

## Editorial: Towards a New Rising

It is one of the paradoxes of Irish history and politics that a state which is currently charging water protesters with 'false imprisonment' for the 'crime' of a sit down protest round Joan Burton's car and politicians who never stop taunting Sinn Féin over their militarist past, will in 2016 commemorate and celebrate with full pomp and circumstance an actual armed republican insurrection.

Of course they will claim that it was 'different in 1916' because Ireland was under British rule whereas now it is an independent 'democracy' and that therefore everybody is obliged to play by the rules - the rules laid down by the state and its politicians. But this justification cannot hide the nauseating hypocrisy. It must be obvious to anyone with eyes to see that in 1916 the political and social types represented by Enda Kenny (the conservative middle classes) and Joan Burton (the Labour movement careerists and 'liberal' middle classes) did not lift a finger for the Rising. On the contrary they condemned it.

Hypocrisy aside, however, the argument that revolutionaries who fought for Irish independence were heroes whereas anyone who protests with the least vigour or militancy today is some sort of fascist and thug rests on a false premise. That premise is that the achievement of political independence [in the 26 counties] and one person one vote creates real democracy and delivers a state and government that represents the interests of 'the people'.

But this premise is not true, neither in Ireland nor in any other capitalist society. This is not just because of flaws in the electoral system or the constitution or corrupt politicians - all of which exist, of course - but because the combination of parliamentary democracy with economic plutocracy i.e. with the ownership and control of production and wealth by a tiny minority, turns parliament into a 'democratic' façade masking the effective dictatorship of the 1 percent, the capitalist class.

The contradiction between the outlook and interests of the contemporary neoliberal

and reactionary ruling class and its claimed revolutionary historical origins is not confined to Ireland; it applies also to England, France and the US and in these cases it requires a rewriting of history either to minimise the revolutionary starting point or to mythologise and sanitise it. Thus, for example, the English Revolution of the seventeenth century became the English 'Civil War', and in 1970s and 80s right wing 'revisionist' historians mounted a major campaign to reclaim the period from Marxists like Christopher Hill and deny there had been any revolution at all. However, the problem for our rulers in Ireland is particularly acute because the Rising and the Revolution/War of Independence are relatively recent, almost within living memory, and because of the role in the struggle of an avowed revolutionary socialist, James Connolly, and his supporters.

At the beginning of *The State and Revolution* Lenin observes how:

During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.

That the Irish bourgeoisie, and also particularly the leaders of the Irish Labour Party, have done this to Connolly is obvious but they have clearly also done it to the 1916 Rising and the Irish Revolution as a whole.

This special issue of IMR is designed to challenge this conversion of the Rising and the Revolution ‘into harmless icons’. Our lead article by Kieran Allen systematically demolishes the key myths about 1916 and after, which have been spread to ‘blunt its revolutionary edge’: that it was ‘blood sacrifice’ by a few heroic individuals lacking wider support; that the struggle was only about national independence and had no social goals. Allen also argues that the Irish state as it exists today, and has existed since 1923, is, in both its structures and its values, not the product or heir of the Rising or the Revolution but of a counter revolution which began with the unleashing of the Civil War by the pro-Treaty forces.

Allen’s arguments are complemented by Conor Kostick’s piece which demonstrates and analyses the high level of independent working class struggle during the War of Independence and its crucial role in forcing Britain to concede at least some measure of independence.

The social revolutionary character of 1916 is confirmed by the exceptional role played in it by women. It is a feature of every real people’s revolution from the English and French Revolutions onwards that they draw women into the struggle and that in the process women challenge their own oppression and second class status. Mary Smith’s article is a powerful evocation of the women of the Irish revolution which combines individual stories with analysis of the relationship and interaction between nationalism, feminism and socialism.

Fergal McClusky and Brian Kelly focus on the northern dimension of the struggle showing how, as Connolly predicted, partition generated a ‘carnival of reaction’, They

argue that ‘Imposed by brute force as a means of undermining the potential for thoroughgoing revolution during a period of remarkable upheaval across Ireland, partition consolidated a new arrangement through which capitalism would continue to dominate Ireland north and south’

Another neglected feature of the Irish Revolution is that it was part of an international struggle, as were the rising of 1798, the Fenian rebellion, the Lockout and the explosion of the Civil Rights movement in 1968. The Lockout of 1913 was linked to a wave of industrial resistance that included ‘the great unrest’ in Britain and stretched as far as the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World) in America. 1916 was the first in a series of revolutionary uprisings against the First World War that went on to include the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German Revolution of 1918, which in turn developed into a revolutionary wave sweeping Europe in 1919. This international context is highlighted by Kieran Allen at the start of his article and also by Dave Sherry in his fascinating study of the relationship between Red Clydeside and the struggle in Ireland.

The central message of all these articles is that the heirs of 1916 are not at all the Enda Kennys and Joan Burtons but those who struggle for a new people’s uprising today. It would be very pleasing if the centenary of the Rising could be accompanied by a ‘rising’ at the ballot box which would see a significant advance for those who still stand for the politics of James Connolly bearing in mind, of course, (as Connolly well knew) that real change will come not through parliament but through the mass movement on the streets and in the workplaces.

**- John Molyneux**