

# The Civil War in Galway

Part 6 of Nollaig O Gadhra's series to mark the 75th anniversary

As mentioned last week, the month of November 1922 marked the initiation by the Provisional pro-Treaty Government of a policy of "official executions" of prisoners, several weeks before the Irish Free State came into being on December 6th, 1922.

And while, in theory, the constitution of the new Irish Free State, was supposed to be liberal, and provided for due process and the rule of law, the reality in December 1922, was quite different. Within 48 hours of the foundation of the new state, on December 6th, 1922, the new cabinet of William T. Cosgrave, now termed the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, descended to a new low, by deliberately executing prisoners of war, who had been held for many months, without any trial, and on cabinet diktat, that still stains the reputation of all those connected with the process, and indeed the name of Ireland around the world.

This is not the place to go back on the vengeful details of how the state's first cabinet behaved once it got the first smell of power and authority that any Irish leaders had for generations. Save to recall, of course, that one of the four men executed in Mountjoy Jail on the morning on December 8th, 1922, was Liam Mellows whose statue stands today in Eyre Square in Galway. Mellows was not a native of Galway, of course, even though he had been active in Republican politics in the county ever since he led the biggest mobilisation in Ireland outside Dublin at Easter 1916.

But unlike DeValera in Clare, he lost his standing as a T.D. in Co. Galway in the June 1922 General Election, just as Erskine Childers lost his seat in Wicklow/Kildare. It is said the main reason why Mellows failed to be returned in Galway in 1922 was that he insisted in using the less familiar Liam O Maoliosá Irish version of his name, and it is alleged, huge numbers of voters failed to recognise it, even though they were native Irish speakers in many cases. The June 1922 election — the famous "Pact Election" — was the first time people had voted P.R. in a complicated Co. Galway seven-seater.

But whatever about that, it is interesting to note that the two Republican T.D.s who lost their seats were shot without much due process within a few months. Contrast this with say, General Tom Maguire, of the Second Western Division of the I.R.A. who was sentenced to death in Athlone in January 1923 along with five others because of their open war against the Free State. Maguire who was a T.D. for South Mayo and South Roscommon was not shot when the others were, most probably because the Free State propaganda machine liked to perpetuate the myth that they did not shoot elected representatives — in spite of what happened Cathal Brugha and Harry Boland in the Summer of 1922.

Another popular Free State propaganda line, at the time, was that the Cosgrave Government selected one man from each province for execution on December 8th, 1922 so that the message would go out to all parts of the troubled land. In this provincial line-up Liam Mellows is supposed to be the Connacht representative, even though, of course, Liam was born in England of Irish parents (farm labourers from South Leinster) and is buried near Gorey in Co. Wexford. Other factors influenced the rather arbitrary decision as to whom to shoot and not to shoot in Government circles in those days. And as the chief Government "spin doctor" at the time, Desmond Fitzgerald is said to have burned the state files when Cumann na nGaedheal lost office in 1932, we shall never know the full story.

But let us look at what J.J. Waldron had to say in his notes for those dark November and December days, up to the end of the dark year of 1922...

## November 4th, 1922

The Civic Guards arrived in town last Friday and took possession of the old R.I.C. Barracks, now in a dilapidated condition. Certain elements in our midst not actually criminals, will be none the worse for the restraining influence of the policeman. The street brawler needs to be more careful, Saturday evening's pitch and toss school under the Cross in the Square will have to seek a more secluded venue and the all night pubs may be tempted to close a little earlier for their own sake if not for the customers'. One member of the force was heartily welcomed. He was Sergeant Roddy. One can't forget his action in July 1920 when as a member of the R.I.C. he refused to take part in the burning of the town. He then resigned the force and was appointed Craner by the Commissioners, a position he held for a short time. He was visited one night at his residence and beaten up by masked men who threatened his life if he did not leave the town which he had to do for the sake of his family. Now he is back in charge of the new force.

## November 11th, 1922

Some surprise mingled with indignation was evident in Tuam on Tuesday, when four young men in the town were arrested by the Free State Troops. The reason for arrest is unknown and puzzles the man in the street.

The arrested men are Michael Loftus, Bishop Street, William Hannon, Naughton's, Shop Street, P. Colleran, Walsh's, High Street, Jim and Tim McHugh, Hosty's, The Square; the latter house had to be closed temporarily owing to their arrest.

Soon after in Dáil Eireann a question was asked of General Mulcahy concerning their arrest. His answer was that Burke was believed to act as intelligence officer for the Republicans and Loftus as a carrier of dispatches, information which is held in grave doubt in the district.

## November 18th, 1922

A search party of troops visited Headford last week in a round-up operation. About to search a house when a man was noticed running from the building. He was called on to halt and a Mauser Rifle, four bombs and a quantity of ammunition was found in his possession. He gave his name as O'Brien and is believed to be from Tuam. On the way back to Galway the Troops were ambushed on two occasions but failed to

find the attackers and reached Galway without mishap.

## November 27, 1922

Tuam again was the target for another raid by Republicans. At about 8 o'clock last night they marched casually through the town. Some proceeded to the Workhouse and soon machine gun and rifle fire was opened on the building to which the garrison replied. When the attackers felt they had the troops rounded up, they started their usual Modus Operandi of commandeering supplies from several shops in town. The unusual commandeered on this occasion was four or five motor cars from local garages as well as two bicycles from the Barracks. Others of the parties made an attempt to fire the signal cabin at the Station but it refused to ignite. On their retreat, they cut down several trees of the Plantation at the end of the Galway Road to prevent pursuit. This was confession night for the First Friday and many people were caught in town from the Galway Road area but their fears were allayed when Fathers Walsh, King and Moane accompanied them through the danger zone. It must be said in justice that the people in question were treated with great courtesy and helped over the obstacles.

The whole affair lasted over an hour and when the invaders left the whole town again settled to its wonted somnolence.

From the raid goods to the value of £29 was taken from Canny's of Bishop Street, £28 from O'Malley's of High Street, including some trench coats, two sides of bacon, value £7.18, from M.S. Walsh & Sons, High Street, Pat McHugh, The Square, Tobs.: Cigs, value £17, T. Waldron, High Street, goods £4-17-6.

## December 16th, 1922

Army Proclamation published on this date from Portobello Barracks, Dublin.

That a conspiracy exists to assassinate the members of the nation's parliament. It has already claimed two victims.

Any person found in possession of bombs, dynamite, gelignite or other explosive substance, revolver, rifle, gun, etc. or ammunition will be tried before any two members of the Army Council. In case the accused are found guilty such person will suffer death or other penalty prescribed.

Signed: December 7th, 1922 on behalf of the Army Council, Ristead Ua Maolcatha, General Commander in Chief.

The two victims mentioned above were Pádraic O Máille and Sean Hales, both T.D.s, shot whilst travelling on a side car through Dublin. The former was wounded, the latter was killed. Messrs Liam Mellows, Rory O'Connor, McKelvey, and Barrett, prisoners in Mountjoy Jail were executed as a reprisal.

## December 17th, 1922

Mr. Martin Joe Nohilly, the popular master of the Tuam Workhouse, was released from Galway Jail last Saturday after serving a sentence of nine months imprisonment by a Military Court for being alleged to have a gun in his possession whilst master of Tuam Workhouse.

## December 30th, 1922

Troops from Tuam and Ballinrobe operating in Headford area captured nine prisoners including T. O'Grady and Vincent Corcoran. The next day in Shrule district at Caherlistrane captured seven more when they surrounded Queally's public house.

## Editor's Notes

Pádraic O Máille represented the single seat Connemara constituency in the first Dáil Eireann (1919-1921) and as one of the seven Sinn Féin T.D.s from multi-seat Galway (city and county) constituency in the Second Dáil Eireann.

He retained his seat, as a pro-Treaty candidate in the June 1922 ("the Pact") election, the full result being as follows:

Galway (seven seats)  
Electorate (81,455)  
Quota 4,563

1. Patrick J. Hogan (pro-Treaty), 6,832, first preferences.
2. Pádraic O Máille (pro-Treaty), 6,445.
3. Thomas J. O'Connell (Labour), 4,821.
4. Joseph Wheleham (pro-Treaty), 4,361.
5. George Nicolls (pro-Treaty), 2,258.
6. Bryan Cusack (anti-Treaty), 4,425.
7. Frank Fahy (anti-Treaty), 3,418.

As we said already Liam Mellows (anti-Treaty) failed to be returned, even though he polled 3,937 first preferences, giving an overall Galway result of four pro-Treaty and two anti-Treaty T.D.s plus one Labour deputy who was in effect also pro-Treaty. In the General Election of August 1923, after the Civil War had been won by the Free State Army and the pro-Treaty deputies had established themselves in power as the Cumann na nGaedheal party, O Máille, who had been elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle, was returned again at No. 3 in what was now a nine-seater race under the new Free State electoral lay-out. This also gave votes to women at the same age as men (21 or over, as opposed to the old British rule, prevailing in 1922, when women had to be over 30 to vote, and the entire electoral voting list stood still during the crucial years from 1918 to 1922). He came below Paddy Hogan and Herbert Charles Mellows, brother of Liam Mellows, who had been shot without trial by the Government the previous December 1922.

The following is a summary of the Galway result.

Galway (9 seats).

Electorate 106,093 — an increase of more than 25 per cent from the previous year, because of the changes outlined above. The quota was 4,845 (all First Preferences)

1. Patrick J. Hogan (Cumann na nGaedheal) 7,563
2. Herbert Charles Mellows (Sinn Féin Republican) 7,131
3. Pádraic O Máille (Cumann na nGaedheal) 6,570
4. Frank Fahy (Sinn Féin Republican) 5,670
5. George Nicolls (Cumann na nGaedheal) 1,732
6. Sean Broderick (Cumann na nGaedheal) 1,817

7. Louis E. O'Dea (Sinn Féin Republican) 1,413

8. Thomas J. O'Connell (Labour) 1,862

9. James Cosgrave (Independent) 1,922

This gave an overall result of: Cumann na nGaedheal, 4, Sinn Féin Republican, 3, Labour, 1, Independent, 1.

It was not very different from the result the year before, but given that some 10,000 Republicans were interned and many of their leading local activists had been shot in the Civil War, the swing against the Treaty seemed to become clear as soon as all women over 21 were given the vote, and the younger generation of men who had fought the British out of 26 counties, but were not on the 1918 Register, still in use in the Summer of 1922, got access to the franchise.

Already too, those honest Cumann na nGaedheal back-benchers, who voted for the Treaty on the instructions of Collins and I.R.B. on the basis that it was a "Stepping Stone" were coming to realise that it was not such a thing. Not only had they been forced to include an Oath to the British Monarch in the new Constitution, but the deliberation of the Boundary Commission had still become, and it looked, increasingly, as in those areas which as late as December 6th, 1922, in his inaugural speech as Head of the Free State Government, W.T. Cosgrave hinted would be returned to what Derry City, Tyrone, Fermanagh, South Antrim and South Down had always voted for would be left not only under British rule but under an even more unfair "local majority tyranny" from the B-Specials, the Orange Order and the Stormont Government.

Pádraic O Máille was one of these honest persons, and when the issue came to a head with the threat of an I.R.B. Coup in the Army in 1924, he resigned his membership of Cumann na nGaedheal and formed part of the new protest group Clan Eireann. Other disillusioned pro-Treaty T.D.s., with I.R.B. connections in many cases, resigned their seats altogether, in Carlow-Kilkenny, Cavan, Dublin North (two T.D.s) Dublin South, Sligo-Leitrim (two T.D.s), Mayo North and Roscommon. O Máille stood as a Clann Eireann candidate in the June 1922 General Election, but lost his seat. He ran again in the September General Election of that year as an Independent, but came last in a changed line-up now that Eamon DeValera's new party, Fianna Fáil, had subscribed to the Oath and entered Leinster House. The September 1927 result in Galway saw Cumann na nGaedheal (Paddy Hogan, Sean Broderick, Martin McDonagh and Josie Moggan) elected, while there were five Fianna Fáilers (Frank Fahy, Sean Tubridy, Mark Killilea, Thomas Power and Stephen Jordan). Thus, for the first time since the split about the Treaty five years earlier, there was now a clear democratic majority in Galway against what had been pushed through with such reluctance and disregard for democracy, not to mention the bloody Civil War legacies. Three months previously, in the June 1927 General Election, the issue was much less clear-cut with Cumann na nGaedheal, (Hogan, Broderick, McDonagh), one National League (William John Duffy), one Labour (Gilbert Lynch) and four Fianna Fáil (still abstentionist) T.D.s (Killilea, Tubridy, Fahy and Powell) being returned. I understand that later on, in fact Pádraic O Máille joined Fianna Fáil and was active in the party in the 1930s. Fáilte roimh colas breise.

The tragic and complex nature of our freedom struggle is clear from the fact that it was the attack on O Máille and Sean Hales on December 7th, 1922 which was never claimed or sanctioned by the I.R.A. that was used as an excuse by the new Free State Government to shoot Liam Mellows and other Republicans without trial in the period that followed. Yet, O Máille was to end up, over a decade later, supporting the Fianna Fáil party which grew out of the ruins of the Republicans' failure to win that Civil War. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the fact that the I.R.A. Chief of Staff, who called off the fighting on April 30th, 1923 (after the death of Liam Lynch) Frank Aiken was in charge of the Free State Army which shot Lynch on a mountain-side in Tipperary, as 26-county Minister for Defence, within nine years. Who said times did not change very rapidly in politics until the advent of television? Indeed here in Galway the fact that the man whose memory is honoured in the Renmore Military Barracks, originally the headquarters of the British Army Connaught Rangers regiment, Liam O Maoliosá, was executed by the founding generation of that same "National Army" is something which fascinates visitors from post-colonial countries from right around the world, when they visit Galway. Only official mentions of these strange realities are almost as rare as references to the statue of Mellows in Eyre Square.

The strongly pro-Free State Pádraic O Conaire gets all the mentions in identifying a Galway location! He is almost as famous as the mermaid in Copenhagen — and had almost as many mutilations over the years! The dramatic circumstances surrounding the unveiling of a statue to the patriot dead at the end of Brendan O hEithir's novel "Lig Sinn i gCathú" needs to be reconsidered in the light of all this. Because the best fiction is usually based, if not on facts, at least on a plausible variation of the truth. Will we have to wait for a Celtic scholar from Copenhagen or someplace where they take the teaching of Irish studies seriously and are not reluctant to probe the relationship between authors and the political and social circumstances which moulded their ideas, before we have a Liam Mellows Summer School? Would Irish history be different if he had not used the Irish version of his name in 1922, had been elected again as a T.D. in the "Pact Election," and therefore, possibly, have avoided execution by his political opponents in the dark days of December 1922?

Any African, Aisan or Latin American scholar would understand the scenario perfectly ... for while history can never answer the "if only" question, any serious study of who and what we are does need to examine the various possible options in context. It is the contexts which are deliberately written out of the scripts by our politicians and the politically-motivated historians, that are the real problem in our attempts to understand, at this remove.