



Unit 5:

THE 1916 RISING

A Short History

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PLANNING A RISING

John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) won seventy-one seats in the general election of January 1910. This result meant that the Home Rule party held the balance of power between the Conservatives and the Liberals in the House of Commons and was in a position to force the Liberal Party to commit to a new Home Rule Bill for Ireland. In the following year, the power of the House of Lords to veto any bill permanently was removed under the Parliament Act and on 11 April 1912, Liberal Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, introduced the Third Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons.

The very real prospect of Home Rule for Ireland caused alarm among the majority Unionist Protestant population in the north. Unionism's deep-seated opposition was expressed in large demonstrations, the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant and the supporting Women's declaration in September 1912. In January 1913, Southern Unionist MP, Sir Edward Carson, sanctioned the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), marking the move to a paramilitary form of opposition to Home Rule.

Southern nationalists responded by establishing their own paramilitary force to secure the implementation of Home Rule legislation. Eoin MacNeill, co-founder of the Gaelic League and editor of its weekly journal, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, wrote an article called 'The North Began' which effectively stated that if the Ulster Volunteers could forcibly defend their stance on Home Rule then nationalists should do likewise. Soon afterwards, representatives of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) approached MacNeill to suggest the formation of a counter force to the UVF. The IRB was a secret oath-bound society committed to securing an Irish republic by force of arms. It had gone into decline in the late 19th century, but was revitalised after 1912 by the dynamic leadership of men like Bulmer Hobson, Denis McCullough, Sean MacDermott and veteran Fenian, Thomas Clarke. It also drew fresh recruits from cultural nationalist organisations such as the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

After the establishment of the Irish Volunteers at the Rotunda in Dublin on 25 November 1913, separatists around the country formed local branches of the paramilitary organisation. In the same year, a tramway workers' strike organised by James Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) was the spark that began the great Lockout of 1913. On 29 August the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) issued a proclamation banning a meeting organised by Larkin in support of the striking workers. The rally went ahead on Sunday 31 August in Sackville (now O'Connell) Street. Between 400 and 600 people were injured



in police baton charges earning it the name 'Bloody Sunday'. In the midst of the strike and lockout, on 23 November 1913, Jim Larkin, James Connolly and Captain Jack White formed the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) to provide protection for the striking workers.

By February 1914 Volunteer units had been established in many of the major towns and cities and a rudimentary chain of command had been formed. The Curragh Mutiny in March and the arming of the UVF in the Larne gunrunning of 24 April escalated the Irish Home Rule Crisis. In July 1914 the Volunteers' director of arms, Michael J O'Rahilly, organised the importation of 900 Mauser rifles with ammunition from Germany on board Erskine Childers' yacht. The *Asgard* arrived in Howth harbour on 26 July where approximately 1,000 Volunteers and members of na Fianna Éireann unloaded the cargo and carried it into Dublin. On the same day, British soldiers fired into a crowd of hostile Dubliners at Bachelor's Walk Quay, killing three and wounding thirty-seven.

Britain's declaration of war on Germany in August 1914 marked her entry into World War I and Home Rule was delayed for the duration of the conflict. John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and Unionist leader, Edward Carson pledged their respective followers to support the British imperial war effort. Red-

mond's call to nationalists to support Catholic Belgium in a speech at Woodenbridge, Co Wicklow in September 1914 led to a split in the Volunteer movement. The majority of approximately 180,000 who followed Redmond became known as the National Volunteers, while the minority of 11,000, unwilling to spill blood on British battlefields, followed Eoin MacNeill and retained the name Irish Volunteers. In September, the Supreme Council of the IRB decided that 'England's Difficulty (World War I) was Ireland's Opportunity' to stage a nationwide rebellion using MacNeill's Volunteers. 1914 also saw the formation of the women's auxiliary league, Cumann na mBan at Wynn's Hotel in Dublin.

Approximately 210,000 Irishmen from all backgrounds served in the British Army during the First World War (1914-1918), of whom about 30,000 never returned home. Many thousand Irish Volunteers joined the two predominately Catholic and nationalist Irish divisions: the 10th and 16th. In the north, 30,000 UVF men joined up to form the 36th (Ulster) Division. Motives for enlistment included economic hardship, political conviction (nationalist and unionist), thirst for adventure, peer pressure and sympathy for Catholic Belgium. Urban areas returned more soldiers than rural as wartime demands for agricultural products made members of the farming community less interested in enlistment.

After an initial surge of recruits at the beginning of the war, enlistments steadily declined in Ireland during 1915 and 1916 as young men became more reluctant to voluntarily join the carnage of industrial warfare. The 10th Irish Division, for example, saw action at Gallipoli where it suffered heavy losses at Sulva Bay in August 1915. Faced with inadequate recruits and a vigorous Sinn Fein anti-recruitment campaign, the British government intensified its recruitment campaign during 1915.





In Ireland, the First World War provided the opportunity for the republican rising of 1916. On 1 August 1915, Patrick Pearse secured his place at the vanguard of the Irish revolution when he delivered the graveside oration at the funeral of Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in Glasnevin cemetery. The occasion proved a rallying point for republican activists at home and abroad. By that point Pearse was a member of the IRB Military Council, formed secretly by the Supreme Council in May 1915 to plan and co-ordinate a rebellion. They sought funding from Clan na Gael - an Irish republican organisation in America - and military assistance from Imperial Germany.

By January 1916 the Military Council had decided on Sunday 23 April as the date for the planned nationwide rebellion and James Connolly, who had been planning independent action by the Irish Citizen Army was admitted into the conspiracy. The original plan envisaged a nationwide rising with provision for a westward retreat if the capital could not be held. This was undermined by a series of developments in April 1916.

Eoin MacNeill, who was not a member of the IRB, was kept in the dark because the Military Council knew that he would not call his small force into action

expect in the event of a crisis. During the first week of April 1916, Pearse, as the Volunteers director of military organisation, issued orders for three days of 'manoeuvres' at Easter. MacNeill became alarmed, but Pearse denied that a rebellion was planned. On 17 April the Military Council approved the draft Proclamation of the Irish Republic and the circulation of the so-called 'Castle Document'. The secret document, supposedly leaked from Dublin Castle, set out plan to suppress the the Volunteers and to arrest its leaders. On Wednesday 19 April, the Volunteer officers received word that a Rising was planned for Easter Sunday. The rank and file of the Volunteers, however, remained in the dark.

On Holy Thursday MacNeill learned of the secret plans for a rising. Incensed, the Volunteer leader confronted Pearse who, on this occasion, confirmed the Military Council's plans. MacNeill immediately wrote a series of orders cancelling the manoeuvres organised for Sunday. Sean MacDermott was able to persuade MacNeill that the uprising had every chance of success because of the imminent arrival of Sir Roger Casement in Kerry with a consignment of 20,000 German rifles. Realising that it was too late to prevent the rising, and still convinced of the truth of the Castle Document, MacNeill ordered Hobson to hold the countermanding orders.

The *Aud*, a German Cargo steamer disguised as a Norwegian freighter, arrived off the southwest coast of Ireland on Thursday 20 April 1916. Its captain, Lt. Karl Spindler, failed to rendezvous with the submarine carrying Roger Casement and was intercepted by the Royal Navy on Friday. On hearing that the *Aud* had been scuttled near Cork Harbour, MacNeill immediately dispatched couriers to deliver the order countermanding the nationwide mobilisation and personally organised its publication in the Sunday Independent.

James Connolly, leader of the Irish Citizen Army and member of the IRB Military Council summoned an emergency meeting of its members on Sunday. Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, Tom Clarke, Sean MacDermott, Joseph Plunkett, Eamonn Ceannt and Thomas MacDonagh resolved to postpone the planned rising until the following day and sent dispatch carriers with messages to that effect around the country. At the same meeting in Liberty Hall, they finalised the draft Proclamation of the Irish Republic and Patrick Pearse was appointed president of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic and commandant general of the Army of the Irish Republic.

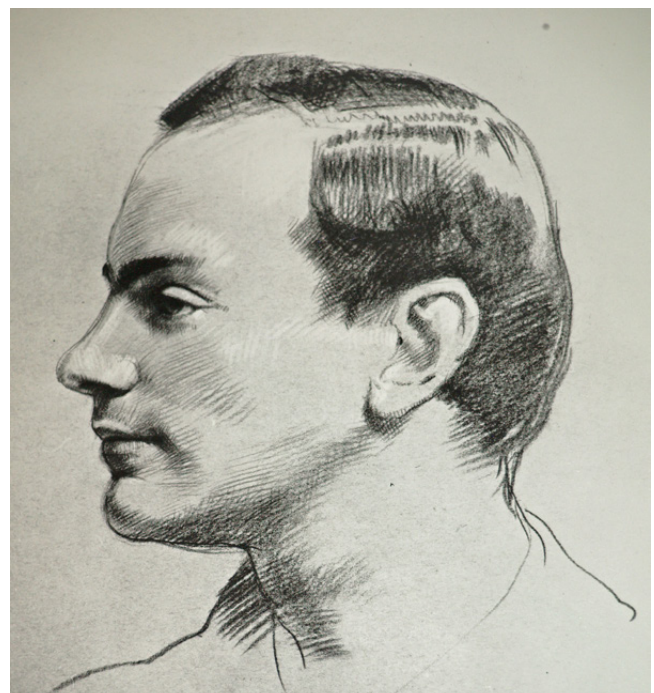
THE EASTER RISING, APRIL 1916

The confusion caused by Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order and the shortage of arms meant that a nationwide rebellion was no longer possible - the Easter Rising was largely confined to the capital city. On Easter Monday morning, 24 April 1916, some twelve hundred separatists occupied strategic buildings across the capital and proclaimed an Irish Republic. Faced by over 20,000 British troops, they had no chance of military success, but the six-day Rising transformed Ireland and swept away the possibility of a peaceful home rule settlement.

The Dublin Division of the Irish Volunteers was organised into four battalions. Fifty men of the 1st Battalion mustered at the Gaelic League Hall in Blackhall Street under Commandant Edward Daly. Sean Heuston took 'D' Company to occupy the Mendicity Institution on the south quays of the River Liffey and the other companies moved out to occupy the area around the Four Courts on Inns Quay to the north of the city.

Most of Thomas MacDonagh's 2nd Battalion gathered at St Stephen's Green and marched to Jacob's Biscuit factory and Bishop Street to the south of the city centre. Eamon de Valera led the 130 men of the 3rd Battalion from Earlsfort Terrace toward Boland's Mills and Bakery to the south east of the city, while the 4th Battalion, under

Eamonn Ceannt left Emerald Square to take the South Dublin Union to the south-west. Con Colbert's men seized an outpost at Watkins' Brewery and Captain Seamus Murphy took command at Jameson's Distillery in Marrowbone Lane.



The Irish Citizen Army gathered at Liberty Hall under Commandant James Connolly. Michael Mallin led 100 men and women of the ICA towards St Stephen's Green and a small detachment under Captain Sean Connolly was deployed to occupy City Hall and its surrounding streets.

The people of Dublin enjoying the bank holiday sunshine were surprised to see James Connolly and Patrick Pearse lead the remaining headquarters battalion to the General Post Office on O'Connell Street. At midday, thirty men – selected from the ranks of the Volunteers, the ICA and Na Fianna Éireann disarmed the guards at the Magazine fort in the Phoenix Park. They were unable to gain access to the main arms store, and the plan to blow up the fort as a signal that the rising had started was a failure. By Monday afternoon the rebels had fortified six main garrisons in the city with relatively little bloodshed. Captain Sean Connolly, who was mortally wounded by a sniper's bullet on the roof of City Hall, was a notable expectation

British reinforcements were quickly rushed in from Belfast, Athlone, Templemore, the Curragh and Britain. By Wednesday, the odds against the rebels had risen to 20 to one and troops continued to pour into the city. Martial law was imposed and on Thursday Sir John

Maxwell arrived in Dublin to take command.

Fighting continued until the insurgents surrendered on 29 April. In Dublin, 64 rebels were killed along with 132 crown forces and about 230 civilians, and extensive use of artillery devastated much of the city centre. The government's reaction to the rising has been widely blamed for converting initial popular hostility to the insurgents into widespread sympathy. The murder of Francis Sheehy Skeffington and the apparent summary killing of civilians by soldiers during the fighting in North King Street, along with widespread arrests and the continuation of martial law, undoubtedly alienated many. Other accounts, however, suggest that the spectacle of nationalists offering a credible military challenge to the crown forces had itself been sufficient to win a degree of public approval.

Overall, the official response was less draconian than poorly judged and unbalanced. Fifteen leaders were executed, along with Sir Roger Casement, arrested after landing in Co Kerry from a German submarine. Yet other participants including such key figures as de Valera and Collins not only survived, but in many cases were free within a matter of months to begin the construction of a new separatist movement.

