An Cháisc 1916

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Newsletter of the 'Reclaim the Spirit of Easter 1916' Festival.

Mná na hEireann — 75 Years On

Now that we have reached the 75th anniversary of the events of 1916 we can serve our present and future interests by recalling women who played a part in the events of that time.

We must keep in mind that then, as now, the problems faced by women in society were not looked on as an integral part of that society's agenda.

Our history books are often silent on the question of how much we owe to the contribution of women to our national story. Time after time, there were women who gave their courage, endurance and imaginative leadership as champions of social and political progress but they have not been to the forefront in our commemorative records.

The basic problems facing Irish women in the paid workforce, in the home, in education, religion, law, politics and economics give women activists a keen sense of the need to forge their own destiny and to work for the establishment of a more nurturing community. In the early years of this century, many women played their part in the national independence movement, yet their stories are not as prominent as the stories of their male colleagues. Indeed, the story of women's own search for equality and liberation is often suppressed and blurred in the history of struggle for national autonomy and identity.

Irish nationalists, as well as other activists and reformers of Irish public opinion were ready to recognise and make use of the growth in demand for participation by women in government and trade union organisations, but we should remember that the women who gave their energies to the general movement made their contribution under an extra restrictive shadow that implied, in the same way as it does today, that ''women's rights'' are somehow concerned with the interests of a minority sub-group.

We should research, recall and record the lives of women who are part of our heritage; the better known individuals as well as the more numerous unnamed supporters whose efforts and service to their cause may have been taken for granted by their brothers.

After 75 years we have the advantage of hindsight and should use this opportunity to recognise and appreciate the contribution made by women to the development of Irish society. These women lived and worked through situations which called for radical solutions as well as conciliation and reform. Their story can inform our understanding of nationalism and feminism and is a timely and significant reminder to us all.



Reclaim the Spirit of Easter 1916

The Reclaim the Spirit of Easter Committee was established in December 1989 and organised a successful week of activities at Easter 1990.

We are at present involved in preparations for a major commemoration and celebration at Easter 1991 - the 75th. Anniversary.

Our aims and objectives are as follows:

- To look at the ideals of the 1916 Rising and relate them to the situation in Ireland today.
- To celebrate being irish and demonstrate pride in our history.
- To involve as many people as possible in constructive political dialogue on the problems facing the Irish people today and how they can be overcome.
- To encourage active involvement in campaigns for peoples rights.
- To build for a country-wide People's Festival for Easter 1991, the 75th anniversary of the 1916 Rising.

All those who support the above are most welcome to join us. Please contact the committee for further information at 16 Nth. Great George's Street, Dublin 1.

Constance Markievicz

BY ANNE HAVERTY

The extraordinary woman that Constance Markievicz was is often underestimated today. Some share Seán O'Casey's attitude that she was a dilletante who took up politics as a means of walking into the limelight, someone who wasn't quite serious enough.

And in its bare bones her story does belong to the pages of romantic fiction — the beautiful aristocratic headstrong girl who rides fast horses over the hedges and ditches of her father's thousands of acres and then turns to conspiracy and revolution. Her soldierly role in the Rising and its aftermath can, given our modern soul-searchings about the recourse to arms in 1916, make her seem belligerent; and this especially since she was a woman. Her different avocations, artist, actress, polemicist and politician, reveal, it is suggested, not her commitment but its opposite. Even her achievements are held against her. They are seen as obscuring the achievements of the many other women of the time who had a less public part than she had and are now forgotten. She has had, it is sometimes said, more than enough attention already.

But Constance Markievicz did not have it so easy as might be imagined. Always uneasy with her social position and the constrictions it imposed, she had to fight for the right to be an artist as she wanted to be and was 25 before she was finally able to go to London to study, and live with some independence. Later, studying in Paris, she held out on two francs a day, because of a family strategy to fore her back to Lissadell. This persistence and determination to take the unconventional and unpopular path stayed with her throughout her life.

The long list of bodies she was involved with, often as a founding member — the Suffragettes, Inine na hEireann, the National Theatre, the Fianna, Sinn Féin, the Citizen Army, the Provisional Government, Cumann na mBan, Fianna Fáil — show her commitment. For 20 years, until her death in 1927, it was this that led her from one badly-lit hall to another to attend those endless contentious meetings which she did not really enjoy. And these were interspersed with gruelling



terms in prisons in England and Ireland.

She was committed to a vision of a new Ireland; independent, Irish, equal and just. When, in the '20s, this vision seemed less and less likely to materialise, she did not lose her spirit but went on hoping and working. All her talents were devoted to this hope. Her clever and incisive writings were polemical but not theoretical. The happiness and welfare of people was her primary motivation. When she founded the Fianna, she was as interested in giving boys who lived in the dreariness of poverty a respite from it as she was in training them to be soldiers. Later, when old people had no coal in a hard winter because of a strike, she would throw theory aside and bring it to them herself.

Her obvious achievements — the first woman to be elected to the British Parliament, first woman minister in government, her refusal to be fettered by the limitations of being a woman — are important. But it was her human qualities that made her unique and earned her the love of thousands of people. Her great generosity, her courage, her total and spirited engagement in the life of her time, make all grudging views of her misplaced.

(Anne Haverty is the author of CONSTANCE MARKIEVICZ: An Independent Life, published by Pandora.)

Deora Duibhshléibhe

Trásnaim Mám Conrach
ar thuairisc mo ghaolta
is níl siad ann,
is tiomáinim liom cruinn direach
ar aghaidh i dtreo Shruibh Bhroin.
Tá tithe na Machairí
ag glioscarnach mar chlocha scáil
is léas ar an uisce
mar bhoga síne iomlán
is gan an bogha le fáil.

Dá mbuailfinn anois leis an mBean Sí
Deora Duibhsléibhe
is í ag teacht ag caoineadh
Ghearaltaigh Mhurargáin; -
seanbheainín liath faoi chlóca uaithne
is madra beadaí faoina hascaill
(chihuaha, ní foláir)
n'fheadar an mbeadh sé de meabhair agam
is d'éirim chinn
fifraí
cad a bhainfead an draíocht
den Dún-idir-Dhá-Dhroí
atá sna huisci thíos
is an léas seo os a choinn
mar scáil?

Nó ab ann ab amhlaidh
a bheannóin di go simplí
is í ag dul thar bráid?
Faoi mar a dheineas anois
ó chianaibhín
le bean ón áit. — LE NUALA NI DHOMHNAILL

HELENA MOLONY

— A LIFE DEDICATED TO STRUGGLE

On this the 75th anniversary recalling those who fought and died for a free Ireland, the woman who stood on the steps of Liberty Hall in 1916 with a gun daring armed policemen to take away the arms inside deserves to be recalled.

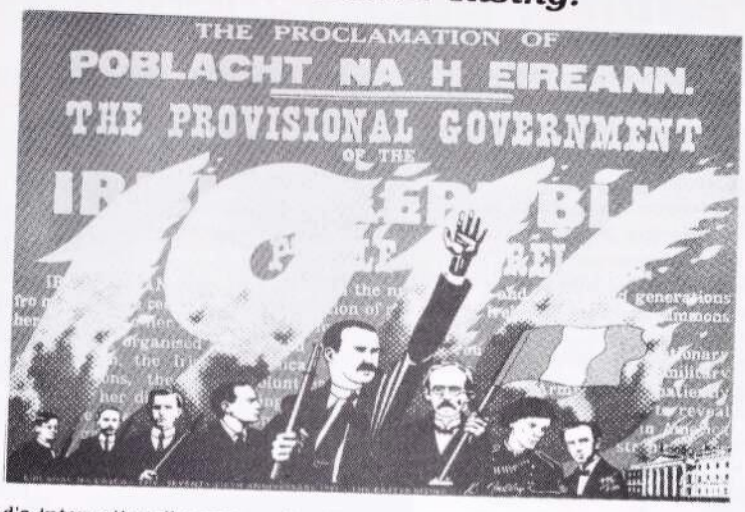
To Helena Molony, the 1916 Rising was a logical and consistent step in the fight for a new and free Ireland, a step consistent with her fight for women's right to work and equal pay and with the socialist and republican views which she held throughout her life.

Like many others in that buoyant period of the Irish struggle for freedom, Helena Molony championed a wide range of causes. She was a trade union orgnaiser, a socialist, an actor, a Gaelic enthusiast and an active member of the militant republican movement. She described herself as a separatist, a feminist and a trade unionist at at time when at least two of those causes weren't fashionable...

In 1900, she was imprisoned for "acts of subversion" during the visit of King George and Queen Mary to Ireland. She threw a stone at the window of a building in Parnell Square which contained pictures of the British rulers. It missed but she was still detained in Mountjoy.

Molony joined Inghinidhe na hEireannn and, later, Cumann na mBan, then deemed a "very dangerous body" by the commander of the British Army in Ireland. In 1910, she became one of the first of the political prisoners to that stage of the Irish struggle for freedom and was to the forefront of the campaign against the recrutiment of Irishmen to fight for England in the first World War. She edited Bean na hEireann, the Inghinidhe

Now available - Original Print by Robert Ballagh Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising.



Ireland's internationally renowned artist, Robert Ballagh, has produced an original graphic to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising.
This graphic has been printed in 6 colours on art paper in a limited edition of 500 and each copy has been signed and numbered by the artist.
All money obtained through the sale of the print will be used to fund a series of events to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1991.
People interested in obtaining a copy of the print should send IR£60.00, Stg.£55 or $100 to:1916 Poster, P.O. Box 2814, Dublin 7, Ireland.

monthly paper, and is credited with influencing Constance Markievicz towards the cause of Irish independence.

At an Inghinidhe meeting in 1911 chaired by James Connolly, Molony mounted the platform, repeating her view that King George was the descendant of "the worst scoundrel in Europe". She was again arrested - mid speech - and sent back to Mountjoy where she was charged with 'high treason". This was later amended to "using language derogatory to His Majesty' . She confessed : "In my heart of hearts, I felt degraded by such a miserable accusation". Molony went to jail rather than pay a fine but her fine was paid by Anna Parnell.

She left Ireland for several months in 1911, it is believed for health reasons, and returned in 1912 to play a part in the Abbey production 'The Mineral Workers'. She used the time between scenes to urge women to join the newly formed Irish Women Workers Union and the increasingly militant movement aimed at securing Irish independence.

After the 1913 Lock-out, Connolly asked Molony to help reorganise the IWWU, then in severe financial difficulties. In an effort to help those women who were sacked as a result of their participation in the 1913 Lock-out, the Irish Women Workers Co-operative Society was established.

The preoccupations of the IWWU in the years before 1916 was the national cause and virtually all of the IWWU members working in the co-op were members of the Irish Citizen Army. After the imperial war began in 1914, the co-op became one of the centres for the stocking of guns and ammunition in preparation for a military uprising. The women regularly confronted posses of armed police intent on ransacking the co-op offices who retreated when they were confronted with guns.

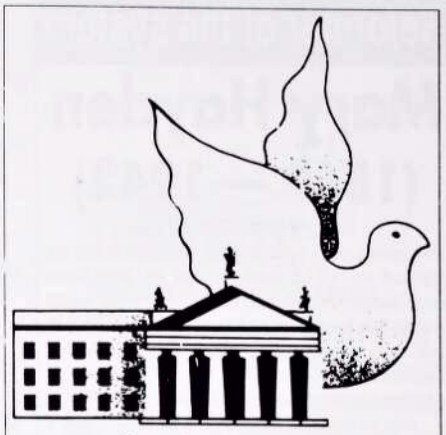
Jennie Shanahan and Rosie Hackett were two of Molony's staunchest allies in the co-op which continued to produce shirts and children's pinafores while it also manufactured flags, armlets and badges. A private post office flourished as a receiving depot for small parcels of arms and ammunition. The women also prepared moulds and lead slugs for bullet cartridges.

On Sunday April 16th 1916, Molly O'Reilly, member of the IWWU and ICA, raised a green flag with a gold harp on the parapet of Liberty Hall. That flag, and the tricolour hoisted over the GPO were produced by the IWWU.

Helena Molony and Jennie Shanahan were assigned to the garrison at Dublin City Hall, Rosie Hackett took up arms at St.Stephens Green. One week later, Molony was marched from Ship Street baracks to Kilmainham Jail from where she was sent to Aylesbury prison in England. She was one of five women interned in Britain - the others were Maire Perolz, Rosie Hackett, Winifred Carney from Belfast and Jennie Shanahan.

Released in December 1916, Helena Molony remained on call for active service throughout the Tan war along with a group of women, including Dr Kathleen Lynn and Madeline Ffrench-Mullen. She retained that commitment to the republican movement and to working women for the rest of her life.

The contribution of this working class Dublin woman to the 1916 Rising was considerable. Fortunately, there are some records left noting that contribution. The tragedy is that the contribution of other women, less prominent, continues undocumented.



Reclaim the Spirit of Easter 1916

The 1916 75th Anniversary Committee, a voluntary committee, was established to organise a fitting commemoration and celebration for Easter 1991. An impressive array of cultural and political events have been put together by this committee and others. Just some of these events are listed below:

- April 2nd: Opening of an exhibition of the paintings of Constance Markievicz at the Labour History Society premises, Beggars' Bush, Dublin.
- April 3rd: A debate in the Mansion House
- April 4th: An evening dedicated to women's role in Irish history.
- April 6th: A Carnival-like Parade through O'Connell Street including musicians, actors and artists.
- April 6th: A Ceilidh Mór at the Mansion House with Set Dancing craic and all!
- A primary school competition is under way with three categories — A poster competition, an essay competition and a poem as Gaeilge competition.

All entres should be sent to 1916 Primary School Competition, 16 North Great George's Street, Dublin 7.

- An Post will be issuing a commemorative stamp and is also mounting a multi-screen video presentation "seven steps to 1916" in the lobby of the General Post Office.

Reformer of the system

Mary Hayden (1862 — 1942)

BY ANNE GRIFFIN

It is interesting to consider with an issue as topical as 1916 both within its own time and today, those public figures who were not to be heard or seen when the Rising itself took place. One such person is Mary Hayden, feminist and then Professor of Modern Irish History in UCD.

Mary Hayden seems to fit Germaine Greer's description of the early feminists as "middle-class ladies clamouring for reform". As a leading feminist, Hayden championed the cause of women's rights in the fields of education, politics and the workplace; yet within that life devoted to progressive change, in which she met with much opposition, she never stepped out of line. She wanted to reform the system from within, not overhaul it.

It is important to understand this fundamental belief in reform rather than revolution when considering Hayden's role in, or attitude to, 1916. Mary's connections with 1916 were quite strong. As an active member of the Gaelic League she befriended many of thse who were to push for and lead the fight for Irish freedom. Despite her close friendship with Pádraig Pearse it is likely that they disagreed over the League's adoption of a political policy on Ireland's independence. Hayden, like many others, believed the principal purpose of the League was an Irish Ireland.

To say, however, that Hayden opposed the ideal of an independent Ireland would be inaccurate. The way in which she wrote of 1916 in her book, "A Short History of the Irish People," and the enthusiasm with which she took over the work of Eoin MacNeill, then Professor of Medieval History in UCD, prove her sympathies lay with the goal of an independent Ireland but not with the methods chosen.

Hayden was a self-proclaimed pacifist. She disagreed with the use of violence no matter how much she herself may have supported or promoted a particular cause. When, on June 13th 1912, the Irish Women's Franchise League broke the windows of Government buildings in Dublin in protest at the Home Rule MP's refusal to promise the female vote, Hayden's reaction as a pacifist was one of disgust, but as a suffragette she was compassionate towards the women whom she stated had been forced to use these means.

Hayden, therefore, fits like many others into a group which sympathised with the ideal of 1916 but was uncomfortable with the thoughts of what its realisation might bring. A revamping of society seemed more to be feared than embraced. Hayden was willing to accept the system as one which could answer the demands of the people through time and effort.

It appears then that Mary Hayden as a reformer and not a revolutionary had no part to play in 1916. It is significant that at a time when the Rising gripped every women's movement in the country in one form or another, the Irish Women's Graduate Association, of which Hayden was President, made no reference to it in its minutes which now survive in the UCD archives.

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington — *Feminist and Nationalist*

BY CAITRIONA BEAUMONT

"Under the 1916 Proclamation, Irishwomen were given equal citizenship, equal rights and equal opportunities. Subsequent constitutions have filched these or smothered them in more 'empty formulae'."

The above statement was made in the 1943 election statement of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington. In that election campaign, Sheehy-Skeffington, an ardent feminist and nationalist, attempted to highlight the betrayal, by consecutive governments of Ireland, of the guarantee of equality contained in the 1916 Proclamation. She felt that Irishwomen who had always been active in Ireland's national struggles had been wrongfully neglected. She wrote that; "their help is as readily received as it is forgotten".

These statements were made in reaction to the conservative protectionism of the 1920s and 1930s which, through legislation and public opinion, envisaged women's role as that of mother and homemaker.

The 1916 Rising utterly changed the life of Hanna Sheehy-Skefington. Her husband, Francis, with whom she shared her feminist, nationalist and pacifist beliefs, was arrested on Easter Tuesday and was shot and killed by firing squad the following morning. Hanna and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington were not involved in the planning of the Rising and there is no doubt that as pacifists, they would not have supported the ideal of a blood sacrifice. In "An open letter to Thomas MacDonagh", written in May 1915, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington warned of the dangers of militarism and asked Thomas MacDonagh to think on these dangers before being drawn; "too far from your humanitarian anchorage".

Following the outbreak of the Rising, Francis and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington set about organising a Citizen's Defence Force to prevent the looting and lawlessness which threatened the city during the rebellion. On Easter Tuesday, Hanna and Francis ventured into the city-centre. Hanna went to the GPO where she was asked to deliver food and messages to the College of Surgeons. Francis spent the day preventing looting and it was on his way home that evening that he was arrested.

The shock of Francis's death, followed by a military search of her home during which Hanna and her son, Owen, were held at gunpoint, did not prevent her from demanding a full inquiry into her husband's death.

A pamphlet entitled "British Militarism As I Have Known It", first published in 1917 as



part of a series of lectures given in the USA by Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington outlines the campaign she embarked on to uncover the events surrounding her husband's death. It emerged that Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was murdered on the orders of Captain Bowen-Colthurst, who was later charged and found guilty but insane. In this pamphlet, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington writes of the atrocities, including her husband's death, which occured under military law in the weeks following the Rising. She condemned British militarism in Ireland and its tireless efforts to prevent the truth of military operations in Ireland being made public.

According to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, the lesson of the Irish Rising and its suppression was to show that Ireland "...has a right also to its place in the sun". When Ireland did achieve her "place in the sun" with independence in 1922, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington expected Irishwomen to be considered on an equal footing with Irishmen. This was not to be the case. Despite the Proclamation of 1916, women in the Free State were relegated to the position of secondary citizens.

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, betrayed by the aspirations of 1916, dedicated herself to the cause of women's equality. Her manifesto of 1943 sums up her raison d'être: "There can be no true democracy where there is not complete economic and political freedom for the entire nation, both men and women."

I am indebted to Mrs Andrée Sheehy-Skeffington for her interest in the research of this paper.