

# General Tom Maguire (101) won't let us forget

## Tuam Workhouse executions - 70 years ago next Sunday

By Nollaig Ó Gadhra

which time De Valera had broken from Sinn Fein and leader of the 26-county Free State was locking up the I.R.A. wherever it could) one of the most enduring and logical claims of General Maguire maintained throughout his long life is that anybody who claims that a 26-county parliament is "Dail Eireann" in the way the original First and Second Dailleanna were, is either dishonest or very stupid. Both perhaps? It really is bad journalism to call a 26-county wage agreement a "national wage agreement" without clarifying, just as there are many more than 300,000 out of work in "this country." And so on and so on! No wonder some people want to get rid of Articles 2 and 3 of Bunreacht na hEireann.



General Maguire and his followers would not regard this legal mechanism by De Valera as being very important, if only because they would hold that Ireland was partitioned without Irish democratic consent before 1937-'38. And while they would see it as nothing more than a form of words to get around the type of problem an Oath to the Crown became in 1927 (having been significantly a cause of the Civil War five years previously!) less rigid voices would argue, perhaps, that at least Articles 2 and 3 remind us that there is a problem, if only because they have to be read in conjunction with Article 1. Naturally this is never

alluded to on R.T.E. whenever Paisley, Mayhew and all those other anti-democratic British politicians, who have no written constitution themselves, come on to tell us just how disappointed they are that the Irish people do not do what Dick Spring, John Bruton, Des O'Malley, Proinsias de Rossa, even Shane Ross and John A. Murphy want them to do!

I do not wish to go on here about the logic of the Maguire position and the heroic sacrifices the man made throughout his extraordinary long life to defend what he said he would defend when he was elected to the 32-county Dail Eireann of the Irish Republic before most of us were even born. Some of what was involved was covered adequately in



TOM MAGUIRE, pictured left aged 21, Comdt. General, T.D. and G.O.C. Second Western Division, I.R.A., and above, aged 97, at his home in Cross, South Mayo.

local newspapers — like this one — last year on the occasion of his 100th birthday, while a video with valuable historical insights and an interview with General Maguire when he was a young 97½ was shown to interested journalists in Castlebar last March.

Interestingly enough, few of the Dublin media attended, or even mentioned the 100th birthday of the last survivor of the Dail without whose revolutionary sacrifices there would be no R.T.E. today. The greatest international interest in the Maguire phenomenon was shown in the United States and on July 22nd last the Honourable Benjamin A. Gilman from New

York read into the record of the 102nd Congress Session of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington a glowing tribute to the grandest grand old man of Irish politics and revolutionary endeavour. Naturally, you did not see much about this on Irish television screens either.

I have no detailed information about Congressman Gilman, what he represents or who in New York informed him about a man and a story that is, by any standards remarkable. I would like to know more but for some strange reasons the only American stories that get covered well on R.T.E. are about showbiz, especially if they obviously have nothing whatever to do with Ireland or Irish achievement in the life of the United States.

It so happens that this year Easter Sunday, April 11th, is the 70th anniversary of the Tuam Workhouse martyrs — the six Republicans executed in vengeful reprisal during the very last days of the Irish Civil War. One of the six, Sean Maguire, was a brother of Tom Maguire. The others were Comdt. Frank Cumann, Killoona; Lt. Sean Newell, Michael Monaghan, both of Headford; Martin Moylan, Annaghdown, and Seamus O'Maille, Uachtar Ard. A few months earlier, six others with Galway, Mayo and Western connections were sentenced to death in Athlone, but the sentence was postponed for a period as part of the then Government policy of "holding hostages" who were shot as soon as some totally unrelated Republican persons outside the prisons "misbehaved"! Then on Saturday, January 20th, 1923, five of the men from the Western Division, including a local man, Captain Tom Hughes from Bogganfin, Athlone, and four from Co. Galway, Captains Martin Burke, Caheristrane, Stephen Joyce and Michael Walsh, Derrymore, Caheristrane and Vol. Hubert Collins, Kickeen, Headford, were taken out and on the orders of the highest Free State authorities, executed. Their relatives were not informed until at the earliest 6 p.m. that evening.

On the same day six others were executed in Tralee and in Limerick in somewhat similar circumstances. However, a sixth man was due to be shot in Athlone on that occasion — that one who got away was General Maguire! Because the Cumann na nGaedheal Government are believed to have burned all the documents of immense historical value before leaving office in 1932, we shall never know what influenced the decision of General Mulcahy and Cosgrave, head of the Government, to save Maguire's life. It can hardly be because the family were popular with a reputation for fairness even during the Tan War when Mayo Loyalists and Unionists could call on him "if someone was leaning on them," given that brother Sean was executed in Tuam in April.

### T.D.s shot too

The only logical reason seems to me to be the fact that General Maguire was an elected T.D. at the time. As was Eamonn de Valera, another person many felt the Free State authorities might have been eliminated if this were politically acceptable at the time of the Civil War. And while it is true, that elected T.D.s were, of course, shot on both sides in the Civil War — we tend to hear less about Republicans Harry Boland and Cathal Brugha than we do about Michael Collins and those who were shot later on in the course of the War, and little or nothing about people like Jim Devins of Sligo who was killed in action with five others (including Brian MacNeill, son of Free State Government Minister Eoin MacNeill) on the Ben Bulbin mountain on Sept. 20th, 1922 — the Cosgrave Government drew the line at executing elected T.D.s at that time probably for "political" reasons connected with their attempts to gain credibility as the "real democrats" in the eyes of the world.

In that regard it is interesting to note, for example, that two of the most tragic victims of the Civil War execution policy in 1922, Erskine Childers and Liam Mellows, had both lost their Dail seats at the June 1922, election. Is this the real reason — political, psychological, call it what you will — why they were executed, and so many other obvious candidates potentially much more important to the Republican cause were left alive even if in jail in those terrible times of military gun-law?

General Tom Maguire, already in his nineties, unveiled the impressive memorial at the site of the Tuam Workhouse executions in April 1985. Thanking God that he had lived to see the day when the dead men were remembered on the site where they met their doom, and expressing gratitude for being asked to unveil the memorial, General Maguire said: "The Republican soldiers who died here, and their comrades in Athlone who also fell before Free State firing squads, were all attached to the Second Western Division which I commanded. They were my men and their blood was spilt by those who were unfit. They gave their lives for the All-Ireland Republic, then under attack. That Republic was overthrown and has yet to be restored."

### Pearse's poem

"Padraig Pearse, first President of the All-Ireland Republic, in 1916 wrote a poem dedicated to his mother while in his death cell awaiting execution. In it, his mother speaks of her two sons and says: 'My sons were faithful and they fought.' This was indeed true of the men who died here and in Athlone and all over Ireland in a similar manner at that time. It is good that their sacrifices are commemorated here in Tuam. But we must also remember that their objective remains unattained. I wish to thank the Tuam Memorial Committee for calling on me to carry out this task. I am proud to be associated with today's worthy ceremony."

The fact that the Maguires of Cross had two sons in the field at that time and that one of them was executed, while his Commander, General Tom, survived, possibly because of his status as an elected T.D., is one of the things perhaps that aroused a certain amount of complex emotion in the aged General Maguire as he spoke in 1985. About that time also he had the following very significant insights into the entire policy of reprisal executions by the Free State Government in the course of an interview for the Unseann Mac Eoin book "Survivors."

General Maguire said about the apparent policy of shooting the majority of the 77 in smaller provincial centres outside Dublin: "It is my opinion that their objective was to involve all of the senior officers in this policy, so that there would be no denying it afterwards. Joe Sweeney carried out executions in Drumboe in Donegal; Dan Hogan had them in Dundalk; Michael Mac Cormick had them in Maryborough, Birr and Roscrea; Joseph Cummins had them in Wexford; Liam Stack had one in Carlow. Sean MacKeon had them in Athlone and Michael Brennan in Tuam, Limerick and Ennis. Eleven of my command were executed by them. With my brother John, five others were executed in Tuam on April 11th, 1923. The executions of March, April and May 1923, were unnecessarily vengeful. The Free Staters knew the I.R.A. was about to suspend its resistance. He (brother John) had been arrested in the Tuam area some time after myself and they had far less on him."

Republicans who will, as usual, gather in Donaghpatrick on Easter Sunday to pray for those who won what freedom we have in this part of the country, will probably pay special homage this year to the six who were executed in Tuam Workhouse 70 years to the exact date. Suaimhneas storra! go raibh acu uilig.

IN ONE SENSE it is probably a sign of our maturity that the various 70th anniversaries associated with the final days of the Irish Civil War in the Spring of 1923 have gone largely unnoticed.

The Irish Civil War was an entirely inglorious and sad affair that many people would prefer to forget, though this in no way should be used to disapprove of those who wish to remember the memory of their loved ones, or those whose ideals they admired in the tragic conflict.

It is also important not to forget the Irish Civil War if only as part of an effort to ensure that such a terrible situation can never arise again. The very birth of the 26-county Irish Free State was stained in blood, by direct cabinet decision, at the highest level, within 48 hours of coming into being on December 8th, 1922. And that legacy, above all else, continues to haunt even those who would seek to see the foundation of the Irish state as a landmark in civilised Irish legal and political development.

It should also be stressed, I believe, that one of the main reasons why Irish passions of barbarity boiled over at the end of 1922 and into the Spring of 1923 is that no political institutions — "acceptable political institutions" to use John Hume's phrase about the North — were then in place to enable the resolution of the conflict by political means. Political Oaths in particular have no place in an open and free democracy if one is genuinely disposed to the idea that opponents have a right to rule if only they would organise and avail of the ballot box. Neither should there be any place for political censorship, or worse still, misrepresentation on semi-monopolistic mass media that form part of our modern life.

Former U.C.G. Lecturer Michael D. Higgins used to be very good on these matters before joining the Government where he is now responsible for broadcasting policy — as well as keeping an eye on the overall printed media semi-monopolies in this state, because of the complex connection between these matters and advertising! I hope Minister Higgins will not develop the type of blind spots which hit his former Labour party colleague Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien when these matters were landed on his lap as far as R.T.E. were concerned in the mid-1970s, after Conor and Michael D. campaigned vigorously against Gerry Collins's censorship policies from 1971 onwards after he introduced the first "Section 31" Directive. The new Labour media Minister even restored to the chairmanship of R.T.E. Donal O'Morain who had been sacked along with the entire R.T.E. Authority by the Lynch Government in 1972. But that did not prevent Conor, with the help of some friends, from bringing in one of the most damaging codes of practice ever in the history of Irish broadcasting that has been in vogue ever since.

### Fearful of criticism

The truth is, I suppose, that people in power would, if they could, silence all critics that openly challenged them or their authority. Especially if they seem geared to take over the power from them or — worse still! — incite or support others to do so! We rarely consider just how fearful of criticism most political regimes are. Which is why they usually lean on those who push their heads up above the rest, or openly express their criticisms rather than on the real "gunmen." It is perfectly clear, for example, that the main victims of Loyalist murder in the North at present, as always, are prominent community Catholics, what the U.V.F./U.F.F./U.D.A. have called "the pan-Nationalist alliance of everything from the S.D.L.P. to the G.A.A. and the Catholic Church." Yet R.T.E. does not probe this reality.

It prefers to hunt "Provos" (under its own beds if necessary!) and to ignore the genuine fears and aspirations of the 21 per cent of the North's Catholic/Nationalist population that do not vote for the S.D.L.P. while at the same time going along with British newsagency rubbish about "men with an Irish accent" — not to mention asking if Irish people in London should "lie low" every time somebody lets off a bomb in Britain. R.T.E. should take its own Unionist bias at its word by recalling that all people born in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland are de facto "citizens of the U.K." according to British legal and political logic. Except of course, when they are caught, protesting about British misgovernment against the Irish — in which case they are sent packing into "internal exile," back into the Six Counties whence they came! Because while they are "British" (against their will — but never mind!) they are still "Paddies" who have no right to expect that they can protest politically within the U.K. without getting into trouble with the authorities.

Meanwhile, Irish citizens of a "foreign E.C. country," working in Britain must keep their heads down, because of the ongoing violence by some Northerners against British rule. "These people," after all, have "Irish accents" as well — and are quoted on R.T.E. as having such by the British police without any indication of whether they mean a Donegal, Monaghan, Cork, Dublin or Galway accent! The latent racism of such media coverage is obvious. Nor did this begin today or yesterday; as those interested in the full truth about the Irish struggle at the beginning of the century can testify.

### Under the carpet

One of the things about the Civil War perhaps was that there seems to have been a general effort to push most of the story under the carpet for a generation at least. So that the sons and daughters of the people who were out in 1922-'23 probably learned a great deal less in many cases from their parents at home, than do the grandchildren who are now learning a rather good if simple summary about the Civil War in the Junior Certificate History course. Or are they? How serious is History taken for general pupils in school today? And what has all this new thinly covered promotion for the E.C. and Maastricht and the "European Union" (for which nobody has ever signed on so far) done to the teaching of history in our schools?

General Tom Maguire, the sole surviving member of the Second Dail Eireann, who represented South Mayo and South Roscommon from May 1921, onwards, was 101 years on March 28th, thank God!

He is, therefore, not just one of the most dramatically interesting characters of our Irish history in recent times — he is a unique part of living history that is all the more important because of the principled Republican stand Maguire has taken on the validity of that Second Dail Eireann, and all that flowed from its overthrow in arms (borrowed from the British) in the summer of 1922, when the 32-county All-Ireland Dail Eireann was pro-rogued, not allowed sit, and there was no representative chamber of any kind — not even a 26-county one — to which the pro-Free State forces of the then Provisional Government would have to account.

### Sole survivor

Whatever about General Maguire's own logical position as the sole survivor of those defenders of the Second Dail and the 32-county Republic who handed on their "legitimacy" in accordance with De Valera's resolution in the First Dail in the Spring of 1921, in 1938 (at