

THE WORLD AROUND US — HISTORY · P5–P7

# Deighilt na hÉireann 1921 — Partition of Ireland

Knowledge Organiser — P5–P7

## Key vocabulary

1

### Partition

The division of Ireland into two separate states in 1921. Northern Ireland (6 counties) remained part of the United Kingdom. The remaining 26 counties became the Irish Free State.

2

### Unionism

The political view that Ireland (or Northern Ireland) should remain part of the United Kingdom. Unionists are mainly (though not exclusively) Protestant.

3

### Nationalism

The political view that Ireland should be independent from Britain — and, for most nationalists, that the island should eventually be united as one country.

4

### Government of Ireland Act (1920)

The British law that proposed dividing Ireland into two self-governing regions — 'Southern Ireland' (26 counties) and 'Northern Ireland' (6 counties), each with their own Parliament.

5

### Why 6 counties?

The Ulster Unionist majority could most safely be maintained in 6 counties (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone). Nine-county Ulster would have had a smaller unionist majority.

*Example: Co. Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal (Ulster but majority nationalist) were excluded*



6

**Northern Ireland Parliament (Stormont)**

The Northern Ireland Parliament, established 1921 at Stormont, Belfast. Governed NI until Direct Rule from Westminster was imposed in 1972 during the Troubles.

## — two paths after 1921

How the two parts of Ireland develop

- **NORTHERN IRELAND (1921):** remained in UK, with its own Parliament at Stormont. Industry (shipbuilding, linen) stronger than in the south. Unionist-dominated government.
- **IRISH FREE STATE (1922):** 26-county state with dominion status. Constitution in 1937 created 'Ireland' (Éire). Republic declared 1949. Left the Commonwealth.
- **THE MINORITY IN EACH STATE:** Catholic nationalists were a minority in NI. Protestant unionists were a minority in the Free State. Both minorities faced discrimination in the early decades.
- **THE BORDER:** at first strictly guarded. Roads were blocked, customs checks operated. Over decades, the border became invisible — then, after the Good Friday Agreement, entirely open.
- **TODAY:** the partition question remains live. Northern Ireland now has a slim nationalist/republican majority in its Assembly. A referendum on Irish unity is a real possibility.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** why do you think Ireland was divided? Was partition a good solution or a bad one? What would have happened if Ireland had remained united?

