

## What were the main Arguments for and Against the Treaty?

When the treaty was initially signed by the five delegates, reaction in Ireland was very mixed. While the ordinary citizens generally welcomed it as the beginning of the return to normalcy, the more radical republicans strongly opposed it. There are valid arguments for both sides which are explained here.

On one hand were the Pro-Treaty side. Represented by Griffith and Collins, they had strong arguments, despite the fact that the treaty achieved neither of their aims when initially entering talks. First of all the treaty provided Ireland with much more than Home Rule. Had the Irish been offered this treaty in 1912 there's little doubt that it would have been accepted. Not only did it give an Irish government control over the day to day running of the country, but it gave evacuation by the British army of Ireland as well as control of finances and education. Another valid argument was the point that Collins made: "In my opinion it gives us freedom, not the total freedom which all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it". He argues here that the treaty is merely a stepping stone towards total separation from Britain and a republic. As well as this you have to realise that everyone believed that the Boundary Commission would be far more successful than it was in reality. At no point was this an argument used against the treaty. Along with these arguments the acceptance of the treaty represented the desires of the common Irish citizens. Life in Ireland at the time was chaotic, with violence and theft rampant. There was no real police force and so no one to enforce law and order. People were sick of it and ready to accept almost any treaty, regardless of an oath to the king and remaining within the commonwealth. Finally there was the military argument. Lloyd George threatened war should the delegates reject the treaty. Collins, one of the delegates knew as head of Intelligence and leader of the IRB that the Irish army was seriously weakened and that the guerilla tactics which were used so successfully in the War of Independence would not be practical as the population could no longer be relied upon to hide flying columns. Its leaders and spy network was exposed and overall their position weakened. This was a major reason to vote for the treaty.

While these were all valid points the anti-Treaty side felt perhaps even more strongly to the contrary and with good reason. To start with many die-hard republicans had powerful ideological oppositions to the oath which politicians would have to swear to the king of England. While the treaty was in fact better than many others in the sense that they only had to swear faithfulness rather than allegiance to the king, this still didn't sit well as many of them had previously sworn an oath to the republic. As well as this many had seen friends and family die in the war. I can completely understand this emotional argument. People felt that they were betraying their dead loved ones and rendering their deaths pointless by voting for the treaty. They had died fighting for total independence so those who had known them would settle for nothing less. One final reason why certain people were against the treaty, an entirely selfish treaty was that they enjoyed the power that they had experienced as local IRA leaders while Ireland was in turmoil. Men who otherwise might simply be farmers or shopkeepers commanded positions of respect. They wanted to extend their reign for as long as possible and weren't ready for the signing of the treaty to bring it to an end.

As I said there were valid points on each side of the argument although overall I think that those who were Pro-Treaty were more realistic and logical, and when it came down to it Ireland was a democratic country. Despite De Valera's belief that "the majority have no right to do wrong" the majority in the end had the right to agree, as they did, to vote for the treaty at 64 votes to 57.