



ENLISTING THE IRISH

During the Great War, the British government extended its recruiting campaign to the rest of the British Isles in an attempt to rally dissidents over issues of Welsh disestablishment, female suffrage, and Irish independence. In Parliament, the Irish Nationalist leader John Redmond pledged his full support of the war; Irish Home Rule was granted on September 18, 1914, to take effect six months after the end of the war.

The original recruitment campaign for Great Britain was run by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC), which was made up of members of the House of Commons. The PRC relied mainly on posters as more likely to reach people than would a newspaper campaign. The posters broke political issues into matters of clear right and wrong, with an emotional, usually nationalistic, pull.

That multi-country method of mass-communicated propaganda was found to be insufficient. Accordingly, the Central Council for the Organisation of Recruiting in Ireland (CCORI), which became the Department for Recruiting in Ireland, was founded to produce propaganda specifically aimed at the Irish, focusing less on responsibility to Great Britain and more on distinctly Irish appeals.

Recruiting for the Great War drew in a quarter of a million Irish soldiers, but was the campaign as successful as it might have been? Certainly it was successful in the north, where private Protestant armies such as the Ulster Volunteers, formed in 1912 to block Home Rule for Ireland, signed up. In the south, recruitment took a drastic downturn after the anti-British Easter Rising of 1916 and the resulting executions of Irish participants. Many nationalists did serve, however, and it may be that the recruitment efforts of the British in the Great War gave Ireland a large, trained force of soldiers who then used their skills in the fighting in Ireland that followed the war.

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