to remember the Great War on Turkey in its full historical context and show why it should never

be commemorated as something that could be admired. I believe that is very important, particularly in the light of the experience of recent Western military adventures in the region.

The book also challenges, largely through the use of British and Irish sources, the British version of the Great War that prevails in many parts of the Western world, including Irish academia today.

Why did Ireland become involved in the war on Turkey?

I suppose the best place to start in talking about the book is to outline how the Irish came to be involved in the invasion forces at Canakkale or Gallipoli that began our participation in the war against Turkey.

Essentially, what happened was that a few years before the war the Irish Party at Westminster, led by John Redmond, decided to enter into an alliance with the British Liberal Party in order to obtain a local parliament in Dublin. This was known as Irish Home Rule. It was not a demand for independence because Irish nationalists realized that the great power of Britain in those days would never allow such a development. So John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party at Westminster, departed from the traditional Irish opposition to British imperialism in order that he could achieve this Home Rule Parliament. And in doing so, he and many of his party gradually became imperialists themselves, no longer opposing the British Empire but desiring a share in its mission and benefits.

When Britain decided to declare war on Germany John Redmond pledged his support for the British Empire and its war. This was a significant event because Irish nationalists had traditionally been against Irishmen fighting in the British Army for the British Empire. Now in Ireland, men were recruited to the British Army on the basis that they owed a debt of honour to the Empire and Germany had attacked 'Little Catholic Belgium' and were an evil force which threatened civilization.

However, many of the Irishmen who joined the British Army to fight the Germans, after hearing this message from the recruiting platforms, ended up sailing to Gallipoli to fight the Turks, after England had declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 5th November 1914.

That was the price that was paid to gain Irish Home Rule - which, in fact, Britain refused after the war. Catholics and Protestants in Ireland (who were against Irish Home Rule) began to enter into a competition to prove how loyal they were to the British Empire so that their respective, and conflicting, causes would triumph, after the war was over. Irish nationalists thought that if they helped the Liberal Government to win a quick war against Germany they would be in a very good position to demand

the full implementation of Home Rule, having proved suitably loyal to England to be seen to be fit enough to run their own Parliament in Dublin. But at the same time Protestant unionists recruited and fought for Britain for precisely the opposite reason - to prevent Ireland obtaining Home Rule.

The Turkish victory at Gallipoli greatly undermined the Irish supporters of imperialism because it led to the replacement of the Liberal Government in London with a more unionist coalition and Ireland, seeing that it was being cheated out of Home Rule, began to turn toward Republican independence itself – particularly after the 1916 rising in Dublin.

In one way the great Turkish resistance at Gallipoli, which prevented a quick British victory in the Great War, had the effect of moving the Irish people more toward a demand for full freedom and independence from the British Empire.

What was the view of Atatürk in Ireland?

Most Irish politicians and newspapers had begun to hold views that were the same as the British understandings of the world. They supported the war, got their news from Britain and therefore saw things in British Imperial terms. They also tended to hold pro-Christian sympathies in favour of the Greeks and Armenians and had prejudices against Islam and the Turks which were absorbed from Gladstonian Liberalism.

There was, however, one notable exception.

One discovery that I made in writing the book was that Irish Republicans knew about and became great admirers of Atatürk. *The Catholic Bulletin* was a popular religious periodical that supported the Irish Republican cause. Fr. Timothy Corcoran, Professor of Education at University College, Dublin, was the driving force and main contributor to the *Bulletin*. He had taught and was a close friend of Eamon DeValera, the Republican leader who did most to achieve Irish independence. *The Catholic Bulletin* took a great interest in events between the end of the Great War and the successful conclusion of Turkey's war of independence. It supported Turkey in its struggle against the imperialist powers and also defended the Turkish position in relation to the Greek invasion, when most of the Western Christian press were sympathetic to the Greeks. It also followed the negotiations at Lausanne keenly and published a commentary on events between 1922 and 1924.

The Catholic Bulletin wrote about Atatürk's victory over the British Empire and saw Turkey's achievement as an inspiration to Ireland. It praised Atatürk's humiliation of the British at Chanak when the Turks defeated the British Empire at the height of its power, as the world was seemingly at its feet. For the *Catholic Bulletin* Atatürk proved that the British Empire was not invincible and gave hope to others who were determined to establish freedom. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Turkish victory at Chanak was a pivotal event in the history of the British Empire and imperialism generally – although the event is mostly forgotten about today in Ireland and Britain.

The Catholic Bulletin was particularly impressed with the Turkish negotiating skill at Lausanne and contrasted it to, what it saw as, the Irish failure in negotiating with the British in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 that left the country part of the British Empire and divided the national forces against each other. The

Turks had successfully beaten the Imperial power and *The Catholic Bulletin* described Atatürk as the 'man of the year' in 1923 and the greatest cause for optimism in a world that was shattered by the catastrophe of war.

The Irish Republican view of Atatürk contained in the *Catholic Bulletin* is important because it was written to counter the British view of the Great War on Turkey - which was still being repeated in Ireland and which has today undergone something of a revival.

For instance, it is taken for granted in Ireland that Turkey was involved in the war simply because she was an ally of Germany. There is little appreciation of the fact that Britain had made war against the Ottoman Empire inevitable by entering into the 1907 alliance with Russia. And it is seldom mentioned that the British Empire had its own designs on parts of the Middle East, including Palestine and Mesopotamia, that greatly influenced her decision to go to war on the Turks with Russia.

Why did Britain make war on Turkey?

This is one of the central questions of my book and it is very important to understand the British strategic imperatives so that misconceptions can be avoided.

For England the war on Turkey came from a great change of policy. Britain acted as an ally of the Ottoman Empire for most of the century before the Great War. During this period Britain was determined to preserve the Ottoman State as a giant buffer zone between its Empire and the expanding Russian Empire. It was part of what was known as the 'Great Game' in England that 'the Russians should not have Constantinople' and the warm water port that this would have given them. It was for this reason that England fought the Crimean War. Later on in the century the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli negotiated the Treaty of Berlin to help preserve the Ottoman Empire against another attempted Russian expansionism in the region.

However, whilst Britain was determined to preserve the Ottoman Empire and was prepared to use force to prevent the Russians having Constantinople, its relations with the Sultan were very disadvantageous to the Turks. England, with the French, helped preserve the Ottoman Empire in a weak, dependent state through devices like the Capitulations so that outlying Ottoman territories could be absorbed into the British Empire in a gradual process (for example, Egypt) when a favourable opportunity arose.

At the same time, despite some writers in England calling for a liquidisation of the Ottoman territories and their sharing between the Imperialist powers, it remained British policy to preserve the Ottoman Empire so that it would not fall into the wrong hands and pose a threat to the British Empire in India. In some respects the British acquisition of the Suez Canal altered the commitment to the Ottoman State but it was not the main reason for the great policy change in Britain.

What completely changed British relations with Turkey was the emergence of Germany as a serious commercial rival around the end of the 19th century. Britain had always practised a Balance of Power policy with regard to Europe. For centuries Britain had built its empire by keeping Europe divided and by giving military assistance to the weaker powers against any power that might be emerging on the continent. Whilst Europe

was preoccupied with war England was able to get on with its business of conquering the rest of the world. It had the great advantage of being an island and therefore it could meddle with Europe and then retire from the continental battlefield and let others continue the fighting when enough had been gained.

During the 19th century Britain's traditional enemy in Europe had been France and her traditional rival in Asia was Russia. However, in the early years of the 20th century England gradually decided that Germany was the coming power to be opposed. Therefore, it was decided to overturn the foreign policy of a century and to establish alliances with its traditional enemies, France and Russia, so that Germany could be encircled and then when war came about Britain would join the conflict and destroy Germany as a commercial rival. The alliance that Britain entered into with Russia in 1907, therefore, was the single most important event that made a British war on Turkey inevitable.

The alliance with Russia was obviously the main factor that spelled trouble for the Ottoman Empire. But what was it that made this alliance so important to Britain that she overturned her traditional foreign policy of preventing Russia from having Constantinople?

As I have said, Britain is an island nation and it was primarily a sea power. It did not have a large army and it had been opposed to military conscription. Therefore it would have been impossible for Britain to have defeated Germany by itself. Therefore, it needed the large French army and the even larger Russian Army to do most of the fighting on the continent for it. The Russian Army was particularly important and it was seen to be like a 'steamroller' that would roll all the way to Berlin, crushing German resistance by its sheer weight of numbers.

The problem for Britain was that the Russians (unlike the French who wanted to recapture Alsace-Lorraine after their loss in 1871) had no real reason to fight Germany. Therefore, something had to be promised to the Czar for his help in destroying Germany. That something was Constantinople. That fact should always be therefore borne in mind when people suggest that Turkey brought the war on itself. The fact of the matter was that in order to defeat Germany Britain had to promise Constantinople to Russia and in order for the Russians to get Constantinople there had to be a war on Turkey.

There were other issues of concern for Britain in relation to Turkey. Germany had begun to show interest in the Ottoman Empire. In 1898 the Kaiser made a celebrated visit to Istanbul to show Germany's good faith to Turkey. What worried Britain about the German involvement with the Ottoman Empire was that it was not a parasitic relationship like the other imperialist powers. The German objective seems to have been to rejuvenate and modernize the Ottoman Empire in exchange for commercial rights there. England and Russia had seen the Ottoman Empire as the 'sick man of Europe' and they had been waiting around for his death but now they looked on as Germany threatened to revive the health of the sick man, and dash their dreams of conquest.

The centrepiece of German involvement in the Ottoman Empire was the Berlin-Baghdad Railway. This was a major cause of the war because Britain looked at it and saw the economic and strategic advantages it would provide to continental Europe and Asia. At this time the Royal Navy controlled the global market by ruling the sea. It was feared that if the Berlin to Baghdad Railway

was built trade would go across land and be beyond the guns of the Royal Navy. It was also feared that the Railway would transport goods at a lower cost, giving the Germans a commercial advantage over Britain in the East. And there might even be the development of a great customs union - a kind of early European Community, with Germany at its head - that would prosper outside of the global market that Britain was establishing and which the Royal Navy policed.

One of the first things Britain determined to do about this railway was to stop it achieving a port at the Persian Gulf. It was the British policy to prevent any power establishing a trade route at this point because England was obsessed with the security of the 'jewel in its crown,' India. For this reason, a local tribal leader was encouraged to detach his territory from the Ottoman Empire and establish his own principality called Kuwait, guaranteed by Britain, so that the Baghdad Railway could be prevented from having a terminus and a means of shipping goods further on.

When the Germans saw how important this issue was to Britain they decided to make concessions and offered Britain a stake in the Railway. However, these proved to be too late because anti-German feeling had been built up in England and the process of strategic reorientation and organizing and manoeuvring for the war had already begun.

How did Turkey come to be involved in the war?

I think historians, even those that are sympathetic to Turkey, do not attribute enough responsibility for the war on the British State and tend toward putting some blame on the Turks, and particularly Enver, which, I believe, is unfair. They tend to ignore the wider context of the war and get tied up in the diplomatic detail, which can be very confusing - and intentionally so. The British State is expert at diplomacy, at covering its tracks and producing a narrative that, if it does not exonerate, sufficiently confuses people into tacit acceptance of the British position.

So why did Turkey end up in the Great War? British accounts present a number of arguments. The first one is that the Germans lured the Turks to their doom by political trickery. A second argument centres on Enver and claims that he worked with the Germans so that Ottoman power could be expanded after a successful war. In other words Britain accused him of desiring, like the Kaiser, conquest and world-domination.

As I have said, the Great War on the Ottoman Empire is usually treated as an incident in the war against Germany, with the Ottomans taken as a mere military ally of the Kaiser. But the activity and behaviour of the Turkish Government in the years preceding the Great War suggest that the Ottoman Government did everything possible to establish good relations with England and France, and the alliance with Germany was actually a defensive act of the last resort, when the Ottoman Government was left with no other option.

The Young Turks, who had overthrown the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, in 1908, were admirers of Britain and France. Many of them had been educated in London and Paris and had got their political ideas from there. They mostly wished to disentangle Ottoman Turkey from the German connection and to establish closer ties with Britain and France, and even the Russians, to secure the future of the Ottoman state.

Between November 1908 and June 1914 the Young Turk Government made at least six attempts to establish defensive alliances with Britain, Russia and France - but all were rejected. Some humiliating economic concessions were granted to Britain along with recognition of the British control in the Persian Gulf and Kuwait in an attempt at buying off the aggressors. England was granted a monopoly on navigation of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Mesopotamia. And it was agreed that the Berlin-Baghdad Railway should not terminate at Basra and also have two British directors on its board.

As part of this conciliating process, and as a token of goodwill, the Young Turks entered into a naval agreement with Britain in which British dockyards took orders for Turkish battleships, under the supervision of Winston Churchill and the Admiralty, and a British naval mission was established at Constantinople. By 1914 the size of this naval mission was as large as the German military mission, and they were looked on as a counter-balance to each other by the Turks. If it was said that Turkey had a military alliance with Germany in 1914 it could be equally said that she had a naval alliance with England.

The Turkish Government offered England and France extraordinary positions of influence in the Ottoman State - positions that no other country with concern for its sovereignty would offer. They entrusted to Britain the most vital components of the defence of their capital - the reorganisation of their navy under Rear-Admiral Gamble and Admiral Limpus and a English Naval Mission, and the modernisation of the arsenal at the Golden Horn (Turkey's centre of munitions) by Armstrong and Vickers. Admiral Limpus offered advice to the Turkish Admiralty on such matters as the location of mine fields in the Straits and mine laying techniques as well as torpedo lines.

It is not surprising that the British took on this constructive work, even though their long term ambition was to destroy the Ottoman Empire. It countered German influence at Constantinople, gave the English a unique, inside knowledge of the defences of the Turkish capital and controlling influence over the Turkish Navy - and made sure that the Russians, French and Germans did not possess such influence or information themselves. And when the English naval mission left, those in charge of it were the first to suggest to Winston Churchill that Constantinople should be attacked, and how it should be, with all the inside information they had obtained.

So the last thing on the minds of the Turks was to wage war on Britain - for to have had this intention and to have entrusted England with such expert knowledge of the defences of the Turkish State would hardly have made sense.

The only aspect of Ottoman reorganisation entrusted by the Young Turks to the Germans was the army. I am sure the Turkish Government saw this as a kind of insurance against being betrayed by the English and French and also as a kind of balancing act between the Powers to ensure that everyone was kept happy.

And so the Turkish alliance with Germany was an alliance of last resort forced on the Turks by the gathering of hostile aggressors around the Ottoman territories who refused to be bought off with either goodwill or bribes and determined that Turkey be not allowed to remain neutral in the war.

What were Turkey's intentions in 1914?

In July 1914 the main intention of the Ottoman State was to survive the War. It knew that Britain had its eyes on grabbing the Arab parts of the Ottoman Empire and that its ally Tsarist Russia wanted Constantinople. To ensure its own survival Turkey remained neutral in the war and played for time by putting Germany off, when it became important for the Kaiser to gain allies, with a number of preconditions for a fully-fledged alliance.

It is sometimes argued by British historians that England desired Turkey to remain neutral in the war. However, there are a number of reasons to doubt this argument. Firstly, whilst Turkey had little to gain in entering the war it was necessary from Britain and Russia's position that the Ottoman Empire should be engaged in the conflict. How else was Constantinople to be got for the Russians? Secondly, Britain began to engage in highly provocative behaviour towards the Turks. A major example of this was the seizure by Winston Churchill of two Turkish battleships being built by the Royal Navy that were being paid for by popular subscription. These were seized illegally and confiscated without compensation by the British - effectively signalling that the naval alliance with Turkey was over.

It is difficult not to conclude that the manner of their seizure was designed to give the maximum provocation to the Turks and to drive the Ottoman government toward Germany.

Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, who had been making the arrangement to hand over Constantinople to the Russians, set down British intentions toward Turkey in early October in an internal memo at the Foreign Office:

"To delay the outbreak of war as long as we could, to gain as much time as we could, and to make it clear, when war came, that we had done everything to avoid war and that Turkey had forced it." (A.L. Macfie, "The Straits Question In The First World War", *Middle Eastern Studies*, July 1983, p.49)

So all along it was the British aim to make war on Turkey at an opportune time and blame the Ottoman Government for the breakdown in relations - while at the same time denying it all for the historic and diplomatic record.

The opportunity of finding a cause of war against Turkey developed after the Royal Navy forced two German ships trapped in the Mediterranean into neutral Constantinople in early August. The German crews faced with the prospect of destruction if they re-entered the Aegean handed the ships over to the Turks. The Turks accepted them in place of the two battleships owed to them by Britain.

Churchill laid a blockade on the Dardanelles to prevent the ships coming out. This in itself was an act of war against Turkey. Then he organised a series of meetings in the first days of September to discuss a pre-emptive strike on Constantinople - to "Copenhagen" the city, as Nelson had done in destroying the Danish fleet in its port in neutral Denmark in 1801 before declaration of war. On the last day of October Churchill gave the order to "commence hostilities with Turkey" without informing the Cabinet or formally declaring war. The Royal Navy began bombarding the Dardanelles on 3rd November even before war was declared on Turkey.

The occasion for the British declaration of war was an obscure incident in the Black Sea where the two formerly German ships engaged Russian ships that were attempting to lay mines on the approaches to Constantinople to complete the blockade which the British had instituted at the other end of the Straits. The ships then engaged Russian guns at the port of Odessa where a Russian Army was being prepared for invasion of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian operation was designed to prevent the Turks from being able to reinforce their Eastern provinces via the Black Sea - something that was indispensable to Ottoman forces due to the lack of a road network toward Eastern Anatolia.

The Black Sea incident that provided the cause for war is an unusually obscure event and I could not find a detailed account of it published in Britain. This is despite the fact that many detailed accounts exist about the events leading to the war on Germany.

The Turks themselves waited another week to declare war on Britain when they found a British army coming up from Kuwait and heading for Baghdad. Kuwait had supposedly been an independent principality in 1914 but it found itself with a sizeable British Indian army camped inside it and ready to expand the Empire into Mesopotamia.

What were Britain's objectives in relation to the Ottoman Empire?

In early 1915 Britain and France began the naval assault on the Straits which was beaten off with great bravery by the Turks. And so a combined naval and military invasion was launched in which Atatürk appeared on the world stage for the first time. When the British invasion was defeated through Turkish resistance at Gallipoli the Entente withdrew their armies to Egypt and to Salonika in neutral Greece.

The armies withdrawn from Gallipoli to Egypt went on to help conquer Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq) for the British Empire. The Imperial conquest of these two parts of the Ottoman State was for strategic and economic reasons and involved the disastrous decision to establish a Zionist colony in Palestine to take care of British interests in the area.

What is clear from any reading of ambassadorial correspondence and other material is how many within British ruling circles were concerned at the so-called 'power of the Jew.' This anti-Semitic mindset in the British ruling class was actually useful to Zionists in convincing the British government that the adoption of the Zionist objective would be indispensable to the British war effort.

This was because many in the Imperial ruling elite had formed the notion that the Jews were a dangerous element in international affairs. It was reasoned that because they had no country and no national existence they were internationalists of a disruptive kind. It was noticed that Jews were prominent both in international finance and international socialism. Many British Imperial civil servants and writers saw them as being associated with German commercial success and even as a hidden power behind the Young Turks, many of whom came from the great Jewish city of Salonika. This was a popular view within powerful circles in England even before the war but as the war became a stalemate it became worried about even more.

The solution to the 'Jewish problem' for Britain, therefore, presented itself in the Zionist objective in which Jews could be made into a national people who no longer disrupted the international affairs of the British Empire. I call this Imperial motivation for altering the Jewish destiny 'the taming of the Jew' because that is how it was seen by British experts in geopolitics.

It was no accident that Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister who introduced the Aliens Act in Britain to reduce Jewish immigration to the country was also the author of the Declaration that proclaimed the Zionist objective as a British war aim.

The Zionists also proved an important ally for England in its manoeuvrings against the French who had been promised the territory of Palestine, as part of Syria, in the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty. However, Britain managed to detach Palestine from Syria and, as a consequence, Palestine from the French by championing the cause of Zionism whereby England took special responsibility for the future of the Jews. This had the effect of trumping the French historical claim to Syria through the English moral claim to be the guardians of the new Jewish homeland as indicated in the Balfour declaration of 1917.

In making war on the Ottoman Empire, and in pursuing the Zionist objective, the British Empire not only destroyed the prosperous and content Jewish communities across the Ottoman possessions but also sowed the seeds for generations of conflict with the local inhabitants of Palestine who would find themselves the chief victims of this great act of conquest and ethnic cleansing.

In the book I describe how Britain established the Jewish homeland in a great surge of fundamentalist Christianity brought about by the catastrophic effects of the war they launched. But in doing so they underestimated the Jewish colonists they helped plant in Palestine who they thought would remain a loyal and servile part of the Empire but who developed instead into vigorous nationalists inspired by the expansionist impulses of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

Both Jew and Arab were used by Britain in the Great War against Turkey. There was some local discontent amongst Arabs at the centralizing of the Young Turk government. However, the Arabs had never been nationalists prior to British attempts to make them rebel against the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the only Arab that can be accurately described as a nationalist, Said Talib of Basra, was actually deported by Britain to India, as a troublemaker, as soon as the British Army occupied southern Iraq.

Some British imperialists came up with the ridiculous idea of making the Sherif of Mecca, Hussein, a new Caliph in order to control the Moslem world. Hussein was flattered by the British and in 1915 the Arab Revolt began when he was promised an independent Arab state up to Syria in return for his help in destabilizing the Ottoman Empire.

The Arabs, as a consequence, found themselves the victims of a great British triple-cross. They were encouraged to rise against the Turks by Colonel Lawrence, with the promise of a great independent Arab state after the War. And then they found this state had been secretly divided between the British and French, and Palestine declared to be a Jewish homeland – all without the wishes of the actual inhabitants being taken into account.

The British conquering of Mesopotamia and establishment of Iraq was another consequence of the Great War on Turkey. In this conquest Britain put together an unstable mix of peoples from the Ottoman vilayets of Basra, Mesopotamia and Mosul in the strategic interests of the Empire, and for the oil of Mosul.

Originally the intention was just to incorporate the Basra region into British India to create a new buffer to replace the Ottoman buffer. Arnold Wilson, who was put in charge of the conquered territories, came with pre-war Imperial understandings and an expectation that British power would be fully utilized to govern Iraq in the firm manner that had been applied to the Indian Empire. When he saw that things had changed and argued against the new approach, he was removed.

The system established by Britain in Iraq was the worst of all possible worlds. The old Ottoman system had the virtue of governing the intermingled peoples of Mesopotamia as the other peoples of the Empire, within a large multi-ethnic unit where local rivalries were largely kept in check. The British Indian model may have functioned in a similar fashion given strong and purposeful government. However, the system that emerged after 1918 was neither strong nor purposeful. It put three distinct groups into a pseudo-nation and created a pressure-cooker environment for them to conflict with each other for power. And it was not surprising that afterwards this system could only be made functional by ruthless strongmen.

Iraq turned out to be a much larger area than was originally intended. The Imperial forces decided to expand the Basra buffer more and more to the North and even tried to push it into northern Persia and the Caucasus, once the Czarist State began to collapse.

However, after the Great War, Britain, whilst it obtained a great amount of territory, found it almost impossible to govern this territory in an effective manner. This was because of two reasons. Firstly, there was so much propaganda produced about fighting the war for small nations and democracy that the old naked imperialism was very difficult to justify in the aftermath of the war. Too many people had been affected by this propaganda and also it was impossible to quietly abandon it because by 1917 America had to be encouraged to join the war against Germany to save the Entente. America did not want to sacrifice its soldiers against Germany just so that the French and British could expand their empires in Asia.

The new state of Iraq was born in violence and deception. There the reality of conquest exposed as a fraud the 'war for small nations'. The Iraqis who thought they were being liberated from Ottoman rule found themselves, like the Arabs, under a new Imperial rule and an insurgency began that was crushed by air power – a precedent for future Western pacification of the region.

A mandate was set up, as in Palestine, which established British control indirectly under the pretense of nationhood. Sir Percy Cox came from Persia to rig an election by kidnapping the opposition candidate in order to maintain British control over a puppet imported to maintain Imperial hegemony. In doing this, a precedent and template for violence and electoral manipulation in Iraqi politics was established by Britain that has persisted to the present.

Why did Britain produce so much propaganda against the Turk?

At this point I should say a bit about Wellington House and its production of propaganda against the Turks. Wellington House was a secret propaganda department set up at the start of the war under Charles Masterman. Masterman was later replaced by John Buchan, the famous author of *The 39 Steps*. Buchan and other notable literary figures and historians of the time were recruited to the propaganda drive through a covert meeting held just after the outbreak of the war. This was kept a close secret - even though it was the largest single gathering of writers for a state purpose in British history. The intention was to establish a propaganda drive against Germany which would use the talents of all these writers in the construction of a great output of material that would demonize the enemy from all possible angles - accusing them of terrible atrocities, having violent natures and instincts, producing aggressive and expansionist ideas etc. etc.

And when Turkey was enlisted as another enemy the focus moved from Germany to the Turks. The big problem Wellington House was confronted with in creating negative propaganda against the Turks was the notion that existed in England at the time which can be summed up in the phrase 'the Turk is a gentleman'. This came about because the traditional view of the Turk in Britain presented him as a clean fighter and an honorable and honest opponent. The propagandists therefore attempted to overcome this view with a great output of atrocity propaganda.

A classic example was Mark Sykes's famous article in *The Times* called 'The clean fighting Turk - a spuriously claim'. Sykes was the man charged with secretly carving up the Middle East with the French at the same time as Britain was openly promising an Arab state on the same territory to the Arabs.

Another example, amongst dozens of others, was the book called *Crescent and Iron Cross* by E.F. Benson. Benson was a famous novelist and writer of ghost stories. As far as I know he had little interest in the history of the Ottoman Empire or Turkish affairs before the Great War. Suddenly he produced a book which demonized the Turks and made all sorts of allegations about the Ottomans and particularly about their treatment of the Armenians.

This book illustrates the Wellington House method very well. Information was collected by unknown propagandists and rewritten by the author as if it was his own work. And this approach was applied by numerous other publications which seemed to be written by well-regarded private individuals and published by independent publishing houses but which were really collaborations by secret propagandists who organized the production and distribution of the work on a massive scale and directed it at influential individuals. Much of the information in these publications was common and had a single original source. However, the sheer volume and range of all these publications produced the same effect as poison gas in the trenches - attacking all the senses and creating something that was very difficult to avoid penetrating the mind.

Two and a half million books and pamphlets reached an audience of at least 13,000 contacts in the United States. The United States was a particular target of the Wellington House propaganda because the Americans were very distrustful of Britain's motives in the Middle East. In order to justify the war on Turkey, which the United States never joined, and the conquest

of the Middle East, Britain felt it had to project an image of the Turks as being wholly unfit to govern anybody and to be the enemies of progress everywhere. The idea was to implant in the American mind the view that once Britain had liberated the Arab areas from the Ottoman Empire they would all become Gardens of Eden and that the British Empire only had the noblest of motives and the interests of native peoples in mind in fighting and conquering in the region.

It is notable that although the US committed armies against Germany and Austria-Hungary it never declared war on Turkey. And the consequence of Americans' experience in working with British Imperialists in the occupied territories ensured that the US refused to get involved in the mandates established after the war.

Who was responsible for the Armenian disaster?

Initially I tried to stay away from this area – seeing it as a matter for debate between historians who have studied it more thoroughly and having greater familiarity with it. However, I found I could not ignore it due to the central role it had in Britain's war on Turkey.

This is where the Armenian issue originates from - or the popularity of the idea of an Armenian 'genocide'. The Armenians were used to cultivate and construct a case against Turkey first and foremost. That was the primary interest of Britain in them and not their well-being or that they should be governed well.

It must be remembered that Britain always sought to undermine enemies or states it saw as rivals by destabilizing them through their national minorities (whilst doing everything to repress and subdue minorities within their own Empire, of course, as in Ireland.)

The Armenians were used by England and Russia as a means of destabilizing the Ottoman Empire and disrupting the Turkish resistance to invasion behind their lines. There were, obviously, Armenian nationalists who were both willing and eager to participate in this process but its main effect was to make the ordinary Armenians' position impossible within the Ottoman Empire. It was made impossible for them to remain a 'loyal community' and a functional part of the Empire, which they had been for centuries.

There was a lot of hypocrisy about Britain's condemnation of the Turks because only a decade previously the British had repressed Boer resistance in South Africa with great ruthlessness, putting families in concentration camps, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands. Although this was British State policy it was only called 'methods of barbarism' but never 'genocide'. This was not even done in the conditions that confronted the Turks during the Great War - blockade, invasion on three fronts, starvation, the collapse of the infrastructure and many local people in eastern Anatolia with scores to settle with the Armenians in the hinterlands of invasion and war.

The use of the word 'genocide' with regard to what happened to the Armenians during the Great War is an attempt to connect Turkey with Nazi Germany. However, a much better analogy would be what happened on the Eastern Front during the Second World War when different groups of people became destabilized by the Nazi invasion of Russia. Here terrible things were done as state authority began to collapse, society began to return to its elements and people struggled to survive in the circumstances.

In 1915 the Russian and British invasions of the Ottoman Empire had a similar effect. The Russians and British raised some people's expectations so that they were willing to exact retribution on people they had grievances against and in turn those people exacted revenge on them. No one quite knew under whose authority they would exist when the war was over and therefore all restraint was removed on behaviour. It was under these circumstances and in this context that the relocation of Armenians took place and the killing of both Christian and Moslem peoples.

Essentially the responsibility for what happened to the Armenians and the other minorities that existed relatively peacefully within the Ottoman Empire for centuries must be placed at the hands of those who attempted to destabilize and ultimately destroy this multinational Empire.

Nationalism was a most unsuitable thing to promote in the region covered by the Ottoman Empire where a great patch-work of peoples were inter-mingled and were inter-dependent. Its promotion in the region by the Western powers was as disastrous for the many Moslem communities of the Balkans and the Caucasus, who were driven from their homes of centuries, as it was for Christians caught up in the inevitable consequences of the simplifying process it encouraged. The same forces in Europe unleashed by the Versailles settlement did much to make the position of Jews untenable within societies where they had dwelt for centuries.

The important point that should be borne in mind is that it was not in the Turkish interest that the Armenians should rebel and resort to war but it was very much in the Russian and British interest that they should do so.

Unfortunately for the Armenians, they, like other peoples in strategically important areas, found themselves being used as pawns in a new 'Great Game.' And after being encouraged to rise and form themselves into a national entity that was never a practicality given their dispersion across Ottoman territories, they were quickly discarded and forgotten when their interests no longer coincided with those of their sponsors.

How and why did the British set the Greeks against the Turks?

That brings us to the issue of the Greeks. The political and military assault launched by Britain on neutral Greece and the devastating effect this ultimately had on the Greek people across the Balkans and Asia Minor is almost completely forgotten about in Western Europe. The Greek King Constantine and his government tried to remain neutral in the war but Britain was determined to enlist as many neutrals as possible in their Great War to help fight it. This was necessary for three main reasons.

Firstly, English Liberalism had to turn the war into a great moral crusade of good versus evil in order that their MPs and supporters would support it. This meant that neutrality was almost impossible as countries had to be either 'for' or 'against' the 'war for civilization' against 'barbarism.' This really was an innovation in the conduct of war and gave the Great War its catastrophic character because an accommodation or peace could hardly be made with evil, particularly for non-conformist Protestants, who made up a great deal of the Liberal rank and file. This thwarted all efforts at peace particularly those of Pope Benedict XV, who tried to put a stop to Europe destroying itself.

Secondly, English Liberalism was opposed to military conscription. That made it necessary, once the Germans had not been defeated quickly, to get others to do the fighting for Britain – the fighting that the Liberal Party was reluctant to impose on its own citizens for fear of interfering in their freedoms. So it became the norm to bully and bribe other nations to fight to avoid conscription at home.

Thirdly, the Liberal Imperialists, like Churchill, favoured a policy of expansion of the war in a desperate attempt to win it. In France and Belgium the war had got bogged down into a static war of attrition where great casualties were being suffered. The thinking was that if the fringes of Europe, and even Asia, were set ablaze this would let others take the casualties and stretch the forces of the Central Powers wider and wider to weaken their lines.

So England made offers to the Greek Prime Minister, Venizelos, of territory in Anatolia which he found too hard to resist. The Greek King, however, under the constitution had the final say on matters of war and he attempted to defend his neutrality policy. King Constantine was then deposed by the actions of the British Army at Salonika, through a starvation blockade by the Royal Navy and a seizure of the harvest by Allied troops. This had the result of a widespread famine in the neutral nation that forced the abdication of Constantine.

These events led to the Greek tragedy in Anatolia because the puppet government under Venizelos, installed in Athens through Allied bayonets, was enlisted as a catspaw to bring the Turks to heel after the Armistice at Mudros. They were presented with the town of Smyrna first and then the Greeks, encouraged by Lloyd George, advanced across Anatolia toward where the Turkish democracy had re-established, at Ankara, after it had been suppressed in Constantinople. Britain was using the Greeks and their desire for a new Byzantium in Anatolia to get Atatürk and the Turkish national forces to submit to the Treaty of Sèvres, and the destruction of not only the Ottoman State but of Turkey itself.

This was because after the war Britain was virtually bankrupt and the promise had been made by Lloyd George to demobilize the troops immediately in order to win a snap election he called just after the Armistice. So the Greek Army was needed to do the imposing of the Treaty of Sèvres which British Imperial forces were unable to undertake.

But the Greek Army perished just short of Ankara after being skillfully manoeuvred into a position by Atatürk in which their lines were stretched. And the two thousand year old Greek population of Asia Minor fled on boats from Smyrna, with the remnants of their army, after Britain had withdrawn its support, because

the Greek democracy had reasserted its will to have back its King.

What was positive about the Great War on Turkey?

Finally I will end with the one great positive development of the Great War on Turkey - Atatürk's achievement in leading the Turkish nation to independence from the Imperialist Powers and the establishment of the Turkish State. This was an event that Republican Ireland could only marvel at, from the confines of the 1921 Treaty which ended the Irish Republic and created an Irish state within the British Empire again.

However, the British Empire's ultimate demise was set in motion by the successful Turkish war of independence and the humiliation of Britain at Chanak. And that had important ramifications for the Irish who wished to overturn the Treaty in the event of a decline in British power.

Irish Republicans were greatly inspired by what Atatürk had achieved. Britain had closed the Turkish parliament in Constantinople as it had done the Irish parliament in Dublin; it had arrested and interned the Turkish deputies as it had the Irish members of Dáil Éireann. It had attempted to destroy the new Turkish national assembly in Ankara as it also attempted to prevent the Irish democracy from functioning. It had forced a treaty reluctantly on the Turks as it had done on the Irish. But then Atatürk came along. He overthrew the punitive treaty of Sèvres dictated by the imperialists at the point of a gun. He defeated and humiliated the most powerful empire in the world and its Army at the height of its power, along with the other victors of the Great War. He then negotiated a new treaty at Lausanne which turned Turkey into an independent democracy.

What Atatürk achieved became an inspiration to the Republicans in Ireland who did not accept the restrictions of the Treaty imposed upon them by Britain. And in the coming decades they gained power under the leadership of DeValera and Fianna Fail and began to challenge and undermine the Treaty in the knowledge that Britain was no longer the power it once was since it came up against Atatürk and Turkey.

To conclude, I would say that it isn't going too far to say that Atatürk was not just the father of the Turkish State but he had also something to do with the birth of the independent Irish nation as well.

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Redmond, the First World War and Knowledge Aforethought.

by Eamon Dyas

The roots of the First World War will not be found in Sarajevo in 1914 or the Balkans in 1912 or Morocco in 1911. The roots can be traced to the British General Election of January 1906. But even then, the outcome leading from January 1906 to August 1914 was not inevitable as any government elected in 1906 would need to face another election before that fateful date and the results of elections cannot always be guaranteed. Of course the World War could have taken place before August 1914 but wars on such a scale take place under specific conditions, and like the outcome of general elections, such conditions cannot always be anticipated. As it was, the conditions were considered favourable in August 1914 so war there was. In 1906 Parliaments could sit for a maximum of 7 years and the Government elected in that year need not have faced another election until 1913. In fact two general elections intervened and both in the year 1910: one in January and one in December. The point at which the First World War became possible was January 1906, the point at which it became inevitable was December 1910 – the last general election until 1918.

The 1906 Election and the Ascent of the Liberal Active Imperialists.

The Boer War of 1899 to 1902 had split the Liberal Party between those who saw themselves as active Imperialists and supported the war and those who were neutral or pro-Boers and seen as passive Imperialists. Although the Liberal leader Campbell-Bannerman had sought to hold the party together, by the time of the 1900 general election the party was seen as divided and its loyalty to the cause of the war suspect. As a result it lost that election and in the aftermath of this defeat the active Imperialists came into their own with people like H.H. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and Richard Haldane wielding increasing influence in the party. The active Imperialists saw the Boer War as a wake-up call to Britain not only in terms of how it was equipped to deal with a white enemy (the Boers were the first such enemy that confronted the British since the Crimean War of 1854) but also to take the initiative in the development of policies to deal with the perceived threat from its next enemy.

The aftermath of the Boer War generated several official inquiries into the way that war developed and the British response to the threat it posed. All the official reports into the war pointed to the fact that the British army was ill prepared to deal with such an enemy and had to rely on the support of its white self-governing colonies for its success. With these lessons in mind the Liberal active Imperialists, who had been concerned about the commercial and industrial challenge to Britain from Germany came to see that country, (similar to itself - industrialized, white and Protestant), as its main military threat. It was also acknowledged that if Germany had been more active in supporting the Boer cause, in all likelihood Britain would have lost South Africa with unforeseen consequences for its hold on the rest of its African empire and beyond.

The Liberal Party had begun to unite behind the active Imperialist agenda when Balfour and the Conservatives resigned in December 1905 leaving Campbell-Bannerman to take over the reins pending the General Election of January 1906. The Liberals entered that election intent on assuring the electorate that it was no longer a disunited party – a development that also required it to jettison its historical commitment to Irish Home Rule.

The election resulted in a landslide win for the Liberal Party. The party fought the election on the issue of Free Trade. Balfour's government began to be associated with certain aspects of protectionism in the aftermath of the 1902 Brussels Sugar Convention and Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform policies of 1903 added to the suspicion that, over time, Balfour would adopt more widespread protectionist policies. Thus, at the time of the 1906 general election the Conservatives were associated with policies that threatened the Free Trade economics which successive British governments had pursued since the 1840s. To the British people, Free Trade had guaranteed prosperity, jobs and cheap food for generations. Such was the affinity of the British with Free Trade that Campbell-Bannerman claimed that to argue against it was like arguing against the law of gravity. This was the main issue on which he and the Liberal Party fought the election. The traditional inclusion of Home Rule on the Liberal Party's election programme was discarded as it entered that election and, although its leaders continued to assure the Irish Nationalists that they still believed in Home Rule, the Liberals publicly stated that, in the event of their being elected, no legislation relating to Home Rule would be introduced for the duration of the Parliament. There is no doubt that this was a significant contributing factor in the Liberal Party winning that election. Home Rule was never a popular issue in Britain and the recent pro-Boer position of the Irish Parliamentary Party had fuelled anti-Home Rule sentiment.

The 1906 General Election resulted in the Conservatives losing more than half their seats and the Liberals winning a majority of 125 seats over all other parties combined. It was also the last hurrah of the party for it was the last occasion when it won an absolute majority in the House of Commons and the last election when it won the highest share of the popular vote. From now on it would hold power on the basis of a minority of seats in Parliament and a minority of the popular vote. The reason why this fact is important is because the Liberal Government went on, after the general elections of 1910, to introduce, arguably, two of the most significant constitutional changes in the history of the British constitution since the 19th century – the abolition of the House of Lords' veto and the 1912 Home Rule Act. That they introduced such constitutional changes as a minority government and without a legitimate electoral mandate, together with the disaster of their role in the First World War, was what effectively destroyed the Liberal Party.

The self-destructive behaviour of the Liberal Party between 1910 and 1912 makes no sense politically. Normally, a British

political party when it is voted into government is cognisant of the circumstances in which it finds itself as the governing party. Large majorities obviously give a governing party more licence to implement more of its programme and smaller majorities act as a brake on what it feels it can reasonably do in terms of implementing its programme. With the exception of the Liberal Party between 1910 and 1912 no British governing party introduced significant constitutional changes unless it had a clear electoral mandate for its constitutional changing proposals and a reasonable majority in Parliament supporting these changes, or, had the support of the opposition in making these changes. The fact is, minority governments in Britain have never introduced significant constitutional change in the circumstances that the Liberal Party found itself in 1910-1912. What then caused this aberrant behaviour? What was going on in the leadership of the Liberal Party at this time to propel it towards such apparently mindless actions?

The simple answer is war and the preparations for war. A war that its leadership was determined would happen, a war that they had invested their future in ensuring would happen, and a war they believed would be over in a matter of months. But Asquith and his coterie could not have done it alone. The unpredictability of the two general elections of 1910 left them dependent upon the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party and without that support their war strategy would not have reached fruition.

The War Alliance.

In a letter published in the *Irish Examiner* on the 24 May 2010, Dr. Gerald Morgan of Trinity College Dublin asks the question, what were patriotic Irish men and women supposed to do in 1914 and 1916, with no Easter Rising on the cards and with no other outlet for their patriotism, other than to join the British Empire's war on Germany. He goes on to say that:-

“The constitutional struggle for Home Rule had been won in the parliament of 1910-14 by the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond in coalition with the Liberals under Asquith (much like the present coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats). Instead of calling into question the patriotism of Irishmen and women in this confused and turbulent period of Irish history we ought to ask the British to explain why they set aside in so disastrous a manner an act of their own sovereign parliament?”

Dr. Morgan's opening question is a meaningless one. The people involved knew what the choices were. Those who followed Redmond into war after 1914 were well aware of that choice. Just as those who refused to join him were well aware of that choice. That choice was whether to help Britain fight her war against Germany as the price of Irish Home Rule or, suspecting that this was a false bargain, stay at home and do what could be done to further the cause of Irish self rule. To take Redmond's route was to buy into the British Government's agenda, an agenda that for years had been geared up for war with Germany. It was this war with Germany that dictated Asquith's *volte face* in December 1909 when he dramatically reversed his hostility to Home Rule in the lead up to the first General Election of 1910. Home Rule was a device used by Asquith to ensure he stayed in power in order to perpetuate his secret plans for war. Until the results of the January 1910 General Election he did not believe that Home Rule would become a real issue of practical politics. He used it in December 1909 as a means of gaining the support of Redmond for the Irish vote in Britain (which, it has been estimated, resulted in between 25 and 30 seats being won by the Liberals in the election)

and the anticipated 80 or so Irish votes in the coming Parliament. In the aftermath of the January 1910 General Election, much to Asquith's surprise and everyone's discomfort, Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party held the balance of power in Westminster and had it in their power to make or break the sitting Government. The subsequent second General Election in December 1910 came up with a similar result and Redmond continued to have the capacity to bring down the Government at any time of his choosing from then until the declaration of war in August 1914. The deal done with Asquith to ensure that he would not use this power was the 1912 Irish Home Rule Act.

However, to describe this, as Dr. Morgan does, as the result of an arrangement “much like the present coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats” is fanciful to say the least. These were not two British national political parties agreeing to share power in order to implement their respective UK-wide programmes. Nor was there any sharing of Government Ministries. The closest thing that comes near to it is an alliance. A coalition involves the formal subverting, to one degree or another, of each participating entity's freedom of action. An alliance involves an understanding between participating entities that their interests coincide within certain recognised limits with each participant retaining the right to withdraw at any time if such coincidence of interest ceases. Alliances between states usually involve the formal codification of such arrangements but such codifications between political parties are not always necessary or indeed politically desirable. From Asquith's and Redmond's point of view such a codification would certainly not have been advisable so the alliance remained unwritten and was denied at every opportunity but as it had feathers, walked like a duck and quacked . . .

Alliances can involve the combination of participants of equal standing but they can also involve an arrangement where one partner is stronger and more powerful than the other. In terms of the Asquith/Redmond alliance, Asquith was the man with the power but Redmond gave the man with the power the power to use it. His contribution, although he was the lesser partner, was pivotal.

The relationship between Asquith and Redmond after January 1910 was in fact an alliance. It was an alliance between an Irish Nationalist party whose intention it was to gain Home Rule at any cost, and a Government coterie whose intention it was to pursue a secret policy, which would lead directly to war with Germany. One party to the alliance, the Irish Parliamentary Party, agreed to help the Government party pursue its domestic and foreign war policy on condition that it put a Home Rule Act on the statute book. Stripped of all its niceties that is what it in fact amounted to. What follows is an account of the way this sordid deal was established and how it worked its way towards the realisation of the Governing party's agenda. An agenda that was realised together with the promise to put Home Rule on the statute book. Nothing was said, however, about ensuring that the Act would ever become operational in law and so it came to pass.

The cost of this arrangement was the death and misery inflicted on countless millions in Europe and beyond and the Irish Parliamentary Party was a culpable partner in the alliance that caused it to happen. Since the time he became Prime Minister in 1908, Asquith knew perfectly well where his policies were leading. But how much did his partner in crimes against humanity, John Redmond, know of this intent? While Asquith's role in the

war has been well documented, Redmond's culpability, because he is the darling of academia in its revisionist crusade against republican history, remains hidden and unexplored. The following narrative of the events that led to the forging of the Asquith/Redmond alliance will also look at the question of Redmond's awareness of the secret war agenda of his ally in that alliance, the wider political reverberations of that alliance for Irish constitutional politics, and the way that the alliance led to the destruction of Europe.

The Unfolding.

In the aftermath of the 1906 election, Campbell-Bannerman, in response to the growing tide of support for the active Imperialists, made Asquith Chancellor of the Exchequer, Grey Foreign Secretary, and Haldane Secretary of State for War (a month earlier these three had led an attempt to oust him as leader). This offered them the opportunity to move the inherited perspective, which had by now replaced Russia with Germany as the main threat to British interests, to a new level.

In 1904 the Balfour administration had signed the 3rd Entente Cordiale with France, and in 1907, at the behest of Sir Edward Grey, the Liberal administration entered into an Entente with Britain's erstwhile enemy, Russia, thereby completing the encirclement of Germany. When in 1908, Campbell-Bannerman resigned on grounds of ill health he was replaced as Prime Minister by Herbert Henry Asquith and the control of government policy by the Liberal active Imperialists became absolute. Asquith was now Prime Minister (albeit an unelected one) and embarked on a secret policy which was to lead directly to the First World War. But, because the existing levels of anti-German feeling were not sufficiently strong to underpin a move towards war, Asquith and his war colleagues had to embark on their crusade as secretly as possible. He followed his plan through the use of bureaucratic devices, administrative duplicity and out and out chicanery. Within a couple of years of becoming Prime Minister he had achieved, to a large extent, his object of creating a cabinet within a cabinet: one which dealt with the normal issues of government and the other specialising on the preparations for the coming war:-

“By appointing *ad hoc* cabinet committees, Asquith could relieve the whole cabinet of tedious detail over such subjects as colonial office reorganization, franchise reform or estimates. In selecting the personnel of such committees, he could exercise a discreet control over unwanted opinions or ensure that discussion was limited to those who had departmental responsibility or expert knowledge to contribute. Immediately after the general election of December 1910, for example, three special committees were nominated. A Foreign Affairs committee apparently created to placate Lloyd George who had complained of being ‘kept in the dark in regard to the essential features of our Foreign Policy’ - consisted of the prime minister, Grey, Lloyd George, Morley, Crewe, and Runciman. Civil Service and Naval Estimates were given to the chancellor of the exchequer, with the lord chancellor, Churchill, Crewe, Burns, Buxton, and Pease. The heads of the big spending departments - Haldane, McKenna, and Runciman - were to appear as witnesses. In addition to ‘ascertain [the] real facts bearing on finance of Home Rule’, the lord chancellor, Birrell, Samuel, Grey, Haldane, Churchill, and Lloyd George formed what was described as a committee of ‘experts’.

Little is known of the working of cabinet committees or how long they lasted. A short life, no more than a couple of months,

seems to have been typical. (The life of the Foreign Affairs committee, for example, seems to have ended by late July 1911.) When such groups were appointed to deal with particular bills, details were thrashed out ‘in consultation with all the experts concerned and at command’. Especially in uncharted fields like unemployment insurance, ministers could use the informal framework of a committee to consult with officials and outside advisers. In April 1909 and again twice during April 1911 unemployment insurance was referred from the cabinet in this way. There was, however, no rule governing the use of committees. The army estimates escaped scrutiny in 1911 because, as the cabinet was told, Lloyd George and Haldane (with Asquith's approval) had made a private ‘deal’. The same thing seems to have happened the following year.”

(“Asquith as Prime Minister, 1908-1916” by Cameron Hazlehurst. Published in *English Historical Review*, July 1970. pp.509-510)

The reference to the Foreign Affairs committee being created to placate Lloyd George (who at this time was Chancellor of the Exchequer) is interesting. Up to this time it would appear that Lloyd George was off message and Asquith needed to ensure that his Chancellor did not continue to undermine his secret agenda. In a speech he gave at the Queen's Hall on 28 July 1908, Lloyd George showed too much sympathy with the position in which Germany was being placed by the policies of its European neighbours - policies which were being actively encouraged by Britain:-

“Look at the position of Germany. Her army is to her what our navy is to us – her sole defence against invasion. She has not got a two-Power standard. She may have a stronger army than France, than Russia, than Italy, than Austria, but she is between two great Powers who, in combination, could pour in a vastly greater number of troops than she has. Don't forget that when you wonder why Germany is frightened at alliances and understandings and some sort of mysterious workings which appear in the press, and hints in the *Times* and *Daily Mail* . . . Here is Germany, in the middle of Europe, with France and Russia on each side, and with a combination of their armies greater than hers. Suppose we had here a possible combination which would lay us open to invasion – suppose Germany and France, or Germany and Russia, or Germany and Austria, had fleets which, in combination, would be stronger than ours, would not we be frightened? Would we not arm? Of course we should.”

(quoted in: “Edward VII and the Entente Cordiale, III” by Francis Neilson, p.183. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol. 17, no. 2, January 1958)

This was the first and the last time that the position of Germany was honestly placed before the British public by a Government Minister (Lloyd George having been made Chancellor of the Exchequer a few months previously). But Germany's position was even more perilous than Lloyd George could afford to admit. At the time that this speech was being made, the US naval hero, Admiral Mahon, was writing in *The Scientific American* that “88 per cent of England's guns were pointed at Germany.” (op. cit. above).

Lloyd George went on to become a member of Asquith's charmed circle, at which point his attitude towards Germany changed. But it appears that Asquith's secret arrangements had wheels within wheels:

In February 1912, Haldane told a friend that he, Grey, Lloyd George, and Churchill 'generally dined together every week'. And these four, though by no means constituting an inner cabinet or enjoying the prime minister's special favour, were demonstrably the most powerful individuals in the ministry. Still, Lloyd George and Churchill did not learn about the controversial Anglo-French military conversations until the whole cabinet were informed in 1911. Knowledge of the military conversations was not confined to a permanent inner group. But there can be no doubt that care was taken to prevent news of the conversations leaking to ministers other than those who were directly involved in their inception or their subsequent continuation. The Committee of Imperial Defence was employed as a conveniently exclusive forum for the discussion of naval and military problems. In practice, especially after 1910, the CID was usually occupied with technical minutiae, and had little to do with major strategic questions." ("Asquith as Prime Minister, 1908-1916" by Cameron Hazlehurst. *English Historical Review*, July 1970. pp.510-511)

The Committee of Imperial Defence was formed in 1904 as a result of a recommendation by the Elgin Committee established by Balfour to investigate the issues and lessons from the Boer War. It was supposed to be the centre through which strategic options for the army and navy could be formulated in the context of the military reductions after the Boer War (at the end of which over 400,000 personnel from the various British and colonial services were involved) but inter-service rivalry prevented it functioning properly (one of the issues Haldane sought to address on becoming Secretary of State for War). By 1912 it had become a forum where members of both services could communicate with each other and with the civil service of relevant government departments. But it also provided Asquith with a 'false forum' by which 'inconvenient' cabinet members could be omitted from important meetings. It seems that Asquith was operating on the basis that those outside the charmed circle would be encouraged to believe that the meetings they were attending constituted the full business of the CID, whereas they were being excluded from those meetings where the real issues were discussed by Asquith's closest circle.

"Exclusiveness was further facilitated by the frequent absence of those ministers whom the prime minister had authorized to attend CID meetings. And, on occasions when the presence of particular people - Morley or Harcourt, for example - was likely to be awkward, Asquith did not scruple at omitting their names from the list of members to be summoned. The flagrant packing of one meeting, the famous gathering on 23 August 1911, provoked a major cabinet storm. Attempting to justify the failure to invite Harcourt, Morley, and Esher, Asquith called the meeting a sub-committee meeting. Harcourt was not slow to point out that no sub-committee had been appointed by the plenary committee. The true explanation, he believed, was that the meeting 'was arranged some time ago for a date when it was supposed that we should all be out of London . . . to decide on where and how British troops could be landed to assist a French Army on the Meuse!!'

This incident shook the faith of some of Asquith's colleagues in his candour and fair dealing with them. Jack Pease put it very simply, after two long and angry cabinet meetings:

'Asquith, Grey, Haldane, Lloyd George, Churchill, thought they could boss the rest, but were mistaken . . . on November 15 we won a great victory for a principle . . . Asquith laid down the constitutional doctrine as to cabinet control in very effective

words but majority of us felt he had been a party to a Defence Comtee arrangement . . . & they had rigged an arrangement to go to war if necessity arose.' (quoted from Pease's diary, 15 Nov. 1911).

What increased the disquiet of Pease, Harcourt, Runciman, and others was that Churchill and Lloyd George, who until 1911 had always been relied upon 'for anti-war feeling', had suddenly become the really warlike element in our Government [and] have not only developed these new tendencies with rapidity but are characteristically given to rushes. The stability or balance of opinion of the cabinet cannot now be relied upon by us . . . (quoted from Runciman to Harcourt, 2 Oct. 1911)"

("Asquith as Prime Minister, 1908-1916" by Cameron Hazlehurst. *English Historical Review*, July 1970. pp.511-512)

This then, was the way that Asquith gradually shifted power from his wider cabinet to those who could be relied upon to pursue the active Imperialist agenda of confronting the main commercial and industrial threat to Britain's hegemony in world trade.

It was also the Prime Minister and Government that resulted from the two General Elections of 1910. But the events which sustained that Government took place in 1909. This was the fateful year that Redmond's Parliamentary Party began to lay down the bedding for the future alliance.

The 1909 People's Budget.

By 1909 it was becoming obvious through by-election losses and growing unemployment, that Asquith's government and his free trade policies were becoming increasingly unpopular. People, witnessing the decline in the economy, began to look at the advisability of tariff protection to ensure the continued existence of factories and jobs. It was this situation that left the Liberal government vulnerable to the action of the House of Lords. Since the 1886 Irish Home Rule bill and the defection of the Liberal Unionists to the Conservatives, the House of Lords had been dominated by the Conservative Party with a majority representing the landed interest and tariff reformers holding a strong position among them.

"In addition to the problems occasioned by the Lords, and concern over the by-election trend, the Government had also to contend with the prospect of an unprecedentedly large peacetime deficit in 1909-1910. An anticipated decline in the returns from existing taxes, the financing of old age pensions, and the demands of the Admiralty for increased naval construction were all combining to produce what Lloyd George was to call a 'financial emergency'. What made this emergency particularly challenging to the Government was the widely held view that the whole future of free trade could well depend on how they reacted to it. If free trade were to be preserved, so it was argued, the onus was upon the Government to prove that the financial burdens of the modern state could be carried without recourse to tariff reform.

For the Liberals the issue of free trade was absolutely vital; the fortunes of the party could not be separated from it. Since 1903, when Joseph Chamberlain had launched his crusade for tariff reform, and divided the Unionist party in the process, the defence of free trade had served the Liberals well. It had given them a new and badly needed sense of unity, and it had contributed enormously to the Liberal success in the 1906 general election. During 1908,

however, with trade in the doldrums and unemployment high, free trade appeared to lose its electoral appeal. The tariff reform cause, by contrast, was beginning to benefit from the growing measure of Unionist solidarity on the question of fiscal change. In fact, by late 1908 the Tariff Reformers were in a highly optimistic mood, and what had contributed to their optimism was the word they had received that the Government was in an 'awful mess' and at their 'wits' end' over the finances for 1909-10. The Chamberlainites had always maintained that tariff reform could alone provide effectively and equitably for the country's finances, and many Unionists now felt encouraged to proclaim that the question of finance would ensure the triumph of tariff reform. As Lord Lansdowne, the Unionist leader in the House of Lords, told the annual meeting of the Liberal Unionist Council on 20 November 1908: 'We shall be driven to it [tariff reform] by the exigencies of the financial situation.'

("The Politics of the 'People's Budget'" by Bruce K. Murray, *The Historical Journal*, Sept. 1973. pp.556-557)

At this time the House of Lords had the power to veto any bill passed by the House of Commons but tradition had dictated that this would not be used if the bill was a 'Money Bill' – those relating to taxation - and budgets were usually included in this definition. As far as Asquith's government was concerned the situation in 1909 was critical. He was confronted with declining electoral support for his government, the principles of Free Trade on which he based his economic programme rapidly losing popularity, and the unknown quantity of a hostile and increasingly confident Conservative dominated House of Lords (capable, at any time, of bringing down the Government by vetoing important legislation). All this made it vital that he not allow events to drift but take the initiative in terms of influencing the agenda as much as he could.

By 1909, the cost of the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act and the beginnings of a new wave of armaments spending left a huge deficit in Treasury coffers and, with the Dreadnought battleship programme demanding previously unknown levels of funding, the government's revenue required significant increases. To procure the necessary funding would involve a new and unprecedented level of direct taxation but this risked a further decline in government popularity. In these circumstances it was unlikely that Asquith's government would see out its seven year term (under the Septennial Act of 1715 a Parliament was allowed to sit for 7 years until it was reduced to 5 years with the passing of the Parliament Act of 1911). Consequently, although a general election was not due until 1913, Asquith went for broke. However, he needed an issue that would enable him to declare an early election and ensure the maximum return in terms of neutralising electoral support for the opposition and for this he turned to his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George.

Although never really part of that camp Asquith fell back on the progressive Liberal agenda to produce a budget that would provide a lifeline for the government. It is this that became known as the "People's Budget" and its centre-piece was to be the introduction of a taxation system that would finance a "war on poverty". To fund this 'war' Lloyd George argued that it was necessary to raise an additional £16 million a year which he proposed to do by bringing in new taxes and increase the levels of existing taxation the burden of which fell on the landed interests.

Lloyd George was advised on the construction of the budget by Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Asquith's constitutional adviser, and came up with the "war on poverty" tactic. This was to be combined with a campaign to raise fears that Unionists' tariff reform policies would involve the introduction of a tax on bread and an increase in food prices generally. He also designed his budget to ensure that, whatever the outcome when it reached the House of Lords, the Liberals would come out of it better positioned. If it were passed, support for the party would be sustained – not only had they hit the unpopular landed interests (the taxation burden fell disproportionately on that section) but they had promised a 'war on poverty' from the proceeds. If it were vetoed, they could then go to the country on the basis that the greedy unelected hereditary Lords had thrown out a budget designed to help the more vulnerable sections of society:-

"To advance the Liberal cause against the Lords, Lloyd George adopted what he described to his brother as 'exquisite plans' for outwitting the peers. Theoretically, the peers were not supposed to interfere with a finance bill and this, in the view of many Liberals, meant the Government could employ the next Budget to by-pass the veto of the Lords on two issues of considerable concern to the party faithful: land valuation and public house licensing. During 1908 the Lords, in addition to rejecting the Government's licensing bill, had also mangled the Government's land valuation bill for Scotland, and both the temperance reformers and the land values group in Parliament had subsequently urged that the Government should resort to the next year's Budget as a way around the obstruction of the Lords. The idea certainly appealed to Lloyd George and, in consultation with Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Asquith's constitutional adviser, he proceeded to work into his projected Budget taxes that would help give effect to the objectives of the land valuation and licensing bills. 'Of course', Ilbert later explained to Bryce in America, 'the political reason for both the land duties and the licence duties is to circumvent the House of Lords. And I am inclined to think that, as a bold and ingenious political manoeuvre, this will succeed.'" ("The Politics of the 'People's Budget'" by Bruce K. Murray, *The Historical Journal*, Sept. 1973. p.558)

However, there are elements in the 1909 budget that show it was constructed in a way that ensured the maximum hostility from the Lords. The issue of increased taxation ostensibly to pay for welfare provision and the continued funding of old age pension provision was one that in itself may not have led to the Lords breaking with tradition and throwing out a "Money Bill" but, as was pointed out at the time, the budget introduced a tax that was not based on income as such, but on the basis of where that income had derived from. By its concentration on income derived from land and property and not on income from securities, shares or other financial sources, the budget was deemed to introduce an element of discrimination that was unprecedented. If that was not enough to get them to throw out the budget the inclusion of two provisions that were certainly not within the terms of a "Money Bill" – the land valuation and public house licensing elements - both of which had previously been sent as non-money bills to the Lords and rejected in one form or another, meant that it was almost inevitable that the 1909 "People's Budget" would be rejected.

Lloyd George introduced his Budget to the House of Commons on 29 April 1909 where he stated that it was designed to provide the revenue for the inevitable expansion of expenditure in the

areas of social reform and national defence. The Irish Nationalists, despite the widespread opposition to the land taxation elements which adversely hit Ireland on account of its greater reliance on income from land and sales from the liquor trade, and despite voting against it on its second reading, decided to abstain from voting against the Budget on its third reading on 5 November. Redmond adopted this position against the overwhelming hostility of his supporters at home. Something compelled him to adjust his position on the Budget in the meantime. His reasoning appears to have been based upon an informed judgment that the Budget would indeed be thrown out by the House of Lords and consequently create a constitutional crisis which would lead to a curtailment of the powers of the Lords. At this stage there is no evidence that Redmond's position on the Budget (one that caused an enormous outcry among his supporters at home) had been bought by Asquith and there was no reason why it should have been - the abstention of Redmond's party on the third reading was not pivotal to the outcome (it was passed in the Commons by a large majority). Knowing the way the wind was blowing, it looks like Redmond didn't want to be considered part of the opposition by Asquith in the lead up to the General Election that would inevitably result from the Lords rejection of Lloyd George's budget. Redmond therefore used his party's vote to send a message to Asquith that he was willing to be courted should Asquith wish to call.

The First 1910 General Election.

As Asquith and John Redmond had hoped, the Budget was thrown out by the House of Lords on 30 November 1909. However, its rejection by the House of Lords was not an absolute rejection. According to the motion of rejection moved by Lord Lansdowne, what was being asked was that Lloyd George's unusual Budget be referred to the electorate for consideration. However, given the inducements of further welfare provision (paid from taxing the landed interests), the Lords must have known that there was a good chance of it coming back to them as a result of approval being expressed by the electorate. Parliament was consequently prorogued on 3 December 1909 with an election being called for the following month.

The Liberals, thanks to Lloyd George's Budget, had gained the high moral ground and entered the election on the vote-winning issues of the people's welfare against the unelected House of Lords. However, despite the expectation of a reduced majority, the Liberals came within a whisker of losing the January election and only managed to hold on to power with the help of Redmond's Irish nationalists. The actual results were: Liberal Party, 275 seats; Conservative Party, 273 seats; Redmondites, 71 seats; Labour Party, 40 seats, O'Brienites, 11. So whatever combination that the Conservatives could muster (even with the unlikely support of both the Labour Party and the O'Brienites) they would still fall short of a combined Liberal and Redmondite total (a Conservative total of 324 against a Liberal total of 346). Consequently, whatever the Liberal Party managed to do during this Parliament was dependent upon the continuing support of Redmond's Irish Nationalists. Conventional accounts of the results of the first 1910 General Election say that it saved the day for free trade. Lloyd George had shown that it was possible to raise sufficient revenue without recourse to protectionism and tariffs.

“The Liberals and their allies did not lose the general election of January 1910. To be sure, they lost a hundred seats, but they won the battle and it was the battle that counted. The Liberals

retained office, and on 28 April 1910 the Lords duly accepted the ‘People's budget’ after only three hours debate. More than that, although the Liberals had not presented to the electorate anything approaching a coherent plan for the future of the House of Lords, and although the cabinet was to come near to disintegrating in the process of working out such a plan, the first step towards abolishing the absolute veto of the Lords had in fact been taken. The second election of 1910, contested in December, was effectively to seal the fate of the Lords. The Tariff Reformers, for their part, had received a decisive setback in the January election; for the December election Balfour more or less jettisoned their programme by announcing that he would stage a special referendum on the tariff issue in the event of a Unionist victory. The Tariff Reformers had had their opportunity to prove they could outwit Lloyd George and they had failed; they were not to get a second chance. Armed with the ‘People's Budget’, Lloyd George had in fact saved the system of free trade.” (ibid p569)

The interesting reference here is to ‘The Liberals and their allies’. There was undoubtedly a natural cohesion between the Liberals and the Labour Party on issues of social legislation but this did not exist with regards to the Irish. Their natural orientation had been against the budget because of the way its taxation elements disproportionately and adversely impacted on the Irish economy. Also, on the issue of free trade versus tariff reform, the Irish Party was not at one with the object of the Budget. Some Irish members favoured Free Trade and others, tariff reform. The motivation which dictated the behaviour of the Irish party in how they used their vote on the Budget was primarily based on the prospects of its rejection by the House of Lords. As far as the Irish Party was concerned, although they supported Asquith during the January 1910 General Election campaign, the basis of such support was not one that could be described as an alliance. There was no alliance between Redmond and Asquith on either the 1909 Budget or the January 1910 General Election campaign. An alliance requires a coincidence of interest between two or more partners with sufficient leverage to ensure that their own programmes find significant expression in the subsequent outcome. That just wasn't there before the outcome of the January 1910 General Election. Redmond only assumed real influence on Asquith's behaviour in the aftermath of that election and only from then can the existence of an alliance be seen to date.

Early in the January General Election campaign Asquith sought the support of Redmond. Confident that his ‘People's Budget’ and crusade against the House of Lords would strike a chord with the electorate, he gambled on optimising his support in the resultant House of Commons by recommitting the Liberal Party to the cause of Irish Home Rule. As Stephen Gwynn explained it:-

“At the beginning of the election Mr. Asquith had made a great speech in the Albert Hall in which he outlined the Liberal policy. In it he declared that the pledge against introducing a Home Rule Bill was withdrawn, and that the establishment of self-government for Ireland, subject to the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, was among the Government's main purposes. But the House of Lords was in the way.

(*John Redmond's Last Years* by Stephen Gwynn. Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1919, p.44)

Although by 1910 hostility towards the Irish Parliamentary Party remained significant on the mainland, Asquith, finding himself in a situation where he was likely to need as many allies

in the House of Commons as he could muster, decided that recommitting the party to Home Rule was worth the risk. The gamble was that the anticipated wave of support in the aftermath of the rejection by the Lords of his 'People's Budget' would just carry the day. A commitment to Home Rule would not only guarantee him over 80 Irish seats in the new parliament but also, during the election, the Irish vote on mainland Britain (a vote which traditionally went to the Liberal Party but with the rise of the Labour Party now providing an alternative for such voters, Asquith had no real choice but to provide the offer of Home Rule).

Thus the January 1910 General Election was fought on three issues, all of which were interpreted in one form or another as constitutional issues. Yet none of these issues cohered in such a way that the result of the election could be seen as an endorsement of action on any specific issue. Reform of the House of Lords, the precedent set by Lloyd George's unusual Budget, and the issue of Irish Home Rule were distinct and separate issues that only found coherence in the programme of the Liberal Party. But the party was not the people. As was seen in the context of the Irish Nationalists, it was possible to be in favour of two (House of Lords reform and Irish Home Rule) but not necessarily on the third (the Budget). So too it was logically possible for parts of the general electorate to be in favour of one, two, or all three of these components. For instance, there was even some opposition to the land issues inherent in their own budget from members of the Liberal party and a significant element among the British electorate would be in favour of all the other issues but the granting of Irish Home Rule. None of this need have become a problem in the event of a significant electoral victory for the Liberal Party but that was not what happened. The results of the election based on these three, not necessarily harmonious constitutional issues, was inconclusive in electoral terms. However, instead of acknowledging the inconclusive nature of the results in terms of their applicability to constitutional issues, Asquith decided to interpret the result as an endorsement to form a Government in order to press on with his constitutional reform programme. But, he needed Redmond and his Irish Nationalists to give effect to his ambitions and they, despite insisting that they were a constitutional party, gave the hand to Asquith and chose to interpret what were important constitutional issues, as if of no real consequence. Gwynn's position was typical:-

"The [January 1910] election had been fought expressly on the issue of Government's claim to enable a Liberal Government to deal with certain problems, among which the Irish question occupied a foremost place. It was easy now for the Tories to argue that the Government appealing to the country on that issue had lost two hundred seats. They said: - 'You have authority to pass your Budget - but for these vast unconstitutional changes you have no mandate.' (*John Redmond's Last Years* by Stephen Gwynn. Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1919, p.44)

"The election was fought expressly on the issue of Government's claim to enable a Liberal Government to deal with certain problems" is hardly an accurate description of what was taking place. The interpretation of the Unionists was undoubtedly correct. There were constitutional issues at stake. But not so in the eyes of Redmond. As far as he was concerned, the election results had given Asquith the authority to implement his entire programme of significant constitutional change. Of course, any other British political party leader, finding themselves in such a situation, would understand instinctively that the results of the election provided no such endorsement but then Asquith had his own

secret agenda to implement and this required him to ignore the inconclusive result of the election.

Thus was the unholy alliance forged between two men in the aftermath of the January General Election, one, a Liberal Imperialist determined on pursuing what he saw as his country's interests by provoking an inevitable war with Germany, and the other, an advocate of Constitutional Nationalism, who chose to misinterpret and misuse the will of the electorate within which that Constitution operated.

But although denying it, Asquith knew that he had a constitutional problem. He attempted to go back on an agreement he had with Redmond to advance the issue of Lords reform before re-submitting his budget. The reason Asquith wanted to deal with the Budget first was because the Government required a stable economic programme in order to get revenue into Treasury coffers as soon as possible and also to give himself time to compile a strategy for dealing with the constitutional problem generated in the wake of his attack on the Lords. On the other hand, the agreement to deal with the House of Lords' veto before dealing with the Budget was viewed as necessary by Redmond in order that he not be pushed into open support for a measure that was deeply unpopular in Ireland without some evidence that this sacrifice was worth it. After all, he had justified his party's abstaining on the third reading of the Budget the previous November on the grounds that it would lead directly to a diminution of the power of the House of Lords in the event of the Liberals winning the January election. Also, the previous November, the vote of the Irish party had been of no real consequence to the third reading of the Budget but now the Irish vote was critical to whether the Budget was passed or not. If he could show that the Lords veto had been dealt with before needing to take a position on the Budget he was confident that his people at home would believe the sacrifice worthwhile. Redmond went public in February 1910 with his concerns about this attempted reversal by Asquith:-

"Redmond's view was not in doubt. At a meeting in Dublin on February 10, 1910, he declared in the most emphatic manner that to deal with the Budget first would be a breach of Mr. Asquith's pledge to the country, since it would throw away the power of the House of Commons to stop supply. This speech attracted much attention, and the memory of it was present to many a fortnight later when Mr. Asquith was replying to Mr. Balfour at the opening of the debate on the Address. The Prime Minister dwelt strongly on the administrative necessity for regulating the financial position disturbed by the Upper House's unconstitutional action. He indicated also the need for reform in the composition of the House. But, above all, he disclaimed as improper and impossible any attempt to secure in advance a pledge for the contingent exercise of the Royal prerogative.

'I have received no such guarantee and I have asked for no such guarantee,' he said.

The change was marked indeed from the moment when he uttered in the Albert Hall his sentence against assuming office or holding office without the necessary safeguards - an assurance at which the whole vast assembly rose to their feet and cheered. Every word in his speech on the Address added to the depression of his followers and the elation of the Opposition. Redmond followed him at once. In such circumstances as then existed, it was exceedingly undesirable for the Irish leader to emphasize the fact that his vote could overthrow the Government: and the least

unnecessary display of this power would naturally and properly have been resented by the Government's following. No one knew this better than Redmond, yet the position demanded bold action. His speech, courteous, as always, in tone, and studiously respectful in its reference to the position of the Crown, was as an open menace to the Government. He quoted the Prime Minister's words at the Albert Hall, he appealed to the House at large for the construction which had been put to them; and it was apparent that he had the full sympathy not only of his own party and of Labour, but most of Mr. Asquith's own following. (ibid. pp.44-46)

The reference here to the Royal prerogative is to the move that would be required to increase the numbers of government-appointed peers to the House of Lords in the event of the budget being rejected after it had been resubmitted to the House. In his speech at the Albert Hall prior to the general election, Asquith had stated that he would only assume office after procuring the Royal prerogative for precisely such a purpose - the 'necessary safeguards' referred to above. Because of the existence of Redmond's 'open menace to the Government' as the agent that could make or break his government Asquith was compelled to agree to Redmond's insistence that the Lords' veto be addressed before the renewal of the budget issue. However, it turned out to be a mere concession of convenience. Although, as Redmond had insisted, the issue of the Lords Veto was introduced to Parliament before the reworked 1909 budget (in its new guise as the 1910 Finance Bill), this was a mere technical device on the part of Asquith. The Parliament, or Veto, Bill was formally introduced on 14 April (Asquith having earlier at the end of March introduced resolutions which served as the basis of the Bill) and was followed a few days later by the Finance Bill. In fact the main Parliamentary efforts of the government were invested in getting the Finance Bill passed before the issue of the Lords was seriously addressed. For that reason the Finance Bill will be explored first even though its introduction to the January 1910 Parliament antedated the reform of the House of Lords issue (which became known as the Parliament Bill) by a few days. This, after all, was the sequence determined by Asquith's actual strategy.

The 1910 Finance Bill.

The new Parliament assembled on 15 February 1910 and the much awaited King's speech was delivered on 21 February. The part dealing with the reform of the House of Lords ran as follows:-

"Proposals will be laid before you, with all convenient speed, to define the relations between the Houses of Parliament so as to secure the undivided authority of the House of Commons over finance, and its predominance in legislation.' In commenting on this declaration the Prime Minister said that the Government would, in due time, introduce resolutions defining the relations between the Houses of Parliament. He also said, however, that the delayed Budget would be passed before the question of the Lords would be taken up."

("Proposed Changes in the British House of Lords" by T.F. Moran. *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, vol. 7, Seventh Annual Meeting (1910), p.46)

Asquith had hoped to have the Finance Bill (the revised previous year's 'People's Budget') presented to the new Parliament and passed almost immediately. However, he had first to come to terms with Redmond's Irish Nationalists and they in turn were made aware of the wide-scale hostility to the budget by demonstrations and meetings throughout Ireland. As has been noted, as a fillip to Redmond and for the sake of appearances, its

introduction was delayed by a few days after the Veto Bill. Asquith, mindful of the unpopularity of the budget in Ireland, offered Redmond some minor concessions to the land and liquor taxes in the way they impacted on Ireland. In the meantime, William O'Brien's independent Nationalists, un-beholden to the Liberal government, remained critical of the Budget and in a speech at Cork on 2 March had denounced Redmond and his party for their vacillation on the budget. At this stage Redmond's intentions, which involved him moving from a position of abstention the previous November (on the third reading of the 1909 People's Budget) to one of support (for its reincarnation as the 1910 Finance Bill), were not yet known. However, by late April the position had become clear. On 25 April, O'Brien, on moving an amendment to the Finance Bill which would have delayed the second reading for a further six months (but which would have effectively brought down the government), had this to say on Redmond's new-found support for the Budget:-

"Although they could not hope for any success against the present Budget, they could at all events place it on record that there were some Irish representatives who were not consenting parties to the yielding of Ireland's claim for relief from over-taxation which beyond all doubt would be involved in the vote given tonight. (Hear, hear.) The Nationalist Party had the power to accept the Budget, but time would show whether Ireland would accept the Budget or the Budgeteers. By-and-by it would be seen if Ireland would repudiate this action, which was something like national apostasy, a shameful surrender made in the name of Ireland of her claim that the present financial arrangements between the two countries are crushing and intolerable, without taking up this fresh taxation imposed by the Budget, or rather imposed by Ireland's own representatives, for if they would support this amendment the Budget would be thrown into the waste-paper basket before the night was over."

(*The Times*, 26 April 1910).

On the question of the benefits of the Old Age Pensions associated with the necessary funding from the Budget, he said:-

"That Act was not framed for Ireland; it was hastily, unthinkingly rushed through partly as a piece of electioneering strategy without the smallest consideration of the totally different circumstances in Ireland, and the Act as it stood would be an absolutely insuperable, insurmountable difficulty in the finance of any future Irish Parliament. He gave full credit to the great mass of Irish members for the belief that in some extraordinary way they were doing service for Home Rule in the future, but they were interposing a far more formidable veto than that of the House of Lords, the veto of bankruptcy. The Veto of the House of Lords was a far more soluble, a more changeable obstacle than would be stereotyped by the passing of this Bill. The position in which they stood showed the abject failure to make any bargain; they were not even to have Home Rule plus bankruptcy, they were to have national bankruptcy without Home Rule, and that would be the work of the Irish representatives." (ibid)

Aware also, of the association of the Budget proposals with the raising of revenue for British military purposes he went on:-

"All the old difficulties in Ireland as to Church establishment, Universities, county government, and landlordism were now settled or were on the way to settlement, and only one question remained really in dispute between the two countries - the question of pounds, shillings, and pence. It was a simple question

of adjusting taxation – how far the richest of all countries was to force the poorest to participate in the former’s magnificent extravagances. The bloated armaments of England were not necessary for the protection of Ireland’s poverty, although they might be necessary for the protection of England’s boundless wealth. Ireland was now on the high road to become a comparatively comfortable agricultural country, and any real great Imperial statesman would find in Ireland not additional material for taxation, but only an increase of contentment, good will and attachment. (Hear, hear.) That might not help to pay for additional Dreadnoughts, but it would certainly help to man them (Opposition cheers); and it was just possible the occasion might arise when that would be at least as valuable a contribution to Imperial defence as any small sum which the land taxes of Death Duties could win out of the small peasant proprietors of Ireland.”

(*The Times*, 26 April 1910)

There is an awareness here of the existence of a hidden military agenda (but not of its extent) behind the Budget. But, although O’Brien went on to support the British in the coming World War, it could not be claimed that he had been a culpable associate in the facilitation of the events that led up to that war. The same cannot be said of Redmond. His continued support for Asquith’s government at a time when he had the ‘open menace to the government’ to make or break it ensured that he was at the very least an enabler of subsequent events.

The fact that Asquith had to depend on Redmond’s Irish Nationalists to get the Finance Bill through the House of Commons naturally became an issue not only among the Unionists but also among certain sections of the Liberal party who remained uneasy about the constitutional implications of the earlier election. Asquith, speaking on the occasion of the third and final reading of the Bill in the House of Commons on 27 April 1910 sought to assert his tenuous claim to electoral endorsement by claiming some sort of equation between his reliance on Redmond’s party and the support that O’Brien and the Independent Nationalists had given to the Unionist side during the course of the progress of the Finance Bill through Parliament. He referred to O’Brien and his supporters as “these enemies of the Constitution, these disintegrators of the unity of the kingdom, these accomplices in treason and crime”:

“Now, Sir, I said at the beginning that before I sat down I would say one word as to the majority by which this Budget is going to be carried. We are told that in some way or other the votes of the people of this country are going to be overridden by an element introduced from elsewhere. As a matter of fact, there is a very large majority for the Budget among the representatives of Great Britain. (Cheers.) I have never myself practised or preached what I may call that form of Separatist logic which seeks to discriminate between the votes of members of Parliament according to the parts of the country from which they come. I am much too good a Unionist (cheers and laughter) to indulge in any such practice. But, I repeat, I never thought and do not think now that apart from Great Britain there is any steady preponderating volume of opinion against the Budget on the other side of St. George’s Channel. The House listened to a very powerful and able speech from the hon. member for West Belfast, who expressed the opinion of that great commercial community (cries of ‘No!’) – of the very part of it which he represents, at all events – and of a vast number of other Irishmen, and he said that the Budget had his whole-hearted support. One is tempted to ask the question, When is a bargain not a bargain? Apparently if and when hon. gentlemen

who represent Ireland join forces with the hon. gentlemen opposite. (Cheers.) Then these enemies of the Constitution, these disintegrators of the unity of the kingdom, these accomplices in treason and crime, are clad for the time being in the garb of immaculate innocence, and are welcomed as the authorized exponents of the voice of the people of the United Kingdom. (Cheers and laughter.) That is the view of what hon. gentlemen opposite entertain of what is not a bargain. Well, Sir, what hypocrisy! (Cheers and counter-cheers.)”

(*The Times*, 28 April 1910)

Even *The Times* was compelled to comment on the scale of Asquith’s own hypocrisy in mounting such an attack. In the same issue it responded in an editorial with the simple statement, “The Nationalist Vote? That presents no difficulties. Unionists cheered Mr. O’Brien and his friends on one or two occasions. After that it is ‘hypocrisy, rank, arrant, transparent hypocrisy,’ to say a word about bargains and understandings. Mr. Asquith has really surpassed himself.”

The third reading of the Finance Bill was voted on and, with Redmond’s assistance, received a majority of 93 votes. Redmond had won the day and Asquith’s war cabinet marched steadily on towards the abyss.

Having negotiated its third reading in the House of Commons, the Finance Bill was re-submitted to the House of Lords where it was nodded through its first reading and received its second reading the following day, the 28 April. Of course it was generally known that it had only been passed by the House of Commons by dint of an unspoken agreement between Asquith and Redmond but, even though British imperial diplomacy was based on such things, it was not considered good form to pretend to know of them. On moving the second reading the Liberal Government peer, the Earl of Crewe, had this to say about the presumed bargain struck between Asquith and Redmond:-

“It has been freely stated that the fact that it (the Finance Bill) has so come up is the result of some kind of bargain. (Opposition cheers.) If it were I do not know whether there would be anything to be ashamed of in that fact. (Laughter.) Certainly five-sixths of the legislation which appears on the Statute-book is the result of a bargain, and it is indeed, because your lordships have in so many cases given up the practice, when a Liberal Government is in power, of bargaining with the other House and have preferred to override it, that so much of the present trouble has arisen. (Cries of ‘No.’) It is quite true that no Finance Bill which has ever become law has been equally welcome in all its clauses to a great number of those who have supported it. We have known cases in which Finance Bills in their progress have been altered in deference to public opinion. . . . But as to corrupt or improper bargains, such bargains unknown as they always have been, and, I trust, always will be, to every party in this country, would meet with a swift and sure punishment. I say, categorically, that as far as this Budget is concerned, or any future Budget, there is no bargain of any kind. There is no bargain of any kind on any action that has been taken or might conceivably be taken with reference to the controversy between the two Houses. There is no bargain of any kind with reference to any future legislation on any subject. I say this categorically, and having said it, I venture to hope we shall hear no more of the accusation. (Laughter and cheers.) The noble lord who laughs is good enough not to believe what I say.”

(*The Times*, 29 April 1910)

Lord Lansdowne replied on behalf of the opposition and in the course of it explained why, in its previous incarnation as the 'People's' Budget, it had been rejected by the Lords:-

"Last year we withheld our concurrence from this Bill solely with the object of obtaining a reference of it to the constituencies, and now that the constituencies, through the mouths of their representatives in the House of Commons, have expressed themselves favourably to the Bill, we are, I conceive, as honourable men bound by the pledges we have given, to acquiesce in the passage of the Bill through all its stages tonight. . . .

May I for a moment recall to your memory the attitude of this House last winter? This Bill came before us announced by His Majesty's Government as being a Budget Bill unlike any other Budget Bill which had ever been produced in the history of Parliament. No language could have been stronger than that which they employed both in and out of Parliament in dwelling upon the wholly unprecedented and novel character of the proposals which they were going to make. (Hear, hear.) It was not merely that those proposals involved the imposition of heavy burdens upon the taxpayers of this country, but that the incidence of those burdens was distributed in a manner which seemed to most of us wholly indefensible. (Cheers.) And pray let it be understood that I am not speaking of the incidence of these taxes as between one class of the community and another class, but of their incidence upon individuals within the same class of the community, whether belonging to the more opulent or the less opulent classes. Under this Bill you will find two persons not differing from one another in their ability to pay taxation treated in a wholly different manner. One man, a working man, perhaps, is called upon to pay double the contribution towards these new liabilities which his neighbour belonging to the same class is called upon to pay; and you will find again among the wealthier classes one individual taxed far more severely than his neighbour simply because he has chosen to invest his fortune in land instead of securities or some other form of property. (Cheers.) What this Budget, this Finance Bill, is very remarkable for is that it introduces us, for the first time, I believe, to the principle of taxation not according to the ability of the individual to pay but according to the origin of his possessions. (Cheers.)"

(ibid)

Lansdowne went on to reveal some interesting events in the aftermath of the results of the January election whereby the original Budget was put to the electorate:-

"The appeal was made to the country, and we know the result. (Hear, hear.) Speaking frankly I do not suppose that either side was very well satisfied with that result. It fell short of our expectations. I do not think it appeared to be entirely agreeable to noble lords opposite. A distinguished member of His Majesty's Government, Sir E. Grey, soon after the election, announced that in his view, it was not very conclusive as regards future issues. Another Minister, the Home Secretary, informed the public that Ministers had hesitated to take office, and that they had finally undertaken great responsibilities with only moderate powers to give effect to them. Surely, if that is so, that in itself is sufficient to justify our hesitation to allow the measure to be passed into law. (Cheers.) That majority includes a body of Irish members, most of whom voted, if I remember right, against the second reading of the Bill and abstained from voting on the occasion of the third reading, and who now proclaim that upon the merits they are no great friends of the Budget. (Laughter.) What I may term the

Nationalist asset was so doubtful that for two long months you did not dare to bring your Budget forward, you, who pledged yourselves emphatically that your first act would be, when you came into power, the introduction of the Budget. (Laughter.)" (ibid)

It seems that the narrow results of the January General Election came as a surprise to many in Asquith's Government and caused a momentary wobble in the face of the evidence of the loss of electoral support. Some of them, it would appear, echoed the feelings of Robert Blatchford's labour paper *The Clarion* when it said that "the majority of votes against the Lords is so small that it cannot by the most optimistic be accepted as a mandate for abolition." However, with Asquith's resolve, they managed to regroup and, with Redmond's Parliamentary votes behind them, decided to press on. The Lords passed the re-submitted 1909 People's Budget without a division and it became law on the 29 April 1910, a year from the date of its original introduction.

The 1910 Finance Act – what happened to the money?

In his 'People's Budget' of 1909 and the Finance Bill of 1910 Lloyd George introduced large scale increases in taxation ostensibly to pay for old age pensions and other welfare provision. There was a vague mention of national defence but the selling point was taxation to pay for a 'War on Poverty'. However, the extent to which his taxation proposals were designed to produce more revenue than was necessary for the publicly stated purpose of funding the "War on Poverty" is revealed in the figures subsequently made available:-

"According to the figures Lloyd George presented to the Commons when he re-introduced the budget on 19 April 1910, receipts and arrears still to be collected were £857,000 below the overall estimate he had given in his Budget speech of the previous April, but an estimated £950,000 from stamps and the income tax had been lost as a consequence of the failure to pass the Budget during the 1909-10 fiscal year, and he claimed that the 'uncertainty' caused by the action of the Lords had cost him £1,250,000 in revenue for the year from the spirit duties.

In the next financial year, [the first one where his budget was given free rein - ED] and again in 1911-1912, the taxes of the 'People's Budget' did bring in very much more revenue than Lloyd George required or anticipated. Revenue in 1910-11 exceeded his estimate by £4,060,000, and in 1911-12 it exceeded his estimate by £3,469,000. His realized surplus in 1910-11 was £5,607,000, and in 1911-12 it was £6,545,000, the greatest on record. . . As *The Economist* commented on 20 May 1911: 'Mr. Lloyd George may stand on record as the author of the most successful Budget, from the revenue-producing point of view, which the financial historian of this, or perhaps, any other, country can recall in times of peace.'" ("The Politics of the 'People's Budget'" by Bruce K. Murray, *The Historical Journal*, Sept. 1973, p.570)

In fact, the increase in revenue resulting from the first full year of the operation of Lloyd George's "People's Budget" was even more than indicated by those provided by him in 1911. This was because the figures provided by Lloyd George when he introduced the budget on 19 April 1910 included money he had taken earlier in the year through a raid on the Government's 'Sinking Fund' and redefined as tax income from the year 1909-1910 – something that had been noticed at the time by Austen Chamberlain on the second reading of the 1910 Finance Bill on 25 April 1910:-

“I think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has a little deceived the House of Commons as to the nature of his surplus. It is not provided by his taxes. It is not provided by his original Budget, or even by the revised Budget of the autumn. It is provided by the total suspension of the Sinking Fund. (Cheers.) I think that this total suspension as a temporary measure was necessary under the circumstances, and I do not criticize the Chancellor of the Exchequer for proposing it; but really he presumes a little on the intelligence of the House when he takes pride to himself for a surplus which, after all his expectations are realized and all his estimates as now modified for the fourth or fifth time, come true, which has not been their fate hereto, will result purely from his raid on the Sinking Fund; and from the additional raid he made by the Treasury Borrowing Bill in the early months of this year, and of which I will only say that if it be realized the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s first duty is to restore it to that purpose from which he has temporarily diverted it and to use it for the reduction of the Debt. (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman said that this surplus would be at the disposal of the House for the reduction of the Debt or for any other purpose for which they might like to use it; but by the settled law and declared and deliberate will of Parliament it is not at the disposal of the Government, but is already allocated not to the new but to the old Sinking Fund for the reduction of the Debt.”

(*The Times*, 26 April 1910)

The ‘Sinking Fund’ was supposed to receive whatever surplus incurred in the national Budget each year and was designed to help draw down the national Debt. However, it came to be used as a contingency fund and was often raided by the Treasury whenever funds were required quickly. Lloyd George appears to have been among the first, if not the first, to develop this use of the traditional Sinking Fund where money drawn from it was redefined as part of the tax surplus – the point noticed by Austen Chamberlain on 25 April 1910. Notwithstanding Bruce K. Murray’s conclusions in the above article which were based on “the figures Lloyd George presented to the Commons when he re-introduced the budget on 19 April 1910”, if the base figure from which Lloyd George calculated his tax revenue surplus for the year 1909-10 had been inflated by money taken from the Sinking Fund (and redefined as tax revenue for that base year), the real tax revenue for 1909-10 must have been less than the stated amount. Consequently, the next year (1910-11), if the calculation of the surplus uses that inflated figure from the previous year, the actual increase in tax revenue over and above that for 1910-11 remains understated and was in fact much more. This is precisely what Austen Chamberlain unintentionally exposed in the debate on the financial report. The ploy performed two functions. Firstly, it enabled Lloyd George to put less into the Sinking Fund for the year 1910-11 and secondly it disguised the actual tax revenue that resulted from his Peoples’ Budget in the first full year of its actual operation. Therefore, it can reasonably be concluded that the first effective year in which the terms of Lloyd George’s People’s Budget came into effect, i.e. 1910-1911, resulted in a higher absolute increase than was admitted at the time.

Because of the way Lloyd George used the Sinking Fund and Treasury Borrowing bills, it is very difficult to ascertain the real tax income from the time of the introduction of the 1909 “People’s Budget” up to the time of the war. Nonetheless, even the official figure for 1910-1911 is quite impressive and gives some indication of how much over-taxation was involved in the original “People’s Budget”. The money of course was primarily required to fund the huge increase in military spending (of which the Dreadnought

programme was but one part). But the required levels of over-taxation could not be justified to the electorate if the purpose was honestly stated. Instead it was concealed behind a “War on Poverty” with defence requirements written in the small print.

As has been noted, Lloyd George had a particularly unusual relationship with the Treasury Sinking Fund. The year after being pulled up by Austen Chamberlain for using it to distort the previous year’s tax figures he was at it again. On 11 May 1911 his use of the fund was challenged by Sir Frederick Banbury in the House of Commons for taking money out of the fund. His response was a typical Lloyd George tactic of claiming some sort of parity between his actions and that of the Conservative government’s behaviour between 1899 and 1905 when they failed to put anything into the fund (a situation brought about by the continuing financial fall-out from the Boer War). Sir Frederick Banbury pointed out that there was a world of difference between not putting money into the fund and actually taking money from it!

But the man was incorrigible – he simply could not help himself. Again, despite having been caught out on the two previous years we find him sidling up to the till once more in 1912. That year, realizing he was being scrutinised, he tried to magic it away by suspending the Sinking Fund altogether in order to get his hands on the £6.5 million of surplus that year. The use to which he intended to put this money remained a closed secret despite the furore his efforts to get his hands on it unleashed. Nonetheless, the general consensus at the time was that it was intended that it be used for ‘defence’ expenditure. This is the resolution submitted by Lloyd George at the time of his annual statement to Parliament:-

“That it is expedient that the obligation to issue the Old Sinking Fund to the National Debt Commissioners should not apply to the Old Sinking Fund for the year ending the thirty-first day of March, nineteen hundred and twelve.”

David Marshall Mason, banker and businessman and Liberal Member of Parliament for Coventry refers to the events in the House of Commons:-

“In the year 1912 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lloyd George, in his annual statement, announced a realised surplus of £6,500,000. In the usual way, and according to the terms of the Old Sinking Fund, this amount ought to have gone to the redemption of the National Debt. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer thought otherwise, and a notice suddenly appeared on the notice-paper of the House of Commons in his name proposing the suspension of this fund. No reason was given for this extraordinary departure from a sound and well-recognised custom, and a strong feeling of opposition to the proposal was at once made manifest on both sides of the House. I took the first opportunity of giving expression to this feeling, and delivered the following speech on the subject on April 29th, 1912, in the House of Commons.”

(*Six Years of Politics 1910-1916* by D.M. Mason, John Murray, London, 1917, p.54)

In the course of his speech Mason asked some awkward questions which resulted in the Government, after two or three week’s delay, giving way and allocating £5 million to the redemption of the national debt, £1 million to the Navy and half a million for Uganda. This is part of Mason’s speech:-

“Is it really urgent that he should ask us to alter the law with regard to the Sinking Fund? What is that law? It is very specifically laid down in the conditions of the Old Sinking Fund that all surpluses should automatically go to the reduction of debt. I submit that unless there is a very urgent case made out we should seriously consider our position before such a very grave alteration of the law is sanctioned. To take a realised surplus of £6,500,000, and carry it to the Exchequer balances, is certainly an operation which has some effect on the money market. In the natural order of things it would have gone to the reduction of debt, and its effect on the short loans market is one that ought to be considered. Further, the carrying forward of this enormous surplus must be a temptation to many a spendthrift tendency to apply to the Treasury for Grants for various purposes. If this money had automatically gone to the reduction of debt we should have been so much the better off; we should have strengthened our national credit by that amount. If it proved to be necessary that the money should be used for naval purposes, there must be an absolute necessity for cash payment for those naval exigencies; and any further money that might be necessary in the current year would, no doubt, be forthcoming in the usual way. Each year ought to stand on its own basis, and the realised surplus ought surely to have gone in the natural order of things to the reduction of debt.

Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer state definitely what he proposes to do with this £6,500,000? Further, will he state frankly that, if the House agrees to the proposal, and the money is required, he will come to the House for its sanction for the purposes for which the money is required? The Chancellor of the Exchequer has shown by the way in which he treated the proposal for an Estimates Committee that he is anxious to carry the House with him in regard to its control of the national finances. I am sure that I am not making too great a demand upon the right hon. Gentleman when I ask him to be very frank in taking this Committee into his confidence; we are always very anxious for a frank and free discussion of our finances, and we ask for his confidence when he asks us to give such wide powers as suggested in this Resolution.” (*Six Years of Politics 1910-1916* by D.M. Mason, Member of Parliament for the City of Coventry, John Murray, London, 1917, pp.55-56)

Such was the secret purpose for which the money was originally intended that the offer to allow the suspension of the Sinking Fund on condition that “he will come to the House for its sanction for the purpose for which the money is required” was too much scrutiny for the Government’s liking. As it was they did manage to gain an additional £1 million for their armaments programme over and above the expenditure already allotted for such purposes. The behaviour of Lloyd George appears to have been sufficiently suspicious that the M.P. who challenged him, David Marshall Mason, was to remain vigilant as to Government policy in terms of ‘defence’ spending from then until his ‘vigilance’ caused him to be de-selected by his Coventry constituency in July 1914 (however, there being no General Election until 1918 he remained a Member of Parliament throughout the World War).

Given Lloyd George’s aptitude for creative accounting there is no way of knowing what secret funding was amassed during these years. Aside from the money allocated to the huge naval expenditure (which was traditionally more transparent) an insight into how Lloyd George used the Exchequer to assist the additional plans for army expenditure is provided by the following:-

“The army estimates escaped scrutiny in 1911 because, as the cabinet was told, Lloyd George and Haldane (with Asquith’s approval) had made a private ‘deal’. The same thing seems to have happened the following year.” (“Asquith as Prime Minister, 1908-1916” by Cameron Hazlehurst. *English Historical Review*, July 1970. p.510)

It seems that the figures for the army estimates revealed to Parliament had not been cleared by Cabinet and consequently their accuracy is incapable of being verified by reference to the records of that body. There is only one explanation for such widespread budgetary machinations and that is, the publicly released figures were less than those actually spent on the army – a concealment made possible by the ‘private deal’ between Lloyd George and Haldane with Asquith’s approval.

The Parliament Bill and the 1910 Constitutional Conference.

The abolition of the House of Lords veto had not been a firmed-up policy in the Liberal Party programme for the January 1910 election. In fact at this time there were two existing schools within the Liberal Party as to how the issue of the House of Lords veto should be dealt with. These were known as the C-B plan (after Campbell-Bannerman’s 1907 proposal which required the outright abolition of the veto and the one that was more or less eventually adopted) and the one known as the Ripon plan. This proposed a mechanism by which disputes between the Lords and the Commons would be resolved by the vote of a combined meeting of both Houses, at which the Commons would sit as a body and the Lords represented by up to 20 government peers and the remainder of 100 delegates freely chosen by the Lords.

Although Asquith was known to have favoured the less robust Ripon plan, after the general election in January, the school around the C-B plan was reinforced by the Government’s reliance on Redmond’s nationalists. Thus, when the Government presented the bones of its veto plan to the House of Commons on 14 April (the terms having been formed from a series of resolutions passed at the end of March) it was based on that particular scheme. At this stage however, there was still uncertainty as to the likely outcome of the Lords refusing to agree to the demise of their veto. As Asquith put it:

“‘If,’ he said, ‘the Lords fail to accept our policy or decline to consider it, we shall feel it to be our duty immediately to tender advice to the Crown as to the steps which will have to be taken if that policy is to receive statutory effect in this Parliament. What the precise terms of that advice will be it would, or course, not be right for me to say now, but if we do not find ourselves in a position to ensure that statutory effect shall be given to that policy in this Parliament we shall either resign our office or recommend the dissolution of Parliament, and in no case would we recommend a dissolution except under such conditions as will secure that in the new Parliament the judgement of the people as expressed at the election will be carried into law.’”

(*The Times*, 15 April 1910)

At this stage Asquith was only threatening to resign or recommend the dissolution of Parliament in the event of the Lords rejecting the removal of their veto. This was a clear denial of his promise during the election campaign in December that he would only accept office if he had in place the Royal Prerogative to create sufficient numbers of government peers to overcome any resistance by the Lords to withdraw their veto.

That this did not provoke an outcry from Redmond was a surprise to everyone. After all, when Asquith, in February, had dared indicate that he would prefer to deal with the Budget before the Lords' veto he had been met with a public riposte from Redmond. Now, Asquith was suggesting that, in the event of the Lords refusing to comply with the required legislation, he would merely resign or dissolve Parliament, there was only silence from Redmond. The lack of response from Redmond was seen to be evidence that Asquith had cleared his speech with Redmond in advance – a suspicion that appeared to be confirmed by a report in *The Times* that they had both conferred in his office about the nature of his speech beforehand. However, Asquith wrote a letter to *The Times* on 16 April denying any such meeting. *The Times* in turn issued an apology but couched in such terms that implied it continued to believe the original report. This is the actual apology as published in the paper, the wording of which is, to say the least, unusual:-

“We greatly regret that we should have made a misstatement about an interview between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Redmond. The statement was not made for the first time in *The Times* of Saturday, but appeared the day before from our careful and well-informed Parliamentary Correspondent, who wrote in his Political Notes that on Thursday ‘Mr. Redmond conferred with Mr. Asquith in his private room, and it is understood that the Nationalist leader was in possession of the purport of the speech before it was delivered.’ Our Correspondent, who made this statement on grounds which certainly seemed at the time to be adequate, had clearly been misinformed. We may add that our confidence in his announcement was confirmed by the fact that no contradiction was issued either by Mr. Asquith or by Mr. Redmond in the course of Friday. We much regret that the error should have caused the Prime Minister annoyance.”

(*The Times*, 18 April 1910)

The absence of any public controversy stirred up by Redmond consequent to the Asquith speech on 14 April would appear to confirm that he had indeed been forewarned of its contents by Asquith. It would seem that Asquith had convinced Redmond that it was best at this stage to keep their powder dry in the confrontation with the Lords. In fact Redmond hardly raises the issue of the Lords veto on a British public platform for the next number of months and was consistent with Asquith's tactic of playing a soft game at this stage of the proceedings. The reason for this seems to be a growing alarm among sections of his own party as to where an abolition of the House of Lords would leave them. These concerns were centred around the issue of the Second Chamber.

Radical opinion within the Liberal Party remained concerned that the constitutional role of the Lords as the Second Chamber be replaced in any legislation relating to the abolition or diminution of the power of the Lords. These concerns were addressed in the Preamble to the Parliament Bill which was printed on 1 May 1910. The Preamble states:-

“Whereas it is expedient that provision should be made for regulating the relations between the two Houses of Parliament:

And whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation:

And whereas provision will require hereafter to be made by Parliament in a measure effecting such substitution for limiting

and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber, but it is expedient to make such provision as in this Act appears for restricting the existing powers of the House of Lords.”

This issue of the constitutional role of the Second Chamber was to re-emerge later but in the meantime the progress of the Parliament Bill was interrupted by the death of King Edward VII on 6 May. This event created an opportunity for Asquith to diffuse the growing constitutional crisis by reaching a compromise with the opposition. As a result of much pressure behind the scenes and a public and private campaign mounted by members of the shadowy Round Table group, a Constitutional Conference was called for 16 June at which the future arrangements for the Lords and the manner in which subsequent Home Rule bills would be treated were the main areas for discussion. The Conference discussed the issue of the Lords' veto around the principles of the Ripon plan which had been introduced by Asquith and his delegation:-

“Asquith's Liberal delegation also included Crewe who had urged a conference; Lloyd George, who opposed the policy as unwise; and Augustine Birrell, the chief secretary for Ireland, who proved, perhaps unexpectedly, an active participant at crucial moments in the Conference's proceedings. They met with a Unionist delegation drawn from the Shadow Cabinet; headed by Arthur Balfour, it also included Lords Lansdowne and Cawdor and Austen Chamberlain. Though no official records were kept and at Liberal insistence no public statements were issued that disclosed the course of negotiations or the reasons for their termination, Chamberlain kept notes of each sitting, which Lansdowne later read and supplemented from his own records; and their accounts make it possible to delineate with some precision the course of negotiations affecting the Ripon plan. The breakdown of the Conference was due, however, not to disagreement over this plan, which the Liberal delegation sponsored, but to the inability of the two delegations to agree on the special treatment to be accorded home rule bills. It appears that the Ripon plan was one more casualty resulting from the intrusion of the Irish question into English politics, but the final result was by no means a foregone conclusion when the Constitutional Conference assembled in the summer of 1910.”

(“Liberal Leadership and the Lords' Veto, 1907-1910”, by Corinne Comstock Weston, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1968, pp.522-523)

It appears that there were very real grounds for agreement on the reform of the House of Lords based on the Ripon plan and there seems little doubt that if it was not for the fact that Asquith's government was relying on Redmond's party to survive, a solution to the constitutional crisis would have been forthcoming. However, as it was, Asquith could not agree to an end to the Conference on that basis. Redmond had made it clear that without some guarantee that a future Home Rule bill be waved through the Lords, he would pull the plug on the Government.

Short of the collapse of the Conference, there was only one other safe exit for Asquith. Because the Ripon plan for dealing with the Lords' veto did not involve its complete abolition, the likelihood was that any future Home Rule bill might conceivably fall foul even of the new arrangements. Consequently, his dependence upon Redmond's party led to a last gasp effort to circumvent this possibility and led to the bizarre political climate that developed in the period leading up to the abandonment of the Conference on 10 November 1910. During this period various

attempts were made at the Conference to keep the Unionists on board. As the veto was viewed by them as the last line of defence against Home Rule and the break-up of the United Kingdom, its retention in the Ripon plan (even in a diluted form) was acceptable. However, as far as they were concerned, the efficacy of the diluted veto would stand or fall by its ability to withstand any future Home Rule bill. The problem then lay in convincing them that any future Home Rule bill would be different to the kind of Home Rule bill that went before and therefore by allowing such bill to circumvent the diluted veto of the Ripon plan, the same threat to the integrity of the UK would not be present. As word got out that the negotiations were experiencing difficulties in this area, the question of reformulating the definition of Home Rule began to be explored. Because of the existence within the Unionist family of a significant body of opinion in favour of Imperial federation (mostly centred on the Round Table members) this was the obvious line on which to hang any new definition of Home Rule. Lloyd George also produced some proposals based on U.K. wide devolution along the lines of "Home Rule all round" and even stoked up the issue of Welsh disestablishment in an attempt to give some credence to the prospects of it applying to Scotland and Wales.

These proposals were introduced very much as a means of exploring possibilities. But the Unionists would require convincing and they knew that Asquith was dependent upon Redmond. Consequently any Home Rule proposal wrapped up in terms of Imperial federalism, or otherwise, that did not meet his approval was never likely to be a candidate. If Redmond could somehow be convinced to give his *imprimatur* to the federal concept it might provide proof that, alongside the dilution of the veto, Asquith could produce the 'diluted' form of Home Rule. This is the only explanation for the shenanigans of Redmond and T.P. O'Connor in September and October 1910 while they were in the United States and Canada respectively. This involved Redmond, while in the US, giving the public appearance of being open to a serious consideration of the federal concept (despite having ruled out such proposals earlier in August) and O'Connor (who had been for many years a personal friend of Lloyd George) suddenly becoming a vociferous advocate of a federal arrangement for Ireland at meetings the length and breadth of Canada (the extent of O'Connor's federalist campaign during this time can be gleaned from an article by J. Caskell Hopkins, editor of *Canadian Annual Review*, which was published in *The Times* on 14 December 1910).

The coincidence between the introduction of the federal concept at the Conference and Redmond and O'Connor's sudden conversion can only be explained in these terms. Of course Balfour, who had always been sceptical of a federal solution, was never going to agree, and even the Round Table people were divided on the issue, with people like Leo Amery and Milner active opponents. As a result the Constitutional Conference came to nothing. In the aftermath of its failure, Redmond was forced to backtrack quite vigorously on the question of federal Home Rule but O'Connor never really recanted and tried to brush off his 'aberration' by claiming that he was merely restating a position that had been part of the history of the Irish Parliamentary Party since its inception. That was true, but the position had never been actively supported in the way Redmond and O'Connor pursued it in the autumn of 1910.

The Conference held a total of twenty-two meetings before it broke up on 10 November without agreement. But, as has been

pointed out, it broke not on the issue of the Lords veto but on the future treatment of Irish Home Rule bills.

December 1910 election and the 1911 Parliament Bill.

Although the Irish Parliamentary Party was not directly involved in the Constitutional Conference of 1910, the behaviour of Redmond and O'Connor during their trip to North America in the course of that conference suggests that they were being kept informed through unofficial channels as to events during the Conference. In all likelihood the source was Lloyd George who had been a close friend of O'Connor for many years. It also shows that Redmond was prepared to co-operate with Asquith in his attempts to navigate a course through the constitutional minefield even if that involved a continuance of a form of the Lords' veto. The issue for Redmond was not the one pursued by the Labour Party and the radical section of the Liberal Party, that of the democratisation of the House of Lords, the issue was purely and simply the facilitation of Home Rule at all costs, with or without the continuance of a form of the Lords' veto.

After the Conference broke down without agreement, and with the Conservatives only agreeing to the Ripon plan, which retained a veto that still had the potential of blocking any future Home Rule bill, Asquith, despite his personal preference for the Ripon plan, was confronted with the prospect of having to reinstate the process leading to the abolition of the veto based on the more extreme C-B version. Before he did that however, he decided to call another general election in the hope that the results might release him from the grip of Redmond's party and presumably to increase his room for compromise with the opposition on the issue of the House of Lords.

The second 1910 General Election was held in December and in the course of the campaigning Asquith restated his commitment to Irish Home Rule but not before Sir Edward Grey, Asquith's Foreign Secretary, had earlier in the campaign stated that "Home Rule for Ireland can only come as part of a large scheme of Devolution all round" (see *The Times*, 6 December 1910). The main issue on which the December election was fought was the House of Lords' veto with Irish Home Rule playing a supplementary part (very few Liberal candidates even mentioned Irish Home Rule in their campaigning). The results of the election more or less mirrored that of the January election with Redmond's party continuing to hold the balance of power. It also resulted in the marginalisation of the two forces on which a genuine solution to the Irish problem might have rested, with the fall in support for William O'Brien's All for Ireland League and the final elimination of the Russellite Unionist Liberal movement in the north of Ireland. Redmond's behaviour throughout 1910 and his campaigning during the election had pushed both Irish Nationalists and Unionists into the adoption of more extreme positions.

The extent to which Redmond continued to be suspicious of the Federalist agenda (one that continued to be pushed by influential members of the Liberal and Conservative parties) can be gauged by the fact that within weeks of the election Redmond wrote an article for the February number of *T.P.'s Magazine* (owned and edited by fellow Nationalist T.P. O'Connor) in which he dealt with the Federalist position and said that:-

"The one thing essential for us to be perfectly clear about is this: that while we are willing that our new Constitution should be so framed as to fit in readily with a general system of Federalism later on, we must get our Constitution at once, and must not be asked

to wait until the other portions of the United Kingdom have made up their minds to obtain Parliaments for themselves.”

For now however, the outcome of the second 1910 election left Redmond in a stronger position than before. He had shown Asquith that he could not be shaken off and had stopped the progress of the All for Ireland League in its tracks. Redmond based his continuing strategy on the fact that Irish Home Rule would have to wait until the eradication of the Lords’ veto. But, aware that any association between the two things in the minds of the British electorate would be counter-productive, he agreed with Asquith that it remain in the background. As a political party outside the run of British two-party politics and holding the future of the British Constitution in its hands, the Irish Parliamentary Party had to tread carefully and took its lead from Asquith as far as the sensibilities of the British electorate were concerned. Consequently the King’s Speech on 7 February 1911 did not mention the subject of Irish Home Rule.

But the Nationalists, still suspicious as to the outcome of the Parliament Bill, thought that Asquith, given his precarious position, might remain open to a compromise with the opposition. On 1 February 1911, the day after the opening of the Parliamentary session, the *Freeman’s Journal* urged caution:

“There may be a danger from the spirit of concession to which many frenzied appeals will be made in the months to come by the Opposition. Upon the rank and file of the progressive parties will rest the duty of protecting their leaders from this peril.”

Asquith continued in his attempts to conceal the issue of Irish Home Rule during any discussions about the Parliament Act. But, on 15 February, through an Opposition amendment to the Prime Minister’s address to the House, he was compelled to make a formal statement in Parliament of the Government’s intentions towards Irish Home Rule:-

“The Opposition amendment to the Address inviting the Government to declare their Home Rule policy, led to high debate, in which several speeches of great power were delivered. They were listened to with the closest attention, and many times during the sitting the Chamber was filled with the surge and swell of long-rolling cheers. The enthusiasm was especially great while the Prime Minister, Lord H. Cecil, and the Nationalist Leader were addressing the House. The main object of the amendment was to extract from the Government a clear statement of their policy, so that it should no longer remain in the twilight of dubiety, and Mr. Asquith intimated that his policy was the creation of an Irish Parliament with an Executive responsible to it to deal with purely Irish affairs. The supremacy of the Imperial Parliament must be maintained. This declaration was interpreted on the Opposition side of the House as meaning full Home Rule based on the South African precedent.”

(*The Times*, 16 February 1911)

The fact that Irish Home Rule was omitted from the King’s Speech on the opening of Parliament and the need to force the commitment out of Asquith by an Opposition amendment to his Address indicate just how precarious was the issue of the abolition of the Lords’ Veto in the context of the Irish Parliamentary Party holding the balance of power.

The Parliament Bill was re-introduced to the new House of Commons for its second reading on 21 February 1911 and, true

to their avowed policy of not becoming involved in the bill as it progressed through Parliament, the Irish Party under Redmond took no part in the debates, restricting themselves to voting in the divisions. If anything this policy only added gall to the Unionists’ wounds but persist with it they did. There appears to have been only one occasion when an Irish Nationalist member intervened (but did not debate) and that was Dillon when on 24 April he challenged the Ulster Loyalists’ declaration that if Home Rule was passed they would not obey the law. He went on to say:-

“He resented as cruel and unjust the charge that the Nationalist members did not care for the English people or for their Constitution. They did admire that Constitution, but complained that the Irish people had never enjoyed its benefits. They were the enemies of reactionary lords, but ever since the days of Daniel O’Connell they had been the champions of the British democracy.”
(*The Times*, 25 April 1911)

And that was the sum total of Redmondite contribution to the debate on the 1911 Parliament Bill. But just how much the Irish Parliamentary Party cared for the English Constitution was revealed a month earlier when the opportunity arose to discuss the issue of the vulnerability of the Constitution in the absence of a Second Chamber after the elimination of the Lords’ veto.

The Second Chamber Issue and the Passing of the Bill.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of a Second Chamber was included in the Preamble to the 1911 Parliament Bill as a concession to the radical wing of the Liberal Party and the Labour Party. It was designed as a mechanism to overcome the possible abuse of power by resultant Single Chamber Government in the wake of the abolition of the Lords’ Veto. Of course it was not something that the framers of the Bill took seriously and, according to the Preamble, its introduction was to be some time in the future:-

“And whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation.”

However, even though the Government did not take it seriously, those whom it was meant to placate did. The area of concern that it was meant to address was probably the only one that was shared across the political divide – a fact that provided Redmond and his party with the opportunity to reach out to their political opponents in a way that would, to some extent, neutralise the arguments of the Unionists that they were constitutional politicians only in name. During the same parliamentary session that Dillon made his above quoted intervention, Asquith was challenged by a fellow Liberal Member of Parliament, Captain Waring, on the issue of the proposed Second Chamber to replace the existing Constitutional role of the House of Lords in the context of the commitment in the Preamble to the Parliament Bill. Asquith replied that:-

“he did not see the necessity for this question, as the Government had not in any way modified their policy in the matter referred to. Later he stated in the course of a speech that he did not see any possibility of the immediate creation of another Second Chamber.”
(*The Times*, 25 April 1911)

Irrespective of the merits of abolishing the House of Lords or

its veto or both, the fact that it was generally acknowledged that it functioned as a Second Chamber under the Constitution should have provided the Redmondite Nationalists with the means by which they could show, as constitutional nationalists, their sensitivity to the democratic elements of the Constitution. In so doing they would have gone some way towards convincing a significant element among the opposition of the sincerity of their position. Instead they simply washed their hands and showed themselves impervious as to what was going to happen to the Constitution after they had abolished the Lords' veto. As was usual in these things, it was left to William O'Brien to show the way.

On 13 March 1911, *The Times* published a letter from the Positivist philosopher and radical liberal, Frederic Harrison which sought to deal with the constitutional implications of the loss of a Second Chamber consequent upon the abolition of the House of Lords veto. The letter was headed "A Parliamentary Eirenicon" (the title being a reference to the most famous *Eirenicon* published by E.B. Pusey in 1865 in an attempt to form a united front between the Anglicans and the newly-converted Newman "in the conflict with unbelief"). Harrison outlined his proposal for dealing with the problem in terms of the formation of an arbitration committee formed from members of the Privy Council and ends the letter with:

"The urgent concern of all thoughtful men today must be to avoid a degradation of our historic Constitution into a Single-House democracy, with adult suffrage. That would open an era of anarchy and of impotence of which no man living would see the issue. To resist such a revolution as that every lover of his country, be he Tory, Whig, Liberal, or Radical, might combine. What is needed to avert such a catastrophe in the scramble on which we seem to be entering is a *modus vivendi*, or rather a *modus agendi*, by which, without the delay even of a Session, the legislative machine may again work forward with freedom."

(*The Times*, 13 March 1911)

Of course, these issues of genuine constitutional concern were ignored by Redmond and company who did not see the need to become involved, despite the fact that it was his agenda that was creating the crisis. The next day, on 14 March, a letter from William O'Brien was published in *The Times* which showed that his brand of Irish nationalist sentiment was not impervious to the upheaval that Redmond was raising in terms of the assault on the Constitution. The letter, which is headed, "Ireland as a Peacemaker", is worth quoting in full:

"Permit me to say a word of admiration for the courage shown by Mr. Frederic Harrison in the letter he addresses to you today. I am not so much concerned in his particular plan of escape from the present deadlock as in the perspicacity with which he, one of the most accredited leaders of Liberal thought, realises that the difference between the mass of the Liberals and the mass of the Unionists as to the exact time and form in which the Second Chamber is to be reconstructed is one to be settled sensibly across a table, and not by Constitutional earthquakes or red revolutions. We are still at the stage at which suggestions like Mr. Frederic Harrison's will only be received with swear words by the party Whips, but six weeks hence – as soon as the two programmes of an interregnum and of a broadly democratised Second Chamber have come to close quarters in both Houses and are understood in the country – the force of events will as sure as fate drive the

responsible leaders of both hosts to think out with Mr. Frederic Harrison what reasonable accommodation can be negotiated.

My object in the present letter is to point out that the representatives of Ireland possess at this moment the proud privilege of being in a position to hasten – nay, if the word be not too harsh, to compel – such an accommodation, and that, if the privilege be unused or misused, Ireland runs the serious danger of the compromise being arrived at without her, or even in spite of her. Great undoubtedly – although precarious – is the power of disposing of the fate of a British Ministry by turning into the one division lobby or into the other; but infinitely a more statesmanlike and far-sighted use of 'the balance of power' to my thinking would be to place Ireland before the Empire, not in the character of a *trouble-fete*, striving to wrest Home Rule from the most sordid instincts of British party politicians in an hour of grave concern for all British interests, but rather of a peacemaker with the power and the will to make the Coronation year memorable by a friendly solution of the two connex difficulties, of a stereo-typed Upper Chamber and of Irish discontent, which have reduced the Imperial Parliament to a condition bordering on anarchy. Here would be indeed a new application of the old axiom, 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity.' Who will deny that it would be a happier one for Ireland as well as for England? Who that knows anything of the inmost thoughts of the most eminent leaders on both sides, whenever their war-paint is washed off, can doubt that Mr. Redmond and his men have only to say the word to bring the present Parliamentary commotion to a most happy termination?

Let me add that I can see nothing but unwisdom in the present exasperating attitude of Mr. Redmond, or rather of his more unthinking followers as unconditional partisans of the Government. They, like all Irish Home Rulers, are bound to give a loyal support to the Parliament Bill, as the only means up to the present proposed for ridding us of the antediluvian Veto of the House of Lords, and as the proposal of a Government pledged to make the enactment of Home Rule the first use of it, if carried into law. But, at the present stage of the Home Rule controversy, when so many of the old bitter prejudices of the Unionist Party have been conquered, it seems to me that a steady support of the Parliament Bill would not be inconsistent with an attitude of tolerance and respect for the 270 British representatives who would take a different way of settling a controversy going down to the deepest roots of their Constitution.

Any one who remembers how largely the best influences in the Unionist Party have been brought of late years – as your own columns, Sir, have attested by more than one historic declaration – to see in a Home Rule settlement by common consent the consolidation of the Empire, as well as the emancipation of the Imperial Parliament, will think twice and thrice before he approves of those proceedings of the last few weeks in the House of Commons, by which the dominant section of Mr. Redmond's Party have out-Liberalled the mass of the Liberal Party by the obsequiousness of their services and the brutalities of their contributions to the all-night sitting of last Thursday and Friday. The only practical effect visible to me at least has been – far from smoothing the way of the Parliament Bill – to make Home Rule a somewhat abject instrument of Liberal Party warfare, to compel the party managers on the other side to refurbish anti-Home Rule as a weapon in their own party arsenal, to drive promising young men in the Unionist Party into the arms of the worthy, but not very formidable, gentlemen from North-East Ulster, and to set the

example of merciless gagging and guillotining of which we may ourselves by and by bitterly feel the smart at the first swing of the English pendulum.

I wish dearly that some Irishman less immersed in Irish party controversies than myself would only say so with the same moral courage with which Mr. Frederic Harrison has affronted the black looks of his own party Whips and sharpshooters.”

(*The Times*, 14 March 1911)

[The issue of Parliamentary behaviour on the previous Thursday and Friday referred to by O'Brien appears to relate to the way the Government dealt with debate on the Revenue Bill, presumably defended vigorously by the Redmondites. It was not related to any discussion on the Parliament Bill. His expression in the final paragraph seems to be a reference to the fact that his hands had been tied by the extreme position adopted by Redmond and in the current climate he could not court controversy by taking action based on his convictions on the issue without damaging his standing among his own supporters].

By the second week in April the opportunity was lost and the lines of demarcation reinforced permanently. This is how *The Times* summed up the proceeding debate in the Commons the previous day when the second reading of the Bill had passed:-

“Dealing then with the whole question of limitation of the power of a Single Chamber to do as it pleases with anything and everything, from the most superficial to the most profound change in our laws and Constitution, Mr. Asquith laid it down broadly that no such limitations can be allowed. When the House of Commons is newly elected the presumption, he informs us, is that it has *carte blanche* to do what it will. It represents the people. That is to say, a majority which may have been returned under our grotesque system of representation by a very small minority of votes has the right to do as it pleases with every portion of the social and political framework. It has as much right to repeal the *Habeas Corpus* Act as to pass a Bill for giving holidays to shop girls. Mr. Asquith has discovered that there is no distinction in our Constitution between organic laws and temporary statutes. Knowing that the Constitution is unwritten, he fearlessly challenges his opponents to show where any such distinction is made. To introduce it would, he says, be disastrous. The Courts of Law would have to decide, as they do in other democracies, what is within the competence of an accidental majority, and what needs for its accomplishment an amendment of the Constitution which no accidental majority can effect. This, Mr. Asquith thinks, would be a shocking innovation. His reverence for the unwritten Constitution will not allow him to contemplate such a thing for a moment.

That Constitution, however, has done without the distinction only because it has provided other machinery to secure that important changes shall not be rushed through by an accidental majority. Mr. Asquith is engaged in destroying that Constitutional machinery. He says it ought to have been obsolete by this time, and as it has not disappeared quietly he is smashing it, while still doing absurd lip-service to an efficient Second Chamber. There is no word of reverence for the Constitution while its safeguards are being destroyed; but, when once the destruction is complete, then reverence for the Constitution forbids Mr. Asquith to think of setting up the only alternative that human ingenuity has yet discovered.

However, he admits that the presumption on which he founds his argument is weakened by time. A House three years old no longer retains the supreme rights and powers he ascribes to it when young. So he sets up what he describes in a very confused passage as a fresh election to be the warrant of the majority. It might be inferred from his words that his Bill requires a fresh election to enable the Commons to override the other House; but what he means is that it is only while the previous election is comparatively fresh that the over-riding can be satisfactorily accomplished. As this safeguard is not an organic law, there is nothing to prevent the next Parliament, if it happens to have a Radical majority, from destroying the safeguard in the first year of its existence. This one will be too busy passing Home Rule and some other things which Mr. Asquith is now perfectly clear that the country knew all about at the last election. Now he says that of course he is going to pass these things. It was in order to pass them that the attack upon the Constitution was engineered, and it would be intolerable to have any limits put to Single-Chamber power after all that trouble has been taken. As Mr. Balfour pointed out, we at last know exactly where we are. We really knew all the time, for the figure of Mr. Redmond was there to instruct us, but the truth has hitherto been represented to the country as a Unionist calumny. The preamble to the Bill is a farce. The reform of the Second Chamber is not a serious proposal, since it is obviously immaterial how a Chamber is composed which is to have no voice in legislation, and can at the most make the House of Commons say a thing three times instead of once. The real object of the Government has been all the time to pass a Home Rule Bill agreeable to the Irish contingent that keeps it in power, and in order to roast that pig it is burning down the edifice that has been the shelter of British liberties.”

(*The Times*, editorial 21 April 1911)

As a concession to the Second Chamber adherents, a Cabinet Committee was established by the Asquith Government to consider the further reform implicit in the preamble to the Parliament Bill, but it never reported back to the Cabinet.

The Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 15 May and was then passed to the House of Lords where it received its second reading without a division on 29 May. It subsequently passed its third reading in the House of Lords on 20 July with amendments and returned to the Commons. The government then returned it to the Lords, shorn of its amendments on 3 August and it was passed by them with a majority of 17 under the threat that should they fail to do so the Government would use the Royal Prerogative to appoint 500 new peers to outvote them.

The Bill thus became the 1911 Parliament Act, the terms of which prevented the Lords from vetoing any public legislation that originated in and had been approved by the Commons, and imposed a maximum legislative delay of one month for “money bills” (those dealing with taxation) and two years for other types of bill. The Speaker was given the power to certify which bills were classified as money bills. If a money bill was not passed by the Lords without amendment within one month after it was received, the bill could be presented for Royal Assent without being passed by the Lords. For other public bills, the 1911 Act originally provided that a rejected bill would become law without the Lords' consent if it were passed by the Commons in three successive sessions, provided that two years elapsed between Second Reading of the bill and its final passing in the Commons.

The 1911 Act still allowed the Lords to veto a bill to prolong the lifetime of a parliament or to confirm a provisional order, and

it could only be used to force through a bill originating in the Commons, so the Lords also retained the power to veto any bill originating within the House of Lords. In addition to curtailing the power of the Lords, the 1911 Act amended the Septennial Act 1715, reducing the maximum duration of any parliament from seven years to five, and provided for Members of Parliament (excluding government ministers) to be paid £400 per year.

The way was now open for the 1912 Home Rule Bill.

The Prize and the Price?

Asquith continued to rely on Redmond's support to keep him in power up to his declaration of war on Germany. Consequently, Redmond gained his Home Rule bill that in time became an Act of Parliament which subsequently became suspended and never came into operation. Such was the prize.

But the machinations required to get this prize resulted in the elimination of the moderate forces in the north and south of Ireland - the Liberal Russellite Unionists disappearing and the marginalisation of the All for Ireland League in the aftermath of the December 1910 General Election. Also, as the blind pursuit of this prize compelled the Redmondites to ride roughshod over the Constitution, it resulted in alienation of moderate Conservative forces and the fatal ingraining of hostility among Ulster Unionists to any prospect of an accommodation with the forces of Irish Nationalism. But the most catastrophic price was undoubtedly the First World War. The people who had been planning the war with Germany since 1906 were enabled with Redmond's support to continue their plans in Government from January 1910 until August 1914 (although Asquith's government continued until it was replaced by a coalition in May 1915, the conditions prevalent in the aftermath of the declaration of war neutralised Parliamentary government and the pivotal influence Redmond had beforehand).

The support of Redmond after January 1910 enabled Asquith to survive until the next General Election in December that year and once more fate presented Redmond with the opportunity of making or breaking Asquith's war Government. By choosing the former Redmond ensured that this was the last General Election in Britain and Ireland until 1918. It was the Government elected in December 1910 that took the world to the grotesque human tragedy of World War One.

But the question remains, was Redmond aware of the war conspiracy of the Asquith clique at the time he provided them with their lifeline in January 1910 or anytime between then and their declaration of war in August 1914? There is no documentary evidence that he knew but then knowledge in these things is not always dependent upon a document. It is difficult to know what level of knowledge he possessed but there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that he could not if he had the inclination but have been aware of the nature of his erstwhile allies and what they were up to. Such was the case possibly beforehand but certainly after 1912.

While it is easy to possess knowledge after the event certain things should have caused him concern before the road to war became irreversible. These were:-

The general tenor of Asquith's foreign policy.

After the January 1910 general election the fact that Asquith was prepared to pursue a policy that radically changed the Constitution of the UK without a clear mandate from the electorate

was surely evidence of a hidden agenda.

The spat in his cabinet on 23 August 1911.

Although this took place within the Cabinet the feelings that it generated must have spilled out at least in the form of rumours in the corridors of Westminster – corridors that Redmond was very familiar with as a veteran Westminster politician.

The change in tenor of Lloyd George and Churchill in 1911.

Two individuals who were normally associated with a more pacific outlook suddenly became war mongers and made no secret of their change of mind.

Lloyd George's suspicious use of the Budget and the Sinking Fund from 1910 onwards.

At the very least Redmond must have been aware of the implications of Lloyd George's 1912 attempts to abolish the Sinking Fund to get his hands on £6.5 million with the suspected purpose of spending it on the armed forces over and above the normal estimates. The man who exposed this was David Marshall Mason, who at the time was a strong proponent of Irish Home Rule and a supporter of Redmond in the House of Commons. Mason was a well-known opponent of the Government's foreign policy and was a member of the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee, which was established in 1911. This group was critical of the direction of the foreign policy of Sir Edward Grey. Mason was connected with the Peace Society and in 1913 was a member of the deputation to Asquith conveying the concern of members of the Liberal Party on the increasing funds being spent on the Navy. That Redmond would not be in personal contact with all the Liberal Party Members of Parliament who actively supported his cause is not feasible and there must have been conversations on the subject of the Government's war policy.

His own colleague, John Dillon, is on record as having known and warned about Asquith's determination to pursue a policy that would lead to war with Germany. As early as 1911 in the aftermath of the publication of the secret agreement between France and England for the partition of Morocco, in direct violation of the 1905 treaty of Algeciras (which had established Germany's commercial interests in the region) he said in the resultant debate in the House of Commons:

“We have heard a good deal tonight of the secrecy of the foreign policy of this country. It is no use attempting to deny it. Those of us who have been a long time in this House and can remember the methods of the Foreign Office twenty-five years ago, know as a fact, which cannot be denied, that the Foreign Office has become, during the last ten years, progressively more secret every year . . . For ten years the foreign policy of this country has been conducted behind an elaborate scheme of secrecy. Some of us pointed out years ago that the secrecy of foreign affairs was the inevitable and logical result of that new departure that was heralded about ten years ago.” (quoted in *The Rise and Fall of Imperial Ireland*, by Pat Walsh. Athol Books, 2003, p.372)

He was also suspicious of the need for Britain's huge naval rearmament programme which had created an arms race in Europe:-

“Britain's share in that race was mainly confined to naval building, but, Dillon insisted, this was itself part of a general – and he thought indefensible – involvement in power politics. Had the old two-power standard, he asked, now been replaced by a three-

power standard? Originally, as he understood it, Britain's naval building had been aimed at matching the combined forces of France and Russia. But now they had the Anglo-French entente and 'a most iniquitous agreement' with Russia which 'rested largely upon the partition of a perfectly inoffensive and defenceless country.' [the partition of Persia between Britain and Russia – ED] Did this then mean that British naval-building must be such as to match the Triple Alliance? And what of the entente with France – what of the military conversations to which the French Foreign Minister had recently referred? 'I say there is a very uncomfortable feeling among many non-members that there is a secret alliance with France, or some understanding which is not known to the members of this House . . .'

(*John Dillon*, by F.S.L. Lyons, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, pp.321-322)

Is it possible that one of his closest lieutenants did not have conversations with Redmond on this subject prior to the events of 1914?

Finally, did he not keep up to date with the literature relating to the Liberal Party – the party on whose fortunes he had banked Home Rule? On that last point, the extent of the suspicions within the party itself was revealed in a book published in 1913 which was written by a minor Liberal politician, who although he stood for Parliament in Liverpool never reached Westminster. If his suspicions led him to the right conclusions without access to the Westminster corridors surely, someone who not only walked those corridors but socialised with many Members of Parliament and shared the inevitable gossip that pervades the place, should have had knowledge of what was going on. The minor liberal politician who saw what was happening was Walter Lyon Blease and he published a book entitled *A Short History of English Liberalism*. The book is written from the point of view of social liberalism and, although critical of the Liberal Government, is not a critique of the Government's foreign policy. What is said on that subject is not the result of any in-depth research but based on publicly available information at the time. It deals with the situation of the Liberal Party up to 1912 and here is what the author says about that Government's policy towards Germany:-

"In 1904 Lord Lansdowne made an agreement with France by which the two contracting Powers settled all their outstanding disputes. This was intended by its author to be only the first of a series of international agreements. It was converted by Sir Edward Grey into a weapon of offence against Germany, the country upon which, after passing from Russia to the United States, and from the United States to France, the animosity of modern Toryism had definitely settled. The fortunes of Great Britain were bound up with those of France. The theory of the Balance of Power was revived, every diplomatic conference was made a conflict between France and Great Britain on the one side and Germany on the other, and in 1911 the lives and the wealth of the British people were endangered, not to maintain any moral principle or any British interest, but to promote the material interests of French financiers in Morocco. To this diplomatic warfare, and to the military warfare which it constantly contemplates, our whole foreign policy is subdued. When Germany proposed at the Hague Conference, that international agreement should abolish the system of destroying private property at sea, Great Britain refused even to discuss the point. When we fought Germany, our great fleet would be able to destroy her commerce. The right to destroy her commerce was our most powerful weapon against her, and as our peace policy was determined by our war policy, we preserved this

relic of barbarism. The inevitable consequence of our diplomacy was to give German jingoism an irresistible argument for the increase of the German Fleet. The increase in the German Fleet was described in threatening language by Mr. Churchill, and was matched by an increase in our own. The burden of armaments increased, and the unremunerative expenditure drained the resources which should have been available for the cost of social reform. Such was the foreign policy of Great Britain until the outbreak of the Balkan War at the end of 1912." (*A Short History of English Liberalism* by Walter Lyon Blease, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1913, pp.364-365)

[The Hague Conference referred to above was in 1907 and was considered a failure due to England's obstruction - ED].

Certainly, by 1912 there is no excuse for Redmond not knowing what was going on and he could have pulled the plug on this Government anytime before mid-1914. While the majority of English politicians were content to believe the regular disclaimers by the Asquith government - they, after all, had been cut from the same cloth with an in-built propensity to believe their own propaganda, but for Redmond, who stood outside the two-party circus and had direct experience of how English governments operated, there is no excuse for his refusal to see the road it was taking. Unless, that is, he chose not to see and was blinded by the glittering prize of Home Rule. Well, he got his Home Rule by selling out not only his integrity but his humanity. To add insult to injury he then went on to encourage tens of thousands of young Irish innocents to kill and be killed on the agricultural fields of France and Belgium.

I will end with an account of the scene in the House of Commons when Redmond formally committed himself and the Irish people he represented to the cause of Asquith's world war. In terms of what we know, not only what went before, but what came afterwards, it makes sobering reading. It is written by Michael MacDonagh, an Irishman who was *The Times* Parliamentary correspondent and who had been promised by Redmond that he would be the first Clerk of the Irish Parliament in the aftermath of Home Rule:-

"I was in the Reporters' Gallery that evening, and I have rarely seen a more crowded Chamber. Chairs were placed on the floor for the accommodation of members who could not find places on the benches or in the galleries. Only on two other occasions had that been done - the introduction by Gladstone of the Home Rule Bills of 1886 and 1893.

The Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, made the momentous announcement. One passage in his speech took the House by surprise. It had a stirring effect, though its full meaning and significance was not understood until later in the proceedings. "The one bright spot in the whole of this terrible situation is Ireland," he said. "The general feeling throughout Ireland – and I would like this to be clearly understood abroad – does not make the Irish question a consideration which we feel we have not to take into account." Germany, in fact, was led to believe that England, torn and distracted by her domestic troubles, would keep out of the war.

Redmond rose from his seat at the corner of the top bench below the gangway. The crowded House hung upon his words with breathless interest. Would he confirm the statement of the Foreign Secretary that Ireland would not weaken England's arm in this supreme crisis? He did not long keep the House in suspense.

It was a short speech. He began by saying, in those deeply moving accents of his, that he was touched by the Foreign Secretary's reference to Ireland. In times past when the Empire was engaged in desperate enterprises, he pointed out, that "for reasons to be found deep down in the centuries of history" Ireland was estranged. But the events of recent years, had, he said, changed that situation completely. Then followed the most important pronouncement of the speech. It was read slowly and deliberately, from half-sheets of notepaper. This showed that Redmond did not act merely upon a passing impulse induced by Grey's reference to Ireland. Whether or not he had been approached by the Government beforehand, he certainly came to the House with his speech carefully prepared and written out: -

'A wider knowledge of the real facts of Irish history, have, I think, altered the views of the democracy of this country towards the Irish question; and today, I honestly believe, that the democracy of Ireland will turn with the utmost anxiety and sympathy to this country in every trial and every danger that may overtake it.'

The House was swept by wave after wave of enthusiasm. Both sides, Liberal and Unionists, joined in loud and prolonged cheers, which were emphasized by the shriller Gaelic note of the Nationalists, who sat, in full array, on the benches below their leader. Redmond went on to recall that in 1778, during the war between England and America, 100,000 Irish Volunteers sprang to arms in defence of their country against invasion. "History is repeating itself," he cried, raising his voice. Two Volunteer forces were in existence in Ireland – one, Protestant and Unionist, the other, Catholic and Nationalist. Why should they not emulate the example of their predecessors? Redmond proceeded to make this offer to the Government, amid approving cheers:-

'I say to the Government that they may tomorrow withdraw everyone of their troops from Ireland. I say that the coast of Ireland will be defended from foreign invasion by her armed sons, and for this purpose armed Nationalist Catholics in the South will be only too glad to join arms with Protestants in the North.'

(*The Home Rule Movement* by Michael Macdonagh, Talbot Press, 1920, pp.257-259)

Redmond's reward – his 30 pieces of silver - was the delusional "passing into law but not quite operational law" Home Rule Bill. Once again, Michael Macdonagh's eye-witness account of the event carries some of the flavour of how this was met in the House of Commons:-

"The greatest day in Redmond's career was September 19, 1914. It was also the red-letter day of the Irish Nationalist Movement. On that day the Home Rule Bill was made law, subject to the condition that it was not to come into operation until the conclusion of Peace. The scenes in the two Houses of Parliament, accompanying the giving of the Royal Assent, were unprecedented for irregularity as well as exaltation of feeling, in those ancient and solemn precincts. As I viewed the spectacle in the House of Lords from the Reporters' Gallery, I saw an empty Chamber, save that at the top, seated on a form under the Throne, were the Lords Commissioners, five in number, arrayed in their scarlet robes, slashed with white bars of ermine, and their black three-cornered hats. They were to give the Royal Assent on behalf of the King. The centre figure was Haldane the Lord Chancellor. At the table in the middle of the Chamber were also two clerks in wig and gown. But there was no one on the benches, rising tier over tier, on each side – no, not a single peer. It was easy to understand why

the Unionist Lords should have stayed away. But how can the absence of the Liberal Lords be explained? Nevertheless, every part of the Chamber, except that technically within the House, was crowded. In the galleries of the Commons, to the right and left of the Reporters' Gallery, I saw many Nationalists mixed with Liberals. Looking down at the Bar of the House, immediately below the Reporters' Gallery, I could discern the portly form of John Redmond, with T.P. O'Connor, William Redmond and other colleagues, grouped behind the Deputy Speaker (Mr. Whitley) who stood in the front with Black Rod to his right and the Sergeant-at-Arms to his left.

Then the ceremony commenced, one of the most ancient and stereotyped in the procedure of Parliament. But on this occasion a new formula was introduced, one that had never been heard before. That was the announcement by the Lord Chancellor that the Royal Assent was to be notified to an Act which had been "duly passed under the provisions of the Parliament Act of 1911." The supreme moment of the ceremony had come. The Clerk of the Crown, standing to the left of the table, took up a printed document and in a loud voice read its title – "Government of Ireland Act." The Clerk of the Parliament, standing to the right of the table, turned and bowed to the Commons at the Bar, and pronounced the decisive words – "Le Roy le veult," The King wills it! Instantly from the Bar and the galleries arose a cheer that was loud and long continued. Again and again the Nationalists in the galleries gave vocal expression to the joy that beamed on their faces. John Dillon, who sat amongst them, a striking figure, so grey as to be almost venerable, was, I noticed, quite unmoved. His grave voice betrayed no emotion. Was he, like a seer, trying to peer into the future? – wondering whether this was really the end, whether Ireland's hopes were, at last, accomplished.

I hastened downstairs to the Lobby, or ante-room of the Chamber. It was thronged by an excited crowd. Redmond was surrounded by Liberal and Labour members, pressing to grasp him by the hand, and congratulate him upon his great victory. Would he not be, in a year or so, the first Prime Minister of an Irish National Government? Suddenly a flash of green and a golden harp appeared over the heads of the crowd. It was the Irish flag raised by Patrick O'Brien; and following in its wake, the Commons, loudly cheering, streamed along the corridors to their own Chamber. Here was another extraordinary scene. The Deputy Speaker announced, according to custom, that he had been to the House of Peers and heard the Royal Assent given to the Government of Ireland Act. And scarcely had the applause which greeted the announcement died down, when Will Crooks, the Labour member, called out in Cockney accents, which trembled with emotion, "Would it be in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to sing 'God Save the King?' Singing in the House of Commons! An unheard of thing! Yet, without waiting for a reply, Crooks started the anthem. All the members rose to their feet and joined in, and the strain was swelled by journalists in the Reporters' Gallery, and strangers in the public galleries at the opposite end of the Chamber. An extraordinary and exciting episode, and it had a dramatic conclusion. 'God Save Ireland!' cried Crooks. Quick came the response in the vibrant voice of John Redmond – 'God Save England!' It was the first time such an ejaculation came from the lips of a Nationalist leader. Cheer after cheer rang through the House of Commons."

(*ibid* pp261-264.)

Michael MacDonagh's observation of the demeanour of John Dillon amidst all this hoopla was quite significant: "John Dillon,

who sat amongst them, a striking figure, so grey as to be almost venerable, was, I noticed, quite unmoved. His grave voice betrayed no emotion. Was he, like a seer, trying to peer into the future? – wondering whether this was really the end, whether Ireland’s hopes were, at last, accomplished.” Dillon knew the price that had just been paid for the glittering prize. He had known for years.

“On 3rd August, after Grey had made his speech (on the declaration of war – ED) and Redmond had made his offer, Scott recorded Dillon’s reaction in his Diary: ‘Dillon says he considers that the Government is honour-bound to go in even though he has consistently opposed the policy which has led them to that position’ (Diaries, p95). On 6th August Dillon wrote to Scott: ‘It is the greatest crime against humanity perpetrated in modern times and I cannot help feeling that England must bear a considerable share of the responsibility’”.

(*The Rise and Fall of Imperial Ireland* by Pat Walsh, Athol Books, 2003, p.397 – the source being quoted is the Diary of C.P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*.)

Is it still possible that Redmond did not also know? As late as July 1914 members of the Liberal Party were expressing their concern about the move towards war. That month around a dozen back-bench Members of Parliament who were members of the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee passed a resolution which was sent to Sir Edward Grey urging that Britain remain neutral in any forthcoming conflict. The Home Rule supporter, David Marshall Mason, M.P. was a signatory to that resolution. Redmond could have acted to ensure that these voices were properly heard. He, after all, held the government in his hand. Yet, knowing where it was going to lead, he did nothing.

Dillon was aware of the secret activities, as were many others in the Liberal Party and beyond, so it is inconceivable that Redmond remained unaware of these activities in the move towards war. However, it may be that he never really believed it would in fact come to war, that the activities of Asquith and his clique were only intended to prepare for eventualities. If that was the case, when war actually came, one would have expected him to have dissociated himself from that outcome. He could have issued a statement to that effect. But, of course that would have meant jettisoning his glittering Home Rule Act (the Act that Asquith had banked upon for the continuing support from Redmond). What happened instead was that he not only endorsed Asquith’s war but became a recruiting sergeant for Britain using the trust invested in him by those unfortunates who could not have known the devious route that had been traversed from 1910 to 1914 by Asquith and his war clique. And, as the war went beyond the supposed matter of months and the sheer horror of it unfolded in all its misery, Redmond remained convinced of the righteousness of both causes and continued to encourage young Irishmen to leave their villages and parishes to join in the carnage. The watchword went out that to serve their country they must be killed

and become involved in the killing of other young men like themselves from many lands which had never done Ireland any harm. Stirred by this watchword they left in their wake loss and misery all over Europe in many farms, hamlets and townlands similar to the ones they themselves had left behind. Truly there was a crime here and one which has left a stain on Redmond’s legacy. Those who now seek to re-invent Ireland on the basis of Redmond’s glittering Home Rule at the very least are attempting to conceal that stain or at the worst attempting to reaffirm it and in the process have become conspirators in the original act.

To revisit Dr. Morgan’s question as to what young patriotic Irishmen were supposed to do in 1914 and 1916 except follow Redmond with no prospect of an Easter Rising on the cards or any other outlet for their patriotism. Perhaps the answer is not as clear-cut as that advanced earlier. Did they know what they were committing themselves to? On one level they did know but what they knew was based upon the false premise for the war and the false premise of the glittering prize. On the other hand, what they knew need not have been based on these falsehoods if the man who posited himself as their leader had been of a higher kind. He knew that what he was asking young men to serve was based on falsehoods. He knew what had been involved in getting Britain to the stage where it could declare war and he surely knew the calibre of the men and the reasoning behind their offer of the glittering prize. The Irish patriots who stayed behind knew and they knew that Redmond knew. As to why others supported Redmond and went the way of his asking, there is no other explanation other than they had been duped by the British Government but more tragically, they had been betrayed by their own leader, John Redmond.

The answer to Dr. Morgan’s other question, as to why the British Government set aside the 1912 Home Rule Act is a simple one. It was set aside because there was never any real prospect of it ever becoming operational in law. It was a device that enabled H.H. Asquith to retain power in circumstances where he found himself relying on John Redmond’s Irish Nationalists to pursue his war agenda. To see that Act in abstraction from the circumstances that prevailed in British politics in the aftermath of the December 1910 General Election is to be condemned to forever seek answers to questions that have no relevance and, as abstractions, by their nature, can never be answered. If Dr. Morgan began with the question as to why the Liberal Government behaved as it did after December 1910 and consequent upon that, what John Redmond knew of the agenda which propelled such behaviour, he might just come near an explanation that is consistent with a rational view of the history of the 1912 Home Rule Act and the role of the Irish Parliamentary Party in facilitating the First World War.

Lest we forget indeed.