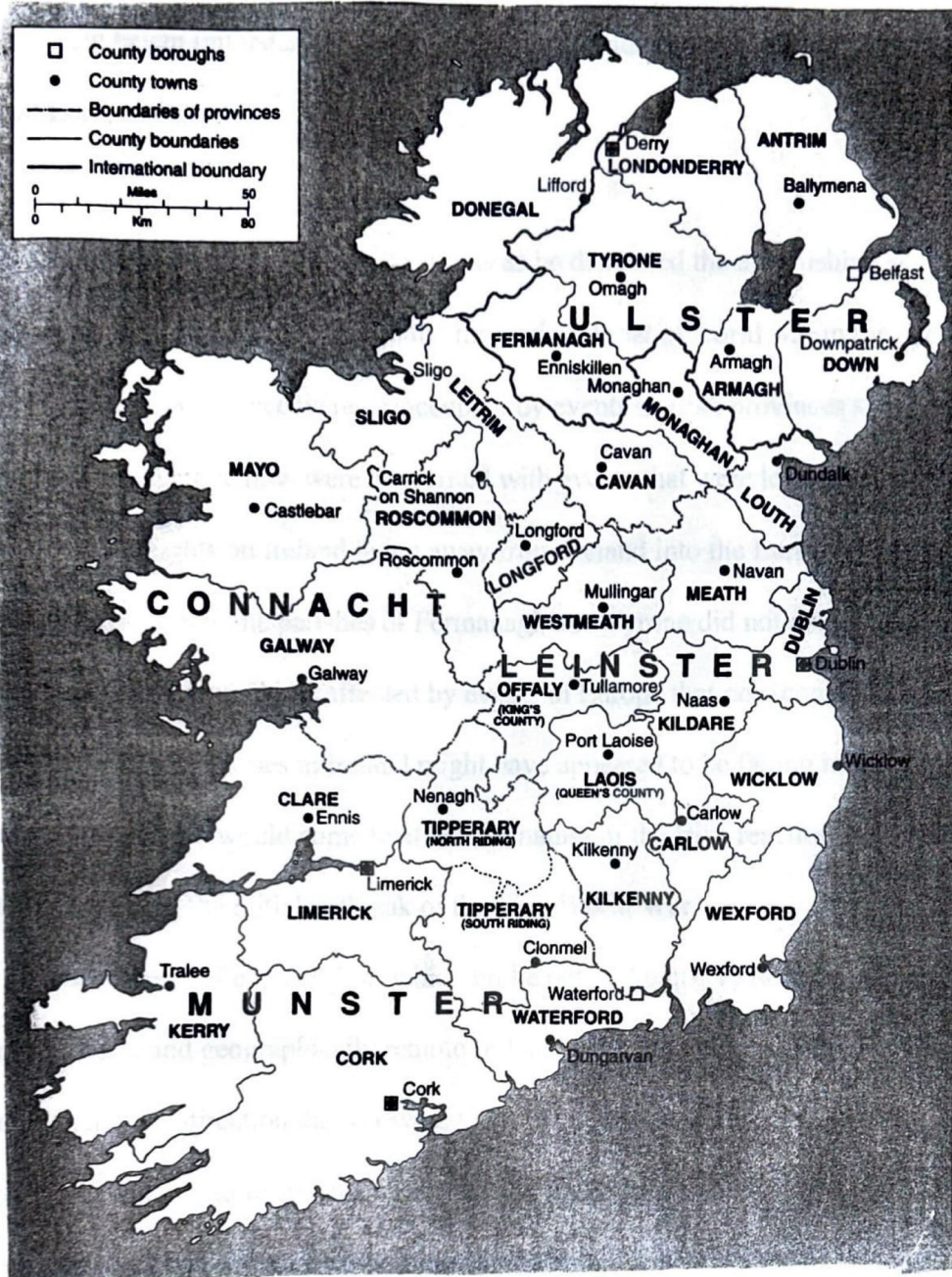


History Senior Honor Thesis  
Professor Kenneth Mouré  
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**Ireland: provinces, countries and county towns**

Source: T.W Moody, F.X. Martin & F.J Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland IX, Maps, Genealogies, Lists: A Companion to Irish History, Part II* (Oxford, 1983). Cited in Alvin Jackson's *Ireland 1798-1998*.



"The parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone faded into the mists and squalls of Ireland and a strange light began immediately, but by perceptible gradations, to fall and grow upon the map of Europe."<sup>1</sup>

Winston Churchill wrote these words as he discussed the diminishing concern for the situation in Ireland with regard to the increasing threat of world war in the summer of 1914. Politicians who once were preoccupied by events in Irish provinces such as Fermanagh and Tyrone now were concerned with events that were leading to war in Europe. As the lights on Ireland faded away from Ireland into the European landscape, the issues surrounding the parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone did not disappear completely, for they would be affected by events in Europe that now controlled the spotlight. While the issues in Ireland might have appeared to be fading into the mists, in actuality these issues would come to affect the nature of the Irish reactions to and attitudes regarding the initial outbreak of the First World War.

The scope of the Great War, which broke out in August 1914, was so great that even politically and geographically remote Ireland was affected by it. While no one could have predicted the direction the war would take or the changes it would create in its wake, each country had its own expectations and agendas to how the war would progress and what it would mean to their own country. Historians have concentrated on the major belligerent powers and have examined their expectations. Studies of the outbreak of war for the nations of Germany, France and Great Britain have been undertaken, but there has

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<sup>1</sup> Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 100.

been a relative neglect of Ireland in the context of the outbreak of war. Irish historical scholarship on the war has mainly been preoccupied with the attitudes of World War One building up to and after the Easter Rising and the Irish. This neglect of Irish reactions has left out an interesting study of how the Irish interpreted the international crisis, as well as how the history of Ireland in the Great War can enrich our understanding of the influences domestic interests play in the public and political response to international crisis. To place Ireland in the context of reactions to the outbreak of World War One, it is beneficial to first look at how historians have treated the major belligerent countries in their responses to the events in the summer of 1914.

### **Studies of Other Nations**

The historiography regarding the reactions to the outbreak of the First World War by various nations has greatly focused on the "war enthusiasm" that swept across Europe. Recent studies shown that it was not just simply exuberant jingoism, but rather that enthusiasm was an overall favorable reception to the start of war that varied in degree and location.<sup>2</sup> However, while it is disputed to what extent the enthusiasm was, there was an overall sense of acceptance and endorsement throughout the fighting nations of the call to arms. Scholarship has turned to studying views of national identity and ideas of community when evaluating the various enthusiasms for the outbreak of war in 1914.

Throughout cities in Germany in July and August of 1914, hype and enthusiasm were the dominate responses and attitudes towards the war. The parades, gathering of crowds and displays of patriotism have led historians to conclude that Germans, for at

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<sup>2</sup> Adrian Gregory, "British 'War Enthusiasm' in 1914: a Reassessment," in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. Gail Braybon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003) w pg. 67-70.



least the first six months, were fully dedicated and fervent about war. However, recent studies have looked further into these displays of enthusiasm and have reached a fuller understanding behind the reasons for enthusiasm. Peter Fritzsche viewed the hype in the summer of 1914 and the sequential months of war as the establishment of a new German psyche. He saw the reactions to war in the last months of 1914 as reactions to a new opportunity for German nationalism. To explain the German reactions as strictly war enthusiasm would be to miss the point that these reactions created a new nationalist public that was more inclusive and less hierarchical. For Germans, the outbreak of war promoted the recognition of common ties that bound the German people as a single nation.<sup>3</sup>

Modris Eksteins, in *The Rites of Spring*, also looked beyond the traditional account of German reaction to war as just simply war frenzy. Eksteins saw the First World War as a war for liberation: an emancipation of all sorts of things, for all nations.<sup>4</sup> For Germany the outbreak of war was an emancipation of the spirit. He wrote that "in August 1914, most Germans regarded the armed conflict they were entering in spiritual terms."<sup>5</sup> He argued that the first six months for the Germans were spiritually necessary, not only for the political understanding of themselves but for the nation's self-esteem and image. According to Eksteins the war presented the Germans with a "supreme test of spirit, and as such, a test of vitality, culture and life."<sup>6</sup>

Eksteins and Fritzsche both agree that Germany saw the war in defensive terms. They saw themselves and their new national identity being surrounded and suffocated by

<sup>3</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 90.

the other nations in Europe. Britain, through her dominance of the sea, further seemed to limit Germany's growth on the sea. The physical boundaries that these great powers formed produced a bar on Germany's growth towards a great power herself and limited the expansion and expression of the cultural life they had been attempting to gain. For Germany the war was their only chance to defend against their confinement by other nations.

Great Britain, too, had a defensive notion of the outbreak of war. For them, however, they felt the war was undertaken in defense of civilization. They believed that German barbarism was what initiated the war and it was Great Britain who would need to uphold the codes of society and defend the world against the treaty-breaking, uncivilized Germans. Eksteins viewed this British understanding of the outbreak through their understanding of the 'sporting spirit.' He believed that this understanding of a war in defense of civilization was due to the British emphasis on game-like values. Eksteins wrote: "decency, fortitude, grit, civilization, Christianity, commerce, all blends into one—the game!"<sup>7</sup> The English believed that these values, which were played out in sporting matches, would be played out in war. The idea of forging British ideals and virtues in a legitimized organization of violence, undertaken for the defense of civilization and morality, produced a feeling of enthusiasm and a sense of community among those that supported it.

When it comes to explaining the dominate support that the French had for the outbreak of war, studies have focused on how important war was in solidifying a national rehabilitation. War was greeted with a favorable reception because it created a unified and durable national community in which this rehabilitation could take place. Studies

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<sup>7</sup> Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 122.



have looked at how internal division in France prior to World War One had caused a depression in national self-respectability and unity. There were many different sectors of society that were at odds with the Republic. The Catholic Church had become estranged from the Republic. The Army and the Republic, highlighted by the Dreyfus Affair, also had its disagreements. And the socialist opposition to the Republic had further caused splintering of a national community prior to the summer of 1914. Historian Leonard V. Smith argued that through the doctrine of the offensive and its believed morality, the war was rendered as a "respectable nationalist aggression" and that war provided a "means of regaining collective self-respect after the Dreyfus debacle."<sup>8</sup> With President Poincaré's declaration of Union sacrée, the internal divisions that were present seemed to have faded into a national community surrounding the war. Socialists, as well as the Catholic Church, were welcomed into a national community. Smith wrote that "the Union sacrée emerged through inclusion, through the integration of communities hitherto excluded from the configuration of forces that ruled the Third Republic."<sup>9</sup> War enthusiasm for the French was an endorsement of the factors that would defeat German aggression as well as forge a national identity and community amidst fears of internal divisions.

Recent studies have looked at European intellectuals' overwhelming enthusiasm of the outbreak of war in August. Roland Stomberg in *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914*, articulated this idea and offered many reasons why such warlike ideas were espoused by Europe's intellectuals. These reasons include an intellectual "hatred of the existing society;... [a desire] for honor and courage against bourgeois pettiness of spirit;...and above all a desire to rejoin the national community in order to

<sup>8</sup> Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *France and the Great War*, 28.

repair the divisions of a fragmented, sundered society.”<sup>10</sup> Stromberg concluded that the resurrection of the community and the resulting crisis of social relationships forced intellectuals to a “primitive instinct to do battle against a common foe to remedy this crisis.”<sup>11</sup>

When war broke out in August 1914, a fundamental belief was that it would it would only last for a short period of time; many believed that it would be over by Christmastime. The belief that it would require men, mobilization, and supplies for only five months affected greatly how the belligerent nations thought of and approached the war.

The enthusiasm that ranged across the major belligerent nations stemmed from various national identities of themselves. For them, enthusiasm was due to the fact that war was an important factor in promoting traits of national pride and solidifying a community that shared these ideas. It provided an opportunity to surmount domestic political problems that caused strife in each respective country through a unified, legitimate, and moral violence. At this level of understanding of the various national attitudes towards the outbreak of war, I would like to turn and look at Ireland. At the time, Ireland was a part of the British Empire and with the British declaration of war on 3 August 1914 Ireland was forced to view the war as part of their own struggle too. The issues of enthusiasm and the importance of war in relation to national identity and a sense of community, along with the reliance on collective violence to forge this national identity amidst domestic political problems, show up in Ireland in fascinating and sometimes similar ways, to those of those nations already mentioned

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<sup>10</sup> Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence, Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), 197.

<sup>11</sup> Stromberg, *Redemption by War*, 197.



Ireland would appear to be an odd location to find enthusiasm for war due to several unique situations. First, Ireland was subordinate to Britain, which had created hostilities between the two in the past. Secondly, Ireland's remoteness from European politics created a situation different from that of England, France and Germany. Lastly, Ireland's domestic problems concerning the Home Rule Crisis, which was at its height in 1914, created completely unusual circumstances. The issue of Home Rule dominated the Irish political arena as well as the Irish psyche, and led to intense hostility throughout Ireland in 1914. Half of the population believed that in their struggle for Home Rule, England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity, while another quarter of the population threatened civil war if Home Rule was implemented. The 'Irish Question', as the British termed this situation, would become a determining factor in the way the Irish viewed the first couple months of the Great War.

#### **The Irish Situation Before August 1914**

Twentieth century Ireland prior to August 1914 was absorbed by the issue of Home Rule. This issue, because of its intensity and scale, would factor into how the Irish perceived the outbreak of war. Ireland was a colony of England and the Act of the Union in 1801 vested all Irish governmental power in the British government in Westminster. Home Rule was the plan to reverse this action and bring a governmental body back to Dublin. Essentially, the Home Rule Bill would create an Irish parliament within the United Kingdom. This Irish parliament would be bicameral, with a 40-member Senate and 164-member House of Commons. It would also reduce the number of Irish Representatives in Westminster from 108 to 42. The Irish would have more control over

their own government, but less say in Imperial matters. The legislative powers that the Irish would obtain would be general law making for the peace, order and maintenance of good government. The Irish government would not control defense, trade outside Ireland, the collection of taxes, the Royal Irish Constabulary (the police force), or the post office.<sup>12</sup> With the passing of the Home Rule Bill, Ireland would gain the status of an English Dominion, instead of an English colony.

But the issue of Home Rule was more than just a political issue; it was also a social one. The forces that drove Home Rule were forces that established identity. The movements for and against Home Rule were a culture. The issues behind Home Rule were absorbed in how one perceived their Irishness in relation to their Britishness. It was an ideology rooted in part religion and part tradition.

The political and social debate over Home Rule was articulated by the two competing sides: Nationalists and Unionists. In its simplest breakdown, the Nationalists favored Home Rule and the Unionists opposed it. But these two groups were more complex than that and a brief explanation of these two sectors of Irish society helps to understand the events prior to August 1914 and the outbreak of war in that same month. Historian Nuala Johnson wrote, "Ireland's role in the war was consistently interpreted through the lens of the conflicting tropes of identity on the Island."<sup>13</sup> It is important to look at these differing identities first to better understand the Irish reaction to the outbreak of World War One.

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Nuala Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.



### The Nationalists

Irish nationalism was divided into two main groups, each of which had extended factions, but at its core Irish nationalism in 1914 saw Ireland as a distinct nation worthy of self-government. Irish Nationalists saw themselves as Irish, first and foremost. Their relationship with Britain had to allow for a distinct Irishness to be exhibited. Irish Nationalists also tended to be Catholic, although not exclusively.

The first main group in Irish nationalism was the Parliamentary, or Constitutional Nationalists. By the year 1914, the Parliamentary Nationalists were headed by John E. Redmond. Their party, the Irish Parliamentary Party, was a political machine designed to work within Westminster to advance the causes of Ireland and Home Rule. The practice of working through Westminster and the British parliamentary system to achieve Home Rule had begun in the 1870's, but Irish nationalism itself had a much longer history. Nationalism as a political movement first became a serious contender in British Parliamentary debate with the advent of Charles Stewart Parnell, the predecessor to Redmond. Their agenda for Home Rule was mainly political, working with the liberals in Westminster. Ironically, this approach required working within the British Government to gain an autonomous Irish government. The passing of Home Rule relied heavily on the Irish working within the Britain system itself.<sup>14</sup>

Another variant of nationalism was cultural nationalism. It had its origins further back than parliamentary nationalism. Cultural nationalists relied more heavily on the establishment of an Irish nation through cultural means. They emphasized the Irish language, as well as uniquely Irish sporting events such as hurling and Gaelic football. Organizations such as the Gaelic League, designed to promote the Irish language, and the

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<sup>14</sup> R.F Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 421-426.

Gaelic Athletic Association, used to promote Irish sporting matches, harnessed the cultural energies of the nationalist movement, and provided activities and events which became popular entertainment in Ireland. The cultural nationalists felt that the best way to achieve Home Rule would be through exhibiting a nationalists' identity. Cultural nationalists feared that the British presence would Anglicize Ireland and they worked to counteract this.<sup>15</sup>

Cultural nationalism varied greatly and was embraced by many different organizations, both political and non-political. It tended to be more radical and militant than parliamentary nationalism. Some advanced forms of cultural nationalism called for Irish revolts to overthrow England. Cultural nationalism put greater importance on achieving Home Rule without the aid of the English government, but rather through demonstrations of their own nationalism. However, through Redmond's predecessor, Parnell, cultural nationalism and parliamentary nationalism were merged.<sup>16</sup> By 1914, some Parliamentary nationalists were also cultural nationalists and some cultural nationalists supported the parliamentary aspects.

Cultural nationalism tended to be more hostile toward Great Britain and usually distrusted her acts. Some groups of cultural nationalists openly denounced England and the tyranny and destruction she had caused in Ireland. They made it clear through a slogan coined by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a cultural nationalist organization, that they were waiting for "England's difficulty" so that Ireland could achieve her opportunity. It was mainly due to these open denunciations of Great Britain that overt

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<sup>15</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 169-184.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, *Ireland*, 93.



Irishness became analogous with sedition and Irish patriotism often gained a stigma as being traitorous and connected with terrorist acts.

The tensions caused by the Home Rule issue in 1913 and 1914 led to the formation of two opposing volunteer armies in Ireland. The Irish Volunteers, formed in November of 1913, under Eoin MacNeill, were a response to the increasing threat from the unionists' volunteer army, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The Irish Volunteers were intended to maintain the law if any outburst or conflict occurred due to UVF action. The Irish Volunteers also had social practicality and an entertainment aspect to it. The Volunteers were formed in the various local Irish communities where camaraderie and social events provided entertainment for the youth of Ireland, and drilling and practice provided structure and discipline for them as well. The Irish Volunteers provided a sense of community based on nationalism.

The Irish Volunteers were mostly made up of cultural nationalists, especially those who strongly believed in the use of organized militancy to forge and demonstrate nationalism. In July 1914, after tensions increased in the north with the UVF, and due to the rising popularity of the Irish Volunteers, Redmond and his party established their authority over the group, placing 25 new members on the Provisional Committee, all of which were Irish Parliamentary Party nominees.<sup>17</sup> Redmond's affiliation with the Irish Volunteers legitimized the organization and gave it more structure. However, this mixing of cultural and political nationalists in a militant field caused a great deal of tension among the nationalists and affected what course of participation the Irish Volunteers' would take in the war. The idea of an armed volunteer army drilling and practicing in the

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<sup>17</sup> Jackson, *Ireland*, 167.

name of nationalist Ireland meant a lot to the Irish, both socially and politically, and played a role in the Irish nationalists' view of the outbreak of war.

### The Unionists

Opposing Home Rule were those in favor of Ireland remaining a part of the Union with Britain. They were called Unionists and they were predominately Protestant.

Unionism, like nationalism, was more than just a political identity. Unionism was part of tradition and identity. Thomas Hennessy wrote "for Irish Unionists the status of British subjectship was far more than a legal definition. It contained a deep emotional tie to the notion of a Britishness ..."<sup>18</sup>

Unionists, like the nationalists, were divided. One division was a geographical split between the Unionists of Ulster (named after the Northeastern Irish province) and the southern Unionists. However, geography wasn't the only or main dividing factor. The Ulster Unionists were divided by their southern brethren by class, socio-economic interests and militarism. The Southern Unionists tended to be rooted in agriculture and made up of the old landed classes. The Unionists, however, were industrialized and export oriented. Because of the decline in the landed class at the time and the profitability of industry in the North, the Southern Unionists were fewer in number and weaker in political strength than their northern counterparts.

The differences between the Southern and Ulster Unionists had a social and mental impact. Ulster tended to be more organized and more militant in its anti-Home Rule campaign. This was due mainly to the fact that in Ulster unionists were the majority, while in the South unionists were the minority. This meant unionism became

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<sup>18</sup>Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, 5.



the dominant identity of Ulster. Because of this, Home Rule was much more of a threat to the livelihood of Ulster and they were much more willing to take military action.

Ulster's leaders were one reason why Ulster Unionism was so successful. Just prior to the war, the leader of the Irish Unionist Party, the Unionist equivalent to the Irish Parliament Party, was Edward Carson. Carson was not only the leader of this island-wide political party, he was also head of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC), which provided the central structures for the Unionist organization in Ulster. Carson, as historian Roy Foster describes him, was "a brilliant Dublin lawyer, emotionally committed to the Union."<sup>19</sup> Between the high profile that Carson brought to the Ulster Unionist movement, and the organization ability of Ulsterman James Craig, the UUC and the Ulster unionist movement was highly popular and effective

The Ulster Unionists, with their capable and determined leadership, took action starting with large demonstrations in Ulster in 1911 denouncing Home Rule. In September 1912 they organized the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant. This was a declaration that if Home Rule was enacted, the Ulster Unionists would rebel and civil war would follow. It provided a provisional government in Ulster if Home Rule went through. Thomas Hennessey describes the covenant and the willingness to declare civil war as a desire to fight for ideals of Britishness. He describes the act as a psychological commitment; a pledge to defend the unity of the Empire.<sup>20</sup>

This psychological commitment was backed up by a real military threat, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which made civil war credible. The UVF was officially established by January of 1913, but they had begun as local armed militia, boasting an

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<sup>19</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 465.

<sup>20</sup> Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, 14.

estimated membership total of 100,000 by 1912.<sup>21</sup> They were well organized and practiced in drilling. The UVF, stemming from a militant tradition in the Protestant grouping called the Orange Order. While the UVF focused mainly on securing the Union, and was less bigoted than the Orange Order, there were some Orangemen who participated in the UVF. Like the Orange Order, the UVF provided a social, organization and community of Ulstermen rooted in a military understanding.

To strengthen this military threat and make it legitimate the UVF required guns. The struggle for arms became hugely important in pre-war Ireland and became an issue both volunteer forces had to deal with when war broke out. Britain, trying to limit the guns into Ireland, had banned the import of guns into Ireland, but gun smuggling continued. In one incident at Larne in April of 1914, 25,000 rifles and 3 million rounds of ammunition came in from Germany illegally. While the gun smuggling at Larne was blatantly obvious, the British Government turned a blind eye to the illegal activity. However, a similar gun running scheme for the Irish Volunteers in July of 1914 resulted in British troops opening fire on a crowd and killing four. The gun-running scheme at Larne showed the British prejudices towards the nationalists and the connectedness between the British and unionists.

An incident in March 1914 further demonstrated that the British military sided with the Unionist cause. On the brink of civil war in early March 1914, the British army ordered that troops be stationed in Ulster to suppress any activity by the UVF. The British troops, some of which came from Ulster, sympathized with the UVF and supported their cause. They believed that UVF actions were out of loyalty to the crown. Because of these connections a group of officers and soldiers in Curragh declared that

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<sup>21</sup> Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, 4.



they would rather be dismissed than be engaged in hostilities against the UVF. The resignation of these British soldiers became known as the Curragh Incident and demonstrated the inability of the British government to use the army to control the situation in Ulster.<sup>22</sup> It also demonstrated the loyalty, sympathy and connection the British army had with the Ulster Unionists and the UVF.

### Ireland Faced with War

Ireland appeared to be on the brink of civil war; Irish society was polarized, militarized and volatile. There was a sense of urgency both in Britain and Ireland to find a solution to the Home Rule Crisis and halt an impending disaster. At the start of 1914 the Irish Question seemed to be the issue that would be at the forefront of social and political discussion for the remainder of the year. The outbreak of World War in Europe changed all of that. Ireland now had to face a European conflict that loomed greater than the issue of Home Rule. How would they react to this in light of their domestic environment? Home Rule was far from settled but the War presented a new pressing issue to be dealt with. The Irish in their unstable situation would now have to view Home Rule alongside the War. Did the uncertainty of Home Rule affect what role the Irish would take in the war? Would the Unionists find their place alongside the British Empire in a military conflict? Did the Nationalists think that War would precipitate the Home Rule Bill? How did each sector of the Irish population react to the outbreak of war when they already had a unique setting from that of the other European countries? And how did these unusual qualities affect each division's reaction to war?

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<sup>22</sup> Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, 44.

### The Nationalist Reaction

The nationalists in Ireland had the traditional catch phrase of "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity." The advent of World War in August was England's biggest difficulty to date. Logically the thought would be for nationalists to take this opportunity to stand against Great Britain and refuse to participate or support her side during the conflict. Prior to the outbreak of war a few Irishmen were even looking towards German aid for the Irish struggle, especially with the importation of guns.<sup>23</sup> However, a very different response came from the nationalists. They did not side with Germany nor did they denounce England's role in the war. The majority of nationalists' response to the war was one of a general enthusiasm for war on the side of England and the allies. Many nationalists overwhelmingly committed themselves to the war effort. To understand the reasons for why they did not view the war as an English adversity which should be taken advantage of but rather something to rally in support of England, for one must look at Nationalist leader, John Redmond, who took the lead in voicing the Parliamentary Nationalists' support for the British war effort. It was through his projection of the ideals and understandings of the war that most mainstream nationalists came to understand the war and therefore many responded in accordance to Redmond's beliefs of the war.

In addition to Redmond and his enthusiasm, it is important to look at the split in the Irish Volunteers in September of 1914, which revealed the conflicting concerns of Irish nationalists in reaction to the outbreak of war. The split in the Irish Volunteers offers further understandings of Nationalists' response to the outbreak of war. The Irish Volunteers' concerns would lead them to a slightly different response and understanding

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<sup>23</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 479.



of war than that of Redmond. Furthermore, to get a complete picture of how the Irish Nationalists responded one must look at those nationalists who rejected their place with the English in the war and notice the reasons behind their choice. By looking at Redmond, the Irish Volunteers and those nationalists who objected to siding with Britain in war, one gets a good understanding of the complexity of Irish Nationalists response to the outbreak of the Great War.

Redmond outlined his beliefs and reactions regarding Ireland's relationship to England and the European conflict on 3 August 1914 in a speech to the House of Commons. Redmond acknowledged that Ireland's reputation towards Great Britain had not always been good. He stated that "in times past, when this Empire has been engaged in these terrible enterprises, it is true—it would be the utmost affectation and folly on my part to deny it—the sympathy of the nationalists of Ireland, for reasons to be found deep down in centuries of history, has been estranged from this country..."<sup>24</sup> He went on to say that times had changed and Irish nationalists were now fully ready to support Great Britain in her causes. According to Redmond, this past stigma of Irish angst towards England had now subsided with the threat of war. He even offered the Irish Volunteers, who had been under his control since June of that year, for defense of the shores of Ireland. This speech received great approval by the British and helped bolster the Irish mainstream nationalists' enthusiasm for the war. The reason behind Redmond dispelling Ireland's past animosities towards England and his full-fledged support for the English war cause was due to the way that Redmond and many parliamentary nationalist perceived the outbreak of war. Redmond went on in his speech to outline some of these perceptions.

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<sup>24</sup> Dennis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972) pp. 356

Redmond perceived that the war offered an opportunity for the Irish nationalists. This opportunity was not to be found in England's adversity, but rather through a favorable stance towards England and a strengthened relationship between Ireland and Great Britain. Redmond had put a new twist on the traditional nationalist catch phrase. Now nationalist opportunity would come through England's difficulty only by supporting her. This he believed would assure future peace for both Ireland and England.<sup>25</sup> In his speech Redmond hinted at some of the opportunities which support of the British would bring about. Redmond believed it would strengthen the claim for Home Rule, and bring both the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers together patching the wounds of divisions in Ireland between Ulster and the South creating a desired unity, and fortify the "integrity of the Irish Nation."<sup>26</sup> These ideas would resonate with many of the nationalists and foster their understanding of the initial months of the war.

### **Solidifying Home Rule Through Enthusiasm**

As Redmond alluded in his speech, many nationalists believed that by supporting England in the war and offering to defend Ireland, they would strengthen the argument for Home Rule. They had several reasons to believe this. First was that they believed that the noble and heroic gesture offered by Redmond would make England see Ireland deserved Home Rule because of the sacrifices that it made for England. And secondly they used Irish military strength as leverage.

Irish Nationalists also saw supporting England's war effort as a way to prove that Ireland would remain faithful to England even if it was given its own home government.

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<sup>25</sup> Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 356-357.

<sup>26</sup> Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 356-357.



This belief worked in accord with the parliamentary nationalists because their strategy in the Home Rule movement was to gain it by working with England and gain England's blessing over Home Rule. Redmond believed that the war could prove that "Home Rule was fully compatible with loyalty to the Crown and Empire."<sup>27</sup> Redmond believed that by supporting the war he could dispel some of the stigmas of Irish hostility and sedition and thus better the chances of Home Rule.

The Irish believed that England would benefit greatly from Ireland's support and they used this as a trump card to entice Great Britain into meeting their desire for Home Rule. The notion of Ireland being a strong fighting race was one embedded in the Irish psyche and the fact that the Irish had, in past conflicts, been available to fight with England made many believe that Ireland would be a strong asset to England at war. The Duke of Wellington once observed: "It is mainly to the Irish Catholics that we all owe our proud preeminence in the military career."<sup>28</sup> The Irish fighting ability was seen as a form of leverage. If England wanted Ireland's strong men then they believed that the least the British could do was offer Home Rule in return.

In an article in the *Irish Times*, Alice Stoppard Green believed that Ireland could play a crucial role in England's defenses, but Ireland could not do this because she had been denied the national patriotism that was needed to rally support. This patriotism, she said, was denied by the Act of the Union. She went on to ask "what would now be the strength of England if she had in Ireland a country of such vitality as Belgium?"<sup>29</sup> For her and for many Irish nationalists, Home Rule was simply needed because it would

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<sup>27</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 472.

<sup>28</sup> Terence Denman, *Ireland's unknown Soldier: the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division of the Great War, 1914-1918*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992) 13.

<sup>29</sup> National Library of Ireland, Mss 7982; 7983. Diary of Mrs. Augustine Henry, August 1914-October 1915.

allow Ireland to embrace Irish patriotism; a patriotism which in the past had been viewed with suspicion and was thought to be subversive to England. Green's argument was that if Home Rule was granted, Irish patriotism could flourish along side England and the English war effort would be strengthened by a supreme fighting race embraced with its own patriotism. Nationalists believed Home Rule would allow for a fuller embracing of Irishness and this would be a benefit for the British war cause.

### Unity through Enthusiasm

The intense political as well as social tensions in Ireland, which created an environment of possible civil war, eased with the outbreak of world war in August. This dwindling of differences and the appearance of unity was another reason for the enthusiastic support by the nationalists for the war. There was initial hope that the war would continue to unify the nation. Redmond's biographer, Denis Gwynn, wrote that in the war Redmond "saw at last the supreme opportunity, for which he had longed vainly, of bringing North and South together on a definitely national issue."<sup>30</sup> Unity for Ireland became a rallying call of the war and the prospect of unity produced great excitement throughout the island.

Redmond was a proponent of the belief that war would bring unity among the nationalists and unionists. He, like many mainstream nationalists, believed that good would come out of the evils of Germany in the form of ridding Ireland of the domestic strife between unionists and nationalists. Redmond felt that nothing would better bring unionists and nationalists together than fighting for the common defense of Ireland against foreign invaders. His specific hope was that the Irish Volunteers and the Ulster

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<sup>30</sup> Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 360.



Volunteer Force would join up in arms together in this defense. He stressed this issue and was constantly looking to see if Carson would be in favor of uniting both Volunteer forces.<sup>31</sup> This idea of using both the UVF and Irish Volunteers was greeted with huge approval in Ireland. The *Leitrim Advertiser* wrote that Ireland was "enthusiastic... in support of Mr. Redmond's appeal to unite with the Ulster Volunteers for the defense of the shores of Ireland against foreign invasion if the government is forced to withdraw the army out of it during the present war."<sup>32</sup> Ireland seemed to embrace the war and was thrilled with the unity it brought.

In August 1914, Redmond not only pledged support of the Irish Volunteers for defense of Ireland; he also encouraged them to sign up in the British army for overseas service. Historian Terence Denman saw this encouragement of the volunteers as a way to bring about further unity between the Ulster Unionists and the nationalists. He wrote that Redmond believed that "by serving together in the war, north and south Ireland would be reconciled on the battle field."<sup>33</sup> It was felt that a blood sacrifice would re-unify the bonds of brotherhood between Ulstermen and nationalists.

The Irish Volunteers, too, saw the war as a way to unite all Ireland. They emphasized unity through an armed group of men defending a nation. In their newspaper the *Irish Volunteer*, they focused on and used rhetoric that would encourage Irishmen to find a shared common ground through a military formation. In an article printed in September, it was written "there is one service in which they [Irishmen] come together at last: the service of their country in arms. We are realizing now how proud a thing it is to

<sup>31</sup> Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 362.

<sup>32</sup> *Leitrim Advertiser*, August 6, 1914.

<sup>33</sup> Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers*, 28.

serve....”<sup>34</sup> The war presented an armed engagement that was seen as a way to promote unity in Ireland through armed service. Defending Ireland was now a rallying point because it offered a chance to unite Ireland militarily.

The amicable atmosphere that seemed to be unifying nationalists and unionists together in a time of war was not a stable thing. The issue of Home Rule was still a consideration. Giving up or ignoring the issue of Home Rule in order to maintain the unity that resulted from his support of war was not an option for Redmond. If he were to do this it would completely alienate all nationalists, many of whom still believed that Home Rule should come above all else. However the unity amongst Irishmen would be crucial if Home Rule were to pass. By pushing Home Rule too far there could be the possibility of losing the unity and creating animosity with the unionists, especially the Ulster Unionists, and Redmond’s dream of having both groups of volunteers fighting side by side in defense of Ireland would be crushed. Redmond was concerned about this predicament, asking, “can it be expected that [this] satisfactory state of things [in Ireland] will continue if the Home Rule bill becomes law?”<sup>35</sup> In drafts of speeches he emphasized the need for Irishmen to “take up the question of the future of Ireland in a new spirit” and that Ireland needed to be a unified nation in the threat of war.<sup>36</sup> In statements such as these, Redmond was pleading with the nationalists that while Home Rule was a grave concern for them, the unity that had recently been exhibited by the outbreak of war could be something just as worthy for the national identity of Ireland. Therefore he urged that Home Rule be approached cautiously so as to maintain the fragile unity.

<sup>34</sup> *Irish Volunteer*, 19 September 1914.

<sup>35</sup> National Library of Ireland, Mss 7982; 7983 Redmond Papers.

<sup>36</sup> National Library of Ireland, Mss 7982; 7983 Redmond Papers.



The British government, too, was aware of the fragility of the situation and developed a solution: a Home Rule suspensory measure passed on 15 September 1914. This measure said that Home Rule, which was enacted three days later on 18 September, would be suspended for the duration of the war. This caused a variety of reactions in Ireland, but for Redmond and his parliamentary nationalists it was greeted with approval as a way to maintain unity but secure future Home Rule. It also was seen as proof that the enthusiastic support of the Irish Nationalists toward the English war effort did pay off in the reward of Home Rule, albeit suspended until after the war.

### A War for Civilization

While Home Rule was a grave issue of nationalist Ireland, the war that began in August 1914 presented a new understanding of war. This understanding was that it was a war for European civilization and that this was seen by some, including some Irish nationalists as more important than Home Rule alone. The belief that the war had begun because of German atrocities and the invasion of neutral Belgium and that the war was now being fought in the name of European civilization was one that resonated throughout Europe and especially among intellectuals. This notion of war affected the attitudes of the Irish, especially the Parliamentary Nationalists, who held very similar understandings of the nature of war to those of the British.

For many Irishmen, World War One was a war in the name of European civilization and a defense against German barbarism. There was an understanding in Ireland that the issue was not a matter of whether to be for or against Great Britain, but simply to be against Germany. Historian Seina Paseta wrote that in Ireland there was "a

genuine sense of outrage at German actions.”<sup>37</sup> This outrage showed up in numerous Irish newspapers, both nationalists and unionists. It ranged from the shock of German brutality to the destruction of public works of war. The horror that the Germans instilled in the Irish caused Irishmen to look favorably towards Britain and her allies and their defense against crimes of civilization.

One nationalist who espoused the importance of supporting the British cause for the security of civilization was T.M. Kettle. Kettle was in Belgium on a gun smuggling mission for the Irish Volunteers in 1914 when Belgium was invaded by the Germans. His activities as a gun smuggler for the nationalists meant that he was an adamant supporter of nationalist efforts. However, his horror at the events in Belgium following the German invasion convinced him that support for the allied war effort was a necessary and good thing.<sup>38</sup> He never disregarded Ireland and her attempts for nationalism, but he felt that the issue in Europe was on a scale much larger than Ireland alone. He saw the German actions as a destruction of European growth, a growth that Ireland could benefit from. Senia Paseta, states that his decision to support Great Britain and the war effort was because “...Europe represented progress towards democracy and sovereignty a progress in which Ireland could participate and a progress which was gravely threatened by German actions in Belgium.”<sup>39</sup>

The situation of Belgium was of crucial importance to the Irish situation. It was believed, by the British mainly, that Ireland should have empathy for the small nation of Belgium. Recruitment leaflets reading “Irishmen! Remember Belgium” and depicting

<sup>37</sup> Senia, Paseta “Thomas Kettle: ‘An Irish soldier in the army of Europe’?” in *Ireland and the Great War ‘A War to Unite Us All’?* ed. Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>38</sup> Paseta “Thomas Kettle,” 10.

<sup>39</sup> Paseta “Thomas Kettle,” 11.



ape-like Germans walking over a woman and baby, became commonplace. Belgium was also of symbolic importance to the nationalists because the majority of nationalists were Catholic. Since Belgium was predominantly a Catholic nation, and had been unjustly invaded, Irish nationalists easily made the connection with Belgium. Along with the burning of the Cathedral at Rheims, the Germans appeared to Irish Catholics as not only the destroyers of civilization but of their faith as well.

### **War Enthusiasm and National Identity**

Prior to the outbreak of World War One, Ireland, being part of the British Empire, was defended against possible foreign invasion by British troops. If an Irishman wanted to defend his country he would have to join the British army and defend his country with them. This affected the national pride of many Irishmen. The lack of a national Irish army was a particularly sensitive subject for the nationalists. When war broke out and British soldiers stationed in Ireland were called to leave Ireland and serve in Europe, the opportunity for the Irish Volunteers to act as an Irish army in defense of their own land was seen as a perfect chance to exhibit national military identity that they had always been denied.

Irishmen had been notoriously known to participate as soldiers for other countries. They had always been fighting under someone else's banner.<sup>40</sup> Many Irish nationalist saw war as an opportunity to establish a legitimate Irish army. And for many an established Irish army was essential to the legitimacy of Irish nationality. Especially those cultural and advanced nationalists who believed Ireland would gain freedom and liberty through the exertion of nationalistic identities such as an armed force. An article

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<sup>40</sup> Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers*, 13.

in the *Irish Volunteer* stated: "...I do not know how nationhood is achieved except by armed men; I do not know how nationhood is guarded except by armed men."<sup>41</sup> Because this was such an issue for the Irish Volunteers, as well as many Irish nationalists, many of their newspapers praised past Irish fighting. They believed that the bravery and heroism of the Irish could be brought together in one army, the Irish Volunteers, and that by defending Ireland during the present conflict the national identity could be solidified.

There were inherent problems in exerting Irish nationalism through armed men. One was that there was a limited supply of arms. There was a huge emphasis placed on the value of guns and obtaining guns. An Irish Volunteers' motto during the fall of 1914 was "The Rifle is the Keystone of Liberty"<sup>42</sup> There were hopes that the war would provide opportunities for the expression of national liberation through arms. The other problems that arose from trying to establish national identity through a national army during the war were discipline, organization, and regularization of the various counties' volunteers. The problems of guns and the regularization of Irish forces were hoped to be met during the war.

Redmond, too, also hoped that national identity could be solidified through the formation of an Irish army. He used his speech on 3 August as leverage to regularize the Irish Volunteers and form them into a more real and legitimate army. In a letter to Asquith on 8 August, Redmond tried to persuade him that Irish support for the British war cause would flourish if England supported the establishment of a national Irish army. Redmond wrote that an enthusiastic response, as well as an increase in Irish recruiting, would come if the British War Office "intended to entrust the defence of Ireland to the

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<sup>41</sup> *Irish Volunteers*, 19 September 1914.

<sup>42</sup> Ben Novick, "The arming of Ireland: gun-running and the Great War, 1914-16." in Gregory, 95.



Volunteers and that, for that purpose [they] would supply at any rate, some arms and some drill instructors.”<sup>43</sup> The idea that the Irish Volunteers could receive guns and top of the line drilling instruction while defending their own country in the largest war to date was a thought that produced enthusiasm for the war by many nationalists.

There really was not much actual threat of Ireland being invaded but the idea of regularizing the Irish Volunteers for the defense of Ireland was of great nationalistic importance, even though it would mean siding with England. Initially, the outbreak of war was believed to provide the opportunity for the Irish Volunteers to achieve their goal of establishing a legitimate Irish army.

However, the English were very reluctant to arm and train a group of men who had been known to denounce England and had a long tradition of hating the Empire. Even propaganda that was geared toward Irish recruiting was seen as a possible incitement of overt nationalistic opinions which could be harmful to the British. Historian Ben Novick pointed out that there were no specific Irish recruiting posters or programs for the first nine months of war. He attributed this to the War Office in London shying away from the introduction of new material aimed specifically at nationalists. He wrote, they “feared what might spring out from that Pandora’s box.”<sup>44</sup> Arming a very nationalistic population and issuing propaganda imbued with nationalistic rhetoric was seen to be playing with fire for the British, for it could lead to a sense of Irish nationalism that rejected Britain all together.

While many Irish nationalists felt that the war offered them opportunities of national venture through the defense of their own soil and the fuller professionalization of

<sup>43</sup> Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 366.

<sup>44</sup> Ben Novick, *Conceiving Revolution: Irish Nationalist Propaganda during the First World War* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 26.

the Irish Volunteers, this still put limits on the formation of an Irish national identity because it would have to be accomplished alongside the British and her war effort. While some Irish nationalists did not object to this, some were hesitant about siding with England and defending Ireland in the name of England's war effort. One cause for this hesitancy was the fear that the English would anglicize the Irish Volunteers and the Irish spirit in the Volunteers would be watered down with British regulation. In the *King's County Independent*, a nationalist newspaper, a reprint of a speech given to the General Corps of the Portarlington Volunteers showed the nationalists' desire to maintain the Irishness of the Irish Volunteers despite their working alongside the British war effort. It stated that the Volunteers were Irish and they "should not be imbued with English ideas and sentiments." It also stated that the Irish Volunteers must maintain distinct Irish clothes, distinct drill, and must overall remain as a distinct army.<sup>45</sup> Redmond emphasized that he would work for attaining these elements and that Home Rule and Irish nationalist identity was still his concern.

Nationalist support for Redmond fractured on September 20, 1914 when Redmond gave a speech in Woodenbridge, outside of Dublin, committing the Irish Volunteers for overseas service. This resulted in a split in the Irish Volunteers. Those that followed Redmond took the name Irish National Volunteers, while those that split kept the name Irish Volunteers. Around 12,000 Irish Volunteers split from Redmond, leaving him with a majority of 158,000 Volunteers.<sup>46</sup> A lot of those that split were cultural nationalists who felt that Redmond's takeover of the Irish Volunteers in June was actually a stealing away of the Volunteers by Redmond and his group. This tension had

<sup>45</sup> *King's County Independent*, August 15, 1914.

<sup>46</sup> Jackson, *Ireland*, 168.



been present in the Irish Volunteers since June but they had kept the together in order to get Home Rule through.<sup>47</sup> Home Rule, which had been passed two days prior to Redmond's Woodenbridge speech, was seen as a prompting factor for Redmond to commit the Irish Volunteers overseas. However his speech does not mention Home Rule specifically. Instead Redmond appeals to Irish military traditions and the underlines the need to uphold Irish valor by participating in a war that was embarked upon in defense of the highest values of morality. Redmond concluded that military service was not only need in Ireland to uphold the dignity of Irish nationality, but "wherever the firing-line extends..."<sup>48</sup> The split in the Irish Volunteers that resulted from this speech revealed a deeper understanding of the nationalists' viewpoint of the war, for it demonstrated a difference in opinions to how collective violence and militarism should be used in achieving a national identity.

Those who split saw militarism and the Irish Volunteers as something to be used as either leverage to achieve further nationalism or used to demonstrate Irish nationality by way of defending their own land, replacing the British troops who had done it prior. Those that split rejected the idea that the dignity of Irish nationalism could be upheld in the British forces abroad. They believed that foreign service in the war was just another incident where the Irish military tradition would be abused and used for the British cause. Opposite to what Redmond declared in his speech, they felt that Irish valor would simply be assimilated into the massive British army and national identity would be lost. Those

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<sup>47</sup> Novick "The arming of Ireland," in Gregory, pg. 110.

<sup>48</sup> John Redmond, *Woodenbridge Speech*, September 20, 1914, in Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 391/392.

who split felt that they could best highlight the distinction and merit of Irish nationality on Ireland's own soil.<sup>49</sup>

Redmond tried to counter the notion that overseas service would be the loss of the nationalistic ambition of an Irish army defending the shores of Ireland. He tried to show that a spirit of nationalism could live in the ranks of the English army. To do this he tried to convince the Irish Volunteers that the Anglicization of the Irish Volunteers overseas would not happen. He promised to work with England to get a solely Irish Brigade, with Irish leaders, Irish dress, Irish flag and Irish mottos.<sup>50</sup> He pointed out that Home Rule was on the books and that they had succeeded in that bit of nationalism. It was now time for the Irish nationalists to support England to end this war so that Home Rule could be enacted. Like all the other belligerent countries, everyone believed the war would be over shortly. No one could have guessed the course it would take and the disastrous effects that would alter the course of Irish identity.

### **Ireland faced with War: The Unionists**

The sector of Irish society that was most enthusiastic about the war was the Southern Unionists. They saw the outbreak of war as a chance for unity not only between northern and southern but between Ireland and Britain. Their enthusiasm was also due to viewing the war through the stress of civilization and the Protestant righteousness that upheld the values of civilization. Backed with their loyalty to the British Empire, the Southern Unionists saw the outbreak of war as their hour of glory.

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<sup>49</sup> Jackson, *Ireland*, 169.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?: The times and world of a southern Catholic Irish man enlisting in the British army during the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 144.



Like the Redmondite nationalists, Southern Unionists saw a huge reward in unity in the declaration of war. The Redmondite Nationalists' endorsement of England and the war cause was seen as a joyous and unifying thing. They believed that if both the nationalists and the unionists could stand with England in defense, that there was not any real difference between them and the whole Home Rule quarrel could be swept under the carpet. Historian R. B. MacDowell, echoing Winston Churchill, wrote that "for the Southern Unionists, this was their finest hour."<sup>51</sup> They could now openly embrace the patriotic efforts towards the Empire while at the same time joining in unison with the nationalists.

Seeing nationalist volunteers openly embrace the war and England gave the Southern Unionists hope that a new atmosphere of unity could be created.<sup>52</sup> Southern Unionists rejoiced at Redmond's pledge of the Irish Volunteers in defense of Ireland. Lord Monteaule, in an article in the *Leitrim Advertiser* wrote that "Mr. Redmond has [risen] nobly to the occasion. Let us Southern Unionists respond in the same spirit and join hands with Irish National Volunteers for the maintenance of order and defense of our country."<sup>53</sup> Unionist MPs and candidates repeated the same thing, constantly claiming that Redmond's action had united Ireland. Bryan Cooper, a Unionist candidate from South County Dublin, praised Redmond by saying "your speech has united Ireland...I will urge every Unionists to do the same."<sup>54</sup> Poems proclaiming the unity and internal similarities of all Irishmen filled Irish newspapers. One poem read:

<sup>51</sup>R. B. Macdowell, *Crisis and Decline: The Fate of the Southern Unionists* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997), 53, quoted in D.G. Boyce "Nationalism, Unionism and the First World War" in *Ireland and the Great War*, Gregory, 204.

<sup>52</sup>D.G Boyce "Nationalism, unionism and the First World War" in *Ireland and the Great War*, Gregory (ed.) 204.

<sup>53</sup>*Leitrim Advertiser*, August 6, 1914.

<sup>54</sup>*Leitrim Advertiser*, August 6, 1914.

"Bless the good fortune that brings us together---  
 Big men and little men, short and tall.  
 Some from the seaside and some from the heather,  
 Townsmen and countrymen---Irishmen all!  
 Ulstermen, Munstermen,  
 Connachtmen, Leinstermen  
 Faithful to Erin; we answer her call,  
 Ulstermen, Munstermen  
 Connachtmen, Leinstermen  
 True-hearted Irishmen—Irishmen all..."

The enthusiasm for the war found in the Southern Unionists was a result of this unity and the hope that it would heal the divides that had grown in early 1914.

The Southern Unionists, like Redmond and the Parliamentary nationalists, believed that unity would come through the joining of both Volunteer forces in the defense of Ireland during the war. Southern Unionist Sir William Hutcheson-Poe, sent a letter with a memorial signed by various prominent Unionists to Redmond on August 19<sup>th</sup> urging him and Carson to unite both volunteer forces for defense of Ireland. The memorial read: "We, the undersigned, sincerely desire that the two Volunteer forces shall unite in the defense of our country at this time of grave peril, and that the political question which alone prevents their doing so shall be settled by consent, earnestly appeal to you, the two Irish leaders to do your utmost to find some way by which these ends may be attained."<sup>55</sup> Enthusiasm for the war by the Southern Unionists was very similar to the Redmondites in that they both saw the Volunteer forces working in unison as the key to Ireland's reconciliation.

Not only were the Southern Unionists thrilled about the prospect of reconciliation with the nationalists, they were also happy about the idea of mending the growing divide between them and the Ulster Unionists. By the summer of 1914, the Ulster Unionists had

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<sup>55</sup> Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond*, 371.



taken on a very different form and political agenda, which included emphasis on militant action and more drastic rhetoric. There were some degrees of hostility and frustration between the southern leadership and the Ulster leadership.<sup>56</sup> The differences between Southern Unionists and Ulster Unionists were so drastic that there was an idea to partition Ireland to ease the Home Rule issue. Partition would mean that Ulster would be secluded from Home Rule and remain part of the Union, while the southern provinces would have a government headed in Dublin.<sup>57</sup> The advent of World War One presented the Southern Unionists with the chance to have a united Island and reconcile the differences between them and their northern counterpart. Drawing the two unionist groups together for support to the Empire would strengthen the unionist bond.

The Southern Unionists also saw the war as an opportunity to mend the animosity between Ireland and England. Southern Unionists were in a sticky situation when it came to the judgments of the English. As unionists they had an affinity towards England and the Empire. However, Irish Unionists also had to battle the British prejudices against the Irish as antagonists to the British Empire. The Southern Unionists also found it increasingly difficult to maintain their bond of friendship with England, because the Ulster Unionists were creating a reputation as trouble-makers. The English had grown exhausted trying to figure out what to do with the situation in Ireland and the Ulster Unionists were complicating the situation with the threat of civil war. This cast a bad light over all Irish Unionists. The Southern Unionists, who demonstrated the greatest loyalty to England, were still subject to the prejudices that affected all Irishmen. The Southern Unionists hoped that the support for the war by a united Ireland would erase

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<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *Ireland*, 232.

<sup>57</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 466.

these past negative views of the Irish. They believed that the war, supported by all Irishmen, would prove the Irish favorably to the British and visa versa.

British favorability towards the Irish came as a result of the war because the British realized that unity in Ireland and between itself and Ireland would have to be encouraged for the mobilization of the War effort. On the 3 August 1914, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, in a gesture to show the declining animosity between the two islands and forge a sense of unity, said that, "the one bright spot in the whole of this terrible situation is Ireland."<sup>58</sup> While this statement was overly optimistic, it does show that the British realized too that unity with Ireland was necessary for the war effort. They would have to be favorable and co-operate with Ireland in order to devote their attention to the international crisis, and this the Southern Unionists could capitalize on to highlight the unity of Ireland and England in the Empire.

### Ulster Unionists' Reactions

While the Southern Unionists embraced the outbreak of war with enthusiasm, the Ulster Unionists were initially very skeptical of what the advent of European War would mean for them. The Ulster Unionists were very uncertain as to what would happen to Home Rule while a European crisis was going on. During the initial two months of war the Ulster Unionists felt unsure of their role with Great Britain and with the passing of Home Rule in September, they felt a sense of political betrayal. However the Ulster Unionists ominous sense of loyalty to the Empire caused them to view the war as just a

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<sup>58</sup> Brigham Young University Library. Sir Edward Grey's speech before House of Commons, August 3, 1914, from Great Britain, Parliamentary debates, Commons, fifth series Vol. LXV 1914, pp. 1821. <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1914/greytalk.html>



postponement to the Home Rule issue and threw their support militarily and emotionally behind the British war cause.

Despite the initial uncertainty that the Ulster Unionists felt towards their role in the British war effort the Ulster Unionist actually held a past affinity with the British military. This affinity was demonstrated in the Curragh incident in early 1914. Historian Keith Jeffery shows that the affinity demonstrated by British Military during the Curragh incident. The *Belfast News-Letter*, on August 5, 1914 pointed out that the UVF had "already won the favourable comments of many military officers of distinction."<sup>59</sup> The "favourable comments" were due to the admiral qualities of a well-organized, well-trained, and close-knit community found in this volunteer army. Also the fact that the UVF members adhered to the Empire and were in favor of the Union between Ireland and England strengthened the association between British Military and the UVF. The British Military members saw a common brotherhood for these men who saw themselves as British. But neither the closeness nor the obligation of Curragh Incident was strong enough to ease the worries of the Ulster Unionists, who did not know whether the war would aid or hinder their Unionist movement.

The uncertainty that filled Ulster was seen in the late summer, when Carson received telegrams from various Ulstermen expressing their fear of Home Rule. As war approached, the fear that the anti-Home Rule campaign would be lost caused great uncertainties in the Unionist camp. Telegrams using strong terms such as, "Don't surrender", "Stand Firm", and "Save Tyrone"<sup>60</sup> came to Carson. As the impending Home Rule Bill seemed likely to be pushed through, Ulster's "belief in the judgment and good

<sup>59</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, August 5 1914.

<sup>60</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11.

faith of the government had been fading away.”<sup>61</sup> The Ulster Unionists were hesitant because they had become increasingly skeptical about whether the British Government would pass Home Rule. When the war came the Ulster Unionists wondered if the British government whose faith they were losing could be trusted if they joined the war.

Ulster Unionists looked to their leader, Edward Carson, for answers, but Carson was initially uncertain of what to do with the advent of war as well. In his personal accounts he questioned himself: “Can we assure men before signing names for the United Kingdom in Foreign Service no danger of the Home Rule Bill passing while they are away?”<sup>62</sup> With Home Rule unsettled the war posed a problem as to whether it would destroy Home Rule or expedite it.

The Ulster Unionists were in a predicament. Patriotism and their sense of Britishness seemed to compel them to embrace the war effort. However, Home Rule loomed over them and they did not want to abandon the fight against it. As proponents of the Empire they surely had to stand by Great Britain and offer their service to England, but there was real concern that the war would serve as a plot to get Home Rule passed by removing the threat of the UVF. One UVF member, Wilfred B. Spender, wrote to Carson in August 1914, expressing his concern of this very predicament. He was fully committed to the British cause and wanted to support the Empire and was willing to head overseas or do anything that might be required of him to aid England. But despite his willingness to take up arms for the English cause and serve in the British Army, he stipulated that this would only be so if Carson said that the UVF did not need him back in

<sup>61</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11.

<sup>62</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11 7 August, 1914.



Ireland defending against Home Rule.<sup>63</sup> He was committed to England, but he did not want to risk losing the strength of the UVF. Spender was caught in the dilemma of wanting to support the English, but afraid that it would mean abandoning their defense against Home Rule.

Spender wasn't the only one who felt this way. Many felt torn between two causes. They did not know whether or not enthusiasm for the war would benefit or hinder their campaign. It would seem obvious that since they wanted to remain a part of the Empire, they should do their utmost to support and defend the Empire when it was in danger. However if the UVF were to take up arms for the Empire in Europe, Ulster's military leverage in the battle against Home Rule would be lost making Ireland more susceptible to the passage of Home Rule, which would break the Union anyway. In another letter to Carson, a fellow Ulster Unionist asked bluntly, "what do you suggest as the best method by which I can help?" He followed that up with a pessimistic statement that summarized the Ulster Unionists initial view of the war, saying, "This is certainly a damnable prospect as regards the Home Rule Bill."<sup>64</sup>

What contributed to this uncertainty in a group whose sense of Britishness would logically seem to guarantee their support and enthusiasm for the British war cause? The main threat of war for the Ulster Unionists was that it would diminish and re-direct the military threat of the UVF. The military threat was a key element in Ulster's anti-Home Rule campaign. Historian Nuala Johnson wrote that, "to some degree...the war had greatly weakened the [Ulster] Unionists' bargaining position, for their patriotism

<sup>63</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11 3 August, 1914.

<sup>64</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11, 7 August, 1914.

prevented them from renewing their threat of civil war in Ulster."<sup>65</sup> The Ulster Unionists saw that they had strength as a political party in destroying the Home Rule Bill, due not only to their well-organized political machine under Carson and Craig, but also to the military threat the UVF posed. The Ulster Unionists worried that the war could mean the dwindling of the UVF and the threat of civil war, both of which they had used as a lever in their political struggle. The question of what would happen to the anti-Home Rule campaign if the military threat of the UVF was gone was a source of concern.

War posed a potential decline of the UVF in several ways. First, war removed the leaders of the UVF from Ireland. Many of the UVF members, especially the leaders and organizers, were reservists in the English Army. With the outbreak of war they were called up for active duty in the Army. With the leaders away in the British army, the backbone of the organization was severely weakened and UVF lost some of their leverage. There were hopes, however, that if Carson did agree to use the UVF for Imperial Forces, these UVF army reservists would be reorganized into battalions with other UVF members.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the prevalent uncertainty among the Ulster Unionists, most Ulstermen opted to embrace the war effort. The support that the UVF and the Ulster Unionist gave to the British war effort was reflective of the Ulster Unionists emphasis on loyalty, sacrifice, and manliness.

Loyalty would be the driving force of the Ulster Unionist support for the war and its contribution to the war effort. In a meeting in Belfast on August 7<sup>th</sup>, attended by 2,000 people, to consider in what way the Government could best be helped in carrying on the

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *Geography of Remembrance*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11. 2 September, 1914.



war, in a public letter to the Lord Mayor, Carson announced his public stance in which he emphasized loyalty and patriotism. Loyalty, he proclaimed, was the "very foundation and ground work of all our political action and the motive power of our sacrifices to maintain our position in the United Kingdom."<sup>67</sup> Carson implied that loyalty had been what allowed them to stay a part of the Union, and it too must now be loyalty that would secure it. He finished the letter by saying that they must be prepared to offer their excellent UVF for service for the king at any cost.

Religious belief was also reflected in how the Ulster Unionists perceived the war. The Ulster Unionists, being almost exclusively Protestant, created a religious aspect, not only in their political movement against Home Rule, but also in the UVF. As a result, when war broke out and the Unionists began to mobilize and support the war, the emphasis of God and duty flourished. The war for the Ulster Protestants had the trappings of a religious war. Captain Cyril Falls noted that the old sense of the alliance of "Bible and Sword" and an "old covenanting spirit," was "reborn" in the soldiers of Ulster.<sup>68</sup> The religious passion that had been bred into the Ulster Unionists' mentality played a part in their views of the outbreak of war. Their religious understanding of war was also one of sacrifice. The stress of sacrifice in the name of the Empire was also a component in the motivation to support the war. Historian James Loughlin emphasized this trend of the Ulster Unionists and wrote that Ulster Protestants combined the war into

<sup>67</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11. 7 August, 1914.

<sup>68</sup> C. Falls, *The History of the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division* (Belfast, M'Caw, Stevenson and Orr, 1922), pp 16-17, quoted in D.G. Boyce, " 'That party politics should divide our tents': nationalism, unionism and the First World War, in *Ireland and the Great War*, Adrian Gregory (ed), 194.

their "discourse of sacrificial loyalty."<sup>69</sup> For them, loyalty to the Empire was supreme even it meant sacrificing themselves and their cause.

The issue of manliness was also a vital element in the Ulster Protestant movement. An emphasis on manliness stemmed back to the start of the Orange Order, and it played a crucial role in mobilizing support for the war and demonstrating Ulster's loyalty to the crown. In a reprint of the Dean of Belfast's sermon that appeared in the *Belfast News-Letter*, he asked, "What should you ask from God before you go to war...?" His response: "I think it would be wise to ask for true manliness—quit yourselves like men, strong, determined, faithful and noble-hearted."<sup>70</sup> This Protestant ethic that was heavily imbued into the UVF was an understanding that most Ulster Unionists believed. This manliness shown to the dedication of the crown was permeated in their understanding of honor. To be a man fighting for the cause of the Union and Empire, both in Ireland and with the advent of war, in Europe, was in large part a statement of honor. Finishing his Sermon on manliness and war, the Dean said "Dishonour is worst than death."<sup>71</sup> To honor the Empire through a show of manly attributes and strength was a Protestant ethic that could be accomplished with support of England overseas service. It was also realized that Ulster had a terrific fighting force in Ireland with which it was able to demonstrate Irish masculinity and honor at war. This terrific fighting force that marched under the name of the Union would dedicate its services to the British cause in the name of honor.

The uncertainty, which was diminished by the stress of loyalty, religious emphasis, and manliness, was demonstrated with Carson's offering the UVF for Foreign

<sup>69</sup> Gregory, Adrian (ed.) *Ireland and the Great War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Belfast News-Letter* 7 August, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 August 1914.



Service on 2 September 1914. On that date, Carson posted the "Ulster Volunteer Force Special Order Enlistment for Imperial Forces." This order said that the War Office had approved a "scheme to form one or more Ulster Volunteer Divisions to join Lord Kitchener's Army..."<sup>72</sup> This essentially guaranteed that the UVF would be willing to go overseas and become a division for the British army. This action showed that the hesitancy with which Ulster first approached the war had vanished.

The Ulster Unionists also became less concerned with what the war would mean for them and more enthusiastic about their role in war, due to several benefits that would help maintain the strength of the UVF during war time. The Ulster Unionists' uncertainty, which stemmed from the possible loss of strength of the UVF, was eased with promises of securing the UVF's strength. This was done several ways, one being the incentive of arms. It was stated in Carson's "Ulster Volunteer Force Special Order Enlistment for Imperial Forces" that the UVF members who applied for overseas service would receive payment in the form of equipment.<sup>73</sup> This included government rifles and ammunitions. This was a crucial incentive for the UVF to maintain the control in Ulster. They, like the Irish Volunteers, placed a heavy importance on guns and ammunition because they were always at a low supply. By guaranteeing armament the UVF members could maintain their military dominance when they returned from the war. Therefore, the idea of new, government issued guns at their side provided a sense of security and reassurance. It allowed them the ability to remedy, if necessary, the situation of Home Rule through military force when they returned from Europe.

<sup>72</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11. 2 September, 1914.

<sup>73</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11 September 2, 1914.

The incentive of keeping together the UVF members that were serving abroad also eased concerns and attributed to the Ulster Unionist growing support of the war. The issues of camaraderie and familiarity of leadership were no doubt incentives to keep the UVF together abroad, but there was also the issue of wanting to keep ranks together to secure an understanding that they were not abandoning what they had worked for or who they had worked for during the Home Rule Crisis. In the 'Ulster Volunteer Force Special Order Enlistment for Imperial Forces', stipulation number ten read, "the services of the officers of the UVF called away on Mobilization will be restored to the Ulster Division by the War Office as far as the necessities of the service permits."<sup>74</sup> Keeping members of the UVF in the same brigades while in the English Army helped diminish the feeling that the UVF members were abandoning their past struggle and leaving it vulnerable in their absence.

Carson's emphasis on the UVF at home also helped show the Ulster Unionists that their support of the war did not mean they had to abandon their cause at home. To ease the worry of the UVF members who went abroad for service in Kitchener's Army of what was happening back home, Carson was constantly assuring them that he would not abandon them in their fight against Home Rule. On 5 September, in Colerain, Carson reassured the UVF that he would take care and reorganize and recruit those UVF members left behind in Ireland. He said in a definitive statement that "I promise you that they [the UVF] will be strong enough and bold and courageous enough to keep the old flag flying while you are away."<sup>75</sup> In a later speech given in Belfast on

<sup>74</sup> PRONI, Carson Irish Papers D/ 1750/A/5/i-A/10/11 September 2, 1914.

<sup>75</sup> Gwynn, *John Redmond*, 390.



7 September, he emphasized the importance of any Ulsterman who could not enlist in the British Army to enlist in the UVF and keep the ranks stocked. Carson concluded that everyone had to do their part, whether in Europe or Ireland in order to secure what they worked for. In his speech on the 7<sup>th</sup>, he said, "you were formed to defend our citizenship in the United Kingdom and Empire and so preserve our civil and religious liberty... and by each one doing his duty our country will be saved and our own interest preserved."<sup>76</sup> Carson demonstrated that the UVF who went abroad were aiding the Unionists cause, and that they had nothing to worry about back home because he would work to maintain the strength of the UVF while they were gone.

The support for the British war effort that followed the hesitancy of the Ulster Unionists was reliant on a trust that Home Rule would not pass as the UVF served abroad. Ulster Unionists hoped that while they militarily supported England, the political issues at hand would be put on hold. A letter from Carson to Sir Hutchenson Poe, reprinted in the *Irish Times*, outlined this. He wrote, "I can assure you that we will be ready to fall in with any scheme formulated by the War Office for the utilization of our Volunteers for the defense of the country. I hope a political truce may be observed meanwhile."<sup>77</sup> They hoped that they would not suffer political betrayal with the passage of a Home Rule bill.

However, their hopes were dashed when Home Rule was passed on 15 September 1914. The supendatory measure proved to be of little condolence to the Ulster Unionist. An article printed in the *Belfast News-Letter* announcing the placement of Home Rule on

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<sup>76</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, September 7, 1914.

<sup>77</sup> *Irish Times*, August 26 1914.

the statute books was entitled, the "Betrayal of Ulster."<sup>78</sup> The Ulster Unionists felt betrayed, but they used it as a reason to further their loyalty to the Empire, by viewing this action as an isolated betrayal by enemies. They saw the passing of the Home Rule Bill as an attack on the Empire and the Unionists by a few select politicians. The author of the article "Betrayal of Ulster" wrote, "...but I ask my followers in Ulster to remember that this is not the action of the nation, but of a despicable political faith..."<sup>79</sup> They could, and should, remain loyal because this was a political blunder. It was one that they would have to amend later, but the importance now was to defend the Empire in its crisis. The author continues, declaring that the "...duty at the present moment is towards our country and Empire."<sup>80</sup> Despite their uncertainty and their sense of betrayal, the Ulster Unionists felt they must continue with their "preparation to assist [their] country and strain every nerve to defeat its enemies."<sup>81</sup> As these enemies were obviously the Germans in context of the international crisis, in the eyes of the Ulster Unionists they were also the "despicable" political faction that through passing the Home Rule Bill destroyed the Union.

After looking at Irish reactions to the advent of war in the summer of 1914, one notices that Ireland responded with some striking similarities to war enthusiasm found elsewhere in Europe, as well as with particularities having to do with domestic politics and agendas for using war to accomplish other ends. Indeed, several conclusions can be drawn about the nature of war in regards to national identity and enthusiasm after observing Ireland. First, that nationalism was important for war enthusiasm. The war

<sup>78</sup> *Belfast New-Letter* September 16, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *Belfast New-Letter* September 16, 1914

<sup>80</sup> *Belfast New-Letter* September 16, 1914

<sup>81</sup> *Belfast New-Letter* September 16, 1914



was believed to be a contest in which national identity could be forged and solidified and thus an opportunity for nationalists. Secondly, that unity and a sense of a united community were dependent on the war enthusiasm which various Irish sectors exhibited. War enthusiasm, especially for the Southern Unionists provided a common ground in which to unify past divisions. Lastly, Irish reactions demonstrate the ability of war to legitimize and strengthen violence and militancy. This provided a source of enthusiasm for Irish nationalists who desired to establish an Irish state through the creation of an Irish army. The legitimization of violence, a violence which had already been present in Ireland, enabled nationalist to demonstrate nationhood and power. As well as provide access to more guns and ammunition which the Irish Nationalist needed for either autonomy or insurrection.

These issues of enthusiasm which were evident in the early stages would dwindle as a sense of exploitation grew and as the demand for further independence by nationalist increased. The believed potential role for the development of national identity through support of the war would prove to be much less than had previously been imagined. Soon, with the emergence of Sinn Féin and the disappearance of southern Unionism, the forging and solidifying of national identity and sense of community through war would be altered. The establishment of these would then be based in Ireland herself, creating whole new ideas of about the relationships between war, violence, unity and Irishness.

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