

COMMEMORATING THE RISING, MACROOM, EASTER SUNDAY 2016

It seems odd to have to defend an event that happened 100 years ago, to have to be defensive about it. It seems even odder to have to defend the people and an event that led to the establishment of this state which is now one of the longest established unbroken democratic states in the world. Many states have come and gone since 1916 but this state has maintained itself and it has not succumbed to totalitarianism of the left or right. In fact this state is one of only 12 that has maintained a democratic system since it was founded nearly a century ago. That is some achievement. And it has not declared war on anyone in that time.

What we are doing today is what every self respecting state does – honour and celebrate its founding fathers and founding events. Look at how the Americans and the French do it every July.

Yet the situation is that if we paid too much attention to our media and Emeritus Professors, who should know better, we need to defend the men and women and what they did to set up this state.

There are all sort of question marks put forward about this Rebellion. The main one, we are told, is that it should not have happened because the people concerned did not have a mandate. Indeed they did not have a mandate but no rebellion has ever had a mandate. Rebels cannot announce or advertise their rebellion. They cannot put an ad in papers declaring that they will launch an attack on the state at 12 o'clock tomorrow and ask people to join in. In 1916 that would have been the greatest Empire in the world.

It is the support they get and whether they win or lose that matters in the end. 1916 was an act of war in the middle of a much bigger war and that war did not have a mandate either from the Irish people. The Government that declared it, and the Irish Party that supported it, were elected in 1910. Nobody campaigned and was elected to support a world war in 1910!

The 1916 people followed the rules of war. But the British did not. They executed the leaders and did not treat them as prisoners of war.

What was the context of 1916? Everything happens in a context and can only be understood in its own context.

We are told that the 1916 took up arms for no good reason as a peaceful alternative was possible. If that were so the people of 1916 were irresponsible and deserve no sympathy and they would never have got the support of the people. And of course, if wishes were horses we would all go for a ride.

It is often forgotten that there was a time when the people of 1916 did trust in a peaceful route. They trusted in Home Rule. Home Rule was of course a very, very limited form of devolved government – for example a lot less than what Scotland has today. It appeared possible to have this in 1912 after nearly 30 years of Parliamentary effort. That mountain of Parliamentary labour had produced a mouse.

And in 1912 Pearse shared a platform with Redmond in support of Home Rule. What happened? Pearse changed his mind. Why? Keynes was once accused of changing his mind and he responded “When circumstance change I change my mind – what do you do, Sir?”

The fact is that there was a rebellion against the Government's plans for Home Rule. And this was a real rebellion. In 1912 the British and Irish Tories/Unionists organised themselves to set up a provisional government, an alternative government to prevent Home Rule. An illegal army was set up in 1913, the UVF, to prevent by force the Government implementing the law it was about to pass, Home Rule. Tons of German arms and ammunition were imported for the Ulster Unionist Volunteers.

The Irish Volunteers were set up afterwards to *support* the Government in implementing Home Rule - to assist in implementing the law, not to break it as the Ulster Volunteers were planning to do. But when they

imported arms to support the Government's policy people were killed for doing so in Bachelors walk.

In 1914 the British Army supported this rebellion when in the Curragh mutiny it declared that it would not obey the Government on Home Rule implementation – they refused to enforce the law! They said they would not enforce Home Rule in Ulster.

And the important thing was that the government allowed all this to happen and conceded all along the line.

But then in 1915 a most important thing happened. Something very unparliamentarily happened in 1915. Something that is hardly ever mentioned these days though it was a crucial event. At the time no UK Parliament could run for more than five years and the last election had been in 1910 so one was constitutionally due in 1915. The Government's mandate had run out.

But the Government decided that an election may not suit them so they did a deal with the Opposition, the Tories/Unionists, to bring them into Government and avoid an election. These were the people who had openly and proudly broken the law against the Government over the prospect of Home Rule and planned for civil war. Now the lawbreakers were the lawmakers! It was a Parliamentary coup d'état.

The Unionists had their own Army, with plenty arms, they had British Army support, and now they were in Government. They had won and it was absolutely clear that Home Rule or any form of Irish Government was off the agenda. There was no two ways about it. If that Government had its way we would still be waiting for Home Rule never mind anything more. The Home Rule Act was already suspended on the day it was passed on 18th September 1914, and that is where it would remain. It was now as dead as the Monty Python parrot.

As a result, this new government lost all moral authority in Ireland. In fact it only had legal authority because the British House of Commons is above the law. Because whatever it does is legal. It can do whatever it likes and it is automatically legal - this is the essence of the British Constitution. The beauty of the British Constitution is that it does not exist! Unlike other

countries there is no Court or Law that the Parliament is accountable to.

Some of the Irish Volunteers were not slow learners when they saw all this happening. It was clear that parliamentary democracy had become a sick joke and that the only reality the Government responded to was rebellion.

To use management-speak, rebellion was best practice when it came to political success at the time.

So while it is true that 1916 had no mandate the existing Government had no mandate either. It was not an elected Government. The Unionists rebellion against their own government had no mandate except what they gave themselves. And there was no Irish mandate for the war that led to the deaths of at least 10 million people.

So the Rebellion of 1916 was perfectly logical and reasonable in the context of the time and when the first opportunity arose to get a mandate in the 1918 Election the Rebellion got an overwhelmingly mandate for what had been done. The British Government never got such a mandate or even looked for it. Advocating Irish Independence always was and always would be treated as treason. It relied on force as it proved yet again with the Auxiliaries and the Black And Tans.

The state that was initiated in 1916 has not failed or been destroyed unlike many states today and look at the result – anarchy and destruction as we see not a million miles away today. The common feature is the destruction of states and the result is barbarity. States are necessary for civilised living. We are lucky to have one. No state is perfect – if there was one I would emigrate there but I don't know of any.

There is only one legitimate objection to commemorating 1916 – it should be *celebrated* unreservedly instead as you are doing here today and it is a privilege to be part of it. Thank you.