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Baptism by Fire: Ireland, The Easter Rising of 1916 and Its Experiment with Radical Republicanism

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As the one hundredth anniversary of the Easter Uprising of 1916 rapidly approaches, this defining moment in Irish history will receive renewed scholarly attention. Beginning on the 24th of April, Irish Volunteers stood up for their right to self-govern and fought to the death to secure sovereignty for the Irish people. With the British Empire embroiled in World War One, it was perhaps the most opportune time to press for their rights, not in the halls of Parliament but on the streets of Dublin. After a botched start and numerous setbacks, the Irish Volunteers faced the daunting task of holding back one of the best militaries in the world. Confronted with an unsupportive populace, lack of a concrete plan and insufficient manpower, the leaders of the Rising were in an unwinnable situation. Six days later, the Rising officially ended with scores dead and many more wounded. British authorities' draconian retribution measures turned popular opinion from openly hostile toward the rebels into idolizing them as martyrs. The Rising left the streets of Dublin looking like a scene from the battlefields of France—its implications reverberating for many years. Political upheaval resulted in a “changing of the guard” from the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party to the more radical Sinn Féin party which preached the need for Irish sovereignty. Women's rights were dramatically improved and the electorate in general increased as the right to vote was extended to more people than ever before. The Easter Rising of 1916 led to a revival in Irish Nationalism, changing the very nature of relations between Ireland and Great Britain.

The Easter Rising of 1916 was not a spontaneous happening. Measures taken by both English and Irish authorities all but ensured an armed insurrection. Beginning in 1914, Irish nationalists began stockpiling weapons, claiming the need to arm themselves for national defense. London allowed paramilitary groups such as the Irish Volunteers to accumulate arms, except in one instance when civilians protesting the seizure were fired upon by British troops. This bloodletting underscored the problems developing just underneath the surface of Anglo-Irish relations.

For many years, Irish Nationalists had fought in Parliament for the right to rule their own land. One popular piece of legislation, the Government of Ireland Act, was considered and ultimately passed. The Government of Ireland Act of 1914—more commonly known as the Home-Rule bill—was enacted by Parliament in 1914, just prior to the outbreak of World War One. The Home-Rule Act granted Ireland the right to establish a legislative body to make domestic decisions; foreign policy decisions as well as ultimate veto power would continue to reside with London.¹ This highly popular piece of legislation, especially

¹ Paul Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 35-36.

among Irish Catholics who constituted the majority in the twenty-six southern counties, was postponed due to wartime necessity.²

John Redmond did perhaps more than the leaders of the Rising to incite armed insurrection against the crown. One thing must be made perfectly clear: John Redmond was unequivocally against the uprising. Redmond was the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), sometimes known as the Irish Nationalist Party. The IPP represented the Irish people in the halls of Parliament; the IPP was the chief supporter and advocate of the Home-Rule movement. When hostilities erupted in Europe in 1914, Redmond, in his infamous “Woodenbridge” speech, pledged support for the war effort in the hopes that doing so would ultimately improve relations between England and Ireland, which might one day lead to a sovereign Ireland. Redmond believed he could speak for the whole of Ireland; he could not have been more incorrect. Back in Ireland, despite war fever gripping the country—as it had done in nearly every belligerent nation—the citizens were split about offering their support to a country which had long been their oppressor. One Dubliner, James Stephens, who would provide a lucid and telling account of the Easter Rising two years later, condemned Redmond for his support of the war effort:

On the day of the declaration of war between England and Germany he [Redmond] took the Irish case, weighty with eight centuries of history and tradition, and he threw it out of the window. He pledged Ireland to a particular course of action, and he had no authority to give this pledge...He swore Ireland to loyalty as if he had Ireland in his pocket, and could answer for her.³

Mr. Stephens even went so far as stating that Redmond was responsible for the whole uprising by pledging Irish support for the war. The decision led to a split in the paramilitary force, the Irish Volunteers, which had long been loyal to Redmond. Approximately 12,000 or six percent of the Volunteers split away and formed their own force, retaining the name Irish Volunteers—the dissenters would form the backbone of the Rising. The forces that remained loyal to the IPP would be forever known as the Irish National Volunteers whose members would go on to serve with distinction in numerous battles throughout the course of the war.⁴

Revolutionaries took advantage of the split in the ranks of the Redmond loyalists. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, a longtime champion of Irish nationalism, convened a military council whose leaders included Patrick Pearse

² David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), preface.

³ James Stephens, *Insurrection in Dublin* (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire England: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1978), 74.

⁴ Terence Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War 1914-1918* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press Ltd., 1992), 33.

and James Connolly. The council put into motion a plan for a joint insurrection between the Volunteers and forces loyal to Connolly known as the Irish Citizen Army. In an article penned on April 30, 1916, in the *New York Times*, the day following the suppression of the Rising, the author argues that the Rising occurred at a critical time in Irish history. British military forces, having been deployed overseas fighting in France, were in no position to suppress an uprising in Ireland. The author believed the timing was perfect to press for Irish independence.⁵

The feeling that England was vulnerable during wartime was certainly prevalent throughout not only Ireland but also troubled members of Parliament. Mathew Nathan, undersecretary to British Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell, was acutely aware of the fragile political and civil situation in Ireland. Nathans understood that to take action to disarm the Volunteers would result in the “alienation of the great bulk of the Irish People, which was not in [favor] of these people.”⁶ While it undoubtedly was a cause of concern for the British government, members of Parliament were not as concerned with the undercurrents in Ireland as they were with the recruitment of the Irish and retaining the loyalty of the IPP.

Roger Casement emerged to become a thorn in the side of the British. Sir Roger Casement was formally an official in the British government but his beliefs radicalized upon joining the Gallic League.⁷ Casement became intimately involved during the early stages of the Rising when he travelled to Berlin and negotiated a weapons deal with Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1916. According to an article published on May 23, 1916, in the *New York Times*, the Germans agreed to an invasion of the British mainland to prevent troops from being sent to Ireland.⁸ The title of the article—“Sinn Féiners Easy Dupes”—seems appropriate, the rebels were indeed duped. The promise of a massive German landing on the coast of England seems to be highly questionable. Considering the Battle of Jutland was a little over one month away, the notion that a German fleet capable of transporting thousands of infantry and providing them with support would be able to defeat Admiral Jellicoe’s Grand Fleet is highly improbable. The Kaiser did in fact send a submarine, *The Aud*, filled with weapons to Ireland. Before it could make landfall and deliver its cargo to the Volunteers, a British naval patrol spotted the ship and its captain, Karl Spindler, was forced to scuttle his ship to

⁵ “Ireland’s Sudden Revolt: Prominent Irish Americans Here Diagnose the Dublin Outbreak and the Causes Leading Up to it,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, May 23, 1916. ProQuest Historical Newspaper. Accessed 12 November 2012.

⁶ “Easter 1916,” 2011, accessed 14 November 2012; available from <http://www.easter1916.ie/>; Internet.

⁷ “Easter Website.”

⁸ “Sinn Féiners Easy Dupes.” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, May 23, 1916. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed 14 November 2012.

prevent the valuable cargo from falling into the hands of the British.⁹ This occurred on April 22, 1916, one day prior to the proposed start date of the Rising. Roger Casement was subsequently arrested when he came ashore, tried and hanged for high treason.

Even though the capture of Casement and the scuttling of the German sub alluded to unrest in Ireland, no additional military units were transferred from England. The 400 troops that were in Dublin were placed on “immediate readiness.”¹⁰ The government believed they had averted insurrection by preventing the rebels from securing outside assistance. Louisa Norway, wife of Arthur Norway, the postmaster in Dublin, recalls in a series of letters to her sister that the troops present in Dublin were not even given ammunition.¹¹

The capture of Casement coupled with the loss of the weapons made the leaders of the Rising apprehensive to move forward with the insurrection, which was scheduled to begin in less than twenty-four hours on Easter Sunday. The military council decided to postpone the mobilization of its followers and posted a notice in the *Sunday Independent* paper informing its followers not to assemble for “movements.” The recall resulted in mass confusion and chaos; its publication would prove fatal the following day when the actual order to mobilize was finally given.

Easter Monday brought forth a sense of confusion in Dublin. The recall order issued on Sunday left many Volunteers wondering if the Rising was still on. The military council also believed that mobilization represented a huge gamble. They feared most Volunteers might not respond to their order to mobilize if there was no clear provocation by the British. The Volunteers might feel that striking without being provoked would be construed by the public as unnecessarily aggressive rather than as a justified response to British imperialism.¹² When the order to mobilize was given, it was primarily a family affair. Brothers marched side by side with their fathers and sisters; some of the senior members of the rank and file had taken part in failed uprisings in the past.

The rebels moved quickly throughout the city, storming numerous buildings and checkpoints. Mrs. Norway provides a list of some of the buildings that fell under control of the rebels including such prominent locations such as the General Post Office (GPO), St. Stephens Green and Jacobs biscuit factory.¹³ Despite early success at seizing some sites, the rebels did encounter resistance.

⁹ Fitzpatrick, *The Two Ireland: 1912-1939*, 59.

¹⁰ “Easter Website.”

¹¹ Keith Jeffery, ed. *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 41.

¹² Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland Easter 1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127-129.

¹³ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 37.

Historians and military scholars question the rebel's strategy in choosing which buildings to capture. One of the most influential buildings in Ireland, Dublin Castle, the long time administrative hub of British rule in Ireland remained under British command throughout the Rising. The actor Sean Connolly and a group of Volunteers attempted to seize the Castle, proceeding to shoot an unarmed police sergeant who became the first casualty of the Rising. Upon seeing that the rebels meant business, a military guard inside the castle closed the heavy gates, denying access to Connolly and his followers. The rebels also failed to capture the harbor which would be used as a transportation hub for British infantry as well as a point of attack for *HMS Helga* who later turned her guns on the city and bombard rebel positions. Perhaps one of the most crucial buildings to remain in British hands was the Shelbourne Hotel. The hotel held a commanding position of St. Stephens Green; the British later put machine guns on its roof and poured deadly fire into the rebels who dug trenches at St. Stephens Green. Eyewitness Dr. Kathleen Lynn recalled the bullets "falling like rain."¹⁴ Historian David Fitzpatrick provides a rationale for why the rebels chose to occupy the buildings they did. According to Fitzpatrick, the rebels occupied buildings in crowded areas to ensure massive civilian casualties and material loss, thereby stoking Irish-Anglo phobia.¹⁵ Perhaps a more simplistic explanation is that the rebels merely did not possess the manpower necessary to occupy every building required. Regardless of the rationale, the decision to occupy the buildings they did all but ensured a brutal and bloody fight.

The Volunteers, who were initially unopposed, were not afraid to seize what they needed. James Stephens provides numerous examples of incidents when rebels forcibly confiscated cars which were used to erect barricades. Stephens describes one such situation when a man attempted to reclaim his "lorry" and was mercilessly shot by the Volunteers; Stephens states "at that moment the Volunteers were hated."¹⁶

Rebel leader Patrick Pearse, on the steps of the GPO, issued a declaration which proclaimed the establishment of a new Irish Republic. Pearse declared "the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible."¹⁷ According to Pearse, the new Irish Republic was "supported by her exiled Children in America and by gallant Allies in Europe." The "gallant allies in Europe" described by Pearse were the Germans. Historian Terence Denman describes such language as "cruel" as the proclamation seemed to marginalize the thousands of Irishmen

¹⁴ "Easter Website."

¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939*, 60.

¹⁶ Stephens, *Insurrection in Dublin*, 18.

¹⁷ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 82-3.

fighting the “gallant allies” overseas.¹⁸ John Redmond was particularly bitter at the proclamation, calling the act “treason”—it was his loyal volunteers who constituted most of the 16th Irish division which had been serving in France—it his followers who were fighting and dying. During the month of April, the division suffered 2,128 casualties including 528 killed, most having died during a pair of gas attacks on April 27 and 29—Redmond’s bitterness was warranted.¹⁹

Every segment of society from the Irish populace to the troops fighting at the front reacted differently, some more drastically than others. The Volunteers believed they were fighting for the rights of Irishmen everywhere, the right to be free from their oppressors. They were shocked and in disbelief at the incredible resistance they encountered from the average Dubliner. Many, including Mrs. Norway were convinced that the Rising was “encouraged no doubt by German intrigue and money” as a desperate last gamble to end the stalemate in France.²⁰ Interestingly, Dublin’s women were by far the most vocal protesters. James Stephens describes overhearing a conversation between two women who believed the rebels “ought to be all shot.”²¹ Martin Walton, a Volunteer who at the tender age of 15 describes a situation he personally encountered in which a woman was openly violent toward the Rising:

When I arrived then at Jacob’s the place was surrounded by a howling mob roaring at the Volunteers inside, ‘Come out to France and fight, you lot of so-and-so slackers.’ And then I started shouting up to the balustrade, ‘Let me in, let me in.’ And then I remember the first blood I ever saw shed. There was a big, very, very big tall woman with something very heavy in her hand and she came across and lifted up her hand to make a bang at me. One of the Volunteers upstairs saw this and fired and I just remember seeing her face and head disappear as she went down like a sack. That was my baptism of fire, and I remember my knees nearly going out from under me. I would have sold my mother and father and the Pope just to get out of that bloody place.²²

Walton’s experience was not unique. Women throughout Dublin were actively sabotaging the rebels, tearing down barricades until being driven away by bayonet-wielding rebels.

Why was there such an adverse reaction by Dublin’s women? No simple answer can explain this phenomenon but historians who have studied their reaction have proposed several reasons. Women might have been more involved than men simply because the rebels might be more reluctant to fire upon women than they would be against men. Dublin’s women also were not simply

¹⁸ Denman, *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918*, 129.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 35.

²¹ Stephens, *Insurrection in Dublin*, 36.

²² “Easter Website.”

bystanders with no standing in international affairs with many of their husbands either fighting overseas or have already sacrificed their lives. Soldiers fighting overseas as well as “war widows” considered the Rising a “stab in the back.”²³ With their husbands overseas, and no longer the breadwinners, the women of Dublin relied heavily on the absentee pay being given to them by the British government. Until the insurrection was quelled, British authorities suspended these payments. The loss of pay infuriated the women who relied on the pay to survive. Historian Keith Jeffery proposed a different theory to explain the reaction by the women. Jeffery argues that the people of Dublin did not support the Rising because they were in mourning for the 10th division, whose Irish soldiers were recruited in 1914 in and around Dublin. The 10th division suffered horrific casualties at Suvla bay during the disastrous Gallipoli campaign in 1915. The citizens of Dublin were in no mood to experience bloodshed with the women in particular infuriated by the lack of respect given to their dead husbands by the rebels.²⁴

John Redmond, in the House of Commons, spoke of widespread feelings of detestation and horror. He insisted the Rising was not supported by the IPP and believed the “Irish nation has been let down and the scores of thousands of Irishmen serving in the war insulted.”²⁵ Redmond condemned the insurrection as an attempt to destroy the IPP. David Fitzpatrick argues that “by appearing to acquiesce in certain retributive acts carried out under martial law...the party separated itself from the new split in Irish nationalism which took the Easter martyrs for its founding fathers.”²⁶ Redmond was in favor of working through Parliament to secure Irish independence rather than resorting to violence to achieve this end.

Of particular interest to both the rebels and British authorities was the reaction of the troops fighting in France. Of the 700,000 Irish men who were of age, 87,500 *voluntarily* joined the British army to fight.²⁷ According to Keith Jeffery, the 16th Dublin division’s morale did not seem to waver as much as the leaders of the Rising had hoped. Jeffery provides an amusing anecdote about the Irish reaction:

During May 1916...the 16th division found themselves faced by two German placards. One read ‘Irishmen! Heavy uproar in Ireland. English guns are firing at your wives [sic]

²³ Stephens, *Insurrection in Dublin*, xviii.

²⁴ Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42.

²⁵ Leon O’ Broin, *Michael Collins* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1980), 19.

²⁶ David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921: Provincial Experiences of War and Revolution* (Ipswich, Suffolk: Ipswich Book Co. Ltd., 1977), 115.

²⁷ “Irelands Sudden Revolt.”

and children.’ According to regimental history, the men responded by singing ‘God Save the King’ and captured the placards which were later presented to King George V.²⁸ Historian Terrence Denman points to the heroic achievements of the 16th division a few months later at the Battle of the Somme to conclude that the fighting spirit of the Irish fighting in France was not affected by events in Ireland.²⁹

Dublin’s police commissioner was caught flatfooted and ill-prepared by the uprising. At first, the unarmed Dublin police force did not take the Volunteers seriously believing they were simply “playing soldier” and on one of their marches. The situation quickly changed following the killing of six officers including one gunned down by Countess Markievicz, who allegedly shouted “I shot him! I shot him!”³⁰ The police commissioner pulled all of his officers off the streets and did not return them until the military had regained control.

Looting began in earnest on day one. Curiously, the first targets of the looters were the toy and candy shops. One explanation for this curiosity was a visceral response by the populace to gather items that represented innocence and good times. The looting was disruptive to the rebels but what posed the gravest threat were the fires set by some of the looters. With their buildings burning around them, the rebels were forced to relocate several times. Pubs were broken into and its ample supplies of beer drank. The rebels faced huge challenges with a drunken mob setting fire to their defenses. Louisa Norway recalls a scene where looters were undeterred by shooting of their compatriots:

The mob was chiefly women and children with a sprinkling of men. They swarmed in and out of the side door bearing huge consignments of bananas, the great bunches on the stalk to which the children attached a cord and ran away dragging it along...higher up at another shop we were told a woman was hanging out of a window dropping loot to a friend, when she was shot through the head by a sniper; the body dropped into the street and the mob cleared. In a few minutes a hand-cart appeared and gathered up the body, and instantly all the mob swarmed back to continue the joyful proceedings!³¹

The looters were fired upon by both the rebels and the British authorities. The looting lasted throughout the uprising posing a real threat to both sides.

Tuesday arrived with the hope that the insurrection was over and British authorities had regained control. As Dubliners attempted to go about their normal business, they were dismayed to learn the Rising was still occurring. The British began landing troops, over 7,000 in all, to retake the city. As British infantry cautiously marched into the city, they were overwhelmed with a sense of confusion. Having been told the rebels were wearing civilian clothing, the

²⁸ Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*, 55.

²⁹ Denman, *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918*, 144.

³⁰ McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland Easter 1916*, 137.

³¹ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 52.

soldiers often mistook running civilians for fleeing rebels. A conversation recorded between Captain E. Gerard and one of his sentries highlights the confusion: “I beg you [sic] pardon, sir, I have just shot two girls.’ ‘I said, ‘What on earth did you do that for?’ He said ‘I thought they were rebels. I was told they were dressed in all classes of attire’.”³² British artillery was brought in to bombard rebel positions which only added to the growing number of civilian casualties.

In an attempt to control the situation, British authorities, led by Lord Wimborne, declared Martial Law. By doing so, Lord Wimborne hoped to minimize civilian casualties by warning “all peaceable and law-abiding subjects in Ireland of the danger of frequenting, or being in, any place in or in the vicinity of His Majesty’s Forces are engaged in the suppression of disorder.”³³ Civilians failed to heed this warning; the British and the Volunteers tried to keep the civilians from watching the battle, who often set up chairs to get a ringside seat to the action.³⁴

Wednesday morning was ushered in with the sounds of machine guns and artillery. The British military renewed their assault on the city, this time attacking across the Mount Street Bridge. Sherwood Foresters from England marched across the bridge only to be met with murderous fire coming from houses occupied by rebels. After numerous attempts, the British dead were beginning to pile up. A rebel witness taking part in the battle described the dead as a “giant khaki-[colored] caterpillar.”³⁵ Finally able to drive the rebels from their positions with overwhelming numbers, the battle claimed the lives of 220 British soldiers and officers.³⁶ The Battle for Mount Street Bridge would go down as the costliest battle for the British during the Easter Rising.

General Maxwell was dispatched from England with orders to suppress the rebellion utilizing any means necessary. General Maxwell, before being appointed as military governor of Ireland, had been the General Officer Commanding (GOC) in Egypt for two years (1914-16). Irish soldiers from the 16th division were particularly dismayed upon learning of his appointment, believing they were fighting for freedom in France, not so Ireland could be placed under a military dictatorship.³⁷

More British troops began arriving and were surprised to be receiving such a warm welcome from the civilians. People who met the soldiers at the

³² “Easter Website.”

³³ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 81.

³⁴ McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland Easter 1916*, 149.

³⁵ “Easter Website.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Denman, *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918*, 50.

harbor showered them with gifts ranging from cigarettes to bread. In addition to more soldiers arriving, *HMS Helga* arrived and began bombarding the GPO, which was being used as the Rising's headquarters. With more troops and the might of the Royal Navy being brought to bear against them, it was only a matter of time until the rebels surrendered.

By Thursday, British soldiers were in control of most of the city. To secure the final positions, workers from the local Guinness factory transformed three boilers into armored cars for the British army to use.³⁸ While most of the city fell to British forces, the horrors were by no means over for the citizens of Dublin. Mrs. Norway describes an "inferno" which was the direct result of British artillery fire.³⁹ When citizens ventured out the next day, they found Sackville Street completely destroyed by the firestorm.

With most of the key buildings under British control, the army began scouring the area for snipers. When they questioned occupants of the hotel where Mrs. Norway was staying about an alleged sniper on their roof, Mrs. Norway was horrified at the idea that "the little wretch" might be on her roof!⁴⁰ It was later discovered there was indeed a sniper on her roof who was subsequently hunted down and shot.

Dubliners experienced boredom occasionally broken by bouts of extreme terror. Since the uprising began, newspapers were few and far between and were often wildly unreliable. No news from England coupled with the wildly inaccurate reports from inside the city cultivated an atmosphere where rumors ran rampant. Rumors spread like wildfire that there were massive German landings on the coast of Ireland and their arrival in the city was imminent. Rumors of insurrection in Cork led Dubliners to conclude that the Rising was not an isolated incident but rather a nationwide insurrection. With unreliable news and nothing much to do because of the virtual lockdown of the city, civilians often risked their lives to gather information, anything to break the unbearable boredom. Mrs. Norway, writing to her sister in England, complains about not being able to sleep, saying it was either the constant bombardment that kept her awake, or it was the "dreadful silence" that frightened her even more.⁴¹

When General Maxwell arrived on Friday, the situation in Dublin was all but under control. Faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation and the prospect of defeat, rebel commanders holed up in the GPO including Pearse and Connolly decided to make a run for it. Throughout the city, rebels began surrendering but their white flags were not recognized, because rebels often used white flags as

³⁸ See *The Rising: Ireland Easter 1916* by Fearghal McGarry for a collection of excellent photographs including one of these "Guinness lorries."

³⁹ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 50.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

bait to lure in British soldiers.⁴² Although the Rising was in its death throes, the people of Dublin were unaware of this, including some of the rebels. A manifesto issued by Pearse justified and praised the Volunteers for “saving Ireland’s honor.”⁴³ With the gun fire still occurring, a curious case developed involving the civilians. According to James Stephens, the citizens of Dublin were seen laughing in the streets. He attempts to explain this phenomenon by arguing that laughter was the civilian’s way of being thankful for surviving the night.⁴⁴

Saturday morning brought the prospect of peace. Pearse was faced with a tough decision; he could continue the battle, futilely trying to defeat the British and in essence wasting the lives of his men, or he could surrender and hope the British treated his men with leniency. Pearse chose the latter and officially surrendered to General Lowe, second in command to General Maxwell early in the afternoon on Saturday. The Tricolor flag, so proudly raised six days ago above St. Stephens Green was lowered. According to folklore, the feisty Countess Markievicz allegedly kissed her automatic pistol before turning it over to British troops. The Rising was officially over, lasting just six days.

Dubliners emerged from their homes to a city in ruin. Both Mrs. Norway and James Stephens compared their city to a scene in France, even going so far as saying the destruction is more complete than what was seen at Ypres.⁴⁵ Vast portions of their city were destroyed; the GPO was gutted by British artillery fire, Sackville Street was destroyed and the blood of rebels and British troops alike stained the streets red.

The Rising’s impact reverberated far and wide. Immediately following the capture of the rebels, secret trials were conducted by General Maxwell and 15 rebels were executed. According to the attending British physician, the Volunteers “died like lions.”⁴⁶ The brutal treatment of the Volunteers—some of whom were Boer War veterans—combined with the execution of the fatally wounded James Connolly, who had to be propped up to be shot, outraged the Irish public. During the course of the Rising, the Volunteers were vilified by the civilians but upon learning of their treatment, civilians began to view the men who fought and died for their cause as heroes.⁴⁷ British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and John Redmond feared that the brutal treatment of the rebels could have far reaching and deadly consequences. Asquith told General Maxwell that “anything like a large number of executions would sow the seeds of lasting

⁴² Ibid., 56.

⁴³ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁴ Stephens, *Insurrection in Dublin*, 65.

⁴⁵ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 66; Stephens, *Insurrection in Dublin*, 73.

⁴⁶ “Easter Website.”

⁴⁷ Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 258.

trouble in Ireland.”⁴⁸ The seeds were indeed sown and would ripen a few years later when a civil war would engulf Ireland, lasting for nearly eighty years.

The Easter Rising had profound political ramifications. An upsurge in Irish Nationalism occurred, leading the Irish people to elect a new leader, Eamon de Valera. David Lloyd George, recently elected Prime Minister, was reluctant to extend conscription to Ireland for fear of exasperating the tensions. A bill was eventually passed in 1918 that did extend military conscription to Ireland but was never implemented.⁴⁹ When asked during the course of the Rising about what the insurrection meant for the Home-Rule bill, Arthur Norway believed it was the death knell of the movement.⁵⁰ John Redmond’s “baby” was indeed set back because of the upsurge in Irish Nationalism. While it was assumed at the time that the masters of the Rising were the group known as Sinn Féin (“Ourselves Alone”), they never actually took part in the rebellion. Sinn Féin reconciled their differences with the Irish Volunteers and secured an overwhelming victory in Parliament during the 1918 election. Sinn Féin strove toward the establishment of Ireland as a sovereign, independent republic, free from British intrusion. Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act of 1918 and the Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act of 1918. The former greatly expanded the electorate by allowing men over the age of 21 and all women over the age of 30 to vote while the latter allowed women over the age of 30 to stand for election.⁵¹ Ironically, the first woman to be elected to office was Countess Markievicz. The Irish Free State was officially established in 1922, with the former rebel Michael Collins elected as its leader.⁵²

Women’s rights were substantially improved due to the Rising. Countess Markievicz was the first woman to be elected to national office not only in Ireland but indeed the whole world. The Proclamation issued by Patrick Pearse on day one was seen, among other things, as a radical endorsement of equal rights for women.⁵³ Women fought and died right alongside the men who rebelled. Stories of bravery saturate the literature produced about the Rising—nurses braved enemy machine gun fire and snipers to recover the wounded, deliver supplies to their comrades and act as couriers. Elizabeth O’ Farrell, a nurse on the side of the Volunteers, rode around the city, dodging sniper fire to deliver the surrender order to the commanders of the Rising.

⁴⁸ “Easter Website.”

⁴⁹ Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918*, 319.

⁵⁰ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 113.

⁵¹ “Easter Website.”

⁵² “Irish Free State Formally Set Up; Collins Heads It.” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, January 15, 1922. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed 14 November 2012.

⁵³ Jeffery, *The Sinn Féin Rebellion as They Saw It*, 82.

With England stretched thin by wartime demands, why did the Rising fail so miserably? Historian Leon O' Broin cites the lack of organization, cooperation and numerous panic decision made by the Rising leadership.⁵⁴ The cancellation order on Sunday hurt the uprising by causing confusion amongst the Volunteers, and as a result, when the order to mobilize finally was issued, the number that turned out was pathetic. The military council lacked a clear goal for the Rising except for the establishment of a new republic. They lacked a plan on how they were going to form this government, and instead hoped that by winning the battle, the business of forming a new government would be simple.⁵⁵ Hostility by the civilians hampered the efforts of the rebels by preventing a general, Irish uprising. The military council relied too heavily on German support for the uprising, and when it failed to materialize, they were doomed due to the lack of any other outside support for their cause.

The Rising claimed the lives of 500 Irish men and women, with an additional 2,500 wounded. During the same time period, the 16th division, fighting for king and country in France, suffered 570 killed and over 1,400 wounded.⁵⁶ The city of Dublin had been turned into a warzone in the battle over Irish Republicanism, its streets reminiscent of war-torn France. Poor planning, lack of outside support and the failure to adequately judge the mood of the Irish population doomed the Rising from the beginning. The Home-Rule Movement was set back many years with the death of its strongest proponent, John Redmond and with the defeat of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the election of 1918. During the uprising, the rebels were hated but following the brutal treatment and the bravery they exhibited facing the firing squad, the Volunteers returned to Ireland heroes, its dead leaders worshiped as martyrs. Historians and political scientists continue to look to this event in Irish history as a watershed moment in the formation of the modern Irish state. With the hundredth anniversary of the Rising rapidly approaching, we may experience a revival of historical interest and scholarship into one of the most tumultuous and important six days in Irish history.

⁵⁴ Broin, *Michael Collins*, 24.

⁵⁵ Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939*, 63.

⁵⁶ Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*, 51

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