

# The IRB role in the Easter Rising of 1916.

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When the tricolour flag of Green, White and Orange was hoisted on the roof of the GPO at 12.30 pm Easter Monday 1916, it symbolised to all who knew, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) had taken the building and proclaimed the Sovereign Irish Republic.

The Green White and Orange tricolour had been long recognised as the flag of the IRB.

The tricolour had been adopted by Thomas Francis Meagher, a member of the IRB and adapted for the organisation. It had been draped on the coffin of James Stephens, founder of the IRB, at his funeral in 1901.

On 24th April 1916, the tricolour also flew from the FOUR COURTS, SOUTH DUBLIN UNION, JACOBS, IMPERIAL HOTEL, STEPHENS GREEN, CITY HALL. Bolands Mills and Marrowbone Lane flew the authorised flag of the Irish Volunteers, the green flag with the gold harp.

The IRB's role in the Easter Rising of 1916 is a significant one.

Its objective to remove the yoke of enslavement on the Irish people and their land by a foreign power, namely the British Crown, had by 1916 taken 58 years of careful and strategic planning.

The Rising was a major step in its overall plan to a Free and Independent Ireland.

The IRB was not a religious or class divide but an inclusive authority.

Their recognition of all people as Sovereign, with a legitimate right to National Sovereignty, was utmost to its campaign and its success.

For the IRB, Irish Nationality had nothing to do with religion. Nationality superseded all sectarian divisions. The question was Ireland against the Crown, not Catholic against Protestant. It was defined not by blood or faith, but by commitment to this view. The success did weigh itself on the role of all people yet within their own ranks they were willing to step forward to its cause.

The GPO became HQ for the IRB's Military Council who were the signatories of the Proclamation- acting on behalf of the Provisional Government proclaimed.

The Military Council knew in advance of the insurrection, their personal challenge, its potential outcome and yet despite lack of support from the main body of the Irish Volunteers's through Mac Neills countermand, led the way.

Pearse had been asked to draft the Proclamation on the lines that were intimate to him. He submitted it to the Military Council on Tuesday 18th April 1916 in their meeting at 21 Henry Street, the home of John and Jenny Wise-Power. A few small amendments were agreed, it was given to Thomas Mc Donagh for safe keeping. The document was printed in Liberty Hall.

Pearse stood beneath the pillars of the GPO shortly after 12 noon on the 24th and delivered it to the People of Ireland.

To build a framework of National spirit, the IRB had founded many National groups from its inception in 1858.

It had helped restore an Irish pride and a deeper understanding of nationhood, which was readily displayed by those who joined their ranks, in the organisation itself and all the sub organisations it had established.

Michael Davitt joined the IRB in 1865 and two years later gave up his job to become organising secretary funded by the IRB of the 'Fenians' in Northern England and Scotland.

He was arrested in London in 1870 while awaiting a delivery of arms, and was sentenced to 15 years' hard labour. The next seven years were spent in complete isolation in prison, where he was compelled to work in inhuman conditions.

With other political prisoners he was released on a ticket of leave on December 19th, 1877. Michael Davitt subsequently became a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB.

Later he toured America with the active assistance of John Devoy, gaining the support of Irish Americans for his policy which was founded in the slogan "The Land for the People." Davitt was instructed by the IRB to establish the league. On August 16th, 1879, the Land League of Mayo was formally founded in Castlebar, with the active support of Charles Stewart Parnell. On October 21st, 1879, the National Land League was formed in Dublin with Parnell as President, and Davitt as one of the secretaries. From that time right on to 1882 the Land War was fought in earnest.

Seven men met in Hayes Hotel, Thurles on November 1st 1884 and founded the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) for the Preservation and Cultivation of National Pastimes, to organise training, gatherings and a network to communicate in the guise of sport.

Maurice Davin was elected President, Michael Cusack, John Wyse Power and John McKay were elected Secretaries. Archbishop Thomas

William Croke, Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt were asked to become patrons.

Through their membership of the IRB, the IV and other groups, many members of the GAA took part in the Rising. GAA activities throughout the country came to a halt as many of the association's members were imprisoned. In 1916 the GAA entered the 'political arena' when it agreed to send a delegation to a Dublin Corporation conference for the purpose of forming a Political Prisoners Amnesty Association. After the 1916 Rising the British Authorities severely curtailed the movement of traffic throughout Ireland and this included trains taking people to Croke Park.

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 for the purpose of re-establishing the Irish language and culture.

The political outgrowth of the League was culminated in 1905 with the founding of the Sinn Fein movement, (We Ourselves), by Arthur Griffith. This was the political wing of the IRB which was established to support withdrawing Irish members from the British Parliament and the setting up of an Irish Parliament along with abandoning constitutional methods of bringing about the repeal of the 1800 Act of Union. The plan called for a boycott of the British army and navy. No Irish members were to be sent to London and an Irish Parliament was to be established in Dublin. A court system would be set up, English goods boycotted and a general program of non-cooperation with the English was to be instituted.

Countess Markievicz (Inghinidhe Na hEireann- I na E) and Bolmer Hobson (IRB), two Irish Protestant nationalists, launched Na Fianna Éireann in August 1909. Their new organisation for boys was the militarised reincarnation of Na Fianna Éireann that Hobson had founded in Belfast in 1902.

The Fianna was the first nationalist group in Ireland to begin drilling; it went on to train members of the I.R.B., and its members were among the few men to possess the military training necessary to become officers when the Irish Volunteers was formed in 1913. Na Fianna also organised girls' branches and its members later helped to establish Cumann na nBan.

As a direct consequence to the arming of the Ulster Volunteers with funding from Guinness, Rothschild and Kipling in 1912, members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in Dublin began drilling in secret.

While drilling continued, the IRB requested Bulmer Hobson to contact The O'Rahilly, a prominent nationalist and asked him to approach Eoin MacNeill.

It was the IRB's intention to use MacNeill as a figurehead of a new nationalist Defence Force.

Hobson helped to form the Irish Volunteers in November 1913, he recruited five senior members of the Fianna to the provisional committee of the new body: Ó Riain, Colbert, Martin, Lonergan and Liam Mellows.

The Supreme Council of the IRB met on 5 September 1914, a month after the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. At this meeting they decided to stage the rising before the war ended.

Responsibility for the planning of the rising was given to Tom Clarke and Sean Mac Dermott.

The Irish Volunteers, the smaller of the two forces resulting from the September 1914 split over support for the British war effort, set up a "headquarters staff" that included Patrick Pearse as Director of Military Organisation, Joseph Plunkett as Director of Military Operations and Thomas MacDonagh as Director of Training. Eamonn Ceant was later added as Director of Communications.

Plunkett had travelled to Germany in April 1915 to join Roger Casement. Casement had gone there from the United States the previous year with the support of Clan na Gael leader John Devoy. Together Plunkett and Casement presented a plan which involved a German expeditionary force landing on the west coast of Ireland, while a rising in Dublin diverted the British forces so that the Germans, with the help of local Volunteers, could secure the line of the River Shannon.

In May 1915 Clarke and MacDermott established a Military Committee within the IRB, consisting of Pearse, Plunkett and Ceannt, to draw up plans for the rising.

IRB members held officer rank in the Volunteers throughout the country and would take their orders from the Military Committee, not from MacNeill.

James Connolly, head of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), the sixth member of the Military Committee, was aware of the IRB's plans for a rising from 1915 and threatened to start a rebellion on his own if other parties failed to act. In January 1916 they convinced Connolly to hold off. Thomas MacDonagh would later become the seventh and final member of the Military Council.

The insurrection is well documented.

Diarmuid Lynch, member of the Supreme Council of the IRB and the last man to leave the GPO, removed the tricolour flag, ensuring it was not captured, so that the campaign would go on. It was later brought to Vaughans Hotel, GHQ of the IRB and set the tone for the next phase of the IRB's plans for a Free and Independent Ireland.

Cristina Ni Dubhslaine, Chairman I.R.B. 2014- 2016

Editor