

# STAGING THE TREATY

## 1. INTO THE MAELSTROM: DAYS 1–4 OF THE DEBATES

The Plenipotentiaries have arrived back in Dublin to present the Treaty they have signed for ratification by Dáil Éireann.

The Dáil goes into Private Session to discuss matters. Arthur Griffith, for the Delegation, outlines the process that led up to the decision to sign, while De Valera argues, with some force, that they should not have signed and that they had no authority to commit the Dáil to its terms.

A bitter argument ensues, about whether or not the Delegation exceeded their authority, with Griffith and Collins, together with Erskine Childers, claiming that they interpreted the meaning of the Cabinet meeting that took place before they returned to London as giving them authority to sign. De Valera, and Cathal Brugha, in particular, deny this. De Valera introduces Document No. 2, his alternative to the Treaty.

It is clear that we have, from the outset, the makings of a split.

## 2. THE BATTLE OF THE TITANS: DAYS 5–8 OF THE DEBATES

The Dáil is now in Public Session. Arthur Griffith proposes adoption of the Treaty, De Valera opposes this.

Collins argues that, drawing on correspondence between De Valera and Lloyd George, it was clear before negotiations began that the Republic was not on the cards. He denies, in the face of Deputies making the allegation, that they have betrayed the Republic, and makes the further point that the Treaty only becomes valid if ratified by the Dáil.

It is clear now that the Dáil is split on the question of an Oath of Allegiance, accepting the King of England as Head of State. Childers argues that the prior Oath is to be to the Constitution, and that the Oath of Allegiance is nullified if it is claimed to take precedence over the Oath to the Constitution.

Opposition Deputies focus on the Oath of Allegiance as the point on which they will break.

## 3. THE PURGE: DAYS 9–11 OF THE DEBATES

As the Debate unfolds, key figures begin to crystallise what is at stake. We see Deputies identifying and lining up with factional leaders. Piaras Béaslaí demands of those against the Treaty to say what alternative they propose. Countess Markievicz forcefully argues for the chimerical Republic. Liam de Róiste, in a quietly electric speech, calls on the Assembly to put first and foremost what is good for the people of Ireland. Cathal Brugha makes a vitriolic speech against the person of Michael Collins. The patriot dead are invoked on both sides.

Former comrades are turning into bitter enemies. Chaos is threatening on all sides. Underneath the increasingly angry speeches, the undermusic of sorrow, of tragedy, is beginning to be heard, the incipient, terrible split is coming closer.

In perhaps his greatest speech in these Debates, De Valera emerges as the leader around whom those who will never accept the Treaty, will rally.

#### **4. THE BALLOT: DAYS 12 & 13 OF THE DEBATES**

Private Session. Attempts to find common ground have failed. De Valera announces that he proposes to resign as President. In the Public Session he says he no longer has confidence in the members of the Cabinet. He further states that, if re-elected by a majority he will have the right to select his own Cabinet and that he will throw out this Treaty.

De Valera's resignation would require the suspension of Standing Orders. Griffith argues that the matter before the Dáil is in fact the question of ratifying the Treaty and that this matter cannot be derailed. The Speaker rules in his favour. Griffith calls, in an impassioned speech, for the Treaty to be passed. And the vote is taken.

The Treaty passes, 64 for, 57 against. Michael Collins asks that a kind of Joint Committee be formed. Mary Mac Swiney is trenchant: there can be no such union. De Valera asks all those who voted against the Treaty to meet with him on the following day.

The Dáil has spoken, but there will be no peace.