



Left: Thomas Murray
CAROLINE QUINN

Right: the Irish delegation, including Éamon de Valera and Sinn Féin founder Arthur Griffith, in London for the Treaty negotiations in 1921. Far right: Darrell Figgis, who helped frame the 1922 Free State Constitution.
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Igniting fire in minds of Irish men and women

Thomas Murray explores how revolutionary ideals were watered down in the 1922 Constitution

WHAT ideas inspired the men and women who rose up in 1916? How did those ideas fare in the Irish Free State founded in 1922?

In his book, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, the historian James Billington traces an almost invisible thread of incendiary ideas that inspired faith in revolutionary social transformation across Europe from the 1700s to the early 1900s. All had a common genesis in the motto of the French Revolution, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'.

In Ireland, too, the 1916 rebels shared common ideological roots in the Enlightenment-era republicanism of the United Irishmen, and the romantic nationalism of Young Ireland. In particular, the alliance of nationalists and socialists, notably Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, found common ground in the writings of the mid-19th century agrarian agitator, James Fintan Lalor.

At the height of the Great Famine in Ireland and the 1848 Revolutions in Europe, Lalor advanced a dangerous idea: the principle "that the entire ownership of Ireland, moral and material, up to the sun and down to the centre, is vested of right in the people of Ireland; that they, and none but they, are the landowners and lawmakers of this island".

Of course, the men and women of 1916 had different understandings of who exactly should own Ireland in the event of their success. In a curious inversion of the European Enlightenment tradition, Irish republicanism in the early 1900s

accentuated the role of Catholicism in defining 'the people'.

Mother Church's self-appointed role as mediator between peasant and landlord, nation and empire, had all but ensured this anomaly. Republicanism thus involved the spiritual work of undoing Holy Ireland's confiscation and anglicisation by a materialist superpower. Conversely, the Irish Citizen Army, admittedly a much smaller grouping in the GPO, drew inspiration from the recent upsurge in labour movements internationally.

Advocating syndicalism (or 'Larkin-ism' in a Dublin accent), the ICA claimed that the fields and factories belonged to those who worked them, a right that could be realised through forming one big union and mounting a general strike of all workers. Naturally, the owners of those fields and factories, the Catholic hierarchy and Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin party were staunchly opposed to socialist ideas of redistribution as 'godless', 'alien', and even 'anti-national'.

Remarkably, for a brief period after the Rising, ordinary men and women made the principle of the popular ownership a living reality. A mass boycott campaign broke the threat of conscription in 1918. Organised labour was notably resurgent thereafter. Between 1918 and 1923, five general strikes and 18 local strikes

occurred. Irish workers refused to handle weapons for the British military, a factor crucial to the IRA's success. Workers also took over the running of more than 80 workplaces and established soviets at the Cleeves factory in Limerick, at the foundry in Drogheda, Co Louth and in the coal mines of Castletomer, Co Kilkenny.

The West was particularly awake. Farmers and labourers revived midnight campaigns of intimidation to expropriate and redistribute land. A network of popularly elected, local arbitration courts sprung up, sometimes to decide the terms of land redistribution. For the first time in Ireland, landlords were forcibly ousted from their homes. In these circumstances, the country's wealthier land owners eventually turned from Westminster to the Sinn Féin party to put an end to 'agrarian Bolshevism' and restore law and order.

The making of the 1922 Irish Free State Constitution shows how nationalist leaders were already retreating from dangerous ideas of popular ownership.

As the Anglo-Irish Treaty split the anti-colonial movement, Hugh Kennedy, the Provisional Government's senior law officer, argued that popular disorder would have to be overcome by 'utterly ruthless action' such as that used by the Reichswehr-Freikorps in crushing the recent Spartacist uprising in Weimar Germany.

Unsurprisingly, the

1922 Constitution was a conservative instrument. It established a Westminster-style parliamentary system of government under a type of constitutional monarchy. Although it contained guarantees of civil and political rights, substantive judicial review would remain inoperative for a generation.

There were some changes. Provisions for direct democracy notably facilitated a citizen's initiative process to amend the constitution and to draft legislation. Interestingly, Kennedy believed such provisions would have a 'chilling' effect on revolutionary movements. Subsequent governments, however, amended the Constitution to stop these provisions coming into effect. This ultimately conservative Constitution belies the radical proposals advanced during its drafting.

In fact, ideas of popular ownership featured prominently during the early drafting stage at the Shelbourne Hotel and later Constituent Assembly debates at Dáil Éireann. In the spring of 1922, drafters such as James Douglas and Darrell Figgis initially included what they called "the Pearse statement" in the opening articles, explicitly providing for "the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the nation's labour".

Clement France, a visiting US lawyer, similarly claimed that the private control of natural resources and public utilities "would be subversive of the welfare of the general public". He explained: "The persons who control and own the great



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Political heirs to the rebellion

While many veterans achieved high office, the descendants of the 1916 leaders were less fortunate, writes **Gerard Siggins**

ONCE the fighting was done, many participants in the Rising and the subsequent conflicts played important roles in Irish politics. For decades, to have been “out” in 1916 almost seemed a pre-requisite for high office. Presidents Seán T O’Kelly (GPO) and Éamon de Valera (Boland’s Mill) saw action, as did taoisigh WT Cosgrave (South Dublin Union), de Valera and Seán Lemass (GPO).

Several of the 16 executed men left behind wives, children and siblings who entered politics after the formation of the Dáil and independence, but surprisingly few were successful.

The son of Major John MacBride and Maud Gonne was the most notable. Seán MacBride had been chief of staff of the IRA for a few months in 1936, but later set up the republican socialist party Clann na Poblachta. He was elected to the Dáil in the Dublin County by-election in 1947 and in three subsequent general elections in Dublin South West. His party won 10 seats in 1948 and joined the Inter-Party Government with MacBride as Minister for External Affairs. In this portfolio he played important roles in the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the declaration of the Irish Republic in 1949.

He lost his seat in 1957 and tried three more times but was never elected again and returned to practise as a barrister. He was awarded the Nobel and Lenin Peace Prizes in the 1970s.

Patrick Pearse’s mother, Margaret Pearse, was elected unopposed to the 2nd Dáil in 1921 but was unseated on the final count the following year when she stood in Dublin County as an anti-treaty Sinn Féin candidate. In 1933, her daughter Margaret Mary Pearse ran for Fianna Fáil and was the last of eight TDs elected in Dublin County. She failed to be returned in 1937 but was elected to the Seanad where she remained until her death in 1968. She still holds the record for the longest unbroken service in the upper house.

Kathleen Clarke was the widow of Tom Clarke and was a vocal member of the 1st and 2nd Dála where she opposed the Treaty. She failed to win her seat in Dublin Mid County in the 1922 election as an anti-Treaty Sinn Féiner, but was re-elected for Fianna Fáil in Dublin North in June 1927. That Dáil lasted just a few weeks and she lost her seat in November and failed at a by-election in 1928. She served in the Free State Seanad until it was abolished in 1936.

She was also the first female Lord Mayor of Dublin (1939-41) and at the age of 70 contested the 1948 general election for Clann na Poblachta but didn’t come close to capturing a seat.

Two of James Connolly’s children served in the Oireachtas. Roddy Connolly ran for Labour in five general elections and a by-election in Louth from 1943-54, winning twice. He later ran unsuccessfully in Dublin South Central. Nora Connolly O’Brien had been a founding member of the Young Republicans, the female wing of Na Fianna, and was 23 when her father was shot. She was involved with several far-left groupings and corresponded with Leon Trotsky, but from 1957 to 1969, she served three Seanad terms as a nominee of the Taoiseach.

Michael O’Hanrahan’s brother Henry O’Hanrahan was also given a death sentence for his role in the Rising at the Jacob’s factory, but it was commuted to life imprisonment. He ran for the Dáil in 1924 but failed to be elected on the Republican ticket in Dublin North when his better-known running-mates Seán T O’Kelly and Ernie O’Malley were returned.

Tom Kent’s brother David Kent was a member of the first Dáil and re-elected in 1921 and 1922 as an anti-treaty Sinn Féin candidate. He was elected again as a Republican for Cork East in 1923 and for Sinn Féin in June 1927, which was his last time to stand. His brother, William Kent, was elected for Fianna Fáil in September 1927, and the National Centre Party in 1933 but did not contest in 1937.



Natural Resources of the Country also control the freedom and wellbeing of the people...The result has been in America that notwithstanding a Republican and Democratic Government, an economic autocracy has developed which controls the Government of the Country and the personal liberties of the people almost as effectively as was ever done by an absolute monarchy”.

Later that autumn, Labour party TDs such as TJ O’Connell proposed provisions such as children’s rights and welfare supports for citizens.

Proposals associating the popular ownership of Ireland with wealth redistribution soon suffered ignominious erasure. Laissez-faire economist and government adviser, George O’Brien rejected claims that citizens should receive “an adequate share” of the nation’s wealth, claiming “I do not know what the last sentence of the present article means”.

At Westminster, British Law Officers disliked the “Soviet character” of the opening articles and claimed they were “of communistic tendency”. Hugh Kennedy, negotiating on behalf of the Provisional Government, agreed that it was “an unnecessary declaration” and acquiesced in the offending provision’s removal.

During the Constituent Assembly debates that autumn, WT Cosgrave claimed the principle of economic sovereignty was unnecessary window-dressing. Echoing the British Law Officers, Kevin O’Higgins similarly declared it would be unwise “to embody in the constitution what certainly looks very

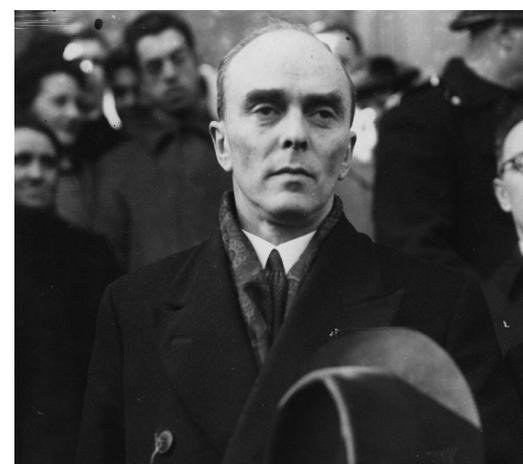
much like a Communistic doctrine”.

Buoyed by its recent electoral victory, the Provisional Government only secured its capacity to enforce these decisions in late 1922. Having effectively ended the civil war as a military contest, it thereafter quashed or conciliated residual outbreaks of agrarian or labour militancy.

Today, recent experiences of “democratic deficits” and popularly unaccountable market forces prompt us to return to the question posed by the 1916 rebels: who owns Ireland? Recent anti-austerity protests renew long-standing claims for rights to “an adequate share” of the nation’s wealth. Similarly, as evidenced by recent water charges demonstrations, the private control of natural resources and public utilities is not infrequently perceived to be “subversive of the welfare of the general public”.

Perhaps the idea of the popular ownership of society remains a dangerous one for the powerful and wealthy. In such circumstances, whether celebrated or commemorated, the 1916 Rising is likely to be remembered so long as men and women believe that Ireland and its future belong to them.

Dr Thomas Murray is Lecturer in Equality Studies at UCD School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice. His book, ‘Contesting Economic and Social Rights in Ireland: Constitution, State and Society: 1848-2016’ is in press with Cambridge University Press



Seán MacBride, former Chief of Staff of the IRA and founder of Clann na Poblachta (above) and Patrick Pearse’s mother, Margaret (right).

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