Irish political leaders cared about just one issue – should Ireland stay in the UK or leave it? They did not want anyone to distract attention from that. As the Home Rule leader, John Redmond, said, “labour must wait” until Ireland had its own parliament.

The start of trade unionism: craft unions

- The first trade unions were ‘craft unions’. They were formed by skilled workers with a craft like brick-laying, printing or carpentry. Each craft had its own union which looked after the interests of its members.
- Most Irish craft unions were branches of British unions and belonged to the British-based Trades Union Congress (TUC). It was set up in 1868 to strengthen the bargaining position of the unions.
- In 1895, some Irish trade unionists, who felt that the TUC was neglecting them, founded the Irish Trades Union Congress (ITUC). By 1900, the ITUC represented about 60,000 skilled workers, but it lacked the money and power of the British TUC.

The growth of mass unions

- Even in Britain, few women or unskilled men belonged to a trade union until the 1880s.
- Then a depression forced wages down and made life even more difficult. For the first time women, dockers, labourers, etc, formed trade unions which were known as ‘mass unions’.
- An interest in socialism also developed. Keir Hardie, a socialist, was the first working man ever elected an MP and in 1900 the British Labour Party began.
- Socialism and mass unions spread to Ireland in the 1890s and early 1900s. The key figures associated with this were James Connolly and James Larkin.

James Connolly (1868–1916)

- Born in Edinburgh to poor Irish parents, went to work aged 11, served in British army, then worked as a dustman in Edinburgh.
- Read economics, history and socialist theories. Wrote articles about socialism and Marxism and was an active trade unionist.
- In 1896, the Dublin Socialist Society invited him to organise a socialist movement in Ireland.
- Set up the Irish Socialist Republican Party which aimed to set up “an Irish Socialist Republic based upon the public ownership by the Irish people of the land and instruments of production, distribution and exchange”.
- He developed his ideas in his paper, The Workers’ Republic:
  - Karl Marx and other socialists disapproved of nationalism. Connolly disagreed with them.
James Larkin (1876–1947)

- Born in Liverpool in 1876 to poor Irish parents; began work at nine. Worked in docks and joined the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL).
- Larkin was a syndicalist, i.e. a socialist who believes trade unions can be used to re-shape society to make it more just to poor workers.
- In 1907, NUDL leaders sent him to Belfast to organise the dockers. Won improved conditions using 'sympathetic strikes' and 'blacking'.
- Sent to Dublin in 1907. His militant tactics alarmed NUDL and they suspended him.
- He set up IT&GWU to organise dockers, carters and other unskilled, poorly paid workers who were not in a union before.
- Several successful strikes by IT&GWU alarmed employers, especially William Martin Murphy. Formed Employers' Federation to destroy 'Larkinism'. Locked out IT&GWU members.
- Workers in other industries struck. By September 1913 over 20000 workers involved. It dragged out for months but the employers refused to give in and at last the workers went back to work on their terms.
- When the first World War broke out Larkin urged Irish workers not to be involved. In October he went to the US to raise money. James Connolly and William O'Brien took over.
- Larkin became involved in the American labour movement. Imprisoned for socialist activity, he was freed in 1923 and returned to Ireland.
- Quarrelled with William O'Brien, a more conservative trade unionist who had built up the IT&GWU during his absence. Expelled from the union in 1924, he set up his own Workers' Union of Ireland.
- This split, which lasted until after Larkin's death, weakened the labour movement in Ireland. Larkin served on Dublin Corporation and briefly as a TD. He died in 1947.

- He thought the British Empire was the enemy of working people in both Ireland and Britain. It must be over-thrown before they could be free and Ireland was a good place to start.
- But independence alone would not help Irish workers. They must create a socialist republic where the sources of wealth would be held in common and there would be no rich and poor.
- Connolly won little support in Ireland. In 1903 he left for the United States.
- He returned to Ireland in 1910, became Belfast organiser of the IT&GWU and worked to improve the conditions for unskilled and women workers.
- When Home Rule seemed likely in 1912, he set up the Irish Labour Party to represent workers in the new Irish parliament.
- Played an active part in the 1913 Lockout, taking over when Larkin was in jail. After police violence, set up the Irish Citizen Army to protect workers. Disliked Larkin's strident attack on British trade unionists.
- Opposed workers' involvement in the first World War. He became leader of the IT&GWU after Larkin left in 1914.
- Became more nationalistic and joined the IRB for the 1916 rising. He was executed after it.
In 1909, James Larkin set up the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (IT&GWU) to organise unskilled workers like dockers, carters and labourers who were not involved in a trade union up to then. Most were casual workers (no regular jobs), very poorly paid, living in crowded slums. The IT&GWU wanted an eight-hour day for workers, pay for the unemployed and old age pensions. Larkin set out these and other aims in the IT&GWU paper, *The Irish Worker*, which he edited. Larkin was a gifted speaker and organiser. The IT&GWU grew quickly. He led series of strikes involving carters, dockers and railwaymen. He won using the tactics of ‘sympathetic strikes’ (workers in other industries striking in sympathy) and ‘blacking’ (workers refusing to handle goods from a firm on strike).

Murphy takes on the workers

His success alarmed employers, especially William Martin Murphy. He was a very successful businessman who owned the Dublin Tramways Company, the *Irish Independent*, *Evening Herald*, and *Irish Catholic* newspapers and Clery’s Department Store. He encouraged the employers to form the Employers’ Federation to combat what he called ‘Larkinism’. In July and August 1913, Murphy sacked workers who belonged to the IT&GWU. When this happened at the *Irish Independent*, other workers struck in sympathy.

‘Bloody Sunday’

On 26 August, Larkin called a strike at the Tramways Company. Not all tramway men came out and Murphy was able to keep the trams running. Police and magistrates supported Murphy. Riots between strikers and the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) were common. Larkin was arrested and a meeting he planned for Sackville St. (now O’Connell St.) on Sunday 31 August was banned. Let out on bail, Larkin went in disguise to Sackville Street and began a speech. Police arrested him at once and attacked the watching crowd, few of whom were strikers. 500 were injured. Later police attacked workers in their homes. ‘Bloody Sunday’ won sympathy for the strikers. On Monday, Jacobs asked its workers to sign a pledge to leave the IT&GWU. When they refused they were locked out. Other employers did
The same, and in other firms workers went out on strike in sympathy. By the end of the week about 20,000 workers were involved.

**The strike drags on**

- British workers helped their Dublin comrades. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) collected £150,000 and sent money and food parcels to feed strikers. But TUC leaders disapproved of sympathetic strikes and tried to make peace.
- The British government set up the Askwith Enquiry to investigate the situation. Larkin gave evidence, stressing Dublin’s low wages and bad housing.
- Askwith condemned both sympathetic strikes and the employers' pledge and recommended conciliation committees to settle disputes. Larkin accepted, but Murphy refused. This turned opinion against the employers.
- Opinion changed again after English sympathisers organised the ‘Dublin kiddies scheme’. Strikers’ children would go to English homes while the strike lasted. Catholic priests bitterly opposed the plan and it damaged the cause of the workers.
- TUC leaders in the UK grew impatient with Larkin when he demanded that they black goods coming from Ireland. They called a meeting in December to consider the issue.
- Before it, Larkin toured Britain appealing to ordinary workers and abusing their leaders. He lost the support of the TUC as a result.
- By January 1914, workers had begun to return to work. Those who got jobs had to give up the IT&GWU but many were not re-employed.

**Results**

- In the short-term the workers were defeated and the IT&GWU almost destroyed.
- But it recovered and in the long term, no employer could ever challenge the right of workers to belong to a trade union in the way had.
Primary schools

- There had been free primary education in Ireland since the 1830s. Boys and girls were taught separately.
- Almost all schools were denominational (i.e. controlled by the Catholic or Protestant churches). The National Board of Education paid teachers, told them what to teach and sent inspectors around to check standards.
- School was not compulsory. Children from poor families often left at ten or twelve years old because their parents needed the wages they could earn.
- Some stayed on to 14, studied Latin or Mathematics and then did examinations for jobs in the civil service or police.

Secondary schools

- In 1870, there were not many secondary schools in Ireland and they, too, were denominational. Most Catholic schools were run by priests and nuns.
- All charged fees, which most parents could not afford. In 1870, only 4% of boys got a secondary education.
- There were a few secondary schools for girls, but the teachers were untrained and they only taught ‘ladylike’ topics such as needlework and music. About 2% of girls attended them.
- In the 1870s, Catholics agitated for state grants for their schools but the British government would not give money for denominational education.
- In 1878, the Intermediate Education Act provided a solution. Children would sit examinations and their schools would get paid if they passed.
- Isabella Tod persuaded the government to let girls sit the exams on the same terms as boys. This gave a big boost to women’s education, especially after girls won as many prizes as boys.
- This system of ‘payments by results’ improved educational standards. By 1911, 8% of boys and 4% of girls were in secondary education.
- But some educationalists condemned it. Patrick Pearse, who set up his own school, called it a ‘murder machine’ because it encouraged learning by heart and neglected Irish culture.

University education

- Trinity College, set up in the 1590s, was the only university in Ireland until the 1840s. Its close links to the Church of Ireland, which made it difficult for Catholics and Presbyterians to go there.
In the 1840s, the British government set up Queen’s Colleges in Belfast, Cork and Galway. No religion was taught in them. Presbyterians went to the Belfast College, but the Catholic bishops forbade Catholics to go to these ‘godless colleges’. They set up a Catholic University in Dublin, but it was short of money and no one accepted its degrees. The bishops campaigned to get the British government to fund it and to recognise the degrees it awarded. In 1879, the government brought in the Royal University Act. The Royal University did not teach, it only set examinations. Anyone who passed got a scholarship and a degree. This gave money and recognition to the Catholic University by the back door. Isabella Tod succeeded in having women admitted to the Royal University exams and scholarships. Protestant girls’ schools set up special university classes where women studied for the examinations. The first women graduated in 1884. Later Catholic convents followed this example. Soon the Queen’s Colleges in Belfast, Cork and Galway admitted women to classes. In 1904 Trinity admitted them as full time students. No one was really satisfied with the Royal University. Negotiations about a better solution dragged on till the Irish Universities Act was passed in 1908:

- It left Trinity College as a separate university
- It turned the Queen’s College in Belfast into Queen’s University
- It combined the Queen’s Colleges in Cork and Galway with the Catholic University in Dublin to form the new National University of Ireland
- Maynooth College, where Catholic priests trained, became an Associated College of the National University
- In theory the National University was neutral between religions, but in practice, Catholic bishops had considerable influence over it
- Women were admitted to universities on equal terms with men.

**Assessment**

Educational reform between 1870 and 1914:

- Ensured that most people could read and write
- Raised the numbers going to secondary school and university
- Opened educational opportunities for women
- Left most education under the control of the Churches.
Origins of cultural nationalism

- All through the 19th century, Irish people became anglicised (i.e. like the English). By the 1880s, most of the population spoke English, read English books and played English games.
- This undermined nationalists’ claim for Irish independence. Why, people asked, should the Irish have their own state when they are the same as the British?
- Cultural nationalists tried to answer that question by developing aspects of Irish life which were different from the English.

Case study

9.1 The Gaelic Athletics Association: GAA

The spread of British games

- Up to the 1860s, most people in Ireland lived on farms or in country villages. They played games which were informal with few rules.
- With the industrial revolution, cities grew. Unorganised games were no longer possible.
- In Britain, where industrialisation began, sporting organisations (FA, MCC, Rugby Union, etc) emerged in the 1850s and 1860s.
- They organised team games, drew up rules and organised competitions.
- In the 1870s, these team games spread to Ireland and began to displace traditional sports like wrestling, hurling, etc.

Setting up the GAA

- Nationalists like Michael Cusack (a sportsman with links with the IRB) and Archbishop Croke (a Home Rule supporter) thought this further undermined Irish claims to a separate identity.
- Cusack also felt the British rules (e.g. no games on Sunday, only gentlemen or amateurs could play) did not suit Irish conditions.
- In November 1884, Cusack called a meeting at Hayes Hotel in Thurles. Seven men attended.
- They set up the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA). Cusack was elected Secretary and Michael Davin (a famous sportsman) President. They asked Croke, Parnell and Davitt to be patrons.
The GAA aimed to organise athletic meetings along Irish lines and to encourage and make rules for Irish football and hurling.

The early years

- Many existing sports clubs joined the GAA and it spread rapidly. By 1887, it had over 600 clubs.
- It drew up the first rules for Gaelic football and hurling.
- It was organised on a parish basis. That encouraged Catholic priests to become involved. This, and having games on Sundays excluded many Protestants and unionists.
- It organised competitions. The first all-Ireland (between clubs, not counties) was held in 1887.
- Cusack was an inefficient Secretary and was replaced after 18 months.

The IRB and the GAA

- The IRB (Fenians) were involved in the GAA from the start. They saw it as a good source of fit young men for their planned war with Britain.
- The British Special Branch had informers in both bodies and knew what was going on. Their reports are our main source for the early years of the GAA.
- At the second annual Conference in 1886, the IRB elected its men to all key offices except that of President.
- Annoyed by their behaviour, Davin resigned early in 1887 and was replaced by another IRB man.
- This worried the priests who opposed the violence and secrecy of the IRB. At the 1887 Conference many of them walked out and the GAA split.
- But Davin and Croke organised a reconciliation. Davin became President again and the GAA just survived.

Support for Parnell almost destroys the GAA

- Financial problems led to a trip to America to raise funds. Badly organised the American invasion lost money. Davin resigned and the IRB quietly regained control.
- In 1890-91, the Home Rule Party split over Parnell’s relationship with Katherine O’Shea. The IRB brought the GAA in behind Parnell. Most priests and anti-Parnellites left.
- Through the 1890s the GAA almost disappeared.

The recovery of the GAA after 1900

- The GAA recovered in the late 1890s and early 1900s due to:
  - Better organisation.
  - New rules which made games faster and more exciting.