



The Irish Question

Origins of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland

- Saint Patrick (born ? – died AD 461 or AD 493) and other Christian missionaries arrived in Ireland in the 5th century.
- By the year 600 Ireland had become Christian.
- The coming of Anglo-Norman mercenaries in 1169 marked the beginning of more than 800 years of direct English involvement in Ireland.
- The English crown did not begin asserting full control of the island until after the English Reformation, when a series of military campaigns was launched between 1534 and 1691.

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- This period was also marked by an official English policy of plantation which led to the arrival of thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers who had been convinced to move to Ireland by the crown's promise that they would receive some land to live on.
- Irish landowners were, therefore, dispossessed of their homes and land which were given to the new settlers.
- From this period on, sectarian conflict became a recurrent theme in Irish history.

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- In addition to all this, Catholics in Ireland did not have the same civil and political rights as the Irish Protestants.
- Since the beginning of the XIX century they (i.e. Irish Catholics) had been asking for reforms and equal civil rights.
- But their peaceful requests were not satisfied by the English Parliament;

This caused



- much discontent among the Catholics
- riots,
- violent protests and, eventually,
- terrorist attacks.

As a matter of fact, the Liberals with Gladstone tried to solve the Irish question in 1886 and 1893 proposing Bills in Parliament in favour of Ireland's Home Rule. Unfortunately, the Parliament rejected them in both cases.

- Irish people therefore came to the conclusion that the only way to obtain what they had been asking for was through the use of force.
- This gave rise to the “Sinn Fein” (“Ourselves” or “we ourselves”), an extreme nationalistic movement that demanded and fought for an independent republic.
- “Sinn Fein” still exists nowadays and struggles for the unification of the two Irelands (the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland).