

AN OVERVIEW OF THE GUN-RUNNING EVENTS IN 1914

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It was the I.R.B who imported arms for the

The importation of arms by the Irish Volunteers, in the summer of 1914, had its roots in the passing of the 3rd Home Rule Bill in January 1913. Ever since the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell the Irish Parliamentary Party had established as their primary goal, the attainment of Home Rule. On two previous occasions, in 1886 and again in 1893 the party had come extremely close to attaining this objective. In 1886 it failed because a sufficient number of Liberal Party MPs switched sides and helped to defeat the bill by 343 votes to 311. In 1893 the 2nd Home Rule Bill was actually passed in the House of Commons by a majority of 40 votes but it was defeated in the House of Lords by the unelected peers of the realm by 419 votes to 41. Irish Home Rule was only an issue for the British Parliament when the arithmetic dictated that the British Liberal Party required the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party to hold government office. William Gladstone was the only leader of the British Liberal Party who treated Home Rule for Ireland as a matter of policy rather than political expediency. However, before any Bill giving Home Rule to Ireland could be successfully enacted the power of veto, held by the House of Lords, had to be tackled. It was also very important that this veto should be tackled on an issue other than Irish Home Rule.

This opportunity was presented to Herbert Asquith, the new leader of the Liberal Party, when the House of Lords refused to pass his budget in 1910. Asquith immediately called a General Election, in December 1910, and he was returned to power with the help of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Asquith immediately introduced a bill which would limit the power of the House of Lords in that they could only delay the passage of a bill for two years. The alternative offered to the Lords was that Asquith would appoint as many new lords as was required to pass bills. Faced with the diminution of their powers the peers opted for the lesser evil. It was against this backdrop that the 3rd Home Rule Bill was introduced in the British Parliament in April 1912. As was to be expected the bill was defeated in the House of Lords, but in contrast to 1893 passing the bill into law was now only delayed.