

Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week

John Joe McCusker, RSF Ard Chomhairle member speaking at a seminar in Wynn's Hotel, February 20, 2016 launching Republican Sinn Féin's Easter 2016 Centenary Programme.

It is not easy to look back 100 years and make judgements on the main characters of Irish history. Each person concerned finding their lives encroached upon by an enormous and momentous period in the history of Ireland and mankind. The World is always changing and it was especially so, in the period from 1912 through to 1922. Set within this historical landscape was Ireland knocking on the door of the Great British Empire seeking Home Rule.

At a time when Irishmen and Irishwomen should be remembering with pride those who gave their lives for the freedom of our country around the grand grey stones and contrasting gruesome slums of Dublin. Irishmen and Irishwomen have found themselves reaching for their old history books to see if they had interpreted the whole core issue correctly, ie. undemocratic English rule and economic domination of our small country.

This Centenary Year of 2016 was just three Sundays old when the old soldiers of the '26 county state' came marching out of the pages of the Sunday Independent, battering the grey walls of the GPO and charging to the defence of John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party. Nothing wrong with this, the IPP were the elected representatives of our people and they had been making progress on the demand for Home Rule.

The background to the Home Rule struggle is not too complex an issue to understand. The majority of the Irish people elected the IPP under the leadership of John Redmond, ably assisted by John Dillon and Joe Devlin et al. It would all seem to be quite straight forward. They only have to advise the English Parliament that they spoke for the majority of the Irish people and that they were going to restore self-governance in Ireland, in much the same way, as was the case with Henry Grattan's Irish parliament prior to the Act of Union.

Unlike the Act of Union however, everything would be 'constitutional' and more importantly, democratic.

The difficulties they encountered when they raised this issue were enormous. All types of arguments were put and threats were made by English and Unionist politicians, of rebellion should the English parliament under the Liberal leadership of Gladstone and then Asquith concede Home Rule for Ireland. Finally, however, on the 11th April, 1912 the English Prime Minister Asquith, moved the third Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons. It had been defeated twice before but on this third occasion it was eventually passed on 25th May, 1914.

Bonar Law the Conservative leader in July 1912 some months after the 1st reading of the Home Rule Bill had declared that if this Bill were passed that he could imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.

Edward Carson a former Crown prosecutor made haste to prepare for a provisional government to rule Ulster, organised to run guns to Ulster and launched the Ulster Covenant. Following from the signing of the Ulster Covenant the Ulster Volunteer Force was formed. F E Smith KC and MP for an English constituency who would become an Attorney General of England and the Earl of Birkenhead, stated that '...they would be ready to risk the collapse of the whole body politic to prevent this monstrous crime'.

Elsewhere upon the stage of Irish history Thomas James Clarke the Fenian Veteran who had served fifteen years penal servitude for his involvement in the Dynamite campaign in England was co-opted on to the Supreme Council of the IRB. Thomas Clarke soon became an extremely influential person in the movement and took the side of the more radical young members of the IRB.

A meeting was arranged, here in this very hotel, Wynne's Hotel, organised by the IRB. A committee elected here proposed and held a meeting at the Rotunda Dublin on 25th November, 1913 with a view to forming a Nationalist Volunteer Movement. John Redmond and the IPP were at one in sentiment and in the actualisation of the National Volunteer Movement. It was stated by Eoin McNeill that the new organisation which would be know as The Irish Volunteers did not intend any hostility towards the UVF. Eoin Mac Neill outlined to those assembled the menace with which the English Conservatives were visiting on the Irish people by their hostility to the democratic wish of the Irish people in regard to Home Rule. The English Government reacted to the formation of the Irish Volunteers by banning the importation of arms.

With the First World War on the horizon Major Fred Crawford, an officer in the British Army, said that if Home Rule becomes affective that he would, "...infinitely prefer to change his allegiance right over to the Emperor of Germany..." Bonar Law Informed King George that he would advise British Army officers to refuse any orders that directed them to take action against Ulster.

King George called a conference of all parties at Buckingham Palace on 21st July, 1914. Partition of Ireland was on the agenda. Irish and English leaders argued as to whether nine counties or the four counties with large Unionist majorities should be partitioned. Another proposal was that any county could vote to be excluded for a period of six years from the Home Rule governance.

The UVF along with their Unionist supporters in Britain were waiting to establish the provisional government for Ulster and its military defence.

Here I will pause and ask you to contemplate what was happening and what was on the table.

Here is the first veiled expression, from a hostile English camp, of the ultimatum 'immediate and terrible war'.

On the vexed issue of partition, Winston Churchill commented, "... that they toiled round the muddy by-ways of Fermanagh and Tyrone".

After four days the conference grinded to a halt without success.

While Asquith was advising the Cabinet, regarding the discussions, the English Foreign Secretary Sir David Grey, came in and read aloud the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. This ultimatum of course was the precursor of an inevitable major war: The First World War. Churchill recalled that, "soon, the parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone faded back into the mists and squalls of Ireland,."

Some days later back in Ireland Erskine Childers landed arms at Howth Co Dublin in his yacht the Asgard.

British officers tried to seize the weapons but were unsuccessful. On their return to Barracks members of the Borderers regiment were stoned and soldiers opened fire and shot four people and many more were wounded. This incident happened at Bachelors Walk.

Some days later in the English Parliament on 3rd August 1914 war was formally announced by the English Foreign Secretary.

John Redmond got up and stated that the British Government might with confidence withdraw all their troops from Ireland, because the Irish Volunteers would cooperate with the Ulster Volunteers in protecting its shores. Of this statement the Chief Secretary for Ireland Augustine Birrell would later remark (with the benefit of hindsight), in the Times newspaper following John Redmond's death in 1918, that, "...His famous speech in the House of Commons was a mistake, though a noble one. He took the curve too sharply and did not carry the train with him".

Notwithstanding the deliberations at the Buckingham conference the Home Rule Bill was put on the Statue book and given royal assent. Then on the 18th September 1914 a Suspensory Act was passed postponing the operation of the Home Rule Act. Modifications, alterations and the consent of Ireland and the UK would have to be tested.

Positions hardened within the Irish Volunteers around the issue of recruitment into the British Army within the Volunteers, Author Griffith wrote in his paper, Sinn Fein, "...Ireland is not at war with Germany. Mr Redmond has offered England the services of the National Volunteers to defend Ireland.

Has she a native Constitution or a National Government to defend? All know that she has not. All know that both were wrested from her by the power to whom Mr Redmond offers the services of National Ireland. All know that Mr Redmond has made an offer without receiving a quid pro quo.

Let the British Government withdraw the abortive Home Rule Bill, and pass in the same space of time a full measure of Home Rule, and Irishmen will have some reason to mobilise for the defence of their institutions. At present, they have none. In the alternative, let a Provisional Government be set up in Dublin by Mr Redmond and Sir Edward Carson, and we shall give it allegiance. But the confidence trick has been too often played upon us to deceive us again.

John Redmond made his choice and brought matters to a clear conclusion when he made his Wooden bridge, County Wicklow speech on 20th September, 1914 where he

called on those Irish Volunteers assembled to join the British Army 'Go on drilling and make yourselves efficient for the work. And then account for yourselves as men not only in Ireland but wherever the firing line extends in defence of right, freedom and religion.

Eoin McNeill responded, "...Mr Redmond, addressing a body of Irish Volunteers on last Sunday, has now announced for the Irish Volunteers a policy and programme fundamentally at variance with their own published and accepted aims and pledges, but with which his nominees are, of course, identified.

He has declared it to be the duty of the Irish Volunteers to take foreign service under a Government which is not Irish. He has made this announcement without consulting the Provisional Committee, the Volunteers themselves, or the people of Ireland to whose service alone they are devoted. Having thus disregarded the Irish Volunteers and their solemn engagement, Mr Redmond is no longer entitled, through his nominees, to any place in the administration and guidance of the Irish Volunteer organisation.

The consequence of these events brought about an ultimate split in the Irish Volunteers. Less than 10% of the organisation some 12,000 remained steadfast to the cause of Ireland. While the vast majority, 180,000, followed John Redmond, in his fight for the freedom of small nations.

It is at this pivotal stage that the scene is set and the outplaying of events from here towards the Easter Rising become predictable.

Recruitment to the British Army continues. Deaths on the battlefronts of Europe continue to mount in an Imperialist war. Tens of thousands of young vibrant men from across Europe whistled upon, 'go die today.'

This the where John Redmond, sent the sons of Ireland. As the thousands and tens of thousands perished so also did the strength of the Irish Nation to defend the integrity of our National Territory.

It is not for me to condemn the man. It was perhaps his belief that maybe he could unite Orange and Green within their common birthright 'Irishmen'. This of course would have been a great achievement on another day out. However having adjudged the history of the British Empire John Redmond should have known better than to barter the blood of his brave volunteers. His best hand was the Irish Volunteers, these he misdirected to the trenches of Europe. You cannot spend the same lives twice. As each Irish mother's son died in Europe John Redmond would die a little too. The tragedy for Ireland was that they died in what many of them believed was a proxy war for Ireland.

There are times when I think that Redmond must have died from a broken and sorrowful heart.

Perhaps the Easter Rising should have happened at Easter 1914 and the Irish people would not have lost the tens of thousands of young men on the western front.

The 1916 Easter Rising interrupted recruitment into the British Army and in a short period of time the selfless sacrifice of those who took part in the rising won the respect and support of the vast majority of the Irish people. The Rising did not win the support of the Sunday Independent. Despite this the people voted democratically for a Sinn Fein Government. The people of 1918 were better placed to adjudicate on the state of affairs in our Country then, than anyone living today. Remember that these voters were the fathers and mother's brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, of 'Redmond's Volunteers', of Connolly's Citizen Army Pearse's Irish Volunteers and the women of Cumann na mBan.

Many British Soldiers upon returning home from Europe rejoined the struggle for the Independence of our country.

The 1916 Rising proclaimed a 32-County Republic, many in the revisionist 26 county establishment would prefer if this could be airbrushed from the pages of our history books. Thankfully it cannot.

The 1916 Proclamation is a living document. It embodies the territorial rights of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible.

"Until our arms have been brought the opportune moment of the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people."

It is this Republic that Irish Republicans defend and shall continue to defend. It is obviously the bent of the 26 county administration to destroy the ideals embodied in the Easter Proclamation.

In recent times they have referred to the Nation and the country in terms of the 26 Counties. There parlance is pointed to develop a clear understanding that the people living in the occupied six counties are not part of the Nation or country that they refer to. This shall in the end be their undoing.

The English, the Unionists and the Green Tories across Ireland tried this for fifty years and it did not work. RTÉ with their government-issued protocols and foreign agenda shall not succeed with their revisionist propaganda.

Armed rebellion is never constitutional it is always anti-constitutional. There was no Irish Constitution. There was a British Empire which was tactically morphed, in 1884 by Lord Rosebury, and marketed as a Commonwealth of Nations. The United Kingdom was Governed by a Constitutional Monarchy. We the Irish were part of a Union, which was not to our liking and one which was not constructed for the well being of the Irish Nation.

Ultimately this is why there was an Easter Rising in 1916 England and her unrelenting interference in our country was to blame then and continues to this day to usurp, by coercion and threats, the democratic rights of the Irish.

There still is no Irish Constitution. We the Irish are part of a Union, which is not to our liking and one which is not constructed for the well being of the Irish Nation
Ultimately this is why Ireland cannot be at peace.

***Long live the Irish Republic
An Phoblacht abú***