

Lloyd George, Empire and the Making of Modern Ireland
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This talk begins with a conversation that took place a little over a century ago, in July 1921, between David Lloyd George, then the prime minister of the United Kingdom, and his deputy cabinet secretary Thomas Jones ('T. J.'). That month there had been encouraging developments in relation to Ireland, something that had been in short supply since 1919 when a bitter guerrilla war fought by the Irish Republican Army and the reprisals of Crown forces against both the IRA and civilians had made parts of the country almost ungovernable. Now, there was a cessation of fighting and the prospect of a path towards a negotiated settlement.

The news of peace was greeted ecstatically on the international stage as an historic breakthrough. Against that background, Thomas Jones suggested that if Lloyd George settled the Irish Question, he 'might be satisfied and "go to heaven"'. The prime minister was not yet ready to join the angelic throng, replying that 'he would not hear of such a dull destiny'. He still had ambitions to make a difference, adding brightly: 'There is still Europe.'¹

As this audience is acutely aware, a century later there is, of course, 'still Europe', and in spite of the optimism of July 1921 there is still Ireland. The two have come together in the controversy over the Irish Protocol and the creation

¹ *Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary, vol. 3: Ireland, 1918-1925*, ed. by Keith Middlemass (London, 1971), p. 91. On Lloyd George's European diplomacy at the Genoa Conference of 1922, see: Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 310-16.

of a trade border down the Irish Sea. These developments were not predicted in 1921 but they are indirect consequences of the partition of Ireland in 1921-22, an event of major historical significance in which Lloyd George was a prime mover. They had a major impact on the political geography of modern Ireland and continue to inflect the discourse about its future.

This evening my aim is to discuss the formative influences on Lloyd George that brought him to that fateful moment. In particular, my focus shall be on the way his attitudes to Ireland throughout his career were shaped by the context of empire. While he was undoubtedly one of those few politicians who succeeded in changing the political weather, in some respects he was also constrained by the context of the times in which he lived. In fact, if we think of his career as an arc stretching from the mid-1880s to 1922, when he finally left high office, there were two unavoidable features of British politics that any ambitious politician had to deal with. The first of these was the question of Irish Home Rule, which split the Liberal party; while its opponents saw Home Rule as separatism, it was in fact a form of devolution within the United Kingdom and the Empire. It was because of this that some Liberals could support it. The second feature of politics was an upsurge in imperialism and a more aggressive attitude to seizing and controlling territory abroad, particularly in Africa. My contention here is that Lloyd George's attitude to Ireland cannot be divorced from his evolving views on the British Empire. His conviction that the existence of that empire was a given determined his actions at crucial moments.

Neither of these issues – Ireland nor Empire – were daily political concerns for him, but they rose to the surface regularly, emerging at key moments in his career, revealing his underlying views about both subjects.

Ireland

In the early 1880s the young Lloyd George was inspired by Irish land agitators, and he drew comparisons between what he saw as oppressive landlordism in that country with the situation in Wales. His first reported speech, as a precocious seventeen-year-old, was about Irish landlordism. If he rarely visited Ireland, in spite of the close proximity of north-west Wales to that country, then on occasion Ireland visited him. In 1886 he would share a platform in Blaenau Ffestiniog with the great Irish land agitator, Michael Davitt, a figure who was too dangerous for many Welsh Liberals. After hearing Lloyd George speak, Davitt said approvingly that the young Welshman was the kind of person Ireland was now electing to parliament, clearly indicating that Wales should do the same.² Lloyd George's reputation as a radical and effective orator was growing – in fact, he was too radical for some – but he was selected to fight a by-election in the constituency of Carnarvon Boroughs in 1890.

That by-election was fought on the question of Irish Home Rule, and Irish people campaigned in the constituency. The Irish Nationalist MP S.T. O'Connor visited to support Lloyd George, while Presbyterian ministers from Ulster campaigned to shore up the Conservative vote, presumably on the grounds that, according to a contemporary slogan, Home Rule = Rome Rule. In a strongly Nonconformist Protestant constituency the significance of this intervention could not be discounted. However, Lloyd George won by a wafer-thin majority and his parliamentary career was launched.³

² J. Graham Jones, *David Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism* (Aberystwyth, 2010).

³ Emyr Price, *David Lloyd George* (Cardiff, 2006), pp. 87-107.

Following his success, the Liberal leader William Gladstone stated that ‘the battle was fought very much upon the great Irish issue [and] in fighting the battle of Ireland you are also fighting the battle of Wales ... The two are inseparable one from the other ...’⁴ Gladstone insisted that solving the Irish Question was a precursor to dealing with the demands of Scotland and Wales.

After the by-election Lloyd George established himself quickly as a Liberal MP of decidedly independent and nationalist leanings. By 1895 he was making direct analogies between Ireland and Wales: ‘The example of Ireland’, he said, ‘was to them an instruction and encouragement.’⁵ By demanding their own parliament, the Irish had secured major reforms from Westminster and the Welsh should follow suit. This can be seen as a tactical approach to Home Rule: simply making the demand would force the Imperial parliament to yield to other Welsh reforms, as had been the case with Ireland, in an attempt to prevent Home Rule from happening. His basic aim was to seek equality of treatment for Wales. At this time, he was described by some in the press as the ‘Parnell of Wales’ (after the Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell); this wasn’t always a compliment.⁶

He came close to recommending obstructionist tactics on Irish nationalist lines in the forthcoming parliament, ‘so that they would be able to convince the

⁴ ‘Welsh Liberals at Hawarden’, *South Wales Daily News*, 30 May 1890.

⁵ ‘Mr Lloyd George and his constituents’, *South Wales Daily News*, 28 June 1895; ‘Ymreolaeth i Gymru’, *Y Genedl Gymreig*, 2 August 1895. The latter referred to Lloyd George demanding ‘annibyniaeth’ (independence) for Wales but almost certainly this meant independence within the empire.

⁶ Price, *David Lloyd George*, pp. 108, 118; David W. Savage, “‘The Parnell of Wales has become the Chamberlain of England’: Lloyd George and the Irish Question”, *Journal of British Studies*, 12/1 (Nov., 1972), pp. 86-108.

average Englishman that the Imperial Parliament is absolutely inadequate’..⁷

The problem of English domination acting as a break on the demands of the other nations of the United Kingdom prompted him to argue in favour of ‘Home Rule All Round’: a measure of self-government for the four nationalities which constituted the United Kingdom.’⁸

For Lloyd George, the empire was the context in which such developments would take place. After his election in 1890 he said: ‘We are Imperialists because we are nationalists ... we know that by the sum of the success, prosperity and happiness attained by little Wales, the great Empire of which she is a part will be the more glorious.’⁹ Although he made references to the empire during the 1890s, he did not go down the same route as his friend and colleague, Tom Ellis, Liberal MP for Merioneth, who became an ardent imperialist after meeting the hugely controversial prime minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil Rhodes, in Africa in 1891 and found him a strong and charismatic figure.¹⁰ By contrast, according to Roy Hattersley, Lloyd George was ‘by instinct an imperialist but one who was more flexible than consistent’.¹¹ What imperialism meant to Lloyd George in practice would become clearer by the end of the decade when his ideas of empire began to take firmer shape, and the relationship between Ireland and empire with them.

First decade of the twentieth century

⁷ ‘Mr Lloyd George, M.P., on his election’, *South Wales Daily News*, 12 August 1895.

⁸ ‘Mr Lloyd George, M.P., at Nevin and Pwllheli. Home Rule All Round’, *North Wales Express*, 16 August 1895.

⁹ Quoted in John Grigg, *Lloyd George and Wales* (Aberystwyth, Welsh Political Archive, 1988), p. 6.

¹⁰ Dewi Rowland Hughes has portrayed this as Ellis moving to the right and Lloyd George moving to the left in a ‘scissor movement’: *Cymru Fydd* (Cardiff, 2006), pp. 118-22.

¹¹ Roy Hattersley, *Lloyd George: the Great Outsider* (London, 2010), electronic version, no pagination.

His ideas crystallised during the South African, or Boer War (1899-1902), during which he gained great notoriety because of his opposition to the conflict. He opposed the 'folly of aggressive imperialism', a stance that put him in a different camp to the Liberal Imperialists, a faction within his own party that were enthusiastic about imperial expansion. He received both verbal and physical attacks from supporters of the war, and famously had to be smuggled out of a meeting at Birmingham disguised as a policeman to avoid a hostile crowd. The Conservative press criticised him for voting against the government and with what they called 'the Irish gang' (that is Irish Nationalists),¹² but he was keen to point out that he did not share their attitude to Empire. In October 1899 he contrasted his attitude to Empire with that of the Irish Home Rulers: theirs, he claimed, was 'one of unconcealed hatred & hostility. That is not ours & it is important we should not be associated with it'.¹³ In reality, there were different and sometimes conflicting attitudes to Empire among Irish nationalists, but the statement tells us a great deal about Lloyd George's thought at the time.¹⁴ While taking a stand against imperial military adventures, he was not against the empire itself and asserted that Wales should take its place in that empire – as should Ireland. He insisted emphatically: 'I am an Imperialist too.'¹⁵

These views outlasted the war. When interviewed in 1905 he stated 'You cannot let Ireland drift away and become a little independent state. At least, that is the opinion of those who believe in the Empire.' In case there was any

¹² *North Wales Chronicle*, 9 December 1899; *South Wales Daily Post*, 29 November 1899.

¹³ NLW, 817(3), William George Papers, David Lloyd George to William George, 1899, Oct. 17.

¹⁴ H. V. Brasted, 'Irish nationalism and the British Empire in the late nineteenth century', in Oliver MacDonagh, W. F. Mandle and Pauric Travers (eds), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950* (London, 1983).

¹⁵ Quoted in Alan Sharp, *Lloyd George* (London, 2009), electronic version, n.p.

doubt about his own views on the matter, he added: 'Certainly I believe in the Empire. It is a great power for good, a great missionary of civilization.'¹⁶

What did he mean by 'missionary of civilization'? In an imperial context such talk was associated with the imposition of the culture, religion and language of the imperial power on subject peoples, sometimes by force. This hardly chimed with the radical politics usually associated with the solicitor from Cricieth. So what are we to make of it? We get an insight into his views by examining his interventions in debates at this time about the idea of the 'English-speaking peoples' that was being promoted by Joseph Chamberlain, who recently had been the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Lloyd George's conception of the idea differed in important ways from that of the dominant type of imperial opinion that was then current. He pointed to the freedoms enjoyed by the White settler colonies of Canada and Australia – such as free education, the absence of State control of religion and the lack of an entrenched landlord system – and he insisted it was the colonies that were showing leadership, and the metropolis should follow.¹⁷ Furthermore, in 1906, at a time when imperialism was still very much in the air, he claimed that the Nonconformist churches represented 'the main stream of the religious life of the English-speaking peoples of the world'.¹⁸ In his view, both Wales and Ireland were comparable to these peoples.

¹⁶ Herbert Vivian, 'Studies in personality, V: Mr. Lloyd George, M.P.', *The Pall Mall Magazine* (June 1905), p. 686.

¹⁷ Peter Clarke, *Mr Churchill's Profession: Statesman, Orator, Writer* (London, 2013), p. 96.

¹⁸ 'Mr Lloyd George on Preaching', *North Wales Express*, 29 June 1906.

Of course, it was only possible to adopt these views by focusing on the rights of White settlers and ignoring non-European peoples who made up the vast majority of colonial subjects. Even if he rejected aggressive and militarist imperialism, his Empire had a White skin. His defence of African peoples in a speech on South Africa in December 1899 has been described as ‘breath-taking hypocrisy’.¹⁹

In Government

In December 1905 he became a minister in the new Liberal government, and he would remain in high office until 1922. This meant that his views on questions such as Ireland and Empire took on a much more practical form. This can be illustrated by two events in 1907. At the beginning of that year he visited Belfast, his only ‘political’ visit to Ireland, where he delivered a speech that explained his stance on Irish Home Rule. He stated unambiguously that ‘He was a profound believer in the virtue of self-government.’ But self-government occurred in an imperial context: ‘The supremacy of the Imperial Parliament must be maintained’, he insisted. ‘Separation between Great Britain and Ireland was unthinkable; it was not even a debateable question ... He could not conceive a worst disaster for Ireland herself than a separate existence.’²⁰ His reference to the ‘Imperial parliament’ had some substance. He described Belfast as ‘this great industrial centre of the Empire’.

Clearly, the empire was very much on his mind in 1907. Later that year he took a full and active part in the Colonial Conference held in London, where he thrashed out matters of imperial trade with the prime ministers of Australia,

¹⁹ Roy Hattersley, *Lloyd George: the Great Outsider* (London, 2010), electronic version, no pagination.

²⁰ ‘Mr. Lloyd George at Belfast’, *Belfast Times*, 9 February 1907

Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand, the Cape Colony and the Transvaal. Afterwards he developed plans for promoting British exports in the colonies. The conference also discussed the possibility of Home Rule for both Ireland and India, so the two threads I've been discussing – Ireland and Empire – came together explicitly in 1907.

These are the ideas that form the background to his involvement in trying to ensure that Home Rule was enacted on a number of occasions from 1912 onwards. It is also worth noting that his positions in economic portfolios – President of the Board of trade, then Chancellor of the Exchequer – brought him into contact with both Irish nationalist leaders and the leaders of Irish Unionism over the nuts and bolts of economic policy.²¹

From 1912, Lloyd George became a key figure in the British government's policy on Irish Home Rule. That year the Third Home Rule Bill was passed by parliament, although fatefully it was delayed by the House of Lords for two years. In 1912 he had suggested in cabinet for the first time the possibility of partition of the island to meet the objections of Ulster Unionists, an idea he would return to later. Before the First World War, therefore, his views on Irish Home Rule, Ulster and empire had all coalesced. The conflict of 1914-18 provided the context for the Irish Question to be intensified and take new directions.

The onset of war in 1914 meant that Home Rule could not be enacted, and developments during the conflict changed the nature of Irish politics in

²¹ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (2003), p. 160.

fundamental ways. Following the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, after which some rebels and others were incarcerated at Frongoch near Bala (only thirty-two miles from Lloyd George's home in Cricieth),²² he was tasked with undertaking negotiations with Irish leaders to enact Home Rule. He applied himself energetically and stated privately that he wanted to settle the Irish Question, but his actions can only be described as disingenuous. During the war he asserted that Ulster could not be coerced into a Home Rule parliament against its will and that to do so would be an injustice. This inevitably meant partition. He reassured the nationalist leader John Redmond that partition would be temporary, while telling the Unionist leader Edward Carson that it would be permanent. The talks broke down amid much recrimination and the moment was lost.²³ It has been described by the historian Alvin Jackson as 'a defining moment'.²⁴

It also taught him a lesson he would draw on later – the wartime government was a coalition that included Conservatives and Unionists, and without their support (or at least acquiescence) a workable solution could not be found.

Prime Minister, 1916-22

Lloyd George's ability to influence both Irish and imperial matters changed decisively when he became prime minister in December 1916, in the process splitting the Liberal Party. Lloyd George was never the leader of his own party in government.²⁵ Lloyd George's involvement with colonial prime ministers

²² Jon Parry, "The Black Hand": 1916 and Irish republican prisoners in north Wales', in Paul O'Leary (ed.), *Irish Migrants in Modern Wales* (Liverpool, 2004), pp. 139-55.

²³ M. C. Rast, 'The Ulster Unionists "On Velvet" Home Rule and Partition in the Lloyd George Proposals, 1916', *American Journal of Irish Studies*, 14 (2017), pp. 113-38.

²⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p. 208.

²⁵ Lord Blake, *An Incongruous Partnership* (Welsh Political Archive Annual lecture, Aberystwyth, 1992).

was clear from the beginning of his premiership.²⁶ He established an Imperial War Cabinet that included colonial prime ministers and some Indian representatives.

At the same time, he wrote to Willie Redmond: 'There is nothing I would like better than being the instrument for settling the Irish question.'²⁷ He established an Irish Convention to discuss the matter, and it's significant that its terms of reference stated that Ireland must be 'within the Empire'.

The tension between prosecuting the war and dealing with Ireland can be seen in a speech he made at the National Eisteddfod at Birkenhead in 1917. This event is usually remembered for the pregnant symbolism of the empty Black Chair of the successful poet Hedd Wyn, who had been killed at Passchendaele and so could not receive his bardic prize. However, immediately before the chairing ceremony Lloyd George delivered a speech on 'Our Imperial Task', in which he used the eisteddfod as an example of how people could sink their differences in a common endeavour. He set out a vision of the British Empire as a commonwealth of nations in which small countries played a crucial role. He ended his speech:

'The British Empire is made up of many nations, some great, some small; but to-day we are one people, one in purpose, one in action, one in

²⁶ 'The Empire's Voice', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 6 January 1917.

²⁷ Lloyd George to Willie Redmond, 4, 6 March 1917. Quoted in: Dermot Meleady, *John Redmond: the National Leader* (Sallins, 2013), electronic edition, n.p. Lloyd George continued: 'I was elected to the House purely as a Home Rule candidate ... and I have voted steadily for Home Rule ever since then. The Irish Members and I fought together on the same side in many a fierce conflict, and I have had no better friends and never wish to have better friends. But you know just as well as I do what the difficulty is in settling the Irish question, and if any man can show me a way out of that I should indeed be happy.'

hope, one in resolve, one in sacrifice, and soon we shall be one in triumph. (Loud cheers.)²⁸

At the same time, Irish nationalism was moving away from such ideas. The imposition of military conscription in Ireland in 1917 was probably Lloyd George's biggest misstep. Irish nationalist leaders had pledged Ireland's voluntary support for the war effort as a sign that the country deserved Home Rule. The imposition of conscription undermined the authority and credibility of constitutional nationalism and allowed the tide of opinion to shift towards Sinn Féin. A series of by-elections in 1917 and 1918 were a portent of what was to come. At the East Cavan by-election of June 1918, which was won by Arthur Griffith, the president of Sinn Féin, the following ditty was composed by Joseph Stanley, who had been incarcerated in Frongoch in 1916:

If you give Lloyd George another chance,
He'll send you – single fare – to France,
On the Conscript graves to sing and dance,
Says the Grand Ould Dame Britannia.²⁹

The calculus of Irish politics was transformed by the general election of 1918. The Home Rule nationalists were largely eliminated as Sinn Féin won constituency after constituency outside of Ulster. In that election, Lloyd George retained his position as prime minister but this time as leader of an

²⁸ 'Our imperial task', *The Times*, 7 September 1917.

²⁹ 'Britannia's appeal to East Cavan', Trinity College Dublin, <https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/concern/works/8k71nj64f?locale=en>

overwhelmingly Conservative coalition. It was in that context he now faced the challenge of dealing with the post-war Irish crisis.

Post-war, 1918-22

Among the questions debated by historians is whether Lloyd George was a prisoner of circumstance after 1918 as leader of a coalition government dominated by the Conservatives and by supporters of the Unionist cause. There is some support for this argument. A member of his coalition government, the Conservative Bonar Law (who opposed Home Rule and would succeed Lloyd George as prime minister), was of the view that the Irish had to be coerced and that they were 'an inferior race'.³⁰ But others disagree.³¹ What is clear is that Lloyd George had no prospect of finding a solution unless he could persuade his Conservative and Unionist colleagues to accept it, as he had failed to do in 1916.³²

Against a deteriorating situation in Ireland, he pushed through the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, which made provision for Home Rule parliaments in Dublin and Belfast. This took place against a background of armed conflict that meant implementing these provisions was impossible. Peace in Ireland would be required before a settlement could be achieved. This takes us back to the conversation between Lloyd George and Thomas Jones in the summer of 1921 with which I began.

³⁰ *Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary, vol. 1: 1916-1925*, ed. by Keith Middlemass (London, 1969), p. 130.

³¹ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Lloyd George and the Irish', in *Ireland after the Union* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 83-103; Deirdre McMahon, 'Ireland, the Empire and the Commonwealth', in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2006), p. 206.

³² D. G. Boyce, 'How to settle the Irish Question: Lloyd George and Ireland, 1916-21', in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: Twelve Essays* (London, 1971), pp. 137-64; Francis Costello, 'Lloyd George and Ireland, 1919-1921: An Uncertain Policy', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 14, No. 1 (Jul., 1988), 5-16.

The deliberations leading to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 were complicated by a number of key questions. One, of course, was the role of Ulster in these new arrangements. Since at least 1912, Lloyd George had toyed with ideas of partition and increasingly spoke, in private at least, about the loyalty of Ulster and his refusal to coerce such loyal citizens into a self-governing Ireland. His contacts over time with the Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson, were important here.³³

However, equally important was the question, since 1919, of whether the south could be a republic, sovereign and independent. This part of the negotiations turned around a number of contentious areas – whether the Crown would remain head of state, security matters and the role of the proposed Free State in the Empire. The debate about sovereignty in the negotiations focused on these questions.

On behalf of the British government, Lloyd George insisted that a self-governing Ireland must remain in the empire and thus could not enjoy independent sovereignty. This view had its origins in his thinking about Welsh Home Rule in the 1890s, developed further during the South African War and taken forward again when dealing with the dominions during the First World War. It was based, fundamentally, on a vision of empire as one of cooperating self-governing nations. This had achieved a degree of practical application with his imperial war council of 1917, but it had also been a feature of the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919, where the prime minister represented the British Empire

³³ On Carson, see Alvin Jackson, *Judging Redmond and Carson* (Dublin, 2018).

but also insisted on full consultation with representatives of the self-governing dominions, including Billy Hughes, the Welsh prime minister of Australia.

During 1921, the question of whether Southern Ireland should be accorded dominion status within the empire came to the fore. This was an important shift in the nature of the constitutional debate. Lloyd George had always thought of Ireland as one of the four nations of the United Kingdom and consequently it could be accommodated by a form of devolution within that structure. Dominion status was different. It was also rather vague. The Colonial Conference of 1907 had created this new, if somewhat ambiguous, term for those self-governing units of the empire that had been known as colonies. These included Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Could Ireland join their ranks? But what was a dominion? Thomas Jones commissioned a confidential memorandum from an expert in the field who conceded it was not possible to define the idea.³⁴

Whatever it meant in practice, since 1917 Lloyd George had rejected the possibility of dominion status for Ireland.³⁵ Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and therefore, in his view, could not enjoy the same sort of relationship to the empire as the former colonies. He insisted it remained impossible in conversations with General Smuts of South Africa who was partial to the idea. However, Lloyd George would be forced to change his views on the matter.

³⁴ Lionel Curtis, 'Memorandum on dominion status' ('Secret'), 17 Oct. 1921, Irish National Archives, DE/2/304/1/39.

³⁵ Minutes of a meeting of the War Cabinet, 17 October 1917, TNA, CAB 23/13/23.

Ireland's relationship to the empire remained a sticking point in the negotiations. Eamonn De Valera, attempted to get around this by suggesting his own vague formulation of what he described as external association with 'the community of nations known as the British Empire'. In the end, the Irish Free State became a self-governing dominion.

Conclusion

On a number of occasions Lloyd George insisted that he wanted to settle the Irish Question, and I think he was sincere in wishing to do so. He championed numerous schemes for different types of Irish self-government during his career. Nevertheless, underlying them all was a belief that the United Kingdom was composed of four nations, each with distinctive demands that should be respected, and that the UK was an imperial state. Empire was for him the framework of his political life in the same way that the United States today is the world within which politicians from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or Texas operate. For Lloyd George it was possible to reform the UK within the context of empire – whether that concerned national grievances like Welsh Church disestablishment or Irish Home Rule, or social reforms like old age pensions and national insurance.

In one sense, of course, the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 was an enormous achievement. It took nerve and stamina to push matters to that conclusion and he had to work in a context in which many members of his coalition government were supporters of the Unionist cause to some degree or other. The Treaty removed the Irish Question from British politics for nearly half a century. But it did not 'settle Ireland' in the long term, as Thomas Jones

had hoped.³⁶ Neither the Free State nor the new Northern Ireland were what either republicans or Unionists had wanted; the result was an uneasy compromise all round.

One of the more insightful comments on the diplomatic success of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 is that by the historian A.J.P. Taylor, who wrote that Lloyd George had conjured the Irish question out of existence.³⁷ This description plays on the characterisation of him as the 'Welsh Wizard', an image that appeared in more than one cartoon relating to Ireland. A cartoon titled 'The Kindest Cut of All' that was published at time of Government of Ireland Act showed the Welsh Wizard on stage with a map of Ireland divided in two, with him saying to his audience:

I now proceed to cut this map into two parts and place them in the hat. After a suitable interval they will be found to have come together of their own accord - (aside) - at least let's hope so; I've never done this trick before.³⁸

As all adults know, magicians don't succeed in making items actually disappear; this is an illusion, a sleight of hand. It's tempting to see the Anglo-Irish Treaty in similar terms. The Civil War in the south and the communal violence against Catholics in Northern Ireland in the 1920s was a stark reminder that the problem had not gone away but had been relocated.

³⁶ For interesting comments on this, see Garret Fitzgerald, *Ireland in the World: Further Reflections* (Dublin, 2005), ch. 3.

³⁷ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (2001 edn), p. 161. Quoted in: Kevin Matthews, *Fatal Influence: The Impact of Ireland on British Politics, 1920-1925* (2004).

³⁸ *Punch*, 3 October 1920.

The Free State – Saorstát Éireann – came into existence in 1922 and would remain formally a dominion within the empire until 1937, but in practice it meant that the United Kingdom had lost around 22.5% of its territory, a fact rarely registered by British historians. In the longer term, it might be added, it bequeathed problems for Welsh and Welsh-based Labour politicians. At the time of the re-emergence of The Troubles in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s, it absorbed the energies of Home Secretaries like James Callaghan and Merlyn Rees, and the MP for East Flintshire Eirene White, who had been born in Belfast, while the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement involved the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and Wales – Paul Murphy, Peter Hain and Ron Davies. But that is a discussion for another occasion.

What we can say in conclusion is that in trying to ‘settle Ireland’ Lloyd George operated in a way many of his English contemporaries did not, as someone who, from a Welsh perspective, understood the territorial dimension to British and Irish politics. That awareness had been present since his youth. During his career, the context for understanding such problems was that of empire, and it was one he embraced. As far as he was concerned, he was offering Ireland not subjugation, but equality; not servitude, but ‘a partnership in the greatest Empire in the world, in the greatest day of its glory’.³⁹ In the end, however, he was unable to reconcile Irish republicans to his vision of a cooperative, self-governing empire under the Crown. As that empire unravelled in the decades after his death in 1945, and country after country seized its independence, the long-term limitations of his vision would be exposed.

³⁹ *The Times*, 10 November 1920.