

Healy-Rae once again gains at our expense

TIME and time again, TDs and senators have been warned about using pre-paid Oireachtas envelopes – or indeed other Leinster House facilities – for electioneering purposes.

Yet, as night follows day the rule is routinely pushed to the limit by public representatives in the run-up to elections; be it local, European or, as is now the case, the looming general election.

This time the culprit is Independent TD Michael Healy-Rae. The Kerry politician has used the Dáil's free postal service, sending unsolicited raffle tickets to his constituents as part of a fundraising drive for his election campaign.

The facility whereby politicians avail of prepaid envelopes in order to keep in contact with their constituents on local matters is long-established and justified. Public representative should not be out of pocket as a result of carrying out their duties, but equally it is incumbent upon them not to abuse any taxpayer-funded services for their personal benefit.

The postal service may be free for TDs and senators but it is paid for by the public purse, which in turn is provided by hard-pressed taxpayers. Our elected representatives are obliged to ensure value for money for the limited tax take, rather than squandering it on expenses that are not about Dáil business.

After suffering the embarrassment of having more than €2,600 of taxpayers' money spent on phone calls made from the Oireachtas to help him win a celebrity reality TV show, one might expect Mr Healy-Rae to be particularly scrupulous in this regard.

Unfortunately this does not appear to be the case. His constituency mailshot that include €30 raffle tickets are the actions of an opportunist, determined to manipulate the system for his own gain. His explaining how the envelopes also contained official correspondence scarcely excuses his actions; rather, it highlights his awareness of the rules governing free postage and his willingness to bend them to his purposes.

Real toll of top-ups

AFTER the recent controversy, it's hardly a surprise that donations to the Central Remedial Clinic almost collapsed last year. Just €27,223 – a paltry sum compared to the €700,000 collected in 2014 – was donated, signalling not just a total lack of trust in the organisation but more crucially, a very bleak outlook for the hundreds of disabled children and adults who depend on the CRC for essential therapies and support.

The tragedy of the scandal about salaries and pension top-ups for senior CRC staff is that it's the vulnerable who pay the price – not the disgraced board members who walked off into the sunset with six-figure pay packets and a nice financial cushion for the future.

Neither literally nor figuratively have they paid for the damage they did to the charity sector, for eroding the goodwill that had been engendered throughout society or for depriving people with disabilities of the opportunity to enjoy more fulfilling lives.

Eubank vs Katie?

FORMER boxing champion Chris Eubank's opinion on women's boxing is bound to divide public opinion. While there are undoubtedly those who believe, like Eubank, that the boxing ring is no place for a lady, there will also be those who, recalling Katie Taylor's Olympic glory, will argue against such discriminatory attitudes and for the rights of women to compete in any sport, regardless of the physical risks that it might entail.

Perhaps the best way to settle the issue is for Chris Eubank to face Katie Taylor in the ring.

As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

A terrible b

Sinn Féin claim to be the heirs of the 1916 Rebels: and yes, both believed in the use of force against their oppressors. But while the leaders of 1916 were prepared to die in open battle, the leaders of the IRA were not – but *were* happy to kill civilians. That is the difference between a true martyr... and a murderer

I GREW up listening to my grandfather tell stories of the 1916 Rising. He was a boy of nine when the rebellion broke out and he lived near the scene of the fighting in the centre of Dublin. Like most people of that generation, he was proud of what the rebels had achieved.

He was by no means an ardent republican, but he was a proud and patriotic Irishman. He lived through the horrors of the War of Independence and the subsequent partitioning of this island in 1922. For him, the Ireland of Liam Cosgrave, Eamon de Valera and Seán Lemass was the true legacy of 1916.

He often told me how his family feared to venture outside their little house off Clanbrassil Street as the fighting raged, and how he could clearly hear the artillery pound the rebel strongholds.

This was living history and, as I listened to my grandfather, I had a sense of being part of it. Linked by the generations, I felt as though I had somehow been present at the birth of this State.

There was, however, something else that I picked up from him, something that I hold firm to this very day. He detested Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA.

That was because he considered their terror campaign a cowardly betrayal of our national principles and the true legacy of 1916.

During the dark days of the Seventies, he and I would often sit listening to the early morning news. Invariably, the headlines would be dominated by the latest IRA atrocity. My grandfather would slowly shake his head and condemn the perpetrators as craven murderers.

How was it that this man who lived through the Rising and who saw its leaders as heroes, could so resolutely condemn their self-professed heirs? After all, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, to which Pádraig Pearse, James Connolly and Thomas MacDonagh belonged, was no less wedded to physical force than the Provisional IRA.

Both groups believed, as Pearse wrote, that 'nationhood is not achieved otherwise than in arms'.

The simple answer is, that like so many of his generation, my grandfather drew a moral distinction between the leaders of 1916 and the masked murderers of the IRA. He firmly believed something which he, in turn, engrained in me: that there is no moral equivalence between those who are prepared to die for their beliefs in the pursuit of freedom and those who are prepared to murder for theirs, for the sake of liberty.

As he saw it, the Rising was led by people of moral conviction who were perhaps misguided, but who were nevertheless prepared to die with dignity for what they believed.

THOSE who led the IRA campaign were guided neither by idealism nor by such moral courage. They were, in effect, a ruthless death squad that tortured and terrorised this country for decades. Those of us who grew up in the grim shadow of their so-called 'war' can clearly see why they were more like Isis than Pádraig Pearse or Nelson Mandela.

It is true that Pearse, in particular, justified the use of violence in a manner that could be construed as lending legitimacy to the IRA. Writing in 1914, he asserted: 'We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing, and a nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed: and slavery is one of them.'

It was, however, in the way

SATURDAY
ESSAY



by Mark
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Pearse and the other leaders of 1916 conducted their rebellion which clearly separates them from those who would seek to seize their legacy.

Those who commanded the 1916 Rising did so openly and in their own name.

Without any realistic hope of success, and in broad daylight, they led their volunteers into battle. And when Pearse brought the revolt to what history now regards as its climactic moment – when, that is, he emerged from the GPO to read the Proclamation to a small crowd of bemused spectators, he proudly did so without a balaclava.

By May 1, 1916, and after nearly a week of fighting, 485 people had been killed, more than half of whom were civilians. However, the leaders of the Rising did not directly target civilians.

Indeed, on April 29 Pearse

issued a note of surrender in which he expressed his desire to prevent 'further slaughter of the civilian population'.

Moreover, on the morning of the Rising, James Connolly reportedly said to William O'Brien: 'Bill, we are going out to be slaughtered.' Like Pearse, Connolly knew there was only one way the Rising would end. They were on their way to a very public martyrdom and neither fear nor the prospect of abject failure would stop them.

It is one thing to offer yourself up for slaughter, but quite another to knowingly slaughter the innocent while safeguarding your own skin.

For Pearse, self-sacrifice was something virtuous if the result was liberty. As he wrote in his last play, *The Singer*: 'I will take no pike, I will go into battle with bare hands. I will stand up before

the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree.'

Pearse and his fellow rebels were, in other words, prepared to sacrifice themselves for their ideals. In sharp contrast, the leaders of the IRA were not.

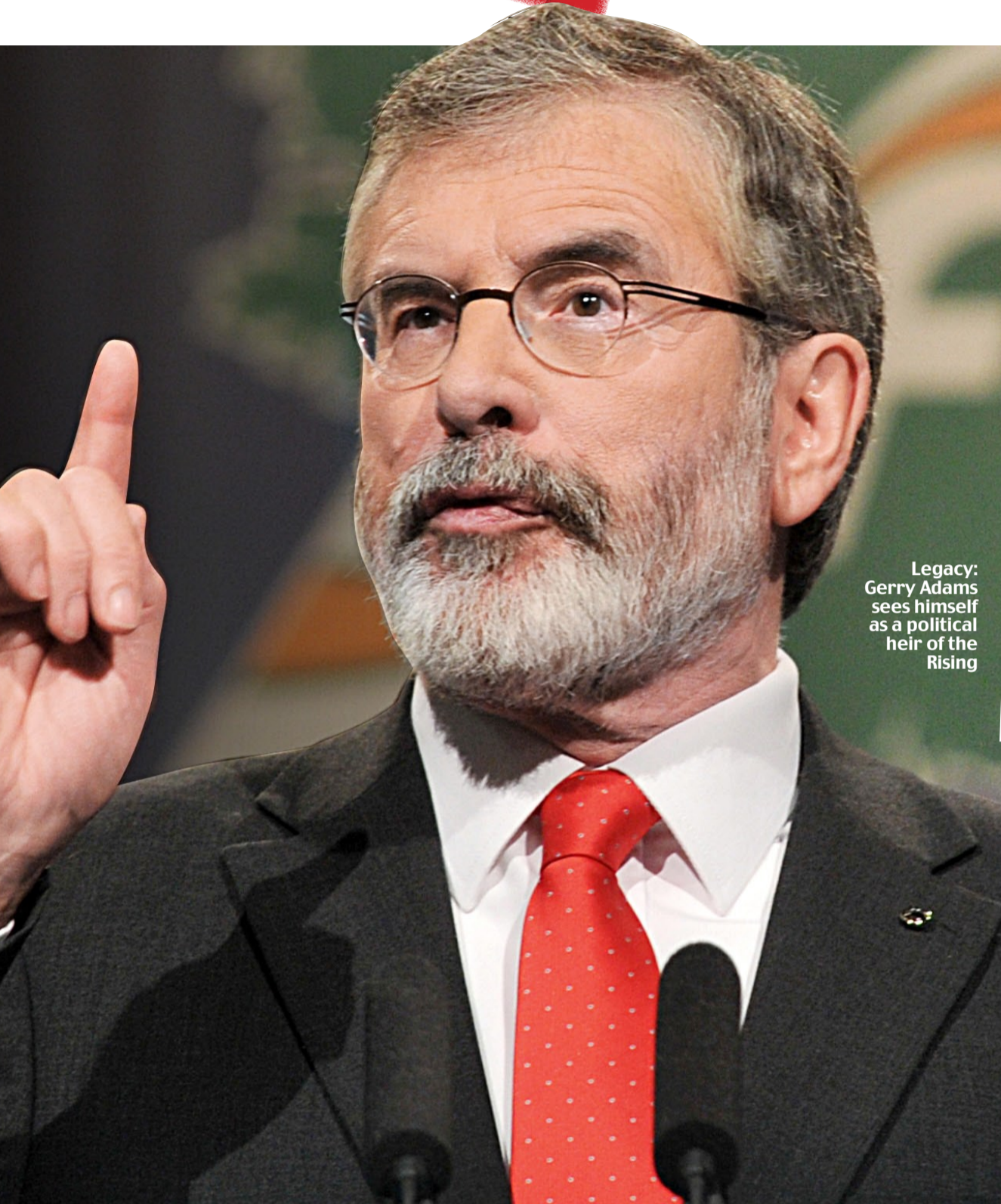
Instead, they murdered and maimed others for 'ideals' that few shared.

PEOPLE may argue that the Hunger Strikes of 1981 were an example of noble martyrdom and the form of self-sacrifice championed by Pearse. However, the big difference is surely that if Pearse and Connolly were around in 1981, they would have gone on hunger strike themselves and not sent their foot soldiers out to die.

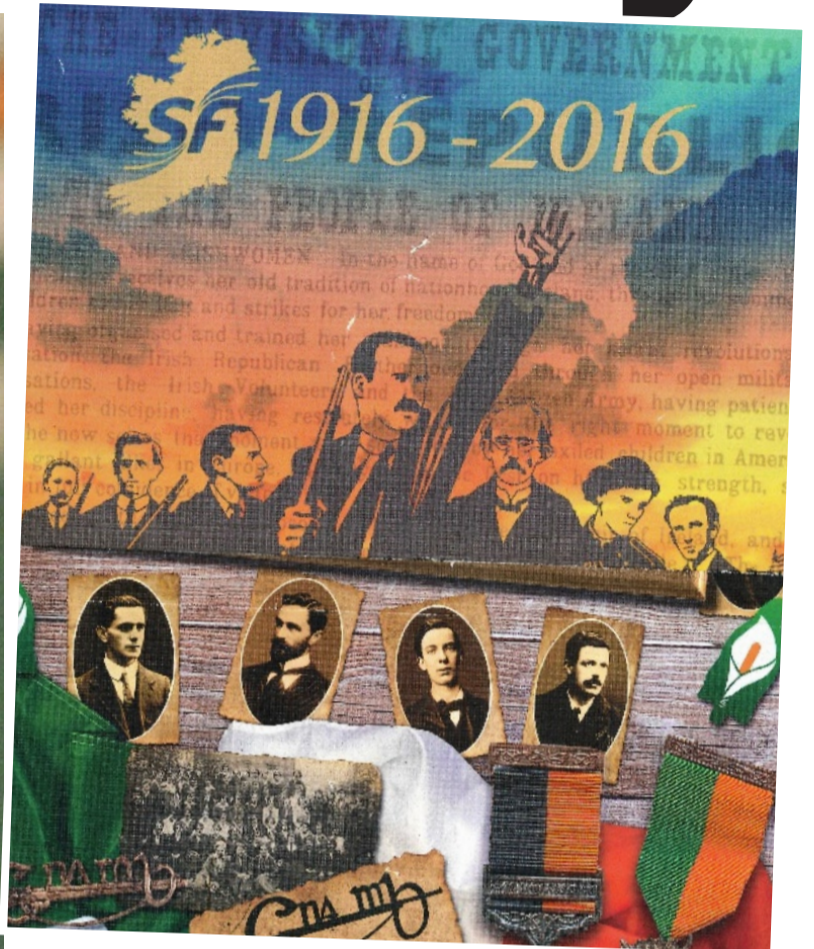
Sending others out to starve themselves to death can only be interpreted as a cruel act of moral cowardice, one sharply at odds with the example of those who faced the firing squad in 1916.

Most people of my generation vividly recall those television images of masked and armed IRA terrorists issuing murderous

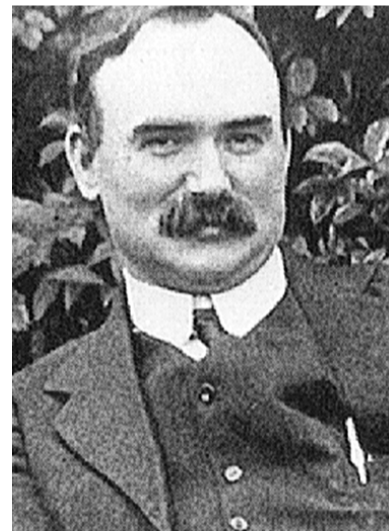
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Legacy: Gerry Adams sees himself as a political heir of the Rising



Hijack: A Sinn Féin campaign graphic on an election flyer



Heroes of the Rising: James Connolly, left, and Pádraig Pearse

threats to the camera. How was that any different to those masked Isis jihadis using the web to threaten terror and slaughter in our cities?

We saw it all before in the propaganda videos of the so-called Provisionals. We saw it all before in the vicious atrocities perpetrated by men too cowardly to show their faces. We saw it when, in 1974, the IRA bombed pubs in Birmingham, murdering 21 civilians.

We saw it when they bombed the La Mon Restaurant in Belfast, killing 12 civilians and injuring 30. We saw it when they murdered 11 civilians during a Remembrance Day Service in Enniskillen in 1987.

We saw it too when, in 1972, they pulled mother of ten Jean McConville from her home in Belfast, before torturing and shooting her in the back of the head. And we saw it most vividly when, in 1990, they tied three men into cars loaded with explosives, before ordering them to drive into British Army checkpoints.

Long before the suicide bomb, the IRA had devised the 'proxy' or 'human' bomb.

This litany of horrors did not exclude the murdering of innocent children, most notably three-year-old Jonathan Ball and 12-year-old Tim Parry. On March 20, 1993, two IRA bombs detonated in a busy shopping

area of Warrington in England. The first explosive drove shoppers directly into the path of the second device which led to the deaths of the two young boys.

This was nothing less than jihad by another name. By callously slaughtering innocent men, women and children, the IRA provided a blueprint for all those fanatical movements that would follow.

Of the total killings during the so-called 'Troubles', the IRA murdered 1,696, which is 49% of all those who perished. And 338 of those IRA victims were Catholic.

It is a moral travesty to link such barbarism to the events of Easter 1916.

It is true, as broadcaster Joe Duffy has shown in his excellent book *Children Of The Rising*, that 38 children under the age of 16 died in the fighting. None, however, was directly murdered by the rebels.

Indeed, when 15-year-old Bridget McKane was killed by a stray rebel bullet in her home in Moore Lane, as the rebels retreated from the GPO, those responsible were distraught and traumatised by what had happened.

As they had tried to fire through a lock of the McKane house in order to escape, the bullet accidentally killed Bridget and wounded her father.

A number of the leaders were present - Pádraig Pearse, James Connolly (on a stretcher), Joseph Plunkett, Seán McDermott and Tom Clarke. Michael Collins was outside.

When he became aware of what had just happened to the child, Pádraig Pearse, according to witness testimony, was distraught, declaring: 'My God, I'm sorry this happened. What can we do?'

Seán MacDermott, meanwhile, turned to Bridget's wounded father, telling him that if he wished, he would make sure that the culprits were punished.

CAN you imagine the IRA leadership weeping over Tim Parry? Did Gerry Adams ever convey an IRA offer to punish Jonathan Ball's killer?

This is not to lessen the gravity of the civilian death toll of 374 souls. It is, however, to say that it is inconceivable that any of the leaders of 1916 would have run around in balaclavas bombing churches, restaurants, packed shopping malls and shooting mothers in the back of the head. It is inconceivable to imagine them strapping innocent people

to cars packed with remotely controlled explosives, murdering children or torturing people in back-rooms before dumping their bodies in unmarked graves.

To those like Pearse or Joseph Plunkett, someone who was steeped in the mystical writings of St John of the Cross, such acts would have been considered not a necessary evil, but evil, pure and simple.

Even now, as the bodies of the so-called 'Disappeared' are still being exhumed from their makeshift tombs, the leadership of Sinn Féin seek to portray themselves as the rightful successors of Pearse, Connolly and Plunkett.

Indeed, only this week, we learned that the election brochures of their candidates in the upcoming election carry the words and image of the 1916 Proclamation.

Last year, meanwhile, while denying - yet again - that he was ever a member of the organisation, Gerry Adams said: 'I don't disassociate myself from the IRA'.

This must mean that he supported their appalling murder methods and terror tactics.

If so, the question then is this: Would those who, in 1916, stared squarely into the barrel of a rifle in Kilmainham Jail, have supported a decades-long killing spree in which

the vast majority were innocent civilians? Would they have supported a 'war' in which they themselves were not at the frontline, fighting in their own name and with their faces clearly visible to the 'enemy'?

Would those 1916 rebels of high ideals have permitted other people to be slaughtered on their behalf, to be immolated, maimed and scarred for life simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time?

History firmly suggests that they would not, and I think that anyone who lived through the terrible years of the 'Troubles' could not, in all good conscience, see any moral similarities between the signatories of the Proclamation and those who caused untold death and destruction while cravenly lurking in the shadows.

My grandfather died in 1986 believing that this country - his country - had been secured by the sacrifice of many great people.

Those patriots did not include the men in masks that he considered so cowardly, so vicious and so threatening to our hard-won democracy.

As we approach the Centenary of the Rising, we owe it to the memory of those who sacrificed so much for this State, that the legacy of 1916 is not now usurped by those who sacrificed nothing except innocent blood.