

The Economy during WWII

- During the 1930s the economy had been in depression, but the war led to an economic boom in Northern Ireland.
- Unemployment fell from 30% to 5%
- Expansion of industry
- Enlistment in the army, navy, and air force
- Workers migrating to work in British factories
- Some industrial unrest during WWII – although strikes were illegal during the war over 250 occurred- 6,000 workers imprisoned for interfering with war effort

Ship building and Aircraft Production

- 140 warships were produced by Harland & Wolff during WWII
- Merchant ships, tanks and aircraft were also produced in Northern Ireland
- Short Brothers built 1,200 Stirling bomber planes
- Naval equipment manufactured in Antrim
- In 1943, the British government took over Harland & Wolff and Shorts Brothers and merged them.

Textile Industry

- The textile industry was disrupted by the war as an important raw material (flax) had been imported from France, Belgium, and Russia
- But the textile industry also benefitted from war, as the demand for uniforms and parachutes (2 million produced in Northern Ireland) tents for war efforts
- Many women employed in the textile factories

Agriculture

- Northern Ireland was important for food production for the UK
- By the end of the war 800,000 acres of tillage farming (oats, potatoes, wheat)
- The number of cattle in Northern Ireland rose from three-quarter of a million in 1939 to 1 million by the end of the war
- Farmers received grants and subsidies from the government and guaranteed prices for their produce
- 100,000 litres of milk sent to Scotland every day
- 20% of Britain's eggs came from Northern Ireland

Preparing for War

- In the first 6 months food rationing, travel restrictions and censorship introduced
- But life in Ulster remained largely unchanged at the beginning of the war
- Genuine belief at the highest level that war would not affect Northern Ireland, as they felt it was too insignificant militarily

- Therefore, lack of preparation to cope with the attack
- Belfast City Council did little to make provisions for attack i.e., organising drills, building bomb shelters and supplying gas masks
- Many felt this was the responsibility of the national government in London and so when war broke out, Belfast was poorly defended.

Preparing for Bombing Raids

- The Air Raid Precautions Act 1939 –set up structures to deal with firefighting, gas attacks, evacuation of children, building of air raid shelters and blackout
- In the weeks leading up to the war Belfast fire services were put on full alert
- Belfast corporation painted all Kerbs, lampposts, and telephone poles – blackout
- Public transport vehicles painted dull blue, drove with lights dimmed
- Stormont castle painted dark colour to avoid it being bombed

Other Measures Taken

- Trenches dug in public parks and schools to use in case of a surprise attack
- 1 million sandbags distributed by the Ministry of Home Affairs – help protect public buildings from blast damage
- 1 million gas masks were requested – but only 420,000 were received
- Bomb shelters built (but in insufficient numbers)

The government prepares for war

- In 1939 Craig was in poor health
- Cabinet was mostly older
- Government did not seem to have realised the threat to Northern Ireland from war
- Responded to crisis by establishing the Ministry of Public Security led by John McDermott – responsibility for civil defence.
- Andrews replaced Craig as PM in 1941
- Brooke replaced Andrews as PM in 1943

Recruitment

- 1939- Military Training Act introduced conscription in Britain, but not extended to Northern Ireland because of protests by nationalists and Catholic Bishops. This was accepted by British PM Chamberlain much to the disgust of NI PM Craig
- Unionist government called on people to join British forces
- Embarrassment at slow response – 2,000 per month in 1939 went down to 1,000 per month by mid 1940. (In all 38,000 joined British forces in NI about 50% southerners who crossed the border to join up)

Local Defence Volunteers- Home Guard

- 1939; Major Frank Eastwood appointed as full-time air raid precautions officer
- Called for 16,000 volunteers to join Local Defense Volunteers (LDV) force part time army
- Only got 3,000 unwillingness to volunteer –problem for duration of the war
- LDV renamed Home Guard in 1940 by Churchill

Recruitment to LDV

- May 1940 Basil Brooke appointed to spearhead drive for recruits for LDV and organise recruitment for army
- Surprising choice- known to be very sectarian
- He insisted that the B specials form basis of new body as he feared nationalists getting guns or training through LDV
- Craig considered withholding employment assistance from those who refused to enlist for the LDV, but this was rejected for fear of backlash

Changes after the Fall of France 1940

- After the fall of France in 1940, fears of invasion increased- likely southern Ireland would be used
- British stationed 100,000 troops in the north
- Apart from soldiers, war made little impact on everyday life in 1940
- Some foods unavailable –shopping queues
- Rationing alleviated by cross border smuggling
- Townspeople grew their own veg and kept poultry
- Blackout was not strictly enforced

Increased risk of bombing by Germany

- With cities in Britain under constant attack there was little anti-aircraft material to spare for defence of Britain
- City now prime target for enemy attack – now marked improvements in attempt to defend north against attack
- Belfast was now of vital military importance. Belfast (+ Derry)- bases for anti-submarine and convoy protection groups
- Extra anti- aircraft machinery put in place along coastlines of Antrim and Derry

A new Prime Minister for Northern Ireland

- Nov 1940 JM Andrews replaced Craig

- Feb 1941; Andrews stated he was ‘very concerned at our anti-aircraft defences’ and at the ‘position which might arise in Belfast after a severe air attack’.
- Fears came true on the 7th–8th of April 1941

The Belfast Blitz

- First attack on Belfast; 7th of April 1941 the Dockside Raid
- Carried out by 6 German bombers
- Targeted dockside area of the city
- No air raid siren warned of attack
- 13 deaths and 81 injured
- 17 fires as a result
- Dockyards damaged
- However relatively small-scale attack
- Government played down threat- hampered evacuation attempts and recruitment of badly needed firearm and volunteers

2nd attack on Belfast: 15th/ 16th of April 1941 (The Easter Tuesday Raid)

- Luftwaffe carried out mass raid
- 180 aircraft- lasted 5 hours
- 200 tones of high explosives dropped- much landed on terraced houses occupied by the poor of Belfast
- 76 landmines dropped
- Huge loss of life (900 estimated) 600 injured (estimated) and destruction to property
- 100,000 temporarily homeless mass exodus from city

Damage caused in 15th- 16th April bombing of Belfast

- Road, rail tracks and tramways also damaged
- Telephone network seriously disrupted
- Public warned to boil water – fear of poisoning
- Electricity output at half power and gas at 75%
- Industrial output fell to 25% of pre blitz levels
- 140 separate fires blazing – Home Guard unable to cope

Free State and the Belfast Bombing 15th- 16th April 1941

- MacDermott asked Dublin to help – De Valera agreed (in breach of his policy of strict neutrality)

- 13 engines and 70 firemen rushed to Belfast through the night from Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Dundalk, and Drogheda.
- Decision may have been influenced by Cardinal Joseph McRory – feared Protestants areas would get priority from NI fire service
- Free State fire fighters shocked at conditions in Belfast
- Bombs had cut through water mains- without high pressure hoses there was little they could do.
- Help from Free State was a small gesture but very important (1st official ‘contact’ between north and south in almost 2 decades)
- Government and people of NI grateful for assistance

3rd attack on Belfast; 4th- 5th of May 1941 (the Fire Raid)

- Luftwaffe's last major attack on Belfast
- 3-hour attack- 200 aircraft dropped 100,000 bombs and 237 tonnes of high explosives
- Over 200 buildings destroyed
- Harland & Wolff shipyard badly damaged including several ships in the process of building
- 6 months before production could resume
- Few people died- bombs fell in less populated areas and many had evacuated

Destruction of housing

- Nearly 60,000 houses in Belfast destroyed or damaged
- 150,000 permanently homeless and 100,000 temporarily
- Public moral at all time low- many fled the city

Evacuation

- Ministry of Public Security – organised evacuations of the city
- Mothers of small children, the old and the sick were priority
- Housed in hotels and hostels awaiting evacuation
- 19th of April 25,000 left city by train
- By June 1941, 222,000 temporarily left Belfast (5,000 to Dublin)
- Many evacuees were middle class- caused resentment among the working class- left to struggle in ruined city

Destruction

- Estimated 1,1000 died in bombing raids in Belfast approx. half were women and children
- £20 million worth in damage to property
- Widespread destruction to property of Belfast required massive programme of reconstruction after the war

- 53% of housing in Belfast was destroyed

American forces in NI

- 1942 American troops stationed in Northern Ireland
- By 1943, 120,000 US troops there

Northern Nationalists and the war

- Ambivalent about the war
- Not encouraged by unionists to become involved
- 1939: some nationalists refused to observe blackouts and burned their gasmasks
- Attitude changed somewhat after the bombing of Belfast in 1941
- Many nationalists joined British forces, they had the highest unemployment rate

Notthern IRA and the war

- Internment imposed in 1939 after the bombing in Britian. Internment also introduced by the Free State Government
- 700 IRA interned in Northern Ireland
- IRA had support among community in the north than the south
- Revival in activity by new leaders after 1942
- Killed members of the RUC
- Internment in north and south made it difficult for the IRA to remain active for long
- By the end of the war, the IRA were seriously weakened

Churchills offer of unity 1940

- In 1940 Churchill said that if the Free State joined the war that Ireland could become 'a nation once again'
- This was seen as an offer of unification with Northern Ireland if the Free State joined the war
- This shocked Craig and unionists

Did WWII widen the gulf between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland and reinforce partition?

- The Irish Free State distanced itself from Britian by its policy of neutrality whilst Northern Ireland strengthened its position in UK by being part of the war effort
- War brought prosperity to north but economic stagnation to south
- In North contact with the wider world through foreign troops. No similar experience in the south
- North- horrific bombing. South only minor damage

- The different experience of the war may have been widened the gulf between north and south that had become apparent in the 1930s
- By 1949 when the Free State left the commonwealth, partition had become entrenched.