Title: ***To what extent did the 3rd Home Rule bill contribute to a divide in Irish Society?***

Passed in the House of Commons, the Third Home Rule Bill which granted Ireland a form of limited self-government within the British Commonwealth was a landmark in Irish history which served to divide the Irish nation. The purpose of the Third Home Rule Bill was to split the governing of Ireland into internal and external affairs while still remaining a part of the Britain. The relationship with Britain was at the centre of the Third Home Rule Bill. On one side the Irish Nationalists were content with Home Rule as it offered them a limited government with a sense greater freedom; while on the other side the Ulster Unionists viewed the bill with major concern as they feared for their future position within Ireland. The two different viewpoints on the bill pitted the Unionists opinion of resistance against the Nationalist policy of acceptance against one another and ultimately divided public opinion. Further, it had Ireland on the verge of civil war as opposition forces such as the Ulster Volunteer Force and Irish Volunteers were set up. WW1 also served to intensify the already existing divide. Using these three key points this essay will discuss how Irish society was divided by the Third Home Rule bill.

**Background to the Home Rule and the Third Bill**

The Bill was the third of its kind and was the first to be passed by the House of Commons, after two other separate bills were rejected; the first being defeated in 1886 and the second in 1893. Both previous Bills were vetoed in the House of Lords, as the House was dominated by members of Conservative Party who were committed supporters of the British Empire. The Third Home Rule Bill was similar to those defeated in 1886 and 1893 as it offered Ireland a Parliament with limited powers. 40 members of the Parliament would still be elected to the Parliament in Westminster to preserve the link with Britain. Home Rule aimed to grant Ireland a form of government with very limited powers while also preserving the link with Britain. The Home Rule Parliament would be directly responsible for internal affairs and the Westminster Parliament would be responsible for issues such as war and peace, taxation and foreign policy. In this way Ireland would remain a part of the British Empire and British Army and Royal Navy members would still be stationed in Ireland. As such the Third Home Rule Bill was controversial and served to further divide the Irish nation.

**Divided Opinion- Nationalists v Unionists (Key Idea 1)**

The issue of Home Rule and Irish independence from Britain had dominated Irish society since the late 19th Century. Irish Nationalists and the Home Rule Party, under the leadership John Redmond, were hopeful that the Third Bill would be passed and Ireland would obtain its own parliament due to the fact that The Parliament Act was passed in 1911. The act meant that the House of Lords could no longer reject a Bill passed by the House of Commons- they could only delay its passage into law for two years. With this Home Rule was due to become law in 1914 as the Third Bill was passed in the House of Commons in 1912. The passing of this Bill was a significant development for Irish Nationalists despite the limited self-government involved as it gave Irish people direct control over areas such as education and language policy. John Redmond declared that the passage of Home Rule into law would mark the beginning of a new era of cooperation between Great Britain and Ireland. However, Unionists in Ireland were not so thrilled about the prospect of Home Rule.

While the bill was favourable to the Nationalists in Ireland, Irish Unionists regarded Home Rule as a deadly threat to their freedom and sense of identity. The Unionists minority in Ireland were very proud of their British identity and therefore were unwilling to accept any Bill that would compromise their heritage and culture. They opposed Home Rule on three fundamental grounds; Political, Economic and Religious. Unionists feared that Home Rule would destroy the prosperity that they built up under the Act of Union, and were content to remain fully within the United Kingdom under a single Parliament. ‘Home Rule is Rome Rule’ summed up their fears of being dominated by a Catholic-controlled parliament in Dublin. Led by Edward Carson and James Craig the unionists were committed to a campaign against Home Rule. Their campaign comprised of various demonstrations which took place throughout Ulster in 1912 as they were completely against the passing of the Third Home Rule Bill into Irish law. (Links first key idea back to essay title)

**Ireland on the verge of Civil War (Key idea 2)**

Unionist opposition to Home Rule threatened Civil War in Ireland as their resistance campaign turned from peaceful demonstrations to military threats with the setting up of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Carson and Craig threatened rebellion and claimed that if the Home Rule Bill were passed, unionists in Ulster would attempt to take over the running of the area themselves. To demonstrate publically the extent of their support and form a military group that would carry out their aims, the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant was signed in September 2012 by over 400,000 unionist men. Women signed a similar declaration. Unionists signed the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant to show that they were committed to defeating Home Rule by any means necessary; some even signed the document in their own blood to show how strongly they felt on the matter. Shortly after the UVF was set up in January 1913 as unionists began preparing for an armed resistance to Home Rule. The UVF was a symbol that the unionists were not just threatening violence. To further show this the UVF landed vast quantities of arms and ammunition from Germany at Larne, Co. Antrim, in an episode known as the ‘Larne Gun Running’.

Shortly after the formation of the UVF both sides of the Home Rule question began preparing for armed conflict when the Nationalists formed their own volunteer group known as the ‘Irish Volunteers’ in November 1913. Eoin MacNeill, a prominent nationalist, wrote an article in the Gaelic League newspaper ‘An Claidheamh Soluis’, calling for the formation of a nationalist equivalent to the UVF in order to put pressure on the British government to not give in to Unionists demands and bring in Home Rule. MacNeill’s article led to a public meeting in Dublin in November 1913 at which the Irish Volunteer Force was set up; MacNeill himself became Chief of Staff. By the middle of 1914, the force had almost 100,000 members showing the strength and willingness to achieve freedom of the nationalists. In response to the Larne Gun Running, Irish Nationalists also brought in arms and ammunition from Germany on Erskine Childer’s boat ‘The Asgard’ at Howth, Co. Dublin. This became known as the ‘Howth Gun Running’. All this time, the Third Home Rule Bill was making progress through the British Parliament at Westminster. Attempts at compromise failed and with both volunteer forces being armed and ready to rebel, it looked as if Ireland was heading for civil war over the issue of Home Rule. (Again, link paragraph/key idea back to title)

**The beginning of World War 1 (Key Idea 3)**

The crisis of Home Rule soon came to an end with the outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914. While the Third Home Rule Bill became law in September, it was immediately suspended due to Britain’s involvement in the war. The beginning of the war again served to further divide the Irish nation as both sides both North and South of the Island joined the British army. The Unionists joined as they wanted to maintain the union with Britain and protect the British Empire. They also believed that they would get special treatment after the war. While the majority of Unionists felt this way, the issue of Irish involvement in World War 1 was controversial for the Nationalists. The majority of Nationalists followed John Redmond’s view that the Irish should fight in the war as he believed that Ireland would be granted Home Rule in return for joining the war effort. About 100,000 volunteers joined the British Army and became known as ‘National Volunteers’. The other 10,000 volunteers rejected Redmond’s views and stayed under the leader of Eoin MacNeill. They kept the name Irish Volunteers and they believed that they should defend Ireland at home. In this way Irish involvement in WW1 was decided with the Third Home Rule Bill in mind and again the Bill can be seen to divide Irish Society. (Linking back to key idea and question).

**Conclusion (Summarising your 3 key points and argument).**

As can be clearly seen from the above essay the Third Home Rule Bill which was introduced in Ireland in 1914 was a historical landmark that served to divide the Irish nation into two main political groups. The Bill was decisive for both Nationalists and Unionists as it would have signalled huge change in the fortunes of both. Ultimately, it was the the passing of the Third Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons in 1912 that caused discontent in Ireland between Unionists and Nationalist as their varying viewpoints had Ireland on the verge of civil war. WW1 caused further divisions as both sides fought for the British army in the hope that Britain would be favourable to their side following the war. Therefore, it can be no doubt that the Third Home Rule Bill dominated Irish political life in the early 20th century and served to divide Irish opinion and society.