

Greenwood, Hamar, first Viscount Greenwood (1870–1948), *politician and businessman* by Martin F. Seedorf

Greenwood, Hamar, first Viscount Greenwood (1870–1948), politician and businessman, was born on 7 February 1870 at Whitby, near Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He was the eldest son in the family of two sons and six daughters of John Hamar Greenwood (1829–1903), a lawyer who as a youth had emigrated from Llanbister, Radnorshire, Wales to Canada. His mother was Charlotte Churchill Hubbard (*d.* 1903), daughter of Thomas C. Hubbard; she was from a United Empire loyalist family, one of whose ancestors had emigrated to Canada after the American War of Independence. At birth, his forenames were first registered as Thomas Hubbard, but he always used the name Hamar. He attended Whitby high school and the University of Toronto, taking his BA degree in 1895. He worked in the Ontario department of agriculture, and for seven years was an officer in the Canadian militia.

In 1895 Greenwood emigrated to England, where he read for the bar. In 1906 he was called to the bar at Gray's Inn, and became a bencher in 1917 and a KC in 1919. His work in helping to raise a regiment of British subjects from overseas, the King's Colonials (later King Edward's Horse), in 1902, indicated the strength of his imperial loyalties. His belief in temperance—he never drank alcohol—drew him initially to the Liberal Party. At the 1906 general election he was elected Liberal MP for York. For four years he was parliamentary private secretary to Winston Churchill. His speeches in the Commons on imperial defence were more in line with the Conservatives than the Liberals. He lost his seat in January 1910 but returned to parliament in December that year as the Liberal member for Sunderland. As a leader of Canadian society in London he argued that England needed 'Canadianising', publishing in 1913 *Canada as an Imperial Factor*, 'a description of his mother country more enthusiastic than critical' (DNB). He married on 23 May 1911 Margery, daughter of Walter Spencer of Fownhope Court, Herefordshire. They had two sons and two daughters.

In August 1914 Greenwood's connection with L. S. Amery, his sister's husband, brought him into the recruiting department at the War Office, a position where he developed his ability for making quick decisions. He himself raised the 10th battalion, South Wales Borderers, and commanded it on the western front in France. Created a baronet in February 1915, he was transferred by Lord Derby to London the next year for additional recruiting work. In August 1916 he returned again to politics, becoming a Coalition Liberal supporter of Lloyd George. In January 1919 he was made under-secretary for home affairs and in July took charge of overseas trade. In April 1920 he joined the cabinet as the last chief secretary for Ireland, the principal minister responsible for Irish affairs.

The Anglo-Irish War had been under way for more than a year, but Greenwood actually knew little about Ireland. He shared Lloyd George's view that the Irish people were terrorized by the IRA, a 'murder gang'. Determined to reassert British authority at Dublin Castle by force, the government reinforced the army. But since the cabinet was not yet prepared to declare a state of martial law, the main responsibility for order fell to the greatly undermanned Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). RIC recruits were hastily brought to Ireland, most of them recently demobilized British war veterans. Their surplus khaki uniforms and black belts earned them the label Black and Tans after the name of Limerick's famous pack of hounds. This appellation was at times mistakenly given to the new 1500 man auxiliary division, RIC, an auxiliary police comprised mainly of former British officers. Undisciplined and inappropriately trained for police work, the Black and Tans and auxiliaries were ignorant of the Irish countryside and its people. This left them ill equipped to deal with the violent methods of the IRA, which they replicated in retaliation for the attacks made upon them.

In parliament the chief secretary's role was to defend both reprisals and the Lloyd George government's policy toward Ireland. Since Greenwood and the government believed that reprisals were beneficial, they made only a token effort to eliminate them. He quickly became known for his denials and evasions in the House of Commons, and his performance was accurately caricatured by the phrases 'to tell a Greenwood' and 'there is no such thing as reprisals, but they have done a great deal of good' (Seedorf, 'The Lloyd George government', 114). As the competition in violence increased, 'unauthorized reprisals' became the greatest obstacle to implementing Lloyd George's policy of force, or of limited 'police war'. The actions of crown forces, culminating in 'bloody Sunday' (21 November 1920), when auxiliaries machine-gunned spectators after a Gaelic football match at Croke Park, Dublin, defeated their own purpose and caused a revulsion of the British conscience as it awakened to the state of affairs in Ireland.

Newspapers and editorials in Ireland condemned the government's failure to investigate and to end reprisals. In addition, Irish opinion became ever more supportive of the IRA, making prolonged guerrilla warfare possible despite Michael Collins's assertion that the Irish never numbered as many as 3000 armed men at any given moment. The Irish hated the British and were willing to bear any amount of suffering to see them go. Lloyd George comprehended this before Greenwood, but despite this kept Greenwood in his cabinet. While privately constraining Greenwood, Lloyd George defended him in public.

By April 1921 circumstances were changing. Lloyd George had already coupled appeasement with his policy of force, and was exploring the chances for negotiation with the Irish republican leaders. After George V's visit to Belfast on 22 June 1921 Lloyd George directly communicated with the Irish leader, Eamon De Valera, and the truce of 11 July was arranged over Greenwood's head. Greenwood was present at the Anglo-Irish conference in London in October, and

signed the Anglo-Irish treaty of 6 December 1921, but he took little active part in the deliberations. When the Irish Free State was set up in January 1922 he remained chief secretary in order to work for the pension rights of the Royal Irish Constabulary, which the free state at once disbanded. When Lloyd George fell from power in October 1922 Greenwood resigned as chief secretary. In the general election of November 1922 he lost his seat at Sunderland, and failed to regain it the following year.

Like other coalitionists, Greenwood moved to the right and was returned to parliament as an 'anti-Socialist' for East Walthamstow in 1924. No office was offered then, but in August 1929 he was elevated to the peerage as first Baron Greenwood of Llanbister, his father's original home in Radnorshire. Between 1933 and 1938 he also served as honorary treasurer of the Conservative Party, securing substantial moneys for the party from his many business friends, and in February 1937 he advanced to a viscountcy. Lady Greenwood was herself appointed CBE in 1920 and DBE in 1922 for her services in Ireland.

Essentially an administrator and executive, Greenwood had the ability to take charge of meetings, which was valuable in business where simultaneously he was chairman of eight of the sixteen company boards of which he sat. These included Dorman, Long & Co., and the Aerated Bread Company. He was also president of the Iron and Steel Federation in 1938. He had a talent for after-dinner speaking; as president of the Pilgrims Society he took charge of the placing of the Franklin Roosevelt statue in Grosvenor Square. He died soon after in London on 10 September 1948. His wife survived him and his elder son, David Henry Hamar Greenwood (*b.* 1914), succeeded to the titles.

MARTIN F. SEEDORF

Sources

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Archives

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Likenesses

W. Stoneman, photograph, 1918, NPG

Wealth at death

£44,823 8s. 5d.: probate, 22 Nov 1948, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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