

Ionkovo, Battle of

See Jankovo, Battle of

Ireland

The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars radicalized and reshaped Irish politics. The French, following a long tradition of Britain's continental enemies, saw Ireland as Britain's weak point, while Catholic and Protestant Irish people opposed to British rule looked to French support. Irish Catholics outnumbered Protestants by about five to one, but they were disarmed and were barred from political participation. In the Protestant community, there was disaffection between the ruling gentry, mostly members of the established Church of Ireland who supported the British government, and the Presbyterian Dissenters in the north. Presbyterians and Catholics, along with some disaffected members of the Church of Ireland, came together in 1791 in a radical secret society, the United Irishmen, led by the Dublin Protestant lawyer Wolfe Tone. The United Irishmen agitated for an independent republic free from English control and published dozens of newspapers and hundreds of pamphlets.

Lack of unity contributed to the failure of the United Irishmen. The gap between Catholic and Protestant in Ireland was widening with the formation of militant sectarian groups, the Catholic Defenders and the Protestant Orange Order. Alliances that the United Irishmen formed with France and with the Defenders were rejected by many Protestants, and by the later part of the decade few Protestants were involved in the group. Nor were all Catholics supporters. Many Catholic prelates preferred Protestant rule to domination by anticlerical and republican France, even going so far as to excommunicate Catholic members of the United Irishmen and the Defenders. A French invasion under General Louis Lazare Hoche in 1796 was prevented by bad weather, and the rising of 1798, despite the landing of a small French force, was defeated by the British, who captured Tone. Tone committed suicide in jail.

Before 1798 William Pitt's government sought to base British-Irish relations on violent repression of revolution and a conservative alliance between the Protestant rulers and the leading and wealthiest Irish Catholics. Pitt encouraged the Irish Parliament to pass a Catholic Relief Act in 1793 that gave Catholics the right to vote on the same economic basis as Protestants and to hold office in the civil

and military administration of Ireland but not the right to stand for Parliament or to serve at the very top level, such as lord lieutenant of Ireland or general in the army. The rising of 1798 convinced Pitt that the Irish Protestants could no longer control the island in the English interest and that the best solution was to unite Britain and Ireland politically. The Act of Union in 1801 created the United Kingdom with one Parliament sitting at Westminster. (George III, citing his coronation oath to defend Protestantism, refused to allow Pitt's plan to complete the policy of union by allowing Catholics to stand for Parliament to pass.) The Union aroused widespread resentment, and there was a brief violent rising under the young Robert Emmet in Dublin on 23 July 1803. Emmet was executed. Emmet's rising, however, was much smaller and less broad-based than the revolts of the late eighteenth century. The Union also broadened the opportunities the British Empire and the British political system offered to Irish people. British recruiting in Ireland accelerated after the Union; thousands of Irishmen served in the British Army during the wars.

William E. Burns

See also British Army; Catholic Emancipation; George III, King; Hoche, Louis Lazare; Irish Rebellion; Lough Swilly Expedition; Pitt, William; Tone, Wolfe; Union, Act of

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Irish Rebellion (1798)

A rebellion led by the United Irishmen against British rule. Despite some early success and the landing of a small French force, the rebels were defeated within a month.