



Two flags were hoisted on the flag poles on either end of the GPO roof: the tricolour at the right corner at Henry Street and a green flag with the inscription 'Irish Republic' at the left corner at Princess Street

1916 Easter Rising

Historian - Neil Cosgrove

April 24, 2009 marked the 93rd anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland. At 11:35AM on Easter Monday member of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army seized several key positions in the city of Dublin, while Pádraig Pearse read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic from the steps of the General Post Office, a center of the British Government bureaucracy. What then followed was seven days of fierce fighting between the mostly inexperienced volunteers and regiments of one of the strongest armies in the world who were equipped with all the weapons of modern warfare including heavy artillery and machine guns. The results were inevitable: the volunteers were after a week long struggle forced to surrender unconditionally and 11 of their leaders were shot by military court martial.

The leaders of the rebellion were as diverse a group of men as one could conceive. There was the Edinburgh born irreligious socialist and ex-British Soldier James Connolly fighting with the religious Joseph Mary Plunkett, his father a Papal Count; idealistic scholars Pádraig Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and piper Éamonn Ceannt, old Tom Clarke and polio victim Seán Mac Diarmada. The Irish Diaspora was represented with New York born schoolteacher Eamon Devalaire. In

many ways, these men, half warrior and half poet, were the last of the Fiana of Finn McCool; strangely out of place in the realities of the then new twentieth century.

These men had no delusions as to the possibility of the success of their rebellion. They had marched out knowing that just days earlier Sir Roger Casement had been captured, that the ship Auld and her consignment of German supplied weapons that Casement had negotiated had been scuttled, and that the British authorities had unraveled the plan for the rising. Even their own Chief-of-Staff Eoin MacNeill had doomed any possible hope of success by countermanding orders that units of Volunteers outside of Dublin should rise. When Connolly was asked by his friend William O'Brien if he thought the rising had a chance, Connolly responded; "Bill, we are going out to be slaughtered." Yet, these men did rise, did fight, and by so doing caused the world to be reminded of the Irish cause for freedom, which had ironically been lost in the "Great War" being fought so "that small nations might be free." While a failure militarily, the sacrifices of these men and the harsh and ill-considered reprisals by the British government set 26 counties of Ireland on the road to nationhood.

In addition to the fact that Easter Week was chosen for the rising because many government leaders and soldiers would be away on leave, many also saw the time of resurrection as symbolic to their hopes of resurrecting the Irish Nation. For many of the leaders of the rising, the rebellion would in fact be their Golgotha, and their dedication and sacrifice to a cause greater than themselves should never be forgotten.

History

Did you Know that....

- After the surrender, the prisoners, particularly the leader of the 1916 rising were treated shamefully. Because of severe wounds, James Connolly had to be carried by stretcher to his execution where he was tied to a chair in order to be shot. British Captain Lee-Wilson went to great efforts to humiliate Tom Clarke including striking him and stripping him before nurses at the Rotunda Hospital grounds where the prisoners were held. Polio victim Seán Mac Diarmada was forced to march without the use of his canes.

- Hours before his execution by firing squad, Joseph Plunkett was married in the prison chapel to his sweetheart Grace Gifford, an event commemorated in the popular Irish Ballad "Grace." Grace Gifford's sister, Muriel, was married to Plunkett's best friend Thomas MacDonagh, who was also executed for his role in the Easter Rising.

- During the rising, Captain Bowen-Cothurst indiscriminately detained six civilians who had no part in the rising including the pacifist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, a friend of James Joyce, and two pro-British journalists, all of whom he later shot in cold blood. After failed attempts to cover up the killings Bowen-Cothurst was declared "insane" by a British Military court. After a confinement of twenty months he was declared "cured" and retired to Canada on a full pension.

- Though a failure militarily, the Easter Rising succeeded tremendously in causing the world to rethink the merits of Irish Independence. Chief among those effected was Nobel Prize winning Poet William Butler Yeats, who in his poem Easter 1916 described how his attitudes towards Irish Republicans changed.