

The Civil War

NOLLAIG O GADHRA continues his review of the Civil War

SURELY Montrose, who had planned their Civil War film for last October initially, could not have failed to realise that they transmitted this pro-Free State apologia on the actual anniversary date of the founding of the First Dáil Eireann, January 21st, 1919 — a glorious date in Irish history and democracy in which most of those on both sides in the Civil War had participated?

Any other civilised country in the world would mark January 21st as our real Independence Day. Our national broadcaster did not even mention it. Not even in the context of the obvious reality that those who claimed in 1992-23 that "what was good enough for Mick Collins is good enough for me" should have been reminded of the blood, sweat, tears and innocent lives which Collins, Cosgrave, Mulcahy, Fitzgerald, Blythe, Hogan and the rest of them were prepared to sacrifice throughout 1919, '20 and '21 to ensure the survival of the First Dáil and the Irish Republic they declared with a democratic mandate that the 1916 rebels never had? I have decided therefore in order to give this series a somewhat local Galway flavour, to draw extensively on notes notes compiled a quarter of a century ago, at the time of the 50th anniversary, by J.J. Waldron of Tuam, in honour of Mr. John Henehan, Athenry Road, Tuam "in memory of the days we roamed together on two wheels on the dusty road from Annaghdown Castle to Ballycurran Castle, Co. Galway." These notes were completed in October 1972 — at a time when far more survivors of the Civil War were around than today — and those who lived through the events would demand right of reply.

Even if the Section 31 mentality of Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien and indeed Gerry Collins (lest we forget! or before him, had already discouraged the national broadcaster from recording all the survivors on all sides while they could still remember. Most, if not all, are now gone to their reward. Ar dheisláimh Dé go raibh siad.

But, the task and the challenge remains to make sense of what material we have, and was collected in such hostile circumstances as prevailed even in 1972. It is only when an issue like this arises that the barbarity of something like Section 31 is seen for what it was. And that the place in history which Michael D. Higgins, in a Labour-Fianna Fáil Government led by Albert Reynolds rightly will have in the history of media freedom, as the years go by, will grow and grow.

It is indeed ironic that it is Jack Lynch's former "spindoctor" from the bad old days when Mr. Lynch actually introduced Section 31, Eoin Neeson, should be one of the first into the breach in the attempt to undo the insult that was done to the noble cause of the Irish Republic by the national broadcaster on the anniversary of the founding of the First Dáil Eireann, already written out of history by so many revisionists.

One of the best things in the Eoin Neeson book, back in 1966, was the accurate breakdown of the actual command of the I.R.A. in March 1922, when the great divide came. And it is interesting, in his comments on the Galway situation, that Mr. Waldron writing in his notes, as he set about describing that situation in 1972, says the Galway situation was complicated because the line between the 1st Western (Clare/South of Galway) Division of the I.R.A. and the 2nd Western Division (South Roscommon, South and East Mayo, North Galway) ran more or less along the railway line from Galway to Athlone. The first Western Division under Commandant Michael Brennan, was pro-Treaty, while the second, under Commandant Thomas Maguire was staunchly anti-Treaty, pro-Republican. Brennan was an exception along the west coast — despite the fact that DeValera and Brian O'Higgins were the two staunch Republican T.D.s for Co. Clare. Maguire, as we know, became a legend over along lifetime into the 1990s, by

steadfastly refusing to compromise, even after Dev had broken with Sinn Féin and taken his new Fianna Fáil party into the Free State Dáil in 1927. But the influence of the local I.R.A. commanders was the key factor in influencing the fighting volunteers in 1922, not the elected politicians like DeValera. Here too, the influence of the secret I.R.B. organisation, then headed up by Collins, who used it as a power-base from 1917 onwards, was crucial. In a key video interview I did with General Maguire on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the first Dáil, in 1989, when Tom was a bright and articulate 97 years of age, he recalled how pressure was brought to bear on all the back-bench T.D.s in the Second Dáil, by Collins's IRB men to vote for the Treaty. When they arrived in Dublin for the vote, they were met at the railway station and told that each and every member would have to speak in the Treaty debate and publicly declare their position. Tom was against the Treaty, would not be moved or bullied and said so. When I suggested that I had not seen his speech in the debate and that it must have been a very short one, he agreed, it was. Two words: "Ní toil!"

Because these commands and the people who led them are crucial to any understanding of the state of the country in 1922-23, I will give them here as quoted by Mr. Waldron from Eoin Neeson's book in 1972.

March 1922

Divisions.

1st Northern: Four Brigades-Down: Commdt. Joseph Sweeney, Pro-Treaty.

2nd Northern: Tyrone and Derry, Four Brigades, Charlie Daly, Anti-Treaty.

3rd Northern: Belfast, Antrim, North Down, Commdt. Joseph McKelvey, Anti-Treaty.

4th Northern: Armagh, West and South Down, North Louth, Commdt. Frank Aiken, Anti-Treaty.

5th Northern: Monaghan, East Cavan and South Fermanagh, Commdt. Dan Hogan, Pro-Treaty.

1st Eastern: Meath, Westmeath and Kildare. 9 Brigades, Commdt. Seán Boylan, Pro-Treaty.

Dublin No. 1: Commdt. Oscar Traynor, Anti-Treaty.

South Dublin Brigade: Commdt. Andrew MacDonnell, Anti-Treaty.

North Wexford: North Wexford and South Wicklow, Commdt. Joseph Cummin, Pro-Treaty.

South Wexford Brigade: Commdt. Thomas O'Sullivan, Anti-Treaty.

Carlow Brigade: Commdt. Liam Stack, Pro-Treaty.

Midlands Division: Longford, Leitrim, Fermanagh, Commdt. Seán MacEoin, Pro-Treaty.

1st Western: Clare and South Galway, Commdt. Michael Brennan, Pro-Treaty.

2nd Western Division: South Roscommon, South and Eastern Mayo, North Galway, Commdt. Thomas Maguire, Anti-Treaty.

3rd Western Division: North Roscommon, Sligo and part of East Mayo, Commdt. Liam Pilkington*, Anti-Treaty.

4th Western Division: North and West Mayo, parts of Sligo and Galway, Commdt. Michael Kilroy, Anti-Treaty.

1st Southern Division: Cork, Kerry, Waterford, West Limerick, Ten Brigades, Commdt. Liam Lynch, Anti-Treaty.

2nd Southern Division: Kilkenny, Limerick and part of Limerick, Five Brigades, Commdt. Earnán O'Malley, Anti-Treaty.

3rd Southern Division: Laois, Offaly, part of Tipperary, five Brigades, Commdt. Michael McCormack, Pro-Treaty.

*In later life Fr. Liam Pilkington. Unlike most of the other commanders of the period, who choose careers in the Army or in politics later in life, Pilkington went on to become a priest as soon as his services in the cause of the Republic had come to an end.

(To be continued.)