

# **Ireland: The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition, 1912-1946 | Sample Answer**

## **What attempts were made to promote cultural identity in the North and South of Ireland, 1912-1945? (2009)**

Due to the way the two states were established, both the North and the South of Ireland strived to set up a cultural identity which was inevitably linked to the ruling political party. The cultural identity also closely reflected the time/decade and also the acceptable social mores at the time. During the late 19th century a cultural movement inspired the setup of the GAA, Gaelic League and the Literary Revival, many of whose members were Protestant and Anglo Irish. However, this was not the case when the free state was founded in 1922. It was a great shame that the ideas of Parnell, Douglas Hyde and W.B Yeats were not listened to and that nationalism became identified with being catholic and speaking Gaelic, and unionism became identified with being protestant and wanted to be a member of the Orange Order.

The south government promoted the Irish language in an attempted to build a distinct Irish identity. In both primary and secondary school Irish history, language and culture became important elements to the education system. This was no doubt influenced by Pearse and his approach to Scoil Eanna and of course the 1916 revolution itself. In 1922 the Irish language was to be taught in primary schools for an hour a day. In 1924 Eoin O'Neill ( the minister for education) said that Irish should be used from infants up. Later Irish became compulsory and necessary to pass in order to have a leaving cert. In 1937 FF made Irish the "official language". So, as a result, both CnG and FF through their policies implied that being Irish was inevitably linked with speaking Irish.

W.T Cosgrave was a devout catholic and this is influenced in his cultural policies. Many of his cabinets were concerned with the decline in moral standards. This was shared by the church who were unhappy about the arrival of foreign literature, films and music. Kevin O'Higgins introduced a series of acts to combat this; The Censorship of Films Act 1923, The Intoxicating Liquor Act 1924 and The Censorship of Publications Act 1929 which banned the publications of any material deemed unfit, particularly if it was of a sexual nature.

The board had extreme views of what was "obscene" and banned much of the serious literature of the time. W.B Yeats actually left politics in 1928 as he was appalled at the government's censorship, in 1932 he formed the anti-censorship Irish Academy of Letters. The Abbey Theatre was subsidised by the state in 1923 but this resulted in it being influenced on what was allowed on stage. Sean O'Casey play "Plough and the Stars," asked uncomfortable questions about 1916 rising and it caused riots with the audiences objecting the use of a prostitute and the appearance of the Irish flag in a scene set in a pub. Lennox Robinsons short story "Tomorrow" dealt with the issue of rape and resulted in his sacking from the Carnegie Library Trust. James Joyce's novel "Ulysses" upset many as it presented Irish nationalism in an unfavourable light.

When FF took over in 1932 they reinforced the conservative policies pursued by CnG. they were concerned about the growing rate of juvenile crime and illegitimate births. The Criminal Law Act 1935 insisted that a Garda be present at all times in dance halls and that they could only take place in a church or parish hall. Strict literary and film censorship continued. Between 1933-1943 1,700 books were banned. Writers including Sean O'Casey, Kate O'Brien, Frank O'Connor, Samuel Beckett as well as foreign authors such as Graham Greene and Robert Graves. Newspapers were also greatly censored by FF. In 1931 Dev launched the "Irish Press" to represent the views of FF. His close friend Frank Gallagher was its first editor. This paper frequently acted as a propaganda machine for the FF government. The Irish Independent offered more balancing reporting yet was still influenced by the church.

Other events which represented the government's attempt at defining Ireland was the Eucharistic Congress 1932 and subsequently the 1937 Constitution. The mass exodus from rural Ireland to Dublin the week of the 1932 Eucharistic Congress reinforced a sense of national and religious fraternity, helping to confirm the Irish identity as primarily Catholic. This was further highlighted in the Constitution, Article 44 gave the Catholic Church a “special position” although the document went on to guarantee “freedom of conscience” to other religions. From the years 1939-1945 strict censorship was reinforced to back up the policy of neutrality. The only publications who sought to print political satire against the government were the “Dublin Opinion” and “The Bell”.

In Northern Ireland, the Unionist Party dominated political life. James Craig who was the Prime Minister from 1920-1940 sought to promote the cultural identity that was protestant and British. The British Union Jack flag was flown outside public buildings. The Orange order that was set up in 1795 to protect Protestantism. It was an openly anti-Catholic organisation which had members of many of Northern Ireland Prime ministers. The Orange Order played a leading role in the drawing up of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant in 1912 and each year on the 12th July the Orange marches took place which was a demonstration of their Protestant heritage and identity. In 1934 prime minister James Craig declared to Stormont “I am an Orangeman first and a politician and member of parliament second”

The Ulster Protestant League was established in 1931. Its main aim was to protect the employment of protestants. The league launched a campaign to ensure that Protestants only employed other protestants. Discrimination in employment in the north was very common, e.g. Ads in the Belfast Telegraph reflected this:- “wanted, strong country girl for housework must be able to milk, Protestant preferred”. The League was involved in a rally in 1934 in which catholic homes were attacked and in 1932 they were involved in attacks on Northern Catholics returning from Dublin after attending Eucharistic Congress when their train was stoned.

Unionist and Nationalist shared many similar beliefs on moral and other matters but rarely came together to celebrate this. Their experiences of WW1 only served to keep them separate, when Unionists signed up to fight in the war and the majority of the Catholics did not. In 1949, the independent culture of Southern Ireland was confirmed by the declaration of an Irish Republic while in the North they continued to maintain strong cultural links with Britain.