

Hayes, Michael

by Diarmaid Ferriter

Hayes, Michael (1889–1976), politician and academic, was born 1 December 1899 in Dublin, one among three children of John Hayes, carpenter, originally from Tipperary, and his wife Jane. After an initial education at Synge St. CBS, Dublin, he was awarded a scholarship by the RUI and attended UCD where his fellow students included Patrick McGilligan (qv); he graduated BA in 1912, the last graduating session of the RUI. After graduation he taught at a number of Dublin schools, including Synge St., until his appointment as an assistant lecturer in French at UCD in 1913, the same year in which he joined the Irish Volunteers. His father was a supporter of C. S. Parnell (qv), but was said to have introduced Hayes at a young age to the old Fenian John O'Leary (qv). Hayes was never a member of the IRB (although his father was), and openly stated his objections to secret organisations. A member of C Coy, 3rd Bn, Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers, he rejected the overtures of his UCD colleague Thomas MacDonagh (qv) that he attend training courses and become an officer. In the days before the 1916 rising he served as orderly to Éamon de Valera (qv), but was not privy to the plans for the rising. Indeed, his immediate reaction was to side with Eoin MacNeill (qv) and oppose armed action. Nevertheless he fought alongside MacDonagh in Jacob's factory, Dublin, during Easter week, but evaded arrest; he remarked at a later stage that many were rushed into rebellion, and candidly admitted that he did not believe armed revolt was justified at this juncture but felt compelled to join his companions once the fighting began.

He resumed his teaching post, and his research on symbolism in French literature resulted in the award of a first-class honours MA (1920). He had also become immersed in Sinn Féin politics and assumed the role of director of elections for the NUI constituency in 1918, becoming involved in the electoral campaign of Eoin MacNeill. In 1920 his house on the South Circular Road, Dublin, became the secret headquarters of Gen. Richard Mulcahy (qv), then chief of staff of the Volunteers. After a raid by the British army, who captured documents relating to planned raids in England, Hayes was arrested (Mulcahy had escaped) and interned at Ballykinlar. He was elected to the second dáil in May 1921 while still interned, was released in August 1921 to attend the dáil, and was appointed minister for education in the provisional government formed in January 1922, after he had voted in favour of the treaty. Any possible conflict between Dáil Éireann and the provisional government at this stage was avoided by a pragmatic division of duties between Hayes and Fionán Lynch (qv), who had been appointed Dáil Éireann's minister for education, with Hayes taking responsibility for intermediate education and Lynch for primary education. Hayes also served briefly as minister for foreign affairs during this period. He remained fascinated with the personality of de Valera, but firmly believed in Michael Collins's (qv) interpretation of the treaty; he also admired Arthur Griffith (qv)

and Richard Mulcahy, arguing that all three were good revolutionaries who combined the traits of soldiers with those of civil servants by giving critical attention to detail, filing meticulously, and organising information about large numbers of people on all sides of the conflict. In his view, hostility to the treaty was explained by the inevitable reluctance of a generation who had never experienced domestic authority.

In September 1922 he was elected in the constituencies of both Dublin City South and the NUI, opted to represent the NUI, and was subsequently elected first *ceann comhairle* (speaker) of the dáil, a position he held until 1932. As *ceann comhairle* he was involved in helping to plan the layout and structures of Leinster House as seat of the oireachtas. It was a difficult period, with countless acrimonious dáil debates on the direction of the fledgling state. In August 1927 he had to make a judgment on whether the form chosen by de Valera in taking the oath of allegiance accorded with the treaty, and decided in favour of the new Fianna Fáil party. In the same month he used his casting vote to ensure the continuation of the Cumann na nGaedheal government, after Tom Johnson (qv), leader of the Labour party, had sought to defeat the government in a vote of no confidence.

As well as being chairman of the civil service commission, he travelled to Paris to the Irish Race Congress (January 1922), and to Boston (1925) with Richard Mulcahy as part of the Irish delegation to the twenty-third conference of the Interparliamentary Union in Washington. After his defeat in the 1933 general election, Hayes was elected to the seanad, serving to its abolition in 1936, and again serving as a senator, in the seanad established under the 1937 constitution, until 1965, either as leader of the opposition or, during inter-party governments, leader of the house. He also acted as chairman of Fine Gael's standing committee and the party's virtual director of elections for nearly thirty years. In 1948 he led a delegation to the commonwealth parliamentary conference in London, and during 1948–51 and 1954–7 was chairman of the cultural relations committee of the Department of External Affairs. During these years he also cultivated contacts with northern unionists, believing that the only prospect of better relations on the island was through dialogue.

Simultaneously pursuing a full academic life, in 1931 Hayes was appointed a lecturer in modern languages (Irish and French) at UCD, eventually becoming head of the Irish department in 1951, until his retirement in 1959. As well as serving on the University's governing body he was a member of the RIA, the RSAI, and the Irish Folklore Society. A lifelong passion for the Irish language ensured he was one of the foremost figures in the language revival movement and the Gaelic League; he frequently bemoaned the state's failure to take a more active role in this regard, noting with irony that Irish was not the language of Irish nationalism, and that in the hands of the Department of Education, its cause was lost. He failed to persuade the seanad to set up an inquiry into the causes of the failure of the Irish-language movement. It must also have been a disappointment to him that education did not figure prominently as a policy among the priorities of Cumann na nGaedheal in

the early decades of the state, despite the keen personal interest of Hayes and fellow party members such as Mulcahy, Michael Tierney (qv), and Eoin MacNeill. Disappointedly concluding that Irish was simply not suited to the modern world, and that under native government there was no will to fight for its survival, he noted in a seanad debate that the 1937 constitution made a purely superficial acknowledgement of Irish to compensate for the decay of interest in the language. He assiduously kept voluminous private papers, which were donated to the UCD archives in 1980 by his sister Bridín Keohe. In this collection there is surprisingly little relating to his academic career and sparse material relating to various political functions and positions held, but rather evidence of his determination in later years to write an account of the years 1919–23 (which was never realised), particularly his preoccupation with the belief in the need for a reassessment of the career of de Valera, and his contention that the pro-treaty politicians had failed to defend their positions historically. Research for and drafts of the book, provisionally entitled 'Successful Irish revolt: the story of Dáil Éireann', involved extensive reviews and correspondence on other works dealing with the period, and continuous contact with writers and historians including Padraic Colum (qv), Leon Ó Broin (qv), F. X. Martin (qv), Lennox Robinson (qv), James Hogan (qv) and Nicholas Mansergh (qv). During the 1940s and 1950s Hayes was also preoccupied with the commissioning and supervising a biography of Arthur Griffith by Sean Milroy (qv), but the author died prematurely. Hayes died suddenly at his home in Templeogue, Dublin, on 12 July 1976, and was buried at Mount Jerome cemetery.

He married (1917) Margaret Kavanagh; they had a daughter and a son, Michael, a solicitor who became Dublin city sheriff.

---

BMH. W. 215; F. X. Martin (ed.), *UCD and 1916* (1966) ; UCD archives, Michael Hayes collection, P53; *Ir. Times*, 12 July 1976; *Ir. Independent*, *Ir. Press*, 13 July 1976; *WWW*; Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish civil war* (1988); Séamas Ó Buachalla, *Education policy in twentieth-century Ireland*; Brian Mayes, *Fine Gael 1923–87* (1993); Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (1997)