

1916: A Real History. Rising Youth, For a Democratic and Socialist Ireland

Introduction

The 1916 Easter Rising is a very important part of Irish history. It marks the beginning of a truly popular campaign for an Ireland free from foreign rule and for an Ireland of and by the Irish people. The rising has often been portrayed as a blood sacrifice or an uprising of 'saints and scholars'. This is a myth. 1916 was a product of its time and conditions. It did not come out of nowhere. 1798 saw the uprising of the United Irishmen, yet no revolution followed. 1804 saw the 'Emmet' uprising yet no revolution followed. Easter 1916 was witness to a revolt of ordinary Irish people against foreign dominance, exploitation and oppression and a revolution followed.

If the authorities were wanting to make Dublin a place with the bombs blazing in the street they were going the right way about it. It was labour supplied the passionate element in the revolt. It has a real grievance. The cultural element, poets, Gaels, etc., never stir more than one percent of a country. It is only when an immense injustice stirs the workers that they unite their grievances with all other grievances.

George Russell, AE.

Class Struggle and the 1913 Lockout

All stories need a starting point and none better than the 1913 lockout for the story of 1916. Dublin in 1913 witnessed the most intense class battle in Europe at that time. William Martin Murphy, owner of the Tramways company, the Independent newspapers, the Imperial Hotel and many other enterprises, allied to the business, political, and religious elite set out to crush the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, ITGWU. This union, headed by Larkin and Connolly, had made successful gains in workers organisation and conditions eating into the profits of Irish 'millionaires'. Murphy set out to starve 400,000 people into submission by locking union members out of employment. To this end 'scab' labour, mostly from Britain, was employed. After a titanic struggle union men were slowly forced back into their jobs, however all was not lost and lessons were learnt. The British people, even labourites, could not be relied upon to deliver Irish freedom, it was a job for the Irish people. Prominent nationalists like Pearse, Ceannt and Maude Gonne showed their understanding of an Ireland for the ordinary Irish people by supporting the union men and women. However, the divide in the nationalist community was also evident with Griffith and MacDiarmada, among others, opposing the union. The Irish Citizen Army, later to play a major role in the Rising, were formed as a workers advocate militia. Ireland was stirring and the unity achieved of socialism and nationalism in 1916 was being forged. At the same time other political philosophies were being promoted like feminism. Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz were instrumental in this movement and Cumann na mBan was set up as a result. It was founded to assist the volunteers for the revolution. Another movement that was growing was the youth movement. Fianna Éireann was founded by Bulmer Hobson and Constance Markievicz

to ensure that the young people would have the proper training when they were of age to fight for their country. The road to 1916 was being set.

Class Struggle in Europe, WW1

One year on the street battles in Dublin were replaced by trench warfare on the continent. World War One marks a terrible tragedy for humankind. Workers and peasants stood face-to-face killing each other by the millions for what? More land, labour and capital for their ruling elites. Britain and its allies claimed they were fighting for the freedom of small nations, like Belgium. In reality this was a war of empires to save themselves from their inevitable decline, in which there were very many innocent victims, like Ireland. The Irish Neutrality League, founded to prevent the enforcement of conscription, argued why fight and die to save British imperialism, which was oppressing Ireland, in a field in France when you could fight and die for your own people's freedom in your own country. It was in this broader European crisis that the Rising developed.

Domestic Events in the build up to 1916

Other factors too must be brought into consideration when looking at 1916. A number of very important domestic events had a profound impact on Irish society and politics. In 1912 the Ulster Volunteers were founded and quickly armed themselves for the so-called 'defence of Ulster'. In reality the elitist led protestant force were designed to protect the property, land and wealth of a few granted them by the British state's occupation of Ireland. The 'arming of Ulster', as it became known, caused two immediate reactions. It brought the Ulster landowners and capitalists temporarily into conflict with the British Liberal government and hastened the establishment and arming of the Irish Volunteer Force. On the first point the British military, based in the Curragh, flatly refused to obey orders from parliament to disarm the Ulster Volunteers. The 'curragh mutiny' showed for all to see the undemocratic nature of the British state in Ireland and also the undemocratic nature of the British state itself. Who held the real power was clear for all to see. On the second point the Irish Volunteers were founded to make sure home rule was achieved, and further the cause of Irish nationalism.

Disappointments in the run up

By 1915 the Irish Republican Brotherhood, IRB, were making plans for an uprising regardless of conscription and Connolly and the ICA were determined not to see the European Imperialist crisis go without a strike for workers and Irish freedom. In 1914 the Irish Volunteers split between the pro-imperialists led by John Redmond willing to fight to save the British Empire and the nationalists led by MacNeill. Pearse, MacDiarmada and Connolly were now convinced that the atmosphere was such around the country that a spark could start a genuinely popular revolution. However arms and their distribution were vital for success. Germany was contacted and eventually conceded to support England's enemy. These arms failed to land, however, and led eventually to the hanging of Roger Casement. The first major setback was suffered, the second was not far off coming. On the eve of the planned uprising MacNeill found out the 'manoeuvres'

planned for Easter Sunday were in fact an armed rebellion. On hearing this he sent a command out cancelling all forthcoming actions and activities causing great confusion and hesitation. This was the final major blow to the 1916 Rising.

Surrender and Execution

One week after the Irish Revolution began, the rebels surrendered to prevent further needless loss of life. Much has subsequently been made of the co-called 'jeering' made by the Dublin citizens. But evidence only points to a small number of gentry and aristocrats engaging in such behaviour, and from them we would expect nothing less! These had everything to lose from a successful revolt so were naturally happy at the English intervention. The leaders did not consider the revolt a failure. They understood well the atmosphere of town and country in Ireland and understood well they were part of the beginning of a defining moment in Irish history.

Date and List of Executions and Dead

- 1Pádraig Mac Piarais – Curtha chun báis, 3ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 2Tomás Ó Cléirigh - Curtha chun báis, 3ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 3Tomás Mac Donnchadha – Curtha chun báis, 3ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 4Seosamh Pluincéid – Curtha chun báis, 4ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 5Éadbhard Ó Dálaigh – Curtha chun báis, 4ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 6Liam Mac Piarais – Curtha chun báis, 4ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 7Mícheal Ó hAnracháin – Curtha chun báis, 4ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 8Seán Mac Giolla Bhríde – Curtha chun báis, 5ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 9Eamonn Ceannt – Curtha chun báis, 8ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 10Mícheal Ó Mealláin – Curtha chun báis, 8ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 11Conchur Colbard – Curtha chun báis, 8ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 12Sean Heuston – Curtha chun báis, 8ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 13Tomás Ceannt – Curtha chun báis, 9ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 14Sean Mac Diarmada – Curtha chun báis, 12ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 15Séamus Ó Conghaile – Curtha chun báis, 12ú Bealtaine, 1916
- 16Ruairdhri Mac Easmainn – Curtha chun báis, 3ú Lúnasa, 1916

Why Revolution?

The details of what followed are not the subject of this story, however it is vital to note the unique situation and time 1916 was part of and made part of. 1916 was part of an intense class and national struggle that was affecting the world over. The age of feudal empires was over, Home Rule was shelved and seen as unsatisfactory by the Irish people, the 1918 elections demonstrate this. The working class of Dublin and Belfast were unhappy and growing in confidence and self-belief, as demonstrated by the enormous growth in the trade union movement. Agrarian unrest, an almost ever-constant in Irish history, continued throughout the countryside through old land league contacts and secret societies voicing peasant discontent. Not to mention the growing unrest in the petit-bourgeois who were witnessing the ruin of competitive capitalism and the rise of industrial monopoly capitalism at their expense. It was these factors that caused 1916 and the War of Independence, not a poetic oration, moving speech or handful of executions.

Unfinished Rising

The Easter Rising remains unfinished. Its goals and objectives are far from complete. Ireland remains divided by imperialism. Ireland remains controlled by undemocratic foreign forces from London to Washington, Brussels to Tokyo. Ireland remains unfree and not at peace.

Rising Youth is a campaign of young democrats, communists and republicans to celebrate and commemorate the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, but also and more importantly to call on the young people of Ireland to continue the struggle for a democratic, independent, and sovereign united Ireland. An Ireland under the control of the ordinary working people of this island regardless of religion or race, a free Ireland.