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The Curragh Incident, March, 1914, causes and effects

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THE CURRAGH INCIDENT
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CAUSES AND EFFECTS

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INTRODUCTION

At 7:00 P.M., Friday, March 20, 1914, the War Office in Whitehall, London, received the following telegram from the General Officer Commanding the Forces in Ireland, with Headquarters at the Royal Hospital, Dublin:

> Officer Commanding 5th Lancers states that all officers except two, and one doubtful, are resigning commissions today. I much fear the same conditions in the 16th Lancers. Fear men will refuse to move.[1]

At 11:35 P.M. on the same day, this message, from the same source, arrived at the War Office: "Regret to report Brigadier and 57 officers, 3rd Cavalry Brigade, prefer to accept dismissal if ordered north."[2] Just before midnight, still Friday, March 20, the Secretary of State for War dispatched this message to the General Officer Commanding in Ireland:

> Your telegram with reference to 5th and 16th Lancers received. You have authority of Army Council to suspend from duty any senior officers who have tendered their resignations or in any other manner disputed your authority. Take whatever action you think proper and report to the War Office.
>
> Direct Gough and Officers Commanding 5th and 16th Lancers to report themselves to the Adjutant-General at the War Office. They should leave on the first possible boat.
>
> They should be relieved of their commands and officers are being sent to relieve them at once.
>
> Resignations of all officers should be refused.[3]

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[1] *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), March 24, 1914, 4.

[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

The exchange of the preceeding communications set off a politico-military crisis that has become known to students of British history as the "Curragh Incident." In a very limited sense, the Curragh Incident--the refusal of a group of cavalry officers stationed in Ireland to accept orders from the War Office--began and ended during one tension-filled week in March, 1914. In a larger sense, the causes of the incident were rooted in the controversy over Home Rule for Ireland going back to the 1880's and its effects carried on well into the period of World War I. The purpose of this paper is to identify the causes and effects of the Curragh Incident and to seek an historical lesson from the political and personal interactions surrounding the incident. The role of the military establishment as the servant of public policy in a liberal political regime will be a subject of special interest.

Background and issues comprise the first chapter. The Home Rule situation is updated from the 1880's to early 1914. The Conservative and Unionist Party rancor over the Parliament Act of 1911 contributed to the weakening of the constitutional processes and so helped set the stage for the incident. Home Rule took on a particularly ominous cast with the formation of a provisional government and the organization of para-military groups in Ulster. Many British army officers, intensely conservative in both heritage and conviction, felt antagonistic toward the Liberal government policy in Ulster. By early 1914, civil war threatened in Ireland.

Short sketches of the lives of the principal participants, with attention given to their characters and convictions, fill the

pages of the second chapter. Included are personalities in the government, in the opposition, in the War Office and with the army in Ireland.

Chapter III covers, in detail, the Curragh Incident itself; the chronology, the movements and the popular and political reactions. Reasoned conjecture fills the gaps in the documented information. Tenative identifications appear of stalwarts, fumblers and blackguards.

The very intense political crisis generated by the incident becomes the chief theme of Chapter IV. Other ramifications also merit discussion: the deleterious effect of the incident on army morale, the transformation of Ulster into an armed camp and the conclusions of international observers.

The last chapter contains some speculation on the liklihood, widely accepted at the time, of a plot on the part of the government to provoke and coerce Ulster. Some observations on military officers who engage in political maneuver and intrigue are put forward. A conclusion is presented on the danger of parliamentary majorities attempting to impose legislative solutions to volatile political problems without gaining acquiescence of affected minorities.

CHAPTER I

THE ISSUES

Home Rule For Ireland

William E. Gladstone, the Grand Old Man of the Liberal Party during the final years of the nineteenth century, introduced the first Home Rule for Ireland Bill in the House of Commons in 1886. Under the bill, Ireland was to be given its own parliament which would have authority over strictly local affairs. Control of foreign, military and naval affairs would be retained by the British Parliament and the Crown would continue to exercise constitutional sovereignty over both England and Ireland. Eighty-six Irish Members of Parliament, led by Charles S. Parnell, supported the government's Home Rule Bill, but a large number of Gladstone's Liberal colleagues, calling themselves the Liberal Unionists, joined with the Tories and seventeen members from Ulster to defeat the bill.[1] The Ulster members vehemently opposed submitting the administration of the Protestant-dominated counties in the northeast province of Ulster to a parliament in Dublin certain to be controlled by Catholics.[2] A majority of the English Members of Parliament, for varying reasons, sided with the Ulsterities. Not the least of those in opposition was Lord

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[1]Dorothy Macardle, The Irish Republic (4th ed.; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 56. Hereafter cited as Macardle, Republic.

[2]Ibid., 77.

Randolph Churchill who, in a letter to another Liberal Unionist on May 7, 1886, gave Ulster a rallying cry that still remained in use in 1914:

> If political parties and political leaders, not only parliamentary but local should be so utterly lost to every feeling and dictate of honour and courage as to hand over coldly, and for the sake of purchasing a short and illusory Parliamentary Tranquillity, the lives and liberties of the loyalists of Ireland to their hereditary and most bitter foes, make no doubt on this point--Ulster will not be a consenting party; Ulster at the proper moment will resort to the supreme arbitrament of force; Ulster will fight; Ulster will be right.[3]

Lord Randolph, somewhat cynically, referred to this championing of Protestant Ulster over the Catholics of the South of Ireland as playing the "Orange card;" he hoped it would turn out to be the ace of trumps.[4]

Defeat on the Home Rule Bill brought about the fall of the Gladstone government. When his party returned to power in 1893, Gladstone proposed another Home Rule measure which, though it passed through the House of Commons, met defeat in the House of Lords. The political power of Parnell and his Irish Nationalists subsided sharply after 1890 when Parnell, a Protestant involved in a divorce action, lost the support of the Irish Catholics. The bishops and priests would not have their people led by a Protestant adulterer, whatever

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[3]The Earl of Oxford and Asquith, Fifty Years of British Parliament (2 vols.; Boston: Little Brown, and Company, 1926), II, 274-275. Hereafter cited as Asquith, Fifty Years.

[4]Randolph S. Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, Volume II; 1901-1914: Young Statesman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 425. Hereafter cited as Churchill, Churchill.

his political prowess.[5] Home Rule for Ireland did not become a viable issue again until 1912, when a series of fortuitous political events joined to insure the reading of the third Home Rule Bill and to virtually assure its passage.

The Liberal Party returned to power in 1905. The Liberal government programs, down to the beginning of 1912, emphasized social welfare legislation and budgetary reform rather than home rule for Ireland. These programs, too, met defeat in the House of Lords. When the Lords rejected the government budget in 1909, the Liberals resolved to break the power of the hereditary house. It soon developed that they needed the support of the Irish Nationalists to accomplish this end. A general election in January, 1910 returned 275 Liberals and 273 Unionists, giving the balance of power to eighty-two Irish Nationalist and forty Labour members.[6] The Lords now accepted the budget but the Liberal government was determined to break the Lords' veto power. The government introduced a Parliament Bill which provided that a bill passed in Commons three times in two years would become law without the assent of the Lords. Before the Parliament Bill could become an act, however, the Lords had to consent to giving up their political power. This they refused to do and, as

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[5]Constantine Fitzgibbon, Out of the Lion's Paw; Ireland Wins Her Freedom (New York: American Heritage Press, 1969), 9. Hereafter cited as Fitzgibbon, Lion's Paw.

[6]R. K. Webb, Modern England; From the Eighteenth Century to the Present (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971), 459. Hereafter cited as Webb, Modern England.

Professor R. K. Webb remarks, "There was no Wellington in sight."[7] The Liberal Prime Minister, Herbert H. Asquith, asked King George V to prepare to create several hundred new (Liberal) peers to break the power of the conservative Lords. The king agreed if another general election confirmed that this was indeed the will of the electorate. Realizing they needed Irish Nationalist support for their continuance in power, the Liberal Party made the Lords' veto and Home Rule for Ireland the outstanding issues in the second general election in 1910.[8] The Irish Nationalists supported the Parliament Bill, knowing Home Rule was impossible unless the Lords' veto was removed. The election in December, 1910, produced almost the same results as the January election: 272 Liberals, 272 Unionists, 84 Irish Nationalists and 42 Labourites.[9] The Lords gave in and the Parliament Bill became the Parliament Act of 1911. John Redmond and his Irish Nationalists were now ready for Asquith and his Liberals to make good on the election campaign promise regarding Home Rule for Ireland.

The Third Home Rule Bill offered Ireland little more political autonomy than the rejected bills of the late nineteenth century. Roy Jenkins, a biographer of Prime Minister Asquith, writes that "the Dublin Parliament was to be so circumscribed in its powers as to be

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[7]Webb, Modern England, 460.

[8]Macardle, Irish Republic, 70.

[9]Webb, Modern England, 460.

closer to a 'glorified county council' than to a soverign assembly."[10] The provisions of the bill stipulated the Imperial Parliament would continue to control foreign relations, military affairs and taxation and that it retained the power to allow or repeal any act of the Irish Parliament. Forty-six members would still represent Ireland in the House of Commons at Westminster. The Irish Parliament would not be allowed to enact legislation that affected any church. These arrangements, very similar to those that prevail in the six counties of Northern Ireland today, were not satisfactory to the Ulster Unionists.[11] The bill dealt with the whole of Ireland and Ulster was not prepared to accept rule from Dublin--which many Ulsterites felt would be "Rome" rule. Sir Edward Carson, the leader of the Ulster Unionists, echoed Lord Randolph Churchill of twenty-five years before when, in September, 1911, he addressed a large gathering at Craigavon, near Belfast. Carson said, "We must be prepared . . . the morning Home Rule is passed, ourselves to become responsible for the government of the Protestant Province of Ulster."[12]

Conservative Opposition

The Conservative politicians, with the notable exception of their leader, Andrew Bonar Law, were not particularly interested

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[10]Roy Jenkins, Asquith; Portrait of a Man and an Era (New York: Chilmark Press, 1964), 274. Hereafter cited as Jenkins, Asquith.

[11]A. P. Ryan, Mutiny at the Curragh (London: Macmillan, 1956, 44. Hereafter cited as Ryan, Mutiny.

[12]Quoted in Jenkins, Asquith, 274.

in the fortunes of Northern Ireland but they quickly recognized the political potential in the problem of Ulster. Once again, the "Orange card" was the one to play. The Tories had been out of power since 1905 and were getting very office-hungry. Asquith quietly pointed out that there were already over twenty self-governing legislatures under the allegiance to the Crown, but the Conservatives derided the Home Rule Bill as an attempt to restore the Heptarchy--the division of England into little kingdoms in Saxon times.[13] Although diverted by the investigation of the sinking of the Titanic, sharp debate on Ireland continued in the House of Commons through the spring of 1912. There was much high-blown eloquence; one Unionist claimed the transfer of Ulster was as horrible as the transfer of Poland to Russia. Nevertheless, the bill passed easily on the second reading, 372-271.[14] Throughout the effort, the bill was never challenged by parliamentary numbers. The Prime Minister points this out: "The average majority in almost countless divisions was well over one hundred, and, if the Irish vote on both sides was subtracted, it had, throughout, the support of a substantial majority of the representatives of Great Britain."[15] The Unionists recognized this and moved their cause outside the House of Commons.

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[13]Pall Mall Gazette (London), September 14, 1912, 2.

[14]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., Vol. 38 (6 May-22 May, 1912), 708. Hereafter cited as Parliamentary Debates with series, volume and inclusive dates.

[15]Asquith, Fifty Years, 148.

At a huge demonstration held at Balmoral (Ireland) on Easter Tuesday of 1912, Sir Edward Carson led the crowd in a pledge that "never under any circumstances will we submit to Home Rule."[16] Bonar Law, seconding Carson, speculated that the Scottish people would face a second Bannockburn or Flodden rather than submit to the fate that confronted Ulster.[17] The Times, reporting on the demonstration, summed up the Ulster position:

> Ulstermen . . . do not admit the right of Parliament--and still less of Parliament as the Liberals have maimed it--to deprive them of their fundamental rights as British citizens. They agree with Mr. Bonar Law that, in all history, no precedent exists for such a step. They would not have one created at their expense. . . . It would take them from under the protection of the British government and of the British Parliament and place them under the rule of men whose ways are not their ways and whose standards are not their standards--under the men who control the United Irish League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. To them that rule means ruin. They will not submit to it, unless it be forced upon them by arms, and they cannot bring themselves to believe that their fellow British subjects will consent to force it upon them.[18]

Asquith regarded all this as the "complete Grammar of Anarchy."[19]

Bonar Law had just begun. At a large Unionist gathering at Blenheim in July, 1912, he leveled this blast at the government;

> . . . if an attempt were made without the clearly expressed will of the people of this country, and as part of a corrupt parliamentary bargain, to deprive these men of their birthright, they would be justified by resisting by all means in their power, including force. . .[20]

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[16] The Times (London), April 10, 1912, 8.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Asquith, Fifty Years, 152.

[20] The Times (London), July 29, 1912, 8.

As if that was not enough, he continued:

> I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.[21]

Asquith, not unreasonably, called this a "declaration of war against Constitutional Government."[22]

A rising young minister in the Liberal Government, Lord Randolph Churchill's son Winston, took sharp exception to his ancestral home being used by Bonar Law to incite Orangemen to make civil war on their fellow countrymen and on British soldiers. Churchill was a renegade Unionist and privately favored the exclusion of Ulster from the Home Rule Bill. He was, however, against anarchy. In a letter to Sir George Richie on September 8, 1912, Churchill wrote that Bonar Law's action was fatal to constitutional evolution. Concerned about the stirring up of the poor, he compared Bonar Law's pronouncements at Blenheim with Ben Tillet's on Tower Hill during the dock strike in 1889. Churchill wrote that the Conservative leader was committing his party to excess and to acts which were cruel, wicked and contrary to law. Bonar Law was pandering to an hysterical spirit of violence. Churchill hoped the Blenheim statement would cause the more reasonable Conservatives to act with more restraint.[23]

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[21] The Times (London), July 29, 1912, 8.

[22] Asquith, Fifty Years, 154.

[23] Pall Mall Gazette (London), August 12, 1912, 3.

Asquith tested the wind in 1912 by making a trip to Dublin for a meeting with John Redmond; the first Prime Minister in history, he proudly notes in his memoirs, to visit Ireland.[24] The Irish were friendly but the suffragettes were not. One threw a hatchet that missed Asquith but gave Redmond a superficial wound.[25] Another set fire to Dublin's Theatre Royal during an Asquith address. Before the smoke drove him from the stage, the Prime Minister denounced the Ulster attitude as unreasonable but he would not commit himself on the use of the British army or the possibility of civil war.[26]

Ulster

As A. J. Ryan remarks in his book, Mutiny at the Curragh, "Constitutional processes only work if all parties affected by them, including minority parties, are prepared to play by the rules. Carson cared for the result, being sincerely convinced that justice was on his side, and did not give a fig for the rules. Herein his approach was the opposite to that of Asquith and completely acceptable to Ulster."[27] Ulsterites considered themselves an alien minority in Ireland. They felt their very survival depended on their

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[24]Asquith, Fifty Years, 158.

[25]The Times (London), April 20, 1912, 9.

[26]Ibid., 10.

[27]Ryan, Mutiny, 23.

vigilance and solidarity. They asserted they would not peacefully submit the administration of their enclave to papist majorities from the provinces of Lenister, Munster and Connaught.

Political and religious delinations were not so geographically sharp as might be supposed. All Ulster was not against Home Rule. John Redmond explained this in Reynold's Magazine on January 8, 1911. There was really "no Ulster question." There were nine counties in Ulster and in five of them (Carvon, Donegal, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Tyrone) the Catholic Nationalists were in the majority.[28] Even Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry had significant Nationalist minorities.[29] The Nationalists were not politically active in Ulster, however, and the dominant Unionists solidly supported the Empire and Protestantism. The Unionists declared, if they could not save Ulster for the Empire by political action, they meant to do it with guns.

On January 5, 1912, a Colonel Wallace, fronting for Carson and Sir James Craig, the acknowledged Ulster Unionist leaders, secured permission from a Belfast Justice of the Peace for the Orange fraternal lodges to practice military drill. The lodges, Wallace maintained, "desire this authority as faithful subjects of His Majesty the King only to make them more efficient citizens for the purpose of maintaining the constitution of the United Kingdom as now established and protecting their rights and liberties thereunder."[30] The Liberal

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[28]Cited in Asquith, Fifty Years, 151.

[29]Ryan, Mutiny, 29. [30]Ibid., 30-31.

government had recently abolished the long-standing prohibition against importing guns into Ireland, but it was necessary, at first, for the lodges to train with dummy rifles. Some Liberals jeered at men playing with wooden toys.[31] Lord Roberts, the hero of South Africa, helped recruit retired British officers to train the Ulster volunteers. Lord Milner, leader of an English movement for the support of Ulster, also helped convince half-pay and reserve officers of the British army to command regiments in the Ulster Volunteer Force.[32]

Sir James Craig, with the help of Protestant church leaders, developed the "Solemn League and Covenant." The Covenant was based on an old Scottish pledge from the seventeenth century. On "Ulster Day," September 28, 1912, eighty thousand Ulsterites gathered at specially-arranged religious services to sign the Covenant.[33] By 1914, the various Covenant documents had one-half million signatures.[34] The Covenanteers swore to support the king--while defying the law:

> Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disasterous for the material well-being of Ulster as well as the whole of Ireland, subversive to our civil and religious freedom, destructive to our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are underwritten, men of

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[31]Churchill, Churchill, 457.

[32]Robert Kee, The Green Flag; The Turbulent History of the Irish Nationalist Movement (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972), 478, 485. Hereafter cited as Kee, Green Flag.

[33]The Times (London), September 30, 1912, 10.

[34]Ryan, Mutiny, 57-60.

> Ulster, loyal subjects of his gracious majesty, King George V, humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished possession of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom, and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a parliament being forced upon us, we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognize its authority. In sure confidence that God will defend the right we hereto subscribe our names. And further, we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant. God save the King.[35]

Conservatism of the British Army

As the threat of insurrection and civil war in Ireland became more real, the newspapers and public speakers began to speculate on the attitude of the officer corps of the British army regarding the future of Ulster. Military men had opinions and prejudices on political and religious subjects as intense as those of their civilian counterparts. A large group of officers were particularly concerned about the issue of Home Rule. The nineteenth century Land Acts brought about a decline in the fortunes of many Anglo-Irish families and large numbers of the younger sons of these families turned to the army for a career. So Ulstermen were particularly numerous among the army officers.[36] An uncertainty now arose about what the army's reaction would be to orders to march into Ulster and subdue the Unionists. In the past, the army's troubles in Ireland had been

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[35]Pall Mall Gazette (London), September 20, 1912, 1.

[36]Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister; the Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 177. Hereafter cited as Blake, Bonar Law.

with extremist Irish nationalists. Would there be defections and resignations in the army if it was ordered to put down the Ulster Volunteers? Many thought so. The question was not a new one. During an earlier Home Rule debate in 1886, a Tory politician had confidently stated the army would not obey orders to shoot down Ulster Unionists.[37] As the Ulster Volunteer Force expanded, a gnawing uneasiness grew about the army attitude.[38]

British army officers, like most European army officers, while not specific about party affiliation, were conservative in their political thinking. Regular officers in standing armies have traditionally been associated with reactionary politics and the established church.[39] The peacetime adversary of the standing army is generally the Liberal politician. The Liberal politician, in turn, views the army as a hostile institution. A natural tendency of armies is to attempt to extend their power outside their assigned spheres, hence any army interest in volitale political situations is viewed with alarm.[40] The army must react immediately, without political polemics, to the orders of the government. If such reaction is uncertain, or if the response to orders becomes selective, the army is no longer a bulwark of the government--it becomes a

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[37]Kee, Green Flag, 486.

[38]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 3, 1914, 2.

[39]Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism; Romance and Realities of a Profession (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1937), 340.

[40]Ibid., 320, 339.

threat to the political stability of the state. The professional officers of the British army, well aware that dependibility is the most essential of all military attributes, prided themselves on their reputation for doing their duty and serving with honor. Discipline, self-denial and unquestioning devotion to duty were among their most ancient traditions. Still, the politicians worried that orders to enforce the Home Rule Bill in Ulster might trigger wholesale resignations in the officer corps.[41]

The army provided a lifetime career for almost all the regu- officers up to 1914. Brigadier-Generals and Colonels were in their fifties; Lieutenant-Generals in their sixties. All felt particularly bound to the King. The Monarch had personally signed the commissions of all but the youngest group of officers. Many had family traditions of military service extending back several generations. Yet, regardless of their oaths and traditions, many of them grew highly emotional over the problem of Ulster.[42] Were not Ulstermen, who only wanted to remain under the Union Jack, also the King's men? Why, they asked, should the army have to support the hated Hibernians by fighting against the King's loyal subjects?[43] George V himself asked the Prime Minister in September, 1913, if the discipline and

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[41]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 53 (27 May-13 June, 1913), 1370.

[42]Pall Mall Gazette (London), December 1, 1913.

[43]Sir James Fergusson, The Curragh Incident (London: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1964), 28. Hereafter cited as Fergusson, Curragh Incident.

loyalty of the troops should be put to such strains. Asquith could only reply that discipline and loyalty demand submission to all such strains within the law.[44]

Threat of Civil War

In January, 1913, a group of prominent Ulster Unionists drafted a scheme for a provisional government. The draft provided for a Central Authority to carry on the business of government when and if the Home Rule Bill became law.[45] Eminent politicians, churchmen and military men expressed themselves willing to serve on the Central Authority. Skeptics noted the absence of working men among the volunteer administrators. The draft began: "The Central Authority in the name of the King's Most Excellent Majesty . . ."[46] An indemnity fund of one million pounds, for the provisional government's operating expenses, was oversubscribed.[47] Carson was now being called "King Carson." By the fall of 1913, the Ulster provisional government was formed and ready in Belfast and elements of the 60,000-man Ulster Volunteer Force, commanded by a retired Indian officer, Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson, marched in review before Carson.[48] In his speech on that day, Carson said he had pledges and

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[45]Pall Mall Gazette (London), September 18, 1913, 3.

[46]Ryan, Mutiny, 69.

[47]Pall Mall Gazette (London), September 26, 1913, 1.

[48]The Times (London), September 29, 1913, 7.

promises from some of the greatest generals in the army to come over and help the provisional forces if it became necessary.[49] All this was patently against the law, but observers speculated that the government did not prosecute because they did not want King Carson to become Saint Carson.[50]

This was true. In his memoirs, Prime Minister Asquith gives his reasons for not arresting Carson. It was true, he concedes, that Carson, Bonar Law and others had spoken out in strong terms about the necessity of flouting Parliament and resorting to direct action. But he says such political "vapouring" is best ignored and its perpetrators left alone. Charges of treason or insurrection need to be based on something more solid than bombast. There was no question that Carson's activities in Ulster were beyond the law but, if he were arrested, it would be necessary to try him in Ulster and, "it was as certain as any of the sequences of nature that no Irish jury would convict." And finally Asquith says that it was imperative that the transfer of authority to the new parliament be made in an aura of peace and that this could not be accomplished by jailing opposition leaders. The Prime Minister was looking for some plan which would meet the special case of Ulster "without denying or delaying the claim of the majority."[51]

Meanwhile the Home Rule Bill (officially the Government of Ireland Bill) progressed steadily through committee and was passed

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[50]Pall Mall Gazette (London), August 7, 1913, 9.

[51]Asquith, Fifty Years, 155-159.

on the second reading for the second time in the House of Commons.[52] In an attempt to allay the fears of Ulster, the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament over future Irish affairs was strengthened and emphasized. Carson, seconded by Bonar Law, saw there was not enough support to put the motion to a vote. Bonar Law said Ulster would prefer foreign to Nationalist rule. Winston Churchill expressed mock horror at the latest Tory threat--that Ulster would secede to Germany. Arthur Balfour asked the government if, in the cause of the bill, they meant to shoot down Ulstermen.[53] The House of Lords, as expected, rejected the bill for the second time. Once more through Commons in 1914 and the Home Rule Bill would become law.[54]

In the latter part of 1913, individuals on both sides began to search for a compromise. Even some of the more militant Tories began to have misgivings. There were indications--rough houses, stone and bottle throwing, a fractured skull--that the Ulster Volunteers were getting out of hand.[55] A newspaper article outlined the problems that might arise between the Covenanteers and the army:

> The Ulster Covenant was signed by soldiers as it was signed by most distingushed judges and they entertain the

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[52]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 53 (27 May-13 June, 1913), 1584.

[53]Ibid., 1306.

[54]Ryan, Mutiny, 72.

[55]Pall Mall Gazette (London), August 15, 1913, 1-2.

> reasonable fear that even even before the Home Rule Bill can pass into law, the government may be compelled to bring troops into collision with the forces of the Unionists in Ireland. Should the bill be passed next May, the army will then be confronted by a situation more serious still; and it is nortorious that some officers have already begun to speak of sending in their papers.[56]

Lord Loreburn, the former Liberal Lord Chancellor, stated in The Times that bloodshed was certain unless the party leaders would meet and agree on a compromise.[57]

The King was deeply concerned and searching for a solution. Bonar Law and Lord Landsdowne suggested the King withhold assent to the Home Rule Bill, force dissolution of the government and call for a general election. When the King proposed this to Lord Ester, the Liberal peer advised strongly against it. Ester said the issue in such an election would not be home rule but, "Is the country governed by the King or the people?" Asquith warned the King that withhold-royal assent was no longer viable. The last time assent had been withheld was in the reign of Queen Anne. A general election would make nonsense of the Parliament Act. If the King forced a general election, Asquith said every government minister, beginning with himself, would attack the King from public platforms. George V decided to reject the Tory suggestion but he pleaded with Asquith to meet with the opposition leaders and search for a compromise.[58]

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[56]Quoted in Ryan, Mutiny, 74-75.

[57]The Times (London), September 12, 1913, 7-8.

[58]Harold Nicholson, King George the Fifth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953), 224-229. Hereafter cited as Nicholson, George V. Jenkins, Asquith, 283. Ryan, Mutiny, 77.

In late 1913, a series of meetings was held between the leaders of the various parties, but no progress was made toward finding a compromise. Bonar Law and Carson said they would accept only the complete exclusion of Ulster from the Home Rule Bill (the boundaries of the area to be excluded were not defined).[59] Asquith, in a letter to Lord Loreburn, wrote that he was willing to compromise on everything except that the Irish Parliament must represent the entire island. The Prime Minister stated this plan was favored by four-fifths of Ireland and a substantial majority of the present and late House of Commons.[60] Redmond, having increasing difficulty holding his own party together in the face of the wavering attitude of his Liberal allies, told Asquith the Nationalists' final position was "autonomy for Ulster under the final supremacy of a Dublin Parliament."[61] At the beginning of 1914, all efforts at compromise on the Government of Ireland Bill had failed.

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[59] The Times (London), September 15, 1913, 7.

[60] Ryan, Mutiny, 85.

[61] Churchill, Churchill, 468.

CHAPTER II

THE PARTICIPANTS

In the Government

Herbert Henry Asquith, Liberal Prime Minister after 1908, the Member for East Fife since 1886, was sixty-two years old in 1914. His interest in the Irish question dated from 1888 when he served as a junior counsel before the Parnell Commission. Asquith was Home Secretary from 1892 to 1895. After a rather long period during which his party was out of office, he became Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Liberal government of 1905. When illness forced Henry Campbell-Bannerman to resign in 1908, Asquith became Prime Minister. As he searched for a way to overcome the obstructionism of the House of Lords, that house provided an issue by rejecting the government budget in 1909. An appeal to the electorate secured the passage of the budget, but the Liberal Party was no longer willing, even in non-financial matters, to accept the Lords' power of veto. Asquith reached a tacit agreement with King George V regarding the creation of sufficient new peers to break the power of the Lords, if such was demonstrated to be the will of the people in another general election. The election returns were favorable but the new peers were not necessary. The Lords, albeit with ill

grace, accepted the Parliament Act of 1911.[1]

In 1912, The Liberal Party had been committed to Home Rule for Ireland for more than a quarter of a century and Asquith's government introduced a new Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons. Of at least equal significance to the home rule tradition was the fact that the Asquith government needed Irish Nationalist voting support to continue in power. When Sir Edward Carson and the Unionist leaders of Protestant Ulster, asserting that armed resistance was their only remaining alternative since the limitation of the veto power of the House of Lords, formed military units to resist Home Rule, Asquith was confounded. He had not expected an unparliamentary challenge to a parliamentary issue. In the past, compromise had saved England from revolution. Wellington convinced the Tories not to oppose the Reform Act of 1832; Peel led his colleagues in accepting the repeal of the Corn Laws. Asquith could not believe a political party would ever defy a majority decision of the House of Commons. The House of Lords would delay it as long as they could but the Home Rule Bill would be law before 1914 was over.[2]

Asquith was highly educated. He had no deep-seated religious convictions but he was a trustworthy man. People in the opposition

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[1]J. A. Spender, "Herbert Henry Asquith" in the Dictionary of National Biography, (1922-1930), ed. by J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 29-34.

[2]George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), 99-101.

and in the army may not have agreed with him but they did trust him. He was an impressive lawyer and parliamentarian; full of common sense. His solidity made him strong and respected.[3]

John Edward Redmond, the Irish Nationalist leader, a native of the Wexford coast, was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. A clerk in the House of Commons even before he became the Member for New Ross in 1881, he had been an active supporter of Parnell. Redmond's nationalism, unlike Parnell's, was not based on hostility toward the British Empire. A man of intense loyalties, Redmond supported Parnell throughout the latter's personal and political crises in 1890 and 1891 and refused to assume the active leadership of the Irish Nationalists until after Parnell's death.[4]

Redmond, a skilled debater in Parliament, never indulged in personal or partisan vilification. He had continual difficulty keeping his party united. There were many sub-surface factional movements both in Ireland and in the House of Commons ("There are two United Irish parties in this House;" Mr. Timothy Healy once remarked to the House of Commons, "I am one of them.").[5] From 1906 to 1909, Redmond championed Home Rule in Parliament and tried to

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[3]George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, 17-18.

[4]Stephen Gwynn, "John Edward Redmond" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1912-1921), ed. by H. W. C. Davis and J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 447-452. Hereafter cited as Gwynn, "Redmond."

[5]Ryan, Mutiny, 19.

hold his volatile factions together at home. By 1912, the Irish Nationalist support of the Liberals in the elections brought on by the debates over the Parliament Act had done a great deal to dilute English animosity toward the Irish. The Nationalist cause was no longer as unpopular as earlier in the century.

Redmond did not really understand Ulster. He tended to view the military preparations being made there as a bluff. In the beginning of 1914, Redmond, fifty-eight years old, still believing in Liberal promises and parliamentary procedures, refused to sanction the formation in the South of the Irish Volunteers as a counterweight to the Ulster Volunteer Force.[6] By this time, however, enthusiasm for Redmond as leader had begun to decline. A group of more rampant nationalists, the Sinn Fein, was rising in Ireland.[7]

There would be occasion, some fifty years after the events of 1914, to eulogize Winston Spencer Churchill as the savior of his country.[8] In 1914, he was, at forty years of age, First Lord of the Admiralty and engrossed with improving the British navy. In the beginning he tried to dilute the Home Rule controversy as much as possible. Had he not been in the government, Churchill would probably have sided with his close friend, F. E. Smith, against Home Rule. Even years later, Churchill's imperial sentiments were

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[6]Gwynn, "Redmond," 450-451.

[7]Ryan, Mutiny, 17.

[8]A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), 4n.

hard to put down. Churchill supported his party's committment to give Ireland a parliament but he went further. He said the claims of Ulster for special treatment could not be ignored and he implied that changes to the bill would be welcomed by the Liberals, if such changes were agreed to by a parliamentary majority.[9]

Changes to proposed legislation were acceptable but threats of insurrection were something else again. Churchill's position noticeably hardened after the Unionist demonstrations at Balmoral and Blenheim. He said Carson was engaged in "a treasonable conspiracy" and he derided the Unionist attitude with telling sarcasm: " . . . coercion for four-fifths of Ireland is a healthful, exhilarating and salutary exercise--but lay a finger on the Tory one-fifth--sacrilege, tyranny, murder!"[10] To Churchill, the constitutional issue was much more important than the Home Rule issue. In The World Crisis, he states: "I would never coerce Ulster to make her come under a Dublin Parliament but I would do all that was necessary to prevent her stopping the rest of Ireland having the Parliament they desired. . . . In support of it I was certainly prepared to maintain the authority of Crown and Parliament under the constitution by whatever means were necessary."[11] This, as became evident, was not political vapouring.

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[9]Churchill, Churchill, 427, 462.

[10]Quoted in Churchill, Churchill, 471-472.

[11]Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 94. Hereafter cited as Churchill, Crisis.

John E. B. Seely was Secretary of State for War in 1914, having succeeded the great Lord Haldane in 1912. Seely had a Liberal background; both his grandfathers had been members of the Anti-Corn Law League. As a child he had sat on John Bright's knee, and had once taken tea with Gladstone. A Yeomanry Colonel in the Boer War, he had a flair for gallant, if sometimes ill-advised, action. Despite his Liberal exposure, Seely began his political career as a Conservative Member of Parliament and then, like Churchill, crossed the aisle.[12]

Seely has been described as brave, ambitious, arrogant and stubborn[13] but, significantly, no one ever called him brilliant. Arthur Balfour, learning that an accident in Switzerland had immobilized Seely for many months with a brain concussion, said, "My dear Jack, that explains it all!"[14] Seely once jumped off a pier to save what he thought was a drowning man only to find it was a champion swimmer giving a life-saving demonstration. According to A. P. Ryan, Seely "took war-like decisions with equal gusto and lack of wisdom."[15]

Elevation to the cabinet turned his head. As an ex-Colonel of the Yeomanry, Seely relished giving orders to Field-Marshalls and

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[12]Ryan, Mutiny, 95-96. [13]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 30.

[14]Major-General the Rt. Hon. J. E. B. Seely, Adventure (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1930), 12-13. Hereafter cited as Seely, Adventure.

[15]Ryan, Mutiny, 96-97.

Generals. He could never gain the respect and confidence of the military leaders. One officer said, "If he [Seely] had just a little more brains, he'd be half-witted."[16] He was the opposite of Haldane; the soldiers found they had exchanged a Schopenhauer for a Cyrano de Bergerac.[17] Forty-six years old in 1914, Seely did not have any strong views on Home Rule and Ulster.

Three other government ministers were involved, to lesser degrees, in the Curragh Incident. Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, never really understood the political undercurrents in that island but may have intensified the crisis when he ridiculed Carson as "an elderly barrister."[18] John Morley, a Home Ruler from another era, was Lord President of the Council. Viscount Haldane, Lord Chancellor in 1914, was still respected by the generals. Had he still been Secretary for War, Haldane might have prevented the Curragh Incident.[19] But only Asquith, Redmond, Churchill and Seely were on the main stage.

In the Opposition

Andrew Bonar Law was born in 1858 in New Brunswick, the son of a Presbyterian minister from Ulster; his mother the daughter of a Glascow iron merchant. He was educated in Scotland and became a staunch conservative in his political thinking. Made independently

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[16]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 30. [17]Ryan, Mutiny, 97.

[18]Ian Covin, The Life of Lord Carson (3 Vols.; London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1934-1936), II, 305. Hereafter cited as Covin, Carson.

[19]Ryan, Mutiny, 17.

wealthy by inheritance, Bonar Law became active in politics and was returned to Parliament for a section of Glascow in 1900.[20] A supporter of Joseph Chamberlain's imperial preference scheme, Bonar Law was more comprehensible, and certainly more energetic, than Arthur Balfour, the Conservative Party leader. In 1909, Bonar Law denounced the government budget as socialistic; he also fought against plans for health and unemployment insurance. A compromise choice between Walter Long and Austen Chamberlain, Bonar Law became leader of the Conservatives and Unionists in the House of Commons in 1911.[21] He fought, unsuccessfully, against the Parliament Act of 1911.

Bonar Law may have been unable to stop the passage of the Parliament Act but he had no intention of deserting his cousins in Ulster simply because his party did not have a parliamentary majority. The Conservative leader's threats of organized disorder over the Ulster question were inexcusable; completely contrary to parliamentary processes. Although he was probably sincere in his concern for Ulster, undoubtably a strong subordinate consideration was the political advantage that would accrue to the Conservatives if the Liberals were discredited over the Home Rule issue. But for an opposition leader to announce, " . . . there are stronger things than parliamentary majorities,"[22] flirts with anarchy. Churchill

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[20]Thomas Jones, "Andrew Bonar Law" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1922-1930), ed. by J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 483-485.

[21]Blake, Bonar Law, 56, 86.

[22]Churchill, Churchill, 453.

accused Bonar Law of "almost treasonable activity."[23]

Sir Edward Carson was born in Dublin in 1854 of Scottish and Irish antecedents. After studying law at Trinity College, he became a respected and important barrister. Appointed Solicitor-General of Ireland in 1893, he was returned to Parliament for Dublin University in that same year. He joined the Middle Temple in 1893. Carson became famous as an advocate when he supported the Marquis of Queensberry against Oscar Wilde in 1895. In January, 1910, Carson was chosen leader of the Irish Unionists in the House of Commons. He once stated, "Devotion to the Union has been the guiding star of my political life."[24]

Carson's feeling for the union appears to have been genuine and, perhaps because he had a better grasp of Irish realities than Redmond, he believed that Ulster could not be seperated from the Empire without a fight. He was politically ambitious. He was also vain and basked in the adulation given him by the Ulsterites.[25] His legal experience had convinced him that it was the verdict, not the means, that counted. Carson was derided by the Liberals as the King of the Bluffers but since his bluff was never called, his probable reaction remains in the realm of conjecture.[26]

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[23]Churchill, Churchill, 453.

[24]Douglas L. Savory, "Edward Henry Carson" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1931-1940), ed. by L. G. Wickham Legg (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 146-147.

[25]Edward Marjoribanks, Carson, the Advocate (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 418-419.

[26]The Times (London), September 30, 1912, 9.

Another important member of the opposition was F. E. Smith, a skilled debater and a personal if not a political friend of Winston Churchill's, who once described himself as Carson's "galloper"[27] (a ranker's derisive term for aide-de-camp). After an initial stance of intransigence, Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) relented and tried to work behind the scenes for a compromise on Home Rule.[28] Another member of Bonar Law's shadow cabinet was Lord Landsdowne, a peer who had large holdings in Southern Ireland, who was against Home Rule not because of Ulster, but because he denied the whole concept of a seperate Irish nation.[29] Sir James Craig, unquestionably an Ulsterite (his ancestral home was on the outskirts of Belfast), helped Carson organize the Unionist Clubs and the Orange Lodges.[30] Other prominent Unionists were Lord Milner and Dr. Jameson (of the raid).[31]

In the War Office

The position of Commander-in-Chief had been abolished in 1904 and the administration of the War Office vested in an Army Council, headed by the Secretary of State for War and composed of four senior military officers and two Members of Parliament. An

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[27]Sir Claud Schuster, "Frederick Edwin Smith" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1922-1930), ed. by J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 785.

[28]Ibid. [29]Blake, Bonar Law, 157.

[30]Clifford King, The Orange and the Green (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1965), 15. Hereafter cited as King, Orange and Green.

[31]Ryan, Mutiny, 122.

imperial general staff on the German model was established in the same year.[32] The Chief and the Adjutant-General of the Imperial General Staff were, ex officio, members of the Army Council and figured significantly in the Curragh Incident.

Field-Marshall Sir John French, who would later gain fame as commander of the British Expeditionary Force in France during the Great War, was Chief of the Imperial General Staff in early 1914. Born in Kent in 1852, the son of an officer of the Royal Navy, he was educated at Eastman's Naval Academy in Portsmouth, but chose a military over a naval career. Beginning as a member of the militia, French joined the 19th Hussars of the regular establishment in 1874. He was a detachment commander in the unsuccessful effort to raise the seige of Khartoum in 1884 and later commanded a regiment in India. In 1914, however, his reputation rested on his record in the South African War. In a splendid cavalry action, French's command raised the seige of Kimberly in February, 1900. After the war ended he held various home commands where he was generally concerned with the training of troops. In 1912, he was assigned to the War Office and was promoted to Field-Marshall in 1913.[33] French was not an

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[32]Harry Bendorf, "Richard Haldane and the British Army Reforms, 1905-1909," Unpublished Master's Thesis (Omaha, Nebraska: Municipal University of Omaha, 1967), 22.

[33]Herman Gaston de Watteville, "John Denton Pinkstone French" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1922-1930), ed. by J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 319-321.

intellectual; abstractions bored him. His one passion was the army; he had no strong feelings about Home Rule or Ulster.[34]

The Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Spencer Ewart, was a quiet, reflective Scot who had also won renown in the South African War. Born into a family with a military tradition stretching back to the Peninsula War, he graduated with honors from Sandhurst and served with distinction in Egypt and the Sudan. Passed out of the Staff College, Ewart served in Malta and again in Egypt before going to South Africa. He was twice mentioned in dispatches. From 1902 to 1914, Ewart held various positions at the War Office. He was Haldane's military secretary and George V's aide-de-camp before becoming Adjutant-General in 1914. He was fifty-three years old.[35] Ewart was deeply concerned about the army attitude toward Ulster. He asked his aide, Captain Wyndham Childs, what that young officer would do in an Ulster crisis. Childs said he did not intend to consider his position until the matter reached the breaking point. "What is that?", asked Ewart. "The movement of the rifle from 'ready' to 'present'", replied Childs.[36]

Of the subordinate directorates within the War Office, three are important to the narrative of the Curragh affair. Major-

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[34]Major the Hon. Gerald French, The Life of Field-Marshall Sir John French, First Earl of Ypres (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1931), 183, 194-195. Hereafter cited as French, French.

[35]Charles V. Owen, "John Spencer Ewart" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1922-1930), ed. by J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 293-294.

[36]Ryan, Mutiny, 100.

General Sir Henry Wilson was Director of Military Operations; Major-General Sir William Robertson was Director of Military Training and Major-General Sir Nevil Macready was Director of Personal Services.

Henry Hughes Wilson is described by A. P. Ryan as "the greatest intriguer who had ever worn the King's uniform."[37] Wilson was Irish, from an Antrim landholding family. His military qualities were not evident in his youth, he failed twice to pass examinations to gain admission to Woolwich and three times into Sandhurst. Like French, he began his career in the militia (where examinations were not required). Wilson transferred to the Royal Irish Brigade and then the Rifle Brigade; serving in India and Burma. At the Staff College, he was a poor student but made many friends. He had a gift for impressing influential people. Becoming a protege of Lord Roberts, Wilson advanced from Captain to Major-General in twelve years. He was a leading expositer of a policy of close cooperation with France in the event of a continental war. Wilson formed a close friendship with General Foch, the commander of the French superior staff college, when Wilson himself was the Commandant of the British Staff College in 1907. He was ordered to the War Office in 1910.[38]

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[37]Ryan, Mutiny, 100.

[38]Herman Gaston de Watteville, "Henry Hughes Wilson" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1922-1930), ed. by J. R. H. Weaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 912-913.

Wilson was a rampant Conservative and bordered on the fanatic when it came to Ulster. In conversation with Sir John French in November of 1913, Wilson said, "I could not fire on the North at the direction of Redmond, and that is what the whole thing means. . . . I cannot bring myself to believe that Asquith will be so mad as to employ force. It will split the army and the Colonies, as well as the country and the Empire."[39] Wilson advised French to put in writing that he (French) could not be responsible for the whole of the army in the event of action in Ulster.[40]

Wilson held almost daily conversations with Conservative politicians. His frequent telephone conversations and meetings with Bonar Law were the Conservative leader's source of information on opinion in the army. Wilson told Bonar Law that "if we were ordered to coerce Ulster there would be wholesale defections."[41] He suggested to Bonar Law that Carson pledge the Ulster Volunteers to fight for England if she was at war; "This would render the employment of troops against Ulster more impossible than ever."[42] General Wilson told the Unionists planning the campaign for the Ulster Volunteers to steer away from seizing depots in order to keep the sympathy of the British Army. Wilson lunched with Lord Milner, a stern, unbending Tory leader, at Brooks and was elated to learn from Milner that, if any officers resigned, they would be

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[39]Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, Field-Marshall Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries (2 vols.; London: Cassell and Company, Ltd. 1927), I, 130. Hereafter cited as Callwell, Wilson.

[40]Ibid., 131. [41]Ibid., 131 [42]Ibid., 131.

reinstated when the Conservatives came to power.[43] He was disappointed when Lord Halsbury ruled against granting belligerent rights to Ulster in the event of civil war. Wilson heartily favored a suggestion that all Unionists in the Territorial Force should resign.[44]

Clearly Wilson subordinated his concept of honor to his political convictions. As the Director of Military Operations in a time of increasing continental tension, he was obligated to keep the army's professional troops removed from the political arena. But his sympathy for Ulster overcame his sense of devotion to his larger duty. It never seems to have occured to him that the passing of information, advice and encouragement to the Unionist leaders, with the express purpose of depriving the government of the support of the army in Ulster after the Home Rule Bill passed, was at least subversion and bordered on mutiny.[45]

Major General Sir William Robertson, the Director of Military Training, was a dour, phlegmatic soldier who had risen through the ranks from cavalry trooper to his present position by 1914. He was destined to become a Field-Marshall and Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Robertson was a clear-thinking, unpolitical professional who viewed military men who indulged in political maneuvering with undisguised disgust. When he was asked by some uneasy

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[43]Callwell, Wilson, 132.

[44]Ryan, Mutiny, 104. [45]Kee, Green Flag, 486-487.

officers what they should do in the event of an Ulster operation, Robertson told them to go away, quit thinking about it and get on with their work.[46]

The Director of Personal Services, Major-General Sir Nevil Macready, had earned a reputation as a peacemaker by maintaining order during a restive coal miners's strike in South Wales in 1910. Colonel Seely had praised him for avoiding a clash between the military and the civil population.[47] Macready was known to be an admirer of Sir Winston Churchill; like Churchill, he believed that firmness and resolute action were more effective than conciliation when there was a danger of civil unrest. But Macready was under no illusions. He writes, "To be responsible for troops and police when engaged in the suppression of disorder is one of the most trying and disagreeable duties a soldier can be called upon to perform."[48]

In Ireland

The General Officer Commanding the Forces in Ireland was Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Paget whose command consisted of two divisions with two attached cavalry brigades. Only the 5th Division,

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[46]Victor Bonham-Carter, The Strategy of Victory, 1914-1918; The Life and Times of the Master Strategist of World War I: Field-Marshall Sir William Robertson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 79-80.

[47]Seely, Adventure, 152.

[48]General the Rt. Hon. Sir Nevil Macready, Annals of an Active Life (2 vols.; London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924), I, 157. Hereafter cited as Macready, Annals.

commanded by Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson, and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Sir Hubert Gough, had any part in the Curragh Incident. Paget's headquarters were in the Royal Hospital, Dublin, while both the 5th Division and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade were headquartered at the Curragh, a large training encampment thirty miles southwest of Dublin, near Newbridge.[49]

Sir Arthur Paget, sixty-three years old, was a veteran of the Ashanti War of 1873, of Suakin and of South Africa. Paget was from an ancient family with a great military heritage and he enjoyed high social standing. At one time he had gone about with the Prince of Wales (Edward VII) who affectionately called him "Artie." Unquestionably gallant, he was prideful and self-centered. In recounting his campaigns, he would use such phrases as "So I massed a thousand guns" and "then I launched my Guards."[50] He claimed "to live history rather than to read it."[51]

However gallant he may have been, Paget was a poor choice for command in an explosive civil situation. Under stress, he was not cool and clear-headed, but rapidly became tempermental and arrogant; he was unable to handle an emotional situation.[52] He was, like Gilbert and Sullivan's "very model of a modern Major-General,"

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[49]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 19. [50]Ryan, Mutiny, 105.

[51]The Times (London), December 10, 1928, 19.

[52]Basil Collier, Brasshat; A Biography of Sir Henry Wilson (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), 148. Hereafter cited as Collier, Brasshat.

out-of-date, casual and intellectually shallow.[53] He had deep-seated prejudices against politicians[54] and "Hibernians."[55] Throughout his life his principal interests had been horse racing, hunting and golf, but since returning from the wars he had taken an almost obsessive interest in horticulture. When Paget died in 1928, the obituary editor of The Times could not resist mentioning that "had he only devoted to military study a fraction of the time which he gave up to the observation of trees and shrubs he might have been ranked as a learned soldier."[56]

If muddle-headed martinets like Paget open the military profession to invective and ridicule, balance is restored by exemplary soldiers such as Sir Charles Fergusson. Born in Edinburgh in 1865, Fergusson spent his adolescence in New Zealand where his father was governor. He graduated from Eton, passed out of Sandhurst with honors and was commissioned in the Guards. Becoming a Baronet on the death of his father, Sir Charles served for seven years in the Egyptian Command, winning distinction under Kitchener in the Sudan. After a series of staff assignments, and a tour as Inspector of Infantry, he became commander of the 5th Division in 1913.[57] Fergusson was a dedicated soldier with few interests outside

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[53]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 33. [54]Ibid., 115.

[55]Covin, Carson, 338.

[56]The Times (London), December 10, 1928, 19.

[57]Sir John Wheeler-Bennet, "Charles Fergusson" in the Dictionary of National Biography (1951-1960), ed. by E. T. Williams and Helen M. Palmer (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 353.

the army. To the dismay and discomfort of some of its brigade officers, the 5th Division maintained a high state of training.[58] Fergusson had no interest in politics and no personal interest in the Irish situation. He was dedicated to maintaining the strength and honor of the army.[59]

Brigadier-General Sir Hubert Gough, also a product of Eton and Sandhurst, had once been the youngest captain, then the youngest commanding officer, and now was the youngest general (forty-three) in the British army. Later he would be the youngest Army commander in World War I. Gough served with distinction under Lord Roberts in South Africa. Executing a daring cavalry maneuver (in doing so he chose to disobey orders in order to capitalize on a fleeting opportunity), he was the first officer to enter Ladysmith after the raising of the seige. Gough was severely wounded in a subsequent action. In service on the Indian Frontier, Gough had met and quarrelled with a cabinet minister, one Winston Churchill, over the application of cavalry tactics.[60]

"Goughie," as he was known to his friends, was the personification of the dashing cavalry officer. He was short and wiry but looked exceptionally well on a horse. Unlike Paget, Gough was keen

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[58]Major-General Lord Edward Gleichen, A Guardsman's Memories; A Book of Recollections (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, Ltd., 1932), 349. Hereafter cited as Gleichen, Memories.

[59]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 59.

[60]Ryan, Mutiny, 130.

and studious. His father died when Gough was an infant and he spent his formative years with an anti-Home Rule family in Clonmel, but he was not politically outspoken and evidenced no particular interest in the Ulster situation until it involved his command.[61] In his biography, Gough writes that ". . . hunting, races and horse shows were our chief amusement when we were not soldiering . . . None of us Cavalry officers were much interested in Irish politics . . ."[62]

One other military officer serving in Ireland deserves mention, not because he was an active participant in the Curragh affair but, because he was such a perceptive observer. Brigadier-General Count Edward Gleichen was commander of the 15th Infantry Brigade, a part of the 5th Division. The 15th was not stationed at the Curragh but, in small elements, dispersed in and around Belfast in Ulster. Gleichen, a grand-nephew of Queen Victoria, was an ex-Guards officer and a veteran of the Sudan and South Africa.[63] His highly articulate, often witty, Memories provide a valuable account of what was happening in Ulster at the time of the Curragh Incident.

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[61]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 64-65.

[62]General Sir Hubert Gough, Soldiering On (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, n. d.), 98. Hereafter cited as Gough, Soldiering.

[63]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 21.

CHAPTER III

THE INCIDENT

Carson Bets, Churchill Calls

On December 16, 1913, Colonel Seely, the Secretary of State for War, held a meeting in the War Office with all the General Officers Commanding in England, Ireland and Wales. Seely had heard speculation that some officers might refuse to obey orders to march into Ulster and he wanted to establish a policy for dealing with such a possibility. Following are parts of the statement Seely made at the meeting:

> I first deal with the legal question. The law clearly lays down that the soldier is entitled to obey an order to shoot only if that order is reasonable under the circumstances. No one, from general officer to private, is entitled to use more force than is required to maintain order and the safety of life and property. No soldier can shelter himself from the civil law behind an order given by a superior if that order is, in fact, unreasonable and outrageous.
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> If therefore, officers and men in the army are led to believe that there is a possibility that they might be called upon to take some outrageous action, for instance, to massacre a demonstration of Orangemen who are causing no danger to the lives of their neighbors, bad as might be the effects on discipline in the army, nevertheless, it is true that they are, in fact and in law, justified in contemplating refusal to obey.
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> But there never has been, and is not now, any intention of giving outrageous and illegal orders to the troops. The law will be respected and must be obeyed. What now has to be faced is the possibility of action being required by His Majesty's troops in supporting the civil power, in protecting life and property if the police are unable to hold their own.
>
> Attempts have been made to dissuade troops from obeying lawful orders given to them when acting in support of the civil power. This amounts to a claim that officers and men can pick and choose between lawful and reasonable orders, saying that they will obey in one case and not in another.

> The Army has been quite steady. During the past year there has not been brought to the notice of the authorities one single case of lack of discipline in this respect. At the same time, in view of statements in the press and elsewhere, it is well to make the position clear.[1]

Seely instructed his generals to make this position clear to their officers. The generals were to be held responsible for discipline in their commands. Infractions were to be dealt with under the King's regulations. Any officer asking to resign because he contemplated disobeying a lawful order, would be removed.[2]

This statement borders on the unintelligible. While the use of ambiguity to mask intentions or to shun responsibility is a time-honored if not an admired strategem in military circles, these instructions were so conflicting as to be meaningless. A soldier could not pick and choose between "lawful and reasonable orders," but under no circumstances would he be justified in obeying an "unreasonable and outrageous" order. Soldiers deal in violence and, by some definitions, all violence is outrageous. Seely did not explain how a soldier in a critical situation could determine if an order was "reasonable under the circumstances." A soldier is conditioned toward instant obedience. The responsibility for lawful and reasonable orders lies with the giver, not the receiver. The Seely statement must have left the generals more confused than reassured.[3] And

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[1] Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 25, 1914, 4.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Winston Churchill as I Knew Him (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode and Collins, 1965), 294. Hereafter cited as Bonham-Carter, Churchill. Collier, Brasshat, 143.

one among them, Sir Arthur Paget, the General Officer Commanding the Forces in Ireland, was susceptible to confusion.

The government ministers became increasingly uneasy about the intentions of the Ulster Volunteer Force as the year 1914 progressed. Although the reports of British government agents in Ulster were often inconsistent and confusing, some intelligence indicated the Ulster Volunteers were gathering information on the Royal Irish Constabulary, the coastguard, the post office and the railway stations. The Ulstermen were said to be reconnoitering the meeting places of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the United Irish League, two covert Irish Nationalist societies. Sir Edward Carson, the Ulster Unionist leader, was out inspecting his regiments. The Ulster Volunteer Force was said to have 110,000 men.[4] The Volunteers now had machine guns, airplanes and ambulances. There was even a ladies' auxillary.[5]

Sir Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations in the War Office, visited Ulster in January, 1914. In his diary, Wilson makes no comment on the condition of the army in which he served, but he gives glowing reports on the Volunteers after a visit to the Ulster Union offices in Belfast: "The arrangements of the Ulster army are well advanced and there is no doubt of the discipline and the spirit of the men and officers. I must come over later

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[4]Pall Mall Gazette (London), January 24, 1914, 3.

[5]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 2, 1914, 1.

and see the troops at work."[6] In a War Office meeting in early February, Seely asked Wilson about the Ulster situation. Sir Neney writes that he told Seely ". . . the government are done. They have bumped up against 100,000 men who are in deadly earnest, and that, as neither the Cabinet nor Englishmen are ever in earnest about anything, Ulster was certain to win."[7]

In early March, the government made a last effort at compromise on the Home Rule Bill. With the reluctant consent of the Irish Nationalist leader, John Redmond, the Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith, offered an amendment which would allow, by plebiscite, any Ulster county to exclude itself from the operation of the bill for six years. After that time, the county would automatically come under the provisions of the Home Rule Act.[8] Carson, supported by Andrew Bonar Law, the Conservative and Unionist Party leader, rejected the proposal. He called it "a sentence of death with a stay of execution for six years."[9] (The Irish Nationalists liked the proposal no better than the Unionists; the nationalists said it would bring about the dismemberment of Ireland.)[10] Carson followed his rejection of the compromise with an appeal to the country against the elected government:

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[6]Callwell, Wilson, 137. [7]Ibid., 138.

[8]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 9, 1914, 1.

[9]The Times (London), March 10, 1914, 12.

[10]Ryan, Mutiny, 116.

> Are you going to allow the forces of the Crown, which are your forces, not the forces of any political caucus, to be used to coerce men who have asked nothing but that they should remain with you? And if you are, are you going to give up, even for a moment, to a government which may be here today and gone tomorrow, the right yourselves to determine what is real liberty, and this to a government who have refused, when asked, to appeal to the country?[11]

Bonar Law and General Wilson discussed a scheme to have the House of Lords amend the Army Annual Bill (the Mutiny Act). Initially against the proposal, Wilson writes that Bonar Law "entirely persuaded me to his side. The proposal is for the Lords to bring in an amendment to the effect that the army shall not be used against Ulster without the will of the people expressed at a General Election. . . . I am convinced Bonar Law is right. Desperate measures are required to save a desperate situation."[12] Bonar Law did not pursue this measure, however, when it threatened to cause a split in his Conservative and Unionist Party.[13]

The entire English political party system seemed to be tottering. Bitter accusations were exchanged in Parliament. The Conservatives accused the government of planning to massacre the Ulster Loyalists. The Liberals said the Tories were blatantly encouraging rebellion and urging army officers to reject their oaths of allegiance. German spies reported to Berlin that England was

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[11]Ryan, Mutiny, 117.

[12]Callwell, Wilson, 138.

[13]Blake, Bonar Law, 186-187.

riddled with factionalism and strife.[14] Hope for a peaceful settlement of the Ulster question was dwindling.[15]

On March 6, the government considered action in response to secret reports received from Ireland that the Ulster Volunteers might be planning to mount a concerted attack on military and police barracks and arms and ammunition depots.[16] Some hot-heads in the Ulster Volunteer Force, the reports indicated, were going to take matters into their own hands and march on Dublin.[17] The source of these reports is one of the unsolved mysteries of the Curragh Incident. After the incident, Asquith, pressed in Parliament, said the reports came from the police; that they were confidential and, for security reasons, he could not produce them. The Prime Minister indicated that such reports had been coming in since December, 1913.[18] The reports did not come from either General Paget or General Gleichen, the senior army officers in Ulster.[19] It is unlikely the reports came from the Royal Irish Constabulary. In a visit to Ireland in 1913, General Macready, the Director of Personal Services at the War Office, described the constabulary as demoralized

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[14]James Cameron, 1914 (New York: Rinehart & Comapny, Inc., 1959), 25. Hereafter cited as Cameron, 1914.

[15]Churchill, Churchill, 470. [16]Bonham-Carter, Churchill, 295.

[17]Blake, Bonar Law, 186-187.

[18]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 25.

[19]Ibid.

and lethargic with an ineffective intelligence service.[20] Whatever the source, Asquith told the cabinet (and reported to the King) that "the latest series of police reports . . . indicates the possibility of attempts on the part of the 'volunteers' to seize by coups de main, police and military barracks, and depots of arms and ammunition."[21] A committee, composed of Lord Crewe, Birrell, Churchill, Seely and Sir John Simon, the Attorney General, were designated by the Prime Minister to investigate and report.[22]

Simon evidently took no part in the activity of the committee and Lord Crewe, appointed chairman to act as a restraining elder statesman, became ill and could not perform his duties.[23] Churchill and Seely, both more men of action than of contemplation, dominated the committee. Certain precautionary measures were directed even before the committee reported back to the cabinet. Churchill and Seely found four particularly vulnerable depots and instructed the War Office to take special measures for the depots' protection.[24] Following are excerpts from orders sent by the War Office to Sir Arthur Paget on March 14:

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[20]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 26. [21]Churchill, Churchill, 471.

[22]J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord of Oxford and Asquith (2 vols.; London: Hutchinson, 1932), II, 42. Hereafter cited as Spender, Asquith.

[23]The Times (London), March 13, 1914, 6.

[24]Bonham-Carter, Churchill, 295.

> Reports . . . have been received that attempts may be made in various parts of Ireland to obtain possession of arms, ammunition and other government stores, . . . You should at once take special precautions for safeguarding depots and other places where arms or stores are kept, . . .
>
> . . . Armagh, Omagh, Carrickfergus and Enniskillen are insufficiently guarded, being specially liable to attack. You will, therefore, please to take the necessary steps and report to this office.
>
> Officers in command of all barracks where guns, small arms, ammunition, and other government stores are located should be warned that they will be held responsible that all measures to insure the safety of the stores, etc., under their custody are taken, and that at no time should barracks or buildings be left without adequate armed guards.[25]

It was also decided that the Constabulary, scattered about Ulster in small detachments, whould be concentrated in Belfast under a single commander. There were few regular troops in Ulster; in fact, only elements of one infantry brigade under Brigadier-General Gleichen. Paget was told that, if the situation became critical, reinforcements would have to be moved from the Curragh into Ulster.[26] After the committee deliberations and decisions on March 14, Winston Churchill journeyed to Bradford, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and made a speech.

No historian or biographer of the time has been able to refrain from quoting large excerpts from Churchill's Bradford speech. In his autobiography, Asquith quotes Churchill's peroration and states: "I am glad to be able to cull this vivid passage from the slowly withering rhetoric of a now half-forgotten controversy, as a

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[25]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 25, 1914, 4.

[26]Churchill, Churchill, 471.

proof, if proof were needed, that the twentieth century can hold its own with its predecessors in an oratorical competition."[27] Ira Covin, Carson's biographer, writes that the speech "was like the flash of a sword suddenly drawn and brandished."[28] Churchill spoke for a government that had diligently sought compromise, had been rebuffed and derided, and now was lashing back. Asquith's final offer of temporary exclusion for Ulster, said Churchill, had been a hard sacrifice for Irish Nationalism. Yet the Unionists had rejected it and talked of violence. He called Carson's Covenanteers "a self-elected body, composed of persons who, to put it plainly, are engaged in a treasonable conspiracy."[29] Was parliamentary government, he asked, going to knuckle under to the menace of illegal force? That issue had already been decided at Marston Moor. He warned the Ulsterites that the first British soldier killed by an Orangeman would cause an explosion in the country.[30] Mr. Churchill denounced the selective anarchy of the Unionists and ended his speech with a declaration daringly close to a battle cry:

> As long as it affects working men in England or Nationist peasants in Ireland, there is no measure of military force which the Tory party will not readily employ. They denounce all violence except their own. They uphold all law except the law they choose to break. They always welcome the application of force to others. But they themselves are to remain immune. They are to select from the Statute Book the laws they will obey and the laws they will resist.

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[27]Asquith, Fifty Years, 165.

[28]Covin, Carson, 303. [29]Asquith, Fifty Years, 164.

[30]Covin, Carson, 303.

> If Ulster seeks peace and fair play she can find it. She knows where to find it. If Ulstermen extend the hand of friendship, it will be clasped by the Liberals, and by their nationalist countrymen, in all good faith and in all good will; but if there is no wish for peace; if every concession that is made is spurned and exploited; if every effort to meet their views is only to be used as a means of breaking down Home Rule, and of barring the way to the rest of Ireland; if Ulster is to become a tool in party calculations; if the civil and parliamentary systems under which we have dwelt so long, and our fathers before us, are to be brought to the rude challenge of force; if the government and the Parliament of this great country and greater Empire are to be exposed to menace and brutality; if all the loose, wanton, and reckless chatter we have been forced to listen to these many months is in the end to disclose a sinister and revolutionary purpose; then I can only say to you: "Let us go forward together and put these grave matters to the proof."[31]

Those Churchills had a way with words.

Paget and the War Office

On Monday, March 16, Seely sent a message to Dublin asking Paget what had been done about the instructions in the War Office letter of March 14. The message also instructed Paget to come to London:

> Please wire to me not later than 8 a. m. tomorrow (17th) what steps you have taken to carry out instructions in paragraph 2 of War Office Confidential letter, dated 14th March, 1914; also if the general instructions in paragraph 3 of the same letter have been issued. I shall be glad if you can come over, bringing with you full plans in detail, and meet me at the War Office at 10:45 a. m. on Wednesday, 18th March.[32]

Paget replied promptly that he had issued the necessary instructions and "taken all available steps." "Will send details tomorrow by post," he wired.[33]

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[31] The Times (London), March 16, 1914, 13.

[32] The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6. [33] Ibid.

On March 17, Paget wrote a letter to the War Office which indicated he had not, in fact, followed his instructions. In December, 1913, Gleichen had sent Paget a long report recommending that no more troops be sent into Ulster.[34] This report made the Commanding General nervous about large troop movements and he chose to move slowly. He ordered depot commanders to intensify their security measures but he did not move troops north for the protection of the four depots mentioned in his orders.[35] He explained in a letter to the War Office: "I am of the opinion that any such move of troops would create intense excitement in Ulster and probably create a crisis. . . . I do not consider myself justified in moving troops at the present time, although I am keeping a sufficient number in readiness to move at short notice . . ." Paget went on to say that ". . . there is no intelligence service in this command . . . so that I am placed at a considerable disadvantage in attempting to judge the urgency of the situation . . ."[36] This sounds rather timorous for one who had massed a thousand guns. The gaps in General Paget's information were filled in at the War Office meeting in London on March 18.

A very important meeting took place at 10:45 A.M. on Wednesday,

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[34]Gleichen, Memories, 371-372.

[35]Covin, Carson, 308.

[36]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

March 18, in the War Office. Assembled were Lord Crewe, Birrell, Simon, Seely, Churchill, French, Ewart, Macready and Paget.[37] Faced with this august array, General Paget readily agreed to move the necessary troops into Ulster to protect the depots. Troops would be moved from Dublin and the Curragh to reinforce the depots at Omagh, Armagh, Carrickfergus and Enniskillen. In addition, Paget was directed to safeguard the artillery park at Dundalk and to send a detachment to Newry (Dundalk and Newry were not arms depots; Dundalk was not in Ulster.).[38] Paget was ready to obey but he did suggest that it might be more propitious to evacuate the depots than to reinforce them. The government ministers did not share his apprehensions. Birrell, the resident Irish expert, did not think the volunteers would fight as long as the troop movements were not provocative. French disliked scattering the troops out in small detachments.[39] The 1st Dorsetshire Regiment, stationed in Victoria Barracks, Belfast, was to move to Holywood. Supporting naval elements would steam off the northeast coast of Ireland to cover the troop movements. General Macready was to go to Belfast with a dormant commission, to be activated when he thought necessary, appointing him the military governor of that city. All these moves were to take place on Friday, March 20; to be completed on Saturday, March 21, "in all secrecy."[40]

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[37]Callwell, Wilson, 139. [38]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 48.

[39]Callwell, Wilson, 139.

[40]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

As the General Officer Commanding in Ireland, Paget was given full discertionary powers to deal with new situations as they arose. He could maneuver the forces of his command as an emergency might require and he could call for large reinforcements from England if they were necessary. He was told he might have to face six possible situations, seperately or in combination: 1) Armed opposition to the troops moving to reinforce the depots 2) Attacks on the depots or on the artillery park at Dundalk 3) The blowing up or destruction of railway lines 4) Serious conflict between Protestants and Catholics at Belfast 5) Disorder in the South and West with Catholics attacking Protestants 6) An organized movement of the Ulster Volunteers under their responsible leaders.[41] This was heady stuff for Paget, but he sent the necessary orders to his second-in-command, Major-General L. B. Friend, in Dublin:

> Bedfords to move to places which have been decided. [A previous message had alerted 300 men to be ready to move to Enniskillen, 100 men in two cruisers to Carrickfergus, 300 men to Omagh and 100 men to Armagh.] Battalion of 14th Brigade to go to Newry and Dundalk. Battalion, Victoria Barracks, to go th Holywood with all ammunition and bolts of rifles if unable to move rifles themselves. These movements to be simultaneous if possible and to be complete by dawn, Saturday, 21st, with all secrecy.[42]

The outcome of the War Office meeting on March 18 worried Sir John French and afterward he discussed it with his Director of Military Operations, Sir Henry Wilson. French railed about the

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[41]Churchill, Churchill, 476.

[42]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

cabinet ministers and told Wilson "they are contemplating scattering troops all over Ulster, as though it were a Pontypool coal strike."[43] French asked Wilson if the General Staff had a plan for the suppression of Ulster and Wilson answered that none existed. Wilson went on to tell French that mobilization would be necessary before the army could suppress Ulster and even then the outcome would be uncertain. According to Wilson, there were certain to be risings on the English side of St. George's Channel if Ulster were forced. Wilson went on to say that "a large proportion of the officers and men" would refuse to fight against Ulster. Wilson writes that French "seemed surprised at all this," but French said the government were determined to see the thing through.[44]

The Conservatives and Unionists were not going to be surprised; not while they had Wilson in the War Office. That very evening he dined with Lord Milner, Dr. Jameson and Carson.[45] Wilson does not admit he told his fellow diners about the War Office plans but Carson's speech in the House of Commons on the following day indicated knowledge of the movements that logically could have come only from Wilson.[46] Carson asked the government ministers to consider the effect on the army of bringing it into armed conflict with Ulster. "Under your directions," he accused, "they will become

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[43]Callwell, Wilson, 139.

[44]Ibid. [45]Ibid.

[46]The Times (London), March 20, 1914, 8.

assassins."[47] "I feel," Carson went on, "that I ought not to be here but in Belfast." Fearing arrest, he left the House for Euston Station and the train for the Belfast boat.[48]

From Carson's manner and language in Commons, the government may have assumed that he planned to proclaim the provisional government upon his arrival in Belfast.[49] This may have affected the deliberations that took place at the War Office on March 19. The conference on that day was longer than on the 18th; the ministers and the generals disagreeing on several points. No notes were kept of the conference and there is even some uncertainty over who actually attended. Certainly Seely, French, Ewart and Paget were there; Macready was probably present. Churchill must have been there for a short time.[50] The nature of the discussion can only be discerned by Paget's subsequent actions.

Paget, as he had pointed out in his letter of March 17, was concerned that the troop movements would be the cause of civil unrest. He also believed that there was a possibility that the employees of the Great Northern Railway would refuse to transport his troops from Dublin and the Curragh into Ulster. Most important, he was fearful that many of his officers would refuse to accept orders to participate in active operations against the Ulster Volunteers.[51]

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[47]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 59 (2 Mar.-20 Mar., 1914), 2277.

[48]Covin, Carson, 313, 316. [49]Blake, Bonar Law, 188.

[50]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 51. [51]Ibid., 51-52.

The ministers must have tried to reassure their timorous general on these points. If his troop movements were resisted or attacked, he must have been promised necessary reinforcements. There is no doubt that Churchill promised that naval vessels would be available to carry the troops by sea to Carrickfergus and Dundalk so that neither detachment would be dependent on railway transportation and the unit bound for Carrickfergus would not have to march through the streets of Belfast.[52] Paget was fairly carried away at one point by all the talk of combined operations and large reinforcements. Becoming excited, he exclaimed, like a reincarnated Jacobite, "I shall lead my army to the Boyne!" This startled French, who told him not to be "a bloody fool."[53]

The number of communications issuing from the Admiralty on March 19 gives a strong indication that Churchill had something more in mind than arms depot security. Orders were sent to the 3rd Battle Squadron, in Arosa Bay, off Portugal, to steam at ordinary speed to Lamlash, in the Firth of Clyde, opposite Belfast. The Commander of the 3rd Battle Squadron, after clearing Ushant, was to proceed in the flagship directly to Plymouth; he was to proceed overland to the Admiralty in London for further orders, then overland to Lamlash. His flagship was to proceed direct from Plymouth to Lamlash.[54] The senior naval officer at Bantry in County Cork was

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[52]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 53.

[53]Blake, Bonar Law, 187.

[54]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 378.

directed to send the two light cruisers, H. M. S. Attentive and Pathfinder to Kingston with orders to arrive by noon on the twentieth. The Attentive was to pick up a company of the Bedfordshire Regiment and then both ships were to steam to Belfast Lough. The Pathfinder was directed to cooperate with the senior military officer at Carrickfergus Castle for its defense. Guns and searchlights from the ships were to be used as necessary. The Captain of the Pathfinder was to proceed, in civilian clothes, to Belfast and report to General Macready, who would be in place by then, for "cooperation with the military in certain eventualities."[55] A destroyer was dispatched from the 4th Flotilla at Portsmouth to Dublin to take aboard the General Officer Commanding in Ireland, if necessary. The destroyer captain was to report, in civilian clothes, to the Royal Hospital, Dublin.[56] All of these orders were sent out in a one-half hour period, from 1:57 P.M. to 2:32 P.M., on March 19.[57] Later on the nineteenth, at nine o'clock that evening, the cruisers, H. M. S. Gibraltar and Royal Arthur, were directed to steam from Plymouth to Kingston, where they would each embark 275 infantrymen and transport them to Dundalk by the morning of March 20.[58] Finally, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet was directed to send eight

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[55]Pall Mall Gazette (London), April 23, 1914, 2.

[56]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

[57]Ryan, Mutiny, 127.

[58]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

destroyers from Southhampton to join the 3rd Battle Squadron at Lamlash.[59] It was indeed a busy day at the Admiralty.

Paget's final concern was the behavior of his officers if they were ordered to march into Ulster. Colonel Seely, apparently prodded by French, finally agreed to some concessions with regard to officers actually domiciled in Ulster. Those officers could be exempted from any operation that might take place. They should be allowed to "disappear" and when all was over they would be allowed to resume their places without their careers or positions being affected.[60] Any other officers should not be permitted to resign their commissions but, if they refused to obey orders, should be dismissed from the army.[61] Paget left for Dublin by the night mail.

A great deal had happened during two days of conferences. Troops on the borders of or in Ulster had been reinforced by two infantry battalions. Belfast was to be placed under a military governor. General Paget was given full discretionary powers to use his forces for the protection of arms depots and the prevention of civil disorder. He had been promised large reinforcements from England if he needed them. Paget had, or soon would have, naval support from seven battleships, four cruisers and nine destroyers. Officers who attempted to resign their commissions if ordered into Ulster were to be dismissed from the army with indulgence shown

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[59] The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

[60] Ryan, Mutiny, 121. [61] Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 55.

only to those officers actually domiciled in Ulster. But all this was in the form of oral instructions; Paget left London without a single written order.[62]

Gough Won't Go

Sir Hubert Gough was startled, early in the afternoon of Thursday, March 19, to hear that the troops at the Curragh, at the direction of Headquarters in Dublin, had been issued extra rounds of ammunition. About the same time his wife received a note from Sir Charles Fergusson's wife. The note stated that the Fergussons would not be able to keep a dinner engagement with the Goughs that evening because Sir Charles was busy issuing orders for the movement of several division units. Gough began to feel uneasy. Something was up. He wrote a quick letter to his brother, Sir John Gough, who was Chief Staff Officer to General Sir Douglas Haig at Aldershot. "What the devil is up?," Sir Hubert asked. Later in the day another order came from Dublin. Gough, Fergusson and every general within reach was to attend a conference with the Commanding General at Dublin on Friday morning.[63]

That meeting in Dublin on Saturday morning was the start of the Curragh incident. As at the War Office no notes were taken; Paget forbade notes. Attending, beside Fergusson and Gough, were Brigadier-General S. P. Rolt, Commander of the 14th Infantry Brigade; Brigadier-General G. J. Cuthbert, Commander of the 13th

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[62] Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 55.

[63] Gough, Soldiering, 99.

Infantry Brigade; Colonel F. F. Hill, commander of the regimental depots in the northern counties and Major-General L. B. Friend, Paget's deputy.[64] Both Gough and Fergusson wrote accounts of the meeting soon after it was over. The accounts do not differ in any essential respect. Both agree that Paget's opening statement lacked coherence.

Paget began the meeting by saying the situation might appear theatrical but was really very serious. Active operations were about to commence against Ulster.[65] "The whole place," he said, "would be in a blaze by Saturday."[66] Precautionary measures had already taken place. There were warships in Belfast Lough, Kingston and Lamlash. Troops would be moved north in the event of a disturbance. If there were disturbances an enormous force would be deployed to convince Ulster that resistance was futile.[67] He had full discretionary powers with an army of reinforcements at his call. Paget reminded his generals of a speech he had made at the Corinthian Club in Dublin three weeks earlier. At that time he had said that, although the army would hate to move north, if the order were given it would be obeyed without hesitation. He had said the army had a stern sense of discipline and would do their duty. The speech had been widely quoted in the newspapers.[68] Paget had ap-

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[64]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 65.

[65]Gough, Soldiering, 101.

[66]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 23, 1914, 2.

[67]Ryan, Mutiny, 131.

[68]Pall Mall Gazette (London), February 14, 1914, 4.

parently forgotten that all he had really been ordered to do was to move two battalions and one company of infantry and re-group some others. This could have been done without excitement; without talk of "active operations against Ulster" and "the whole place being in a blaze." Sir James Fergusson (General Fergusson's son), in his book, The Curragh Incident, speculates that Paget was "hearing trumpets and smelling battle afar off."[69]

Paget did emphasize that no aggressive act on the government's part must start the conflict. If there was going to be fighting, the Ulstermen must begin it. He repeated over and over again that there must be no agression on the part of the troops. He expected them to accept punishment without returning fire in hope that a parley could be arranged and government terms accepted.[70]

The Commanding General proudly announced that he had, with Sir John French's help, secured the following concessions from the Secretary of State for War:

> First: Officers actually domiciled in Ulster would be exempted from taking part in any operations that might take place. They would be permitted to "disappear" (that being the exact phrase used by the War Office) and when all was over would be allowed to resume their places without their position or career being affected.
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> Second: Officers who stated they were unwilling to serve might tender their resignations, but these could not be accepted. And officers doing so would forthwith be removed from the service.[71]

The brigade commanders were directed to put these alternatives to

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[69]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 67. [70]Ryan, Mutiny, 131.

[71]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 8.

their officers. "Domiciled in Ulster" was to be strictly interpreted. Paget announced that if any general present at the meeting was not willing to do his part, he was not to report to the second conference, scheduled for Saturday afternoon. Decisions were to be prompt and the number of officers not prepared to do their duty must be reported by that evening. Paget told Gough a squadron of cavalry was to be ready to march north by the next morning. He went on to say, "Tell your men to trust me and I will guarantee that there will be no bloodshed."[72] But, he added, he was no prophet and, once embarked on the enterprise, they must go through to the "bitter end."[73]

Turning again to Gough, Paget said, "'You may expect no mercy from your old friend at the War Office'--meaning Sir John French." This caused Gough to "put up his hackles." Why, Gough wondered, had he been singled out to be threatened?[74] The meeting ended on that note.

Fergusson and Gough talked immediately after the meeting. According to Gough, Fergusson was agitated; pale and trembling. Fergusson said, "The army must hold together; we must not break up the army, etc."[75] Gough says, "I did not argue. I listened. Fergusson went away saying he had decided to go. I said I would not go."[76]

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[72]Ryan, Mutiny, 132-133.

[73]Gough, Soldiering, 102. [74]Ibid., 101.

[75]Covin, Carson, 330.

[76]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 70.

Fergusson drew up a memorandum of the meeting for his unit commanders, stating the terms that were to be put to the officers, and sent it to the Curragh. Gough telegraphed his brother John at Aldershot, telling him of the Paget alternatives and that he (Hubert) was resigning from the service. Sir Hubert then went to Knightsbridge where the 5th Lancers (a squadron of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade) were quartered. He collected the available officers, told them of the alternatives, and said that every man must decide for himself. All of the Lancer officers except three said they would resign with their Brigade Commander.[77] Returning to Headquarters, Gough told General Friend of his decision. Friend asked him if he could not look upon the operation as an effort to maintain law and order. Gough said he could not; it might develop into civil war at any time. Friend then told the cavalry commander to send in a letter of resignation. Gough returned to the Curragh.[78]

Paget's second conference was held at two o'clock at the Royal Hospital. There was much controversy later about what he said. Again notes were forbidden and again Fergusson wrote an account of the meeting after it was over. Fergusson, Friend and Major-General Pultney, Commander of the 4th Division stationed in the South of Ireland, attended.[79] Friend explained Gough's absense and Paget expressed regret.[80]

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[77]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 80.

[78]Gough, Soldiering, 102-103.

[79]Ryan, Mutiny, 135. [80]Ibid.

The plan of campaign was outlined. If there was a disturbance in Ulster, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was to seize bridgeheads on the Boyne. The 5th Division would advance and consolidate these positions. The 6th Division would move from the South into the positions vacated by the 5th Division in Dublin and at the Curragh. The 1st Division from Aldershot would reinforce the 5th Division. Three infantry battalions from Scotland, with supporting artillery, would land in the North and garrison points forming a ring around Belfast; Larne, Ballymena, Lisburn, Holywood and Bangor. A naval brigade was to land at Bangor.[81] Paget again said there must be no act of aggression. There was to be no firing unless personally authorized by Paget. If troops were molested or their progress otherwise impeded, they were to return to their barracks. The troops from England and Scotland were for demonstration only. All measures were precautionary; to be ready if the Ulsterites got out of hand and attacked the police.[82]

Back at the Curragh, General Gough polled the rest of his brigade, acknowledged a request for clarification from his officers and sent the following minute to Paget:

> With reference to the Communication from the War Office conveyed to me verbally by the Commander-in-Chief this morning, I have the honour to report the results of my interviews with the Officers of my Brigade.
>
> The officers are of the unanimous opinion that further information is essential before they are called upon at such short notice to take decisions so vitally affecting their whole future, and especially that a clear definition should be given of the terms "duty as ordered" and "active operations" in Ulster.

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[81]Covin, Carson, 331-332. [82]Ibid., 332.

> If such duty consists of the maintenance of order and the preservation of property, all the officers of this brigade, including myself, would be prepared to carry out that duty.
>
> But if the duty involves the initiation of active military operations against Ulster, the following numbers of officers by regiments would respectfully, and under protest, prefer to be dismissed:
>
> Brigade Staff, 2 officers.
> 4th Hussars, 17 out of 19 doing duty.
> 5th Lancers, 17 out of 20 doing duty.
> 16th Lancers, 16 out of 16 doing duty.
> 3rd Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery, 6 out of 13 doing duty, "including R. M."
> 4th Field Troop, Royal Engineers, 1 out of 1 doing duty.
> 3rd Signal Troop, Royal Engineers, 1 out of 1 doing duty.
>
> In addition, the following are domiciled in Ulster and claim protection as such:
>
> 4th Hussars, 2 officers.
> 5th Lancers, 1 officer.
> 3rd Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery, 2 officers.[83]

Gough's absence from the second conference, a meeting between Paget and Colonel Parker of the 5th Lancers, and this letter prompted the messages to the War Office on the defections (see page 1).

Fergusson took a different tack in response to Paget's directive to poll the officers in the 5th Division on their willingness to serve against Ulster. At Paget's second meeting, Fergusson asked if the orders came from the King. Paget replied that he would not have accepted the orders if they had not had the sanction of the King (Not that it really mattered, but King George did not even know about the War Office orders to Paget. Technically, they had the King's sanction since they were issued by the government.). Fergusson used this asserted sanction to good effect.[84] Back at the Curragh, he assembled the staff officers of the Royal Engineers and the Service

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[83]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 24, 1914, 4.

[84]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 78.

Corps had asked for their decisions. They all said they hated the use of troops against Ulster and resented the way in which their decisions had been demanded on short notice but said they would, under protest, do their duty if ordered. A report of these decisions was forwarded to Paget along with Gough's minute.[85]

Saturday, March 21, was a day of almost frenzied activity for Fergusson. He began by seeing General Rolt and exhorting this wavering officer to hold his units together. The example of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was known and many other officers were ready to resign. Fergusson spoke personally to the officers and men of the 21st Suffolk Regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment. The soldiers evidenced strong feelings and resentment but there were no resignations.[86] Many of the junior officers were shocked and indignant. They wrote emotional letters home; some of which were later printed in newspapers and used by Bonar Law in the House of Commons.[87] Next, Fergusson saw Gough and tried to dissuade him from resigning. According to a witness, Gough looked uncertain but said he had gone too far to turn back. Reluctantly Fergusson, following Paget's orders, ordered Gough, Colonel Parker of the 5th Lancers and Colonel MacEwen of the 16th Lancers to report to London in accordance with the War Office telegram (see page 1).[88]

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[85]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 90. [86]Ryan, Mutiny, 144-145.

[87]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 24, 1914, 1.

[88]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 117.

Fergusson went to Kildare and Newbridge to talk to his artillery units. There were painful scenes but less resentment and no resignations. Fergusson made similar but not identical remarks to all units. He said the first duty of soldiers was to obey the orders of the King and of constitutional authority. This order (the forced choice between dismissal or duty in Ulster) was the King's; issued with his sanction. Officers were told of their responsibility for influencing juniors and subordinates. Personal considerations must give way to their duties as commanders of troops. They must not be a party to anything that weakened discipline. Officers could not refuse to obey the present orders and still expect their men to obey when they--on strike duty, for instance--were placed in similar difficulties. If the army was disrupted, the country would be at the mercy of the mob. Society, the Monarchy and the Empire might be shattered. Fergusson repeatedly emphasized that no aggressive measures were contemplated. Use of the King's name was most effective. Loyalty to the King was the determining factor in inducing most officers to withhold their resignations.[89]

A lot depended on how the ultimatum was presented. Colonel Turner, Commander of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, whose advance units were already enroute to Dundalk and Newry, had no resignations. "Active operations in Ulster" did not alarm his unit.[90] Fergusson went on to Dublin and convinced the officers of the 1st East Surrey Regiment and the 13th Infantry Brigade to not resign.

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[89]Ryan, Mutiny, 145-146. [90]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 84.

The King's Own Scotch Borderers, previously stationed in Holywood but now in Dublin, were not unwilling to fight Orangemen but the suddenness of the ultimatum antagonized them and ten officers chose dismissal. Fergusson talked them out of it.[91] By the end of the day on Saturday, March 21, General Fergusson, after a magnificent effort, could report that, except for a few Ulster-domiciled officers and one or two waverers, the officer corps of the 5th Division was intact and ready for duty. The resignations in response to the ultimatum were effectively confined to the 3rd Cavalry Brigade.

About the time General Ewart in the War Office was reading Paget's first telegram ("Fear men will refuse to move"), the first news of the Curragh situation reached Fleet Street. An Exchange Telegraph message from an Irish correspondent stated that word had been received at the Curragh from the War Office that any officer not prepared to serve against Ulster must immediately send in their resignations or be dismissed from the service.[92] About one hundred officers, another story said, had turned in their papers.[93] The rumors about the resignations of the cavalry officers appeared in The Times on Saturday morning.[94] There was also an accurate article about the movement of troops. A battalion of Bedfords had been

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[91] Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 118.

[92] Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 21, 1914, 1.

[93] Ibid.

[94] The Times (London), March 21, 1914, 8.

moved from Mullingar to Enniskillen. Another detachment of Bedfords had arrived at Armagh. The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry was at Newry. The garrison at Dundalk had been doubled. The article went on to say that Sir Arthur Paget had been given wide authority to safeguard government property and to keep order. Inaccurately, the article stated that the War Office had not specifically directed the movement of troops into Ulster.[95]

Paget went to the Curragh on Saturday morning to make a personal appeal to the cavalry officers. The accounts of this meeting, by Gough and other officers, indicate that Paget was near hysteria. In an inconsistent, disjointed harangue, the Commanding General pleaded with the cavalry officers to trust him and he promised they would not be placed in any objectionable positions. He had no intention of making war on Ulster. Units would be moved only for the protection of stores. The movements were, in fact, directed mostly against "Hibernians" (an ambigious term; to Paget it probably meant those affiliated, in fact or in spirit, with the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a secret society of radical Irish Nationalists.). The depot at Enniskillen was dangerously exposed to Hibernians. The hills around Dundalk were peopled with Hibernians. Any clash with Ulster men would be avoided. If any battalion met resistance, it was to turn around and go back into barracks. If fighting took place, he would order his men to lie down and not return the fire, while he and his generals went forward to parley with the Ulsterites.

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[95] The Times (London), March 21, 1914, 8.

The cavalry would not be required to take any serious part. He would use them only as scouts and to protect his lines of communication. The scouts need not fire a shot; just supply him information. They need take no part in an actual engagement. He did, however, expect the cavalry squadrons to hold the line of the Boyne while 25,000 reinforcements were brought over from England.[96]

Turning from conciliation to threat, Paget said he expected only a "few religious fanatics" to accept dismissal. If officers liked to "indulge in the luxury of sentiment" they must pay for it. No resignations would be accepted. Defecting senior officers would be tried by Court-Martial. He told the cavalry officers they were disobeying the direct order of their sovereign. He would never have agreed to the orders if he had not known it was the King's wish. He asked the officers if they thought he would obey "those dirty swine of politicians." Paget finished this remarkable address by directly confronting Gough and telling the cavalry general that he could expect no mercy. Gough coldly replied that he did not ask for mercy.[97] No resignations were withdrawn. Paget directed Gough, Parker and MacEwen to hand over their commands, cross to London that night and report to the War Office the following morning.[98]

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[96]Gough, Soldiering, 103-104.

[97]Ibid., 104-105.

[98]Ibid., 105.

Gough to London

Rumors had begun to circulate in the political circles of London as early as Friday night, March 20. "The fleet has been ordered to Belfast and Sir Arthur Paget is to be reinforced with 60,000 troops."[99] The ubiquitous Henry Wilson was called to meet with Brigadier-General John E. Gough at the Gough home in Sloane Square. John had learned that his brother Hubert had just been dismissed from the service because he would not undertake operations against Ulster. John Gough stated he was going to resign in sympathy, but Wilson told him to wait. Later that evening, someone telephoned Wilson that all the officers of the 16th Lancers had resigned.[100]

Wilson was in Bonar Law's office by nine-thirty Saturday morning. He told Bonar Law that Hubert Gough and about fifty officers at the Curragh had resigned rather than move against Ulster. After getting an agreement from the Conservative leader that it was imperative to back Hubert, Wilson went on to the War Office for several meetings with Sir John French. French did not appear to be aware of the gravity of the situation. Wilson told French the breakaway of the Curragh officers was just the beginning; the General Staff would break away next. He urged French to ask the Prime Minister to take immediate action to placate the Curragh officers before there was a general defection. French discussed

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[99]Ryan, Mutiny, 147.

[100]Callwell, Wilson, 140.

the matter with Colonel Seely. Seely was inclined toward direct and speedy action--court-martial, etc.--but asked what terms the army would accept. French then asked Wilson to draft a proposal for the reinstatement of the Curragh officers.[101]

Wilson wrote out a promise on the part of the government "not to employ the army to coerce Ulster to accept the Home Rule Bill" and to reinstate Hubert Gough and all his officers. French took the paper to Seely but, very soon, brought it back. Wilson remarks, "I gathered it was not popular with Asquith and his crowd." French arranged a meeting between Wilson and Seely at seven o'clock, Saturday evening. It began with polite, banal exchanges. Seely even thanked Wilson for the way he had behaved during the past two years; particularly when he knew Wilson's sympathies were with Ulster. Wilson then presented a briefing on the Curragh situation and the liklihood of wholesale resignations within the army. If Gough and his officers were not reinstated, there would be "no officers on the General Staff at the War Office; the regiments would be depleted of officers." England would be facing a "hostile Europe; our friends leaving us because we had failed them and our enemies realizing we had lost our army." Despite this impassioned appeal, "Seely remained untouched." Wilson went straight from Seely to another meeting with Bonar Law. He writes in his diary that he was determined to resign but "cannot think of a good way of doing it."[102]

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[101]Callwell, Wilson, 140. [102]Ibid., 141.

King George, in whose name Paget and Fergusson--with varying success--were urging their officers to hold together, found out about the crisis when he read the morning papers on Saturday. He promptly called Seely and had some sharp words with the Secretary for War. Lord Roberts came to see the king. The elderly Field-Marshall was in despair; he said the crisis "would ruin the army." Next King George sent for Sir John French and impressed upon the taciturn Field-Marshall that "if great care were not shown there would be no army left." The king wrote a well-justified letter of complaint to Asquith, expressing indignation at the free way in which his name had been used.[103]

Hubert Gough arrived at his mother's flat in Sloane Square on Sunday morning, March 22. He was met by his brother John with news that the War Office would take the line that there had been a complete misunderstanding; that Paget's alternatives should never have been put before the officers and that they were to be reinstated. Hubert was not placated; he was now thoroughly aroused. Suspicious of his superiors, both civilian and military, he was determined to resign. The Gough brothers went to the War Office where they met Parker and MacEwen. All of them agreed they would not return to their commands if they were liable to be exposed again to the situation forced on them by Paget. And they were not

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[103]Nicholson, George V, 238.

[104]Gough, Soldiering, 105.

prepared to undertake war on Ulster.[104] Hubert Gough gave General Wilson a written account of Paget's conference in Dublin on March 20. Wilson wrote in his diary, "This is a perfect God-send for me." He could now say that, given the same alternatives, he would give the same answer. Wilson promptly sent a copy of Hubert Gough's report to Bonar Law, telling Bonar Law to freely use what Paget had said.[105]

Brigadier-General Gough, without his colonels, was ushered into a meeting with Generals Ewart and Macready. He was stiff and correct, determined not to submit to a lecture or a "wigging." He writes that he was conscious of no offense but filled with resentment over the cruel and hard position forced upon him by Paget and the War Office. Ewart asked Gough what had happened at the Curragh. After Gough had replied, Ewart asked Gough if he thought "an officer had any right to question when he should go or should not go in support of the civil powers." Gough answered promptly, "None whatever," but added that he had never been ordered by Paget to go in support of the civil power. Paget had offered two alternatives of which Gough had accepted one.[106] This ended the interview. Gough was told to stay in London within reach by telephone. Parker and MacEwen had seperate interviews. Colonel F. F. Hill, commander of the regimental depots in the north of Ireland who had attended

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[105]Callwell, Wilson, 141.

[106]Gough, Soldiering, 106-107.

the first meeting with Paget on March 20, was also with the Cavalry officers in their confrontation with the War Office generals.[107]

Gough now felt he was in a very strong position and he resolved that "I would not return to my command unless I was given a guarantee in writing that neither I nor my officers would be exposed again to being ordered to impose Home Rule on Ulster. I was not really a very interested Ulsterman, but I felt the army was being made a pawn in the political game, . . ."[108]

Mr. Asquith spent a busy weekend on the twenty-second and twenty-third of March. After being briefed by Seely, The Prime Minister saw the legal aspects of the situation were not as important as keeping the army together. He was chagrined that Paget had been authorized to question the officers in Ireland on how they would react under hypothetical circumstances. The officers had been asked to decide questions that were the province of the government.[109] Rather testily, he pointed out to his Secretary for War that officers should not be asked to choose between their military duties and their political convictions, but simply given orders. The Prime Minister directed Seely to reach a settlement with the officers from the Curragh before the House of Commons met on Monday, March 23.[110] On Sunday Asquith gave a statement to The Times; to be published on Monday. The statement was incomplete and, in part, inaccurate

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[107]Ryan, Mutiny, 150-151. [108]Gough, Soldiering, 106.

[109]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar-8 Apr., 1914), 419.

[110]Covin, Carson, 341-342.

but this may not have been deliberate. He stated that the troop movements in Ireland were purely precautionary and intended only to safeguard arms depots. Naval movements consisted of two small cruisers dispatched to convey a detachment of troops to Carrickfergus so they would not have to march through Belfast. No further troop movements were contemplated. The Ulster leaders were not going to be arrested. There was not going to be an inquisition into the intentions of the cavalry officers if they were asked to take up arms against Ulster. "The employment of troops against Ulster is a contingency which the government hopes may never arise."[111] Mr. Asquith was trying to cool off an explosive situation. He did not know that a top general on the Imperial General Staff was briefing the opposition leader on every unpublicized development.

The Prime Minister also had a few words with the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Churchill. The King had written Asquith on the twenty-first about " . . . some excitement caused . . . in Ireland by the movements of some ships and I have heard nothing from the First Lord of the Admiralty . . ." Questioned, Churchill told Asquith for the first time about the movement of the 3rd Battle Squadron and the Southampton destroyers.[112] Asquith ordered both movements cancelled. The destroyers put back into Southampton and the battle squadron was directed back to Portuguese waters.[113]

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[111] The Times (London), March 23, 1914, 1-2.

[112] Churchill, Churchill, 481.

[113] Covin, Carson, 340.

Later, when questioned about the changing of the fleet orders, Asquith, with masterly aplomb, said, "In view of the prevelant excitement in the country, and the fact that the precautionary measures in Ireland had been peacefully carried out, I suggested to Churchill that the movement of the ships should be delayed."[114]

Hubert Gough had breakfast with Wilson at the latter's home in Eaton Place on Monday, March 23. They both agreed that any government proposals must be in writing and stipulate that General Gough would not be asked to use his troops to coerce Ulster.[115] At the War Office, Gouch talked with General Sir Douglas Haig who had come up from Aldershot to offer encouragement to the cavalry general. At 11:15 that morning Gough met with French and Ewart. French said, " . . . a great misunderstanding." Gough replied, "No misunderstanding on my part, Sir." French directed, "You are to return to your commands as if nothing had happened." Gough replied, "I am quite willing to do that, but such a grave crisis has arisen that neither I nor the officers can return unless we receive a definite assurance that we shall not be asked again to enforce on Ulster the present Home Rule Bill." French immediately replied that he could give such an assurance. Gough demanded the assurance in writing. French asked, "Is my word not good enough? Let's wipe everything off the slate and go back to Thursday evening."[116] The answer to the question was no. Gough writes in his autobiography, "I had no faith in Sir John French's promises, but I did not want to say

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[114]Churchill, Churchill, 481.

[115]Callwell, Wilson, 141. [116]Ryan, Mutiny, 152-153.

so!"[117] The cavalry general continued to hold out for a written assurance. French said it was impossible; Gough refused to return without it. Finally, after a long and painful silence, French said, "There is nothing for it but to take him before the Secretary of State."[118] In the hallway enroute to Seely's office, French made a last appeal, "For God's sake, go back and don't make any more difficulties; you don't know how serious all of this is. If you don't go back all the War Office will resign. I have done my best for you. If they had attempted to penalize you, I would have resigned myself." Gough said he was "awfully grateful."[119]

Paget was with Seely when Gough, French and Ewart entered the Secretary's office; evidently he had been summoned from Ireland on Sunday. According to Gough, Seely expressed extreme hauteur; was stiff with French and Ewart, glared at Gough. Gough was struck by the submissive attitude of French, Ewart and Paget. Seely began a pompous harangue. His manner varied from extreme truculence to fawning paternalism. He gave a long discourse on the relationship of the military to the civil power; emphasizing that to maintain law and order the civil power was justified in using the necessary force. Gough writes that the remarks of the Secretary were a summary of the Preamble to the Army Act. Gough listened attentively, fearful that Seely would attempt to put him in a disadvantageous position. Seely finished his remarks by saying that the Prime

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[117]Gough, Soldiering, 107. [118]Ibid.

[119]Ryan, Mutiny, 153.

Minister had just stated the government was not planning to coerce Ulster and that such an assurance should be sufficient for Gough. Gough replied that under ordinary circumstances this would be true but, such grave misunderstandings had arisen, that he felt he must have the promise in writing. Seely became very indignant and said no soldier would be allowed to dictate to the government. Gough merely repeated his request.[120] There was another one of those painful silences.

French rescued Seely and removed the impasse by suggesting that Gough would not be able to keep the respect of his subordinates unless he could show them a written assurance. Gough writes that he knew this was nonsense but he was willing to accept it because it gave Seely a chance to extricate himself. So Gough "hastened to thank Sir John French for his explanation."[121] Seely's manner was still very condescending but he said this put the request for a written assurance in a new light and he added that there should be no difficulty in drawing up a satisfactory memorandum. Paget agreed. Ewart was tasked to draft the memorandum; Gough was to return for it at four o'clock that afternoon.[122]

Ewart, perhaps with French's help, quickly drafted the memorandum and sent it to the cabinet for approval. The cabinet had begun discussion of the draft when Seely had to leave for an audience with the King. When he returned the cabinet meeting was breaking

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[120]Gough, Soldiering, 108. [121]Ibid.

[122]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 110.

up and Asquith handed him the amended document. After reading the memorandum as amended by the cabinet, Seely felt some additions were necessary if the document was going to satisfy Gough and his officers. For some unknown reason, he felt empowered to make the suitable additions.[123] Lord Morley, who was still in the room, helped Seely frame and append two additional paragraphs. Seely might not have been a principled man but Lord Morley was and it is amazing to find him conniving with Seely to tamper with a cabinet paper.[124] But later Lord Morley bravely admitted his responsibility.

Before the four o'clock meeting Sir Douglas Haig called on Sir John French to warn that, if Gough were punished, every officer in the Aldershot command might resign. French had Haig's warning on his mind when he received the cabinet document from Seely. Both French and Ewart added their initials to Seely's on the bottom of the document and, about four-thirty, the document was handed to Gough.[125] In its completed form (the first three paragraphs from the whole cabinet; the last two from Seely and Morley), it read as follows:

> You are authorized by the Army Council to inform the officers of the Third Cavalry Brigade that the Army Council are satisfied that the incident which has arisen in regard to their resignations has been due to a misunderstanding.
>
> It is the duty of all soldiers to obey lawful commands given to them through the proper channels by the Army Council, either for the protection of public property and the support

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[123] Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (31 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 416-417.

[124] Blake, Bonar Law, 197.

[125] Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 150-151.

> of the civil power in the event of disturbances or for the protection of the lives and property of the inhabitants.
>
> This was the only point it was intended to put to the officers in the questions of the General Officer Commanding, and the Army Council have been glad to learn from you that there never has been and never will be any question of disobeying such lawful orders.
>
> His Majesty's government must retain their right to use all the forces of the Crown in Ireland, or elsewhere, to maintain law and order and to support the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty.
>
> But they have no intention whatever of taking advantage of the right to crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill.[126]

Gough asked permission to study the document. This made French very impatient. He said the King was waiting to learn if the matter had been settled. Gough said it was important to preclude any further misunderstanding. Gough, his brother, Parker, MacEwen and Wilson studied the document.[127] Wilson and Gough approved of the memorandum except for the last paragraph. The phrase "crush political opposition" could be variously interpeted.[128] Gough took a sheet of War Office stationery and, with Wilson's help, wrote the following: "I understand the reading of the last paragraph to be that the troops under our command will not be called upon to enforce the present Home Rule Bill on Ulster, and that we can so assure our officers. H. P. Gough."[129] Taking Parker and MacEwen with him as witnesses, Gough returnes to French's office. French had been waiting in great agitation. Gough observed that the Field-Marshall's hands were shaking. When Gough read from the

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[126]Pall Mall Gazette (London), March 24, 1914, 4.

[127]Gough, Soldiering, 109.

[128]Callwell, Wilson, 142. [129]French, French, 193.

paper the interpetation he and Wilson had placed on the ambigious phrase, French considered for a moment and then said, "That seems all right." He took a pen and wrote on the bottom of Gough's paper, "That is how I read it. J. F."[130] Gough and his colonels shook hands with French and Ewart, said good-bye and crossed to Dublin on the night mail. Wilson felt sure the government would object to the fifth paragraph of the memorandum. It constituted a definite promise on the part of the government. He was also sure that French would be in trouble for agreeing to it. Although he gave no advice or information to his immediate superior, Wilson promptly informed Bonar Law of all that had taken place.[131] It had been a busy day.

At 5:00 P.M. on March 23, General Wilson assembled the officers of his directorate and briefed them on the situation. A major on Wilson's staff, one Archibald P. Wavell, wrote down, in a letter to his father, his impressions of Wilson's remarks. Wilson told his assembled officers that General Gough and his colonels were going back to Ireland with a signed pledge that the army would not be used against Ulster. The statement that Wilson and Gough had written and French had initialed was read to the group. Wavell writes that the attitude of a majority of the assembled officers was that the army had won a great victory. But he does not agree. The army had won a political battle and political victories by the

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[130]French, French, 194.

[131]Callwell, Wilson, 142.

army might destroy the political stability of the country. Wilson was openly jubilant over the events. "He actually said, 'The Army have done what the opposition failed to do' and 'will probably cause the fall of the present government.'" Wavell found this deplorable. "What right," he wrote, "have the army to be on the side of the opposition, what do they have to do with causing the fall of the government?" "How," he continued, "is the country going to take that state of affairs?"[132]

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[132]John Connell, Wavell: Scholar and Soldier (London, Collins, 1964), 87. Hereafter cited as Connell, Wavell.

CHAPTER IV

IMPACT AND AFTERMATH

House of Commons

In the House of Commons on Monday evening, March 23 (the day Sir Hubert Gough received his written assurance and returned to Ireland), the government ministers were attacked from both sides of the aisle. The opposition accused them of trying to use the armed forces to provoke violence and give the government forces an excuse to shoot down Ulstermen. The Liberal members railed about "playboy cavalry officers" who allowed their political views to overcome their sense of duty and discipline. General Paget was quoted and misquoted. Bonar Law brought forth letters from officers asserting that more than merely protective operations (as Asquith had claimed) were planned.[1] Arthur Balfour accused Asquith of planning to coerce Ulster and then losing his nerve.[2] Ramsey MacDonald remarked that the Syndicalists had not been able to sell their doctrines to the Labour Party but apparently had made some headway with the Tories.[3] A Syndicalist Manifesto was read into the record. Addressed to the enlisted men of the British Army; it reminded them

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[1] Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 73.

[2] Ibid., 95. [3] Ibid., 96-97.

that their officers had exercised an option about obeying orders and asked the men to resolve never to fire on their own class.[4]

The anti-government speeches showed two conflicting points of view; either there had been a wicked government plot or the cavalry officers had gone on strike. John Ward, a Socialist returned as a Labour member for the Potteries, raised the "men on horseback" specter. "We have . . . to decide whether we are going to maintain . . civil authority and law within these realms, or whether . . . this House, when elected by the people, must go to a committee of officers and ask that Military Junta . . . whether it is a subject which they, as officers of the Army, think that we, as representing the people, are entitled to interfere."[5]

In vain, the government tried to explain and minimize the incident. Colonel Seely, with Asquith, outlined the troop movements and asserted that all orders had been punctually and implicitly obeyed. The movements, Seely said, were purely protective and there had been no intention of moving the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. No plans existed or were being considered for conquering or intimidating Ulster. Brigadier-General Gough had misunderstood his instructions but this misunderstanding had been resolved and Gough was on his way back to Ireland to resume his duties (In fact, at the very moment Seely was speaking, Gough and Sir John French were still

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[4]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 120.

[5]Ibid., 119-120.

discussing the meaning of the phraseology in the government memorandum that cleared up the misunderstanding). No reinstatement was necessary because no officers had been deposed.[6]

Bonar Law, supplied with extensive confidential government information by Sir Henry Wilson, did not accept the explanations of the ministers. The opposition leader quoted General Paget's ultimatum. He referred to Paget's remark that Ulster would be "in a blaze by Saturday." Information from other commands, Bonar Law asserted, indicated large numbers of officers intended to resign. "Our army is being destroyed before our eyes," he said, "over the government plot to conquer Ulster." Bonar Law quoted Churchill's Bradford speech as proof of government intentions to use force in Ulster. How, he asked, could the Curragh officers be punished for refusing to move against their own countrymen? Precedent, the Tory leader claimed, had been established during the American Revolution for officers opting out of service in a civil war. The scruples of officers refusing to serve against the American colonies had been respected; why not the scruples of officers refusing to serve against Ulster?[7] It was a bad evening for the government.

Some foreign views on the Army-Ulster situation appeared in The Times on Tuesday morning, March 24. From Paris, a correspondent wrote the crisis had given "a painful impression" of the state of British politics. A Berlin newspaper called the crisis

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[6]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 73, 82.

[7]Ibid., 73, 79.

one of "the perils of democracy." The Times already had accurate news of Gough's written assurance: "The troops under his command will not be used to coerce the people of Ulster into acceptance of the Home Rule Bill."[8] Asquith and Seely must have been startled to read that article.

In the War Office, Major-General Robertson tried to convince Sir John French that the government would never accept the addendum to the cabinet memorandum that Gough had composed and French had initialed. French would not listen; he had not yet told Seely of the addendum when news of it appeared in The Times. Wilson hastened to report all this to Bonar Law. Wilson, like some oily Iago, assured French that--though the Field-Marshall would probably be dismissed when the government found out about the added assurance given to Gough--there was no need for worry. The Army would stick by him.[9]

As it became apparent the government was avoiding giving full details, belief grew in the country that some sort of government plot had been thwarted by the action of the army officers. In the House of Commons on March 24, neither Seely or Asquith would answer opposition questions about Gough's written assurance. Asquith denied any knowledge of destroyer movements from Southampton to Belfast Lough. John Ward, with telling sarcasm, asked, "Is it

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[8]The Times (London), March 24, 1914, 7-8.

[9]Callwell, Wilson, 142-143.

proposed to ask General Gough to form a government?"[10] An editorial in The Times stated there was good evidence that the War Office had planned an attack on Ulster and the attack was prevented only when large numbers of officers chose dismissal. Citing Bonar Law's speech in Commons on Paget's ultimatum, the editorial speculated that "a frank soldier artlessly blurted out the whole project to his brigadiers and colonels, instead of deftly disguising the real interests of the government." What could cause, the editorial continued, "the whole place to be in a blaze by Saturday," except a deliberate attempt to provoke the Covenanteers?[11]

The government issued a white paper on March 24 that contained a selection of documents and telegrams but no fleet orders were included. Unfortunately for the government, General Wilson, on that same day, found out about the Churchill orders sending the 3rd Battle Squadron and two flotillas to Lamlash. From there, Wilson surmised, the naval contingents were "to make a regular Jameson raid on some Ulster stronghold." Only the Army action, Wilson felt, had prevented a naval incursion.[12] Bonar Law and the press were promptly informed and when Commons met on the 25th, the government white paper was derided as inaccurate, incomplete and misleading. Sir Charles Beresford asked, with obvious accurate knowledge, about the fleet orders and their cancellation. Churchill replied that it had been decided two weeks earlier to send a battle

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[10]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 204-207.

[11]The Times (London), March 24, 1914, 9.

[12]Callwell, Wilson, 142.

squadron to Lamlash; to be there in the event of disorder. The movement of the squadron had been cancelled on March 21 because the precautionary troop movements had been completed without incident. Mr. Amery accused Churchill of hoping the precautionary measures would lead to fighting and bloodshed. Churchill called this a "hellish" insinuation.[13]

Bonar Law, at the same sitting on the 25th, asked about the additions to the Gough letter. Asquith replied that the document was drawn up to allay uneasiness in the officers' minds about the hypothetical questions put to them by General Paget. The Prime Minister said it was incorrect to put hypothetical questions to the soldiers and it was further incorrect for soldiers to ask for written assurances from their government.[14] The two paragraphs added by Seely and Morley, Asquith said, were subject to misunderstanding and were repudiated by the government.[15] Later, he also repudiated the Gough-French written agreement. Asquith saw that note as a new claim which, if allowed, would place the government and the country at the mercy of the army. The government would never yield, the Prime Minister said, to the claim of any body of men in the service of the Crown, to advance options of what they would or would not do in circumstances that had not arisen.[16] He added that General

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[13]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar-8 Apr., 1914), 378-380.

[14]Asquith, Fifty Years, 168.

[15]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar-8 Apr., 1914), 419-420.

[16]Ryan, Mutiny, 159. Spender, Asquith, 48.

Gough had been informed that the two added paragraphs were not to be considered as operative.[17]

What had Paget really said? What were his orders? Bonar Law asked the questions but he already knew the answers. Asquith admitted Paget had no written orders.[18] Seely added that it had initially appeared that Gough and the others had denied Paget's authority and for that reason they had been summoned to London. When Paget had said "in a blaze" he had meant the press would be in a blaze, Seely explained. Seely admitted he had made a grave error in adding to the cabinet document and offered to resign.[19] Arthur Balfour questioned the government's grounds for the precautionary moves. He suggested their purpose was to maneuver Ulster into an offensive. Notwithstanding the government's repudiation, Balfour personally approved of the "peccant paragraphs." Austen Chamberlain asked if anyone believed that Paget would put such questions and make such statements without authority?[20] The government made no immediate reply to either Balfour or Chamberlain.

The Army

The cabinet memorandum given to Gough was published in the white paper, but not the Gough-French agreement. Wilson wired

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[17]Asquith, Fifty Years, 168.

[18]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 376.

[19]Ibid., 395-401.

[20]Ibid., 411, 496.

Hubert Gough to "stand like a rock" and then hurried into strategy sessions with Bonar Law, pursuant to bringing down the government.[21] Returning to the War Office, Wilson urged French, since the Field-Marshall's promise to General Gough had been repudiated, to resign. The rest of the army would hold as long as no action was taken against Gough. French offered to resign but, for the moment, Seely would not allow it. According to Wilson, all the Commanders-in-Chief and the division commanders notified French that the army would not fight Ulster. Wilson was exultant but thought French and Ewart should resign in the interest of army solidarity. The cabinet was trying to keep French in place in order to minimize the extent of the army's uneasiness.[22]

Early in the week of March 22, Lord Haldane announced in the House of Lords: "No orders were issued, no orders are likely to be issued, and no orders will be issued, for the coercion of Ulster." Now Haldane sent for French and told the Field-Marshall that the Prime Minister had agreed to let the Haldane statement stand. This statement in effect colaborated the Gough-French agreement. French wrote a letter to Gough stating that, although the government would not recognize the Gough-French concordance, the Haldane statement was now recognized government policy. French showed this letter to Haldane and Asquith before it was sent.[23]

Pursuant to his goal of keeping the army intact and responsive (This was, after all, 1914 and it looked like there could soon

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[21]Callwell, Wilson, 143. [22]Ibid., 144. [23]Ibid., 143-144.

be more vital employment for the army than putting down civil disturbance in Ulster.), Asquith, hoping to avert future Curragh Incidents, issued an Army Order on Discipline:

> No officer or soldier should in the future be questioned by his superior officer as to the attitude he will adopt, or as to his action, in the event of his being required to obey orders dependent on future or hypothetical contingencies.
>
> An officer or soldier is forbidden in future to ask for assurances as to orders which he may be required to obey.
>
> In particular, it is the duty of every officer and soldier to obey all lawful commands given to them through the proper channel, either for the safeguarding of public property, or the support of the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty, or for the protection of the lives and property of the inhabitants in the case of disturbance of the peace.[24]

Wilson called the order "ridiculous" and continued to urge French to resign.[25]

Lord Milner once remarked, "They talk a lot about Gough but the man who saved the Empire is Henry Wilson."[26] Whatever Wilson was trying to save, it was not Sir John French. French, still wavering on resignation, composed a letter to the Prime Minister. In giving the assurance to Gough, French wrote, he had thought he was carrying out the instructions of the government; he had no idea of soldiers dictating to the cabinet or to Parliament. French inserted a paragraph approving of Asquith's order on Discipline but Wilson talked him into deleting it. In the final paragraph, French stated he believed the government would not coerce public opinion

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[24]Asquith, Fifty Years, 167.

[25]Callwell, Wilson, 144. [26]Ibid.

in Ulster and that there would be no active operations in Ulster. For these reasons, French contemplated no action against Gough; nor would he make any effort to recover the concordance, which Gough still held.[27] This was not enough. Asquith again repudiated the Seely addendum and the French-Gough concordance.

On March 30, the Prime Minister accepted the resignations of Seely, French and Ewart. Asquith became his own Secretary of State for War; he held the additional office until the early days of World War I, when he relinquished it to Lord Kitchener. Asquith told his new charges: "The Army will hear nothing of politics from me and, in return, I expect to hear nothing of politics from the army."[28] Although Wilson still maneuvered to bring down the government, many officers, including Gough, approved of Asquith's move. They considered Asquith "a gentleman, honest and straightforward, . . . with the interests of the Army at heart."[29] Sir Charles Douglas and Sir Henry Sclater succeeded French and Ewart.[30]

In a speech at Ladybank, in Fife, on April 4, Asquith quoted and endorsed the doctrine laid down by Pitt, the Elder, in the House of Commons, in 1745:

> The right of inquiring what measures may conduce to the advantage and security of the public, belongs not to the Army, but to this House. To this House belongs the power of constituting the Army, or of advising His Majesty with regard to

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[27]Callwell, Wilson, 144-145.

[28]Asquith, Fifty Years, 170. [29]Gough, Soldiering, 110.

[30]Callwell, Wilson, 145.

> its constitution. Our Armies have no better right to determine for themselves than any other body of men, nor are we to suffer them to prescribe laws to the Legislature, or to govern those by whose authority they subsist.[31]

The Prime Minister should have made the doctrines of the Elder Pitt required reading for Sir Henry Wilson.

Although the soldiers were still uneasy, routine was returning to the Curragh and the other army camps. Affairs at the War Office were resuming their normal course. Wilson, still convinced that he and Gough had thwarted a government plot, discussed with Lord Milner the importance of making the cabinet reveal what orders had been given to Paget. "The disclosure of the orders will absolutely abolish the cry of 'the people versus the army' and will ruin Winston, Lloyd George, Birrell, Seely and (I think) Asquith," Wilson notes in his diary.[32] Wilson went to France in mid-April to explain to General de Castelnau exactly what happened at the Curragh in connection with Ulster. The singular situation that had arisen in Ireland--particularly the army's involvement--attracted a great deal of attention in France and, indeed, all over the continent.[33]

Brigadier-General Gough and his regimental colonels were welcomed as heroes when they returned to the Curragh. Gough gave a speech in which he said that soldiers, as well as other men, had the right to follow the dictates of their consciences. The reluctant general received a great deal of fan mail--most of it from

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[31]Asquith, Fifty Years, 169-170.

[32]Callwell, Wilson, 146. [33]Ibid.

Ulster. The government asked that the cabinet memorandum be returned but Gough refused, saying he had deeded the document in trust to his eldest daughter.[34] Gough facetiously complains, in his autobiography, that his role as a hero of the Ulsterites was very short-lived. " . . . I was soon replaced by Henry Wilson!"[35]

Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson, whose magnificant effort halted the spread of the defections, found himself in trouble with his sovereign. Lord Stamfordham, George V's secretary, wrote a letter to General Fergusson sharply criticizing him for assuring his officers that Paget's orders had been fully approved by the King. Stamfordham had received a letter from an Infantry colonel of the 5th Division who told the secretary that he and his officers understood "the King had given the order, and we one and all obeyed."[36] The King, in fact, had known nothing about the orders or the problem they created until he read the morning paper on Saturday, March 21. The King resented his name being used so freely; without his knowledge or consent.[37] Fergusson's soldierly qualities did not preclude a knowledge of the constitution; he replied, respectfully but firmly, that he felt orders coming to him from his superiors were technically from the King and, as such, merited respect and obedience.[38] Even General Paget, scolded by the King on this same subject,

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[34]Gough, Soldiering, 110. [35]Ibid.

[36]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 174-175.

[37]Nicholson, George V, 238.

[38]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 175-176.

said, "All orders to the Army were the King's orders."[39] Fergusson offered to resign. Stamfordham quickly replied, saying the king had reconsidered Fergusson's action and had decided the general had been correct in that he did what he was told, and urged Fergusson not to resign.[40] The army continued to settle down but there was a vague uneasiness in the relations between the military commanders and the government ministers. Morale suffered; suspicion spread and rumors were ripe.

Ulster

Ulster was quiet. Ulster had been quiet throughout the crisis.[41] The Saturday on which Ulster was to be "in a blaze" passed in complete calm at Holywood and Belfast. When Major-General Macready arrived in Belfast with his dormant commission as military governor, he was greeted by Brigadier-General Gleichen, who reported all was well.[42] In the first week of April, the Dorset Battalion moved, without incident, from Holywood back into Victoria Barracks. The officers of Gleichen's infantry brigade, stationed in the heart of Ulster and almost certain to be the first troops involved if an incident occured, were never presented with Paget's ultimatum--to choose between operations in Ulster and dismissal.[43]

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[39]Nicholson, George V, 238.

[40]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 177.

[41]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

[42]Gleichen, Memories, 376-377. [43]Ibid., 380.

The Plot

The opposition and the Conservative press continued to insist a sinister government plot to coerce Ulster had been foiled by the Army crisis. Asquith was pressed in Commons about the confidential reports on the danger to the arms depots, but he refused to make them public. Colonel Seely announced that his resignation had been necessary--not because of the failure of a plot to coerce Ulster but--because he had, although it had not been his intention, made a bargain with serving army officers.[44] Churchill said the military and naval movements to protect the arms depots were made "to eliminate temptation;" not to provoke disturbances. The government insisted that Paget had not been ordered to force alternatives on his officers.[45] The opposition still talked of a plot; of Churchill's Bradford speech; of Paget's "blaze." F. E. Smith asserted that a Napoleonic scheme had been concocted, "but there was no Napoleon."[46] Churchill retorted that, if the Bradford speech was provocative, what about some of Bonar Law's and Carson's speeches?[47] Bonar Law demanded a written account from General Paget on the orders he had received and what he had said to his officers on March 20. The government agreed to publish a second, more complete white paper in late April.[48]

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[44] *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., Vol. 60 (23 Mar.-8 Apr., 1914), 836-841.

[45] *Ibid.*, 893-902. [46] *Ibid.*, 877. [47] *Ibid.*, 905.

[48] *Ibid.*, 978.

On April 4, a huge Tory-organized demonstration in Hyde Park protested the use of the army and navy against Ulster. Fourteen platforms were built between the Serpentine and Bayswater Road. Twenty-two processions marched in the West End streets. Supporters wore badges inscribed "Support Loyal Ulster." Fiery speeches endorsed the resolution: "We protest against the use of the Army and Navy to drive out by force of arms our fellow subjects in Ireland from their full heritage in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. And we demand that the government shall immediately submit this grave issue to the people."[49] The speeches were filled with accusatory bombast; mostly against Churchill. Robert Cecil claimed Churchill "contemplated the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of his fellow men." Sir Charles Beresford called Churchill "a Lilliput Napoleon, a man with an unbalanced mind, an egomaniac."[50] Even Arthur Balfour was there; his first and last Hyde Park speech.[51] Mrs. Drummond took advantage of the crowd to stage a militant suffragist counter-demonstration.[52]

For all the demonstrating and press speculating, a more restrained aura prevailed in the House of Commons in the first week of April. Balfour said the main problem was "how, with decent credit to ourselves, we can avoid the national calamity of civil war." Referring to the more subdued temper of the House, Balfour said this

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[49]Pall Mall Gazette (London), April 4, 1914, 1.

[50]Ryan, Mutiny, 164. [51]Cameron, 1914, 23.

[52]Pall Mall Gazette (London), April 4, 1914, 1.

did not mean they were agreed but that they were frightened.[53] Even Carson appeared to be searching for a compromise. He offered to submit to the voters of Ulster a proposal that would leave--after the six-year exclusion period--to the Imperial Parliament to determine what would happen to the excluded counties. But he still refused to accept the automatic inclusion of Ulster after six years and this was as far as the government would go.[54] The Home Rule Bill passed its second reading (for the third time) with a majority of eighty on April 6.[55]

The debate on the "Plot" started up again in the House of Commons on April 20. The opposition asked for a judicial inquiry into the crisis. The government refused, saying there had been no arraignments and none were planned.[56] Asquith denied that Paget had been directed to pass on his orders verbally. The direction to his officers to take no notes had been at Paget's initiative; not the government's. Paget had been given no written orders other than those on March 14.[57] Again asked to publish the reports that led the cabinet to believe the arms depots were about to be seized, Asquith again refused. He did agree, however, to an opposition request for an expanded white paper.[58] He acknowledged that the outlying stations were not given the ultimatum. Pressed about the fleet

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[53]Ryan, Mutiny, 164. [54]Ibid., 164-165.

[55]Covin, Carson, 355.

[56]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 61 (14 Apr.-1 May, 1914), 578.

[57]Ibid., 578-579. [58]Ibid., 580, 582.

orders, Asquith said he found out about them on March 21 and "suggested" they be cancelled. Mr. Amery reminded the Prime Minister that, if that were the case, the statement that Mr. Asquith had given to The Times on March 22 contained an untruth.[59]

A second white paper was released on April 23. It contained fifty-five documents, including the fleet orders, compared with eight documents in the original paper.[60] Also included was a statement by Paget concerning the meetings in Dublin on March 20. Government ministers worked with the general for some time to get a coherent account of what he thought he said to his generals. Paget wrote that he had been misunderstood by his generals; that he had no intention of ascertaining the intentions of subordinate officers. He admitted the government ministers had not directed him to undertake active operations in Ulster but he--thinking there would be disturbances when the arms depots were reinforced--had directed his commanders to be ready for active operations.[61]

The opposition did not believe in Paget's statement or in the completeness of the white paper. The Tories subjected Asquith to savage cross-examination--particularly about The Times statement on the limited fleet movements--now that the new white paper indi-

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[59]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 61 (14 Apr.-1 May, 1914), 578-579.

[60]The Times (London), April 23, 1914, 6.

[61]Ibid.

cated far more extensive naval activity.[62] Asquith presented a skillful explanation. He had given the First Lord of the Admiralty general permission to move a battle squadron from Arosa Bay to Lamlash on March 11. Churchill had acted on that permission without telling Asquith. When Asquith heard about the movement, he ordered it cancelled. In view of the cancellation, the statement in The Times was essentially correct.[63]

The Ulster Unionist Council, a group that generally included the members of Carson's provisional government, issued a statement on April 17 which included an account of Paget's conferences and proported to give the facts connected with the contemplated operations. The statement quoted expressions by Paget which indicated a definite intention to initiate active hostile action against Ulster. The plan of operation was linked with Churchill's Bradford speech. Although it was not backed by any solid evidence, this statement caused a sensation in the press; the government did not acknowledge or repudiate it.[64] Colonel Replington, The Times military expert, wrote that there was good reason to suspect a plot. He could not believe the deployment of the military and naval units was arranged on mere verbal instructions.[65]

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[62]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 61 (14 Apr.-1 May, 1914), 1550-1555.

[63]Ryan, Mutiny, 169. [64]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 183.

[65]The Times (London), April 27, 1914, 5-6.

On April 25, a huge shipment of arms and ammunition--24,600 rifles and three million rounds--secretly purchased in Germany, was landed at Larne.[66] Units of the Ulster Volunteer Force were mobilized to cover the landing of the smuggled arms. Communications lines were cut between Larne and Bangor; police and customs officials were prevented from interfering with the landing.[67] There was no longer any temptation to raid arms depots. Also gone was the likelihood that the British Army could easily subdue the Ulster Volunteer Force if a provisional government was established in Ulster. The army was no longer a means of resolving the Irish deadlock. Redmond and his Nationalists were beaten; Ulster would have to be excluded from the Home Rule Bill.[68] General Macready, supposedly in Belfast to organize the government effort, was called to London for new instructions. Asquith told him not to interfere if fighting broke out; to remain on the defensive if the provisional government was proclaimed; to leave the protection of Belfast in the hands of the Lord Mayor. Macready had a sardonic streak. "With these heroic instructions in my pocket," he writes, "I returned to Belfast."[69]

On April 27 and 28, the opposition made one more attempt--by offering a motion for an official inquiry into the alledged plot--

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[66]Pall Mall Gazette (London), April 27, 1914, 1.

[67]Kee, Green Flag, 489.

[68]Ibid., 489-490.

[69]Macready, Annals, 191.

to discredit the government. This move caused Winston Churchill to "put up his hackles." He began with a stinging attack on the Tory methods and ended with a tenative offering of the olive branch:

> What we are now witnessing in the House is uncommonly like a vote of censure by the criminal classes on the police, . . . The Conservative Party, the party of the comfortable, the wealthy, the party of those who have the most to gain by the continuance of the existing social order, here they are committed to naked revolution, committed to a policy of armed violence, and utter defiance of lawfully constituted authority, committed to tampering with the discipline of the army and navy, . . . committed to smuggling in arms by moonlight, committed to the piratical seizure of ships, and to the unlawful imprisonment of the king's servants,--the Conservative Party as a whole committed to that.[70]

Continuing on a different tack, Churchill discussed the possible effect of certain Tory tenets:

> . . . Take his doctrine in regard to the Army--his doctrine of what the officers are entitled to choose or not to choose. He was obliged to carry that further, and say that men might choose also. I am not going to push the matter too far, but consider the application of that doctrine to the native officers of the Indian Army, or to the native soldiers of the Indian or Egyptian Army, and you will see that, in his insatiable hunger to get into office he is subverting principles which are absolutely vital to the continued organized government of the British Empire.[71]

He raised an interesting security problem:

> I am certainly not going into details of confidential discussions which were held with Sir Arthur Paget and other generals. . . . I think it is a very cool request on the part of gentlemen engaged in planning military operations against the organized government of the King--on the part of gentlemen engaged in arming, as they tell us, a hundred thousand men with rifles and ammunition, to shoot down the

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[70]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 61 (14 Apr.-1 May, 1914), 1575-1577.

[71]Ibid., 1578.

> King's servants--I think it is a very cool request that they should come forward and ask to be informed what are the precise military or police measures that will be adopted against them. Therefore I have not the slightest intention of going into any of those confidential matters.[72]

The irresponsible actions of the opposition were cited:

> All this talk of civil war has not come from us; it has come from you. For the last two years, we have been forced to listen to a drone of threats of civil war with the most blood-curdling accompaniments and consequences. What did they mean by civil war? Did they really think that if a civil war came, it was to be a war in which only one side was to take action? Did they really believe it was all going to be dashing exploits and brilliant gun-running coups on the side of rebellion and nothing but fiendish plots on the part of the government?. . . I wish to make it perfectly clear that if rebellion comes, we shall put it down, and if it comes to civil war, we shall do our best to conquer in the civil war. But there will be neither rebellion nor civil war unless it is of your making.[73]

Churchill finished with a dramatic appeal to Carson:

> The right hon. Gentleman, the member for the University of Dublin [Carson] is running great risks--no one can deny it--in strife. Why will he not run some risk for peace? The key is in his hands now. . . . Why cannot the rt. hon. and learned gentleman say boldly, "Give me the amendment to the Home Rule Bill which I ask for, to safeguard the dignity and the interests of Protestant Ulster, and in return I will use all my influence and good will to make Ireland an integral unit in a federal system.". . . If such language were used, I firmly believe that all that procession of hideous and hateful moves and counter-moves that we have been discussing and are now forced to discuss, and that hateful avenue down which we have looked too long, would give place to a clear and bright prospect.[74]

It was beautiful oratory even if it did not answer any of the specific questions put by the opposition. Balfour remarked that

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[72]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 61 (14 Apr.-1 May, 1914), 1585-1586.

[73]Ibid., 1589-1590. [74]Ibid., 1590-1592.

Churchill, asked to reply in detail to specific charges, had provided the House with "an outburst of demogogic rhetoric." Seely, emboldened by Churchill, discussed Paget's promised reinforcements: "If I am accused of a plot, I go further, and on my own responsibility I said [to Paget], 'Not only may you have forces to bring you up to any number of thousands you may require to maintain law and order, but you can have as many more as you find necessary, even to the last man."[75] Asquith backed his ministers all the way. The Prime Minister maintained the actions taken were adequate and proper precautions; he called the alleged plot a "mare's nest." The motion for the inquiry was put and rejected.[76] But still there was no compromise on the Home Rule Bill.

Search for Compromise

May, June and July of 1914 were months of decreasing tension on the Home Rule problem and increasing tension in European capitals. If the British Army was not going to enforce the Home Rule Bill in Ulster, the only solution appeared to be exclusion. Asquith was now privately convinced some parts of Ulster would have to be excluded. An Amending Bill was introduced in the House of Lords to allow any Ulster county to vote for exclusion for six years. In committee the Lords further modified the Amending Bill to allow

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[75]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 61 (14 Apr.-1 May, 1914), 1589-1590.

[76]Ryan, Mutiny, 190.

the permanent exclusion of Ulster by plebiscite. This was acceptable to Carson and Bonar Law but Redmond would not recognize this solution. He still hoped, unrealistically, to achieve a united and Home Rule Ireland.[77] The Home Rule Bill, protected by the Parliament Act of 1911, was ready for Royal Assent without amendment, but Asquith delayed final action and began, at the King's urging, further negotiations with Bonar Law and Carson.[78] It was during these efforts at compromise that the news arrived of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Serajevo on June 28.

Major-General Wilson continued his seditious ways becoming, if anything, bolder. In a conference with Lord Milner, Wilson agreed that, unless Asquith agreed to the Lords' exclusion amendment (and both Wilson and Milner were certain Redmond would not allow this), Carson should establish his provisional government and take over as many government offices as he could short of bloodshed (Wilson may have known about the instructions to Macready). Milner wanted to know what the army would do when the provisional government was proclaimed. Wilson answered, "I thought that if Carson and his government were sitting in City Hall, and we were ordered down to close the hall, we would not go."[79] Douglas and Sclater, according to Wilson, also said they had no intention of moving into Ulster "except in the ordinary way of quelling riots."[80]

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[77]Asquith, Fifty Years, 172. [78]Jenkins, Asquith, 318.

[79]Callwell, Wilson, 148. [80]Ibid.

By mid-July all parties, even Redmond, saw the urgent need for an understanding. Regardless of majority decisions, partition was inevitable, and detailed negotiations and geographic decisions were necessary.[81] All sides accepted the King's invitation to a conference at Buckingham Palace on July 21. Asquith and Lloyd George represented the government; Bonar Law and Lord Landsdown, the Conservatives; Redmond and Dillon, the Nationalists; Carson and Craig, the Ulster Unionists.[82] The conference came to nothing; it broke down on the boundaries of Fermanagh and Tyrone. The events at the Curragh, in Ulster and in the House of Commons were not enough to shock the politicians into unity. Civil war in Ireland seemed inevitable. "An all-sufficient shock was, however, at hand."[83] Churchill was disgusted. The disposition of Tyrone might be worth a war to the Irish but was certainly not worth a war to forty million British. War came from another direction. On July 25, as "the cabinet toiled in the muddy byways of Fermanagh and Tyrone," Sir Edward Grey interrupted to read the Austrian ultimatum to Servia.[84]

World War I buried the Home Rule Bill. Carson put his Volunteers at the disposal of the government. Redmond asserted the Irish could defend their own coasts; releasing British troops to

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[81]Cameron, 1914, 26-27.

[82]Churchill, Churchill, 487.

[83]Churchill, Crisis, 100.

[84]Churchill, Churchill, 488-489.

the continent.[85] The Home Rule Bill did receive Royal Assent on September 18, 1914, but its implementation was suspended until after the war. In the House of Commons, Will Crooks called out, "God save Ireland!" Redmond replied, "God save England!"[86]

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[85]Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., Vol. 65 (20 Jul.,-10 Aug., 1914), 1829.

[86]Pall Mall Gazette (London), September 18, 1914, 1.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Plot

Did a plot exist? Did the government, or individuals within the government, conspire to provoke Ulster to armed resistance against British authority, thereby giving the government the excuse to use massive power to put down resistance and impose the Home Rule Bill on Ulster by force of arms? Insufficient historical evidence precludes positive determination of the presence or absence of a plot. The fact that Lieutenant-General Paget was given no written orders, beyond the directive of March 14, 1914,[1] can be used to sustain either view. It can be argued that he received no written orders so the secrecy of the plot could be preserved, or that he received no written orders because there was no plot. The cabinet committee, that caused the pertinent verbal orders to be issued to Paget, was formed by the Prime Minister in response to cited police reports from Ireland; reports that the Ulsterites might attack government arms depots. The government never produced these reports and the question of their existence was raised by the opposition.[2] Publication of these reports would have helped the government cause.

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[1] Supra, 61. [2] Supra, 99, 101.

Unfortunately for the historian, men do not always have a rational basis for their actions, but it is difficult to find a sound reason for the Ulster Volunteer Force to have attacked the government arms depots. The Ulsterites wanted to avoid a confrontation with British regular forces. If Ulster was to fight, they wanted to fight an attempt by Southern Irishmen to enforce the decrees of a Home Rule Parliament controlled by Catholics. British soldiers would be resisted only if they attempted to support the Irish Parliament against the provisional government of Ulster. The Ulsterites had no pressing need for arms. Arms were on the way; the planning and execution of the Larne smuggling operation took many months.[3] Thus there were no apparent advantages to the Ulster provisionals in attacking the government arms depots; there were apparent disadvantages. As Churchill said at Bradford, if British soldiers were killed by Ulstermen, vast numbers of Englishmen would turn against the Ulster cause.[4] The possibility existed that some radical guerrilla bands of Ulsterites, not affiliated with the provisional government, might have tried an attack on an arms depot, but the provisional government of Ulster--mindful of the need for continued English support--would have been more interested in stopping such an attack than the imperial government at Westminster. The police reports, if they did exist, probably lacked validity.

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[3] Supra, 104. Covin, Carson, 362, et seq.

[4] Supra, 52.

What, exactly, was the British government facing in Ulster? A provisional government had been formed; a volunteer army organized. Led by able and determined politicians, this group intended to resist being seperated from the imperial government. They were determined to resist seperation by political action and to resist, by force of arms if necessary, subservience to the Irish Parliament as constituted by the Home Rule Bill.[5] The threat of the Ulsterites to resort to violent action was not directed against Great Britain but against their fellow islanders. The British government has an obligation to keep the peace and enforce the law--which would soon include the Home Rule Bill. Ulster, the threats of the Conservative and Unionist politicians notwithstanding, would probably not have resisted, by force of arms, the presence of the British Army in Ulster to enforce the law. The trouble would become serious after the British Army departed.[6] Yet the army could not remain in Ulster indefinitely. An Irish Parliament in Dublin, dominated by Southern Irishmen, would cite the continued presence of the British Army in Ulster as a tacit government effort to exclude Ulster from the operation of the Home Rule Bill.[7] Unless the Asquith government were prepared to "put these grave matters to the proof," they would be compelled to modify the Home Rule legislation.

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[5]Blake, Bonar Law, 207.

[6]Jenkins, Asquith, 284.

[7]Fitzgibbon, Lion's Paw, 43.

Would Redmond and his Nationalists have accepted a major modification to the Home Rule Bill which allowed the Ulster counties to be excluded by majority plebiscite? Probably not; by doing so the Nationalists would have lost creditability among their constituents.[8] But the Irish Nationalists would have been unable to block such an amendment if the Liberals had joined the Conservatives and Unionists in voting for it. If a Home Rule Bill, so amended, became a statute, the Nationalists would surely have resigned themselves to accepting the modicum of self-government offered by such a law, even with Ulster's exclusion. Such was the choice of the British Liberal government: Assist the Southern Irish by forcing Ulster to accept Home Rule or exclude Ulster and limit Home Rule to the consenting counties of the South and West of Ireland.[9]

The British government was, as yet, unwilling, in March, 1914, to deprive their political allies, the Irish Nationalists, of the opportunity for insular unity. The Ulster Unionists, whose fear of "Rome" rule was genuine if unrealistic, felt they were about to be abandoned by their country and so established the provisional government and the Ulster Volunteer Force. The Ulsterites did not organize to fight the British government. Rather, they formed military organizations because they were about to lose the protection of the government at Westminster. Asquith saw this with

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[8] Supra, 22.

[9] Supra, 107, 108.

some clarity. When warned by the King that many officers would resign their commissions rather than fight in Ulster, the Prime Minister asked, "Who are they going to fight?"[10] A good question; General Paget should have considered it.

Police reports aside, what would have been the motivation for the cabinet committee to provoke Ulster into a fight? A fear of insurrection might have justified increased security but was no reason for a provocative act. If the committee expected Carson to proclaim the provisional government (This was not likely; Carson had repeatedly said the provisional government would be proclaimed only when the Home Rule Bill became law.)[11] and they were planning to put it down, surely they would have alerted reinforcements or even declared a partial mobilization. They did neither.[12] There was no evident rational basis for the government ministers to seek a confrontation with the Ulster Volunteer Force.

If arms depot security was, in fact, the real motivation for the orders to Sir Arthur Paget, what was the source of Paget's statements, in his meetings with his generals and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade officers, concerning "active operations in Ulster" and "in a blaze by Saturday?"[13] Paget's own mind, rather than committee

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[10] Nicholson, George V, 233.

[11] Supra, 8.

[12] Supra, 56. Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 179.

[13] Supra, 63.

instructions, may have generated such phraseology. Paget was not given to understatement; he may have been subject to delusions of power and grandeur.[14] The very lack of coherence that all noted in his statements argues against a plot; plots require careful structuring.

The opposition politicians and press were convinced of the existence of a plot to provoke an incident in which Unionists would attack British soldiers. The attack, they said, would be the occasion for large military and naval units to move into Ulster, destroy the Ulster Volunteer Force, arrest the provisional government leaders and place Ulster under martial law. According to the Conservatives and Unionists, the evacuation of Victoria Barracks, the formation of a "ring of steel" around Belfast, plus plans for naval shelling and massive reinforcements from Scotland and England, were all parts of a diabolical government plot. The aim of the plot, it was alleged, was to reduce Ulster to a state of docility that would make the country amenable to parliamentary control by Southern Irishmen under the terms of the Home Rule Bill.[15]

The evidence is too sketchy and contradictory to support the idea of a plot. Churchill was certainly planning to assemble a massive naval force off Belfast Lough. He may have sincerely believed in the possibility of the mobilization of the Ulster Volunteer Force and have been concerned about the preparedness of the navy.

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[14] Supra, 63.

[15] Covin, Carson, 331-332.

This would have been an excusable concern for a young First Lord of the Admiralty. No evidence has been discovered, however, that he connived in provoking an Ulsterite attack.[16] Colonel Seely, the War Secretary, disregarded Paget's recommendations against troop movements and ordered the reinforcement of the arms depots in Ulster that formed a skeletal ring around Belfast. These arrangements, however, would have been inadequate to cope with a mobilized Ulster Volunteer Force operating on interior lines. Sir John French ridiculed the scattering of the British troops which he felt was an incorrect disposition of forces for the suppression of trouble in Ulster.[17] Paget was evidently promised large reinforcements if he needed them but the Aldershot Command, the only ready source of reinforcements, was never alerted for operations in Ireland.[18] Paget may have expected, in view of Brigadier-General Gleichen's reports and because of his own intuition, that the Ulsterites would resist the troop movements; hence "active operations in Ulster" and "in a blaze by Saturday." All who heard him agree, moreover, that General Paget insisted that aggression begin with the Ulsterites; under no circumstances would the army begin the fighting. Fire would not be returned until all efforts for a parley had been exhausted.[19] These instructions cannot be reconciled with opposition

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[16]Churchill, Churchill, 482.

[17]Supra, 56.

[18]Fergusson, Curragh Incident, 179.

[19]Supra, 63.

assertion that part of the government plot was to persuade Paget, with only unwritten orders, to provoke an incident and lead a division-sized invasion of Ulster.[20] Paget's mere presence at the hub of the action dilutes the strength of the plot allegation. Serious plotters would have picked a better man. Neither the evidence or the motivation for a plot is substantial enough to be convincing.

Mutiny

If there was no plot, was there a mutiny? Brigadier-General Gough, in his autobiography, contends he was not guilty of mutiny. Given a choice between active operations in Ulster and dismissal, he chose dismissal and, by example if not by words, influenced his brigade officers to resign with him. Gough asserts that, if he had been ordered north, he would have obeyed without question.[21] He was given an option not to obey and he took it. Gough, however, knew he should never have been given such an option. He may have chosen dismissal simply because he was angered by Paget's threats--and later was too proud to admit he had made a rash decision. The cavalry general records that Irish politics did not particularly interest him, yet, in spite of this, he used every leverage to extract a promise from the government not to enforce a political decision in Ulster.[22] Why? Perhaps he could not resist the frivolous

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[20] Supra, 103, 106. [21] Gough, Soldiering, 99.

[22] Ibid., 98.

indulgence of his own ego when he saw the embarassment of his military and political superiors.[23]

Gough was an extremely suspicious man. He admittedly distrusted Churchill, Seely, French, Macready and Paget.[24] The cavalry leader attributes his intransigence at the War Office to his resentment over "the Army . . . being made a pawn in the political game."[25] Gough would not accept that, within the limits of the constitution, the army was indeed a tool in the political game. Manipulating government policy does not fall within the survey of a cavalry brigade commander. Technically Gough was not a mutineer but neither was he an exemplary soldier. When Gough's conduct is compared with Major-General Fergusson's, no question remains as to which general acted in the best interests of his country.[26]

General Paget's action was--as Fouche said of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien--worse than a crime; it was a blunder. Possessed, or not, of secret unwritten orders, Paget played his hand poorly. He should never have confronted his officers with the ultimatum. Before the ultimatum was necessary, there should have been some resignations. Before there were any resignations, there should have been some marching orders. Given marching orders without options, probably all officers would have obeyed.[27]

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[23] Supra, 83-84. [24] Gough, Soldiering, 106-122, passim.

[25] Ibid., 106. [26] Supra, 69-70.

[27] Gough, Soldiering, 99.

Sir Henry Wilson was really a mutineer. He cannot be excused, whatever the depth of his political conviction, for engaging in intrigue to bring down the government under which he served; for subverting the army and giving aid to potential enemies--all while holding high military rank. Yet, for all his activity, Wilson's actions had a limited effect on events. His principal role was that of a disloyal errand boy carrying secrets to the opposition. He lacked the fortitude to lead a mutiny. While his Ulster sympathies did not seem to him a compelling reason for resigning his office, he did not hesitate to urge Sir John French to resign. Although Wilson urged Sir Hubert Gough to "stand like a rock,"[28] Gough did not modify his conduct at the request of Wilson; the cavalry general acted on his own throughout the incident. Wilson did not case the Curragh Incident; Gough did. If Gough had not chosen dismissal, there would have been no incident.[29]

Wilson was a mutineer in his heart even if he shunned direct action. He told Lord Milner, ". . . if . . . ordered . . . we will not go."[30] But it can be predicted, with reasonable certainty, that Sir Henry would get somebody else to make the first refusal.

World War I

The effects of the Curragh incident were to be felt in the early days of World War I. Liberal Party politicians and military

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[28] Supra, 93. [29] Supra, 64.

[30] Supra, 108. Callwell, Wilson, 148.

leaders worked together in the opening months of that struggle in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. Mistrust clouded the liaison between soldiers and statesmen.[31] Some officers feared that, since the army had won at the Curragh, the politicians might try to discredit the army in France. Nothing of the kind materialized; peril generated unity. Time diluted most of the doubt brought about by the incident. Some abrasions remained. A strong dislike arose between Sir John French, who became commander of the British Expeditionary Force, and Sir Douglas Haig, the commander, under French, of I Corps.[32]

Echoes of the Curragh incident may have extended into World War II. The relations between Wavell and Churchill indicate that the thread of suspicion might run from the Curragh in 1914 to the Middle East in 1940; from a disillusioned young major and a thwarted First Lord to a reluctant Field-Marshall and an impatient Prime Minister.[33]

Ireland

The Conservative and Unionist Party responsibility for the crisis has already been mentioned but the Liberal ministers must bear a share of the onus for the situation. Majority rule may be a tenet

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[31]John Terraine, Douglas Haig, the Educated Soldier (London: Hutchinson, 1963), 65.

[32]Ibid., 79. Cameron, 1914, 90.

[33]Connell, Wavell, 254-255.

of representative government but the continued existence of such a government depends on the acquiescense of the minority as well as the rule of the majority. While the majority may pass legislation that the minority regards as improper, a prudent majority will refrain from promulgating decrees that the minority regards as intolerable. In the Irish situation from 1912 to 1914, a diligent search for a solution less than intolerable to both the Irish Nationalists and the Ulster Unionists should have been a prime consideration of the British government. If the government and the opposition had begun to "toil in the muddy byways of Fermanagh and Tyrone" in 1912, a compromise, albeit improbable, might have been found. An honest, though tardy, attempt at the Buckingham Palace Conference in 1914 came tantalizingly close to such a solution.[34]

Minorities can accept majority decisions in a politically balanced country because elections have a way of changing the roles. Yesterday's minority becomes today's majority and vice versa. Ireland had no such balance. The Protestant minority could never hope to achieve dominance or even parity with the Catholics. Yet the Protestants looked upon the possibility of Catholic political domination with a fear nurtured by almost four centuries of bitterness and strife. Thus many Irish Protestants found the Home Rule Bill intolerable.[35]

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[34] Supra, 109.

[35] Blake, Bonar Law, 208.

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