

Seán Moylan

-was he a rebel?

A review of Aideen Carroll's
Seán Moylan- rebel leader

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Aubane
Historical
Society

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Was Seán Moylan a rebel?

A full biography of Seán Moylan was long overdue and anyone interested in Moylan and his inside story of the War of Independence would welcome any additional information on his life and actions. This biography provides some interesting and useful new information. As the biographer, Aideen Carroll, being a granddaughter of Moylan, had access to family records it also includes very interesting family documents and photographs that have not hitherto been published, as far as I know.

However there are aspects of the biography that do not do justice to Moylan and present a less than accurate and just account of some of his political positions. I think this arises from the fact that Ms. Carroll has been influenced by the parameters set by Professor Peter Hart and others in analysing the politics of the War of Independence and the conflict over the Treaty. Professor Hart is acknowledged in her introduction as a guide and two of his books are given in her bibliography. Even though he has been caught out inventing evidence, she treats him as a reliable historian.

While the book is interesting for the family mementoes and anecdotes it contains — drawn from sources not accessible to the public, it is problematic in other respects. And the problems begin with the sub-title, *Rebel Leader*. When was Moylan a rebel?

He was perhaps a would-be rebel in 1916. The Easter event at the GPO might be called a Rebellion without too much damage to the language and ethos of the democratic era. Although Britain had no democratic authority to govern Ireland, neither had the Republican Volunteer groups a democratic mandate to dispute by force the rule of a Government based on force. But Moylan did not fire a shot in 1916. There would have been many Irish rebels in the course of the long English domination of Ireland. When I say that Moylan was not a rebel, it is not my intention to disparage them. Rebellion was the only form of protest against authoritarian misrule that was open to them.

Moylan's military activity began after the Irish electorate had voted to establish independent Government in Ireland, after the elected representatives had met as a Parliament, declared independence, and established a Government to give effect to the election mandate — and after the British Parliament had shown that it would take no heed of the Irish election and would continue governing Ireland on the authority of mere force. This policy by Britain made a war inevitable — unless the Irish people did not take themselves seriously. But Moylan and many others did.

This is not exactly the behaviour of a rebel, of somebody who just rejects authority and accepted conventions — a troublemaker. This may seem a playing with words but it is crucially important to consider these things before looking at the events of Moylan's life, what motivated him and how we should judge him.

A rebel person is the cause of his own behaviour. The person who is caused to act by the behaviour of others is a very different kettle of fish and their actions are to be judged in a totally different light. The actions may resemble each other in the actual facts of what they do but their cause and their purpose are totally different.

In fact if these distinctions are not borne in mind when dealing with any history it is very easy to get cause and effect mixed up and history can then quite literally be turned upside down. I am sorry to say that this is evident in Ms. Carroll's book.

Historical background

The structure of Irish life was shattered by the Williamite conquest in the 17th century and the system of Penal Laws that was imposed on the basis of the Conquest. After a century and a half of oppressed fragmentation, the fragments reassembled themselves and asserted a national will. Pearse described the 19th century history of Ireland as the desperate attempt of a mob to realise itself as a nation.

When national life was restored in the 1880s it demanded no more than Home Rule within the United Kingdom at first, because Britain said that all the resources of the Empire would be mobilised to prevent Ireland from becoming independent. Then in 1914 Britain made war on Germany and Austria and Turkey under the slogan of Democracy and Self-Determination. It was put to the Irish that, if they were genuine democrats and nationalists like they said they were, they would rally to the British flag, under which Democracy and Nationalism would reign supreme in the world. Many Irishmen did not believe a word of it. Moylan was one of them. But a great many did believe, and joined the British Army in the war, in order to kill and be killed in the cause of freedom. And after that things could never be the same again.

The Election of 1918

The post-War election in Ireland was contested by a party whose programme was Irish independence. That had never happened before. And the independence party won a sweeping victory in Ireland. When the British Government promptly forgot all that it had been saying for four years about Democracy and the Rights of Nations, the party that won the Election set up a Parliament and Government to run the country in accordance with its mandate, and with the right that Britain had been proclaiming to the world for four years.

Moylan went to war under the authority of the democratically elected Government of his country. How does that make him a rebel? He made war on the Imperial Power which tried to carry on governing the country after its right to do so had been overwhelmingly rejected by the electorate.

He acted militarily in support of the Constitutional authority established on the basis of a mandate from the Irish electorate, after the Imperial Power had abandoned all pretence of democratic legitimacy.

This was how the War of Independence and its cause was always looked at. But this biography does not introduce the war like that.

How did the War of Independence start?

The author makes a fleeting reference to the 1918 Election result but for her the significance of the First Dáil is overshadowed by the ambush of two RIC men at Soloheadbeg in January 1919 which is dealt with at some length by the author. It is

described as "... an identifiable moment that marked the reopening of hostilities." (p.29). It is not made clear when hostilities were closed in Ireland.

Consider some of the things that were happening during 1918 alone before Ms. Carroll sees 'the reopening of hostilities':

On 16 April 1918 the Military Service (Ireland) Bill passed into law. This was described as "a declaration of war on the Irish nation" by the very moderate people who made up the Irish Convention at the time. On May 10, 1918 Lord French accepted the offer to become Lord Lieutenant of Ireland "as a military viceroy at the head of a quasi-military government". French took steps to send an extra 12,000 troops to Ireland (25,000 were already here) and planned to establish four "entrenched air camps" which could be used to bomb Sinn Féiners. Following a proclamation by Lord French on May 16, 1918 in relation to an alleged German plot, more than 100 members of Sinn Féin were imprisoned without trial under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). By the end of 1918 about 200 Sinn Féiners were imprisoned under this act. In other words, there was a British army of occupation enforcing martial law in Ireland. And this state of affairs was created when there was clearly growing support for Sinn Fein in a series of by-elections.

In the course of these elections, newspapers and meetings supporting Republicans were banned and suppressed, and there were many arrests. Arms were seized from Volunteers, but not from the UVF.

In 1918 civil conflict continued: baton/bayonet charges, arrests under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) and 1887 Crimes Act, hunger strikes, killings, banning meetings, etc. In April 1918 several newspapers were suppressed and overseas circulation of others was banned. On 28 March 1918, Thomas Russell was bayoneted to death by soldiers. On 16 April 1918 an RIC barracks in Kerry was raided for arms and two Volunteers were shot dead. These were the first Volunteers to be killed in arms raids. Though no Volunteer reprisals were officially authorised, on 14 June 1918 two RIC men were fired on in Tralee and one was wounded. On 16 March 1918 the RIC were ordered to smash musical instruments to prevent the playing of "seditious music". The order was carried out. On 25 April 1918 the meaning of "persons of hostile origin" in DORA was extended, from citizens of countries with which Britain was at war, to include persons born in Ireland. On 24 April 1918 a General Strike was held to resist Conscription.

At the end of April 1918, Cathal Brugha (future Defence Minister in the Irish government elected in November 1918) moved to London in order to organise the assassination of leading members of the British government in the House of Commons if and when conscription was ordered for Ireland. On 5 July 1918 the quasi-military government of Lord French banned all meetings and assemblies throughout Ireland. In the course of the month there were 11 baton and bayonet charges by government forces. On 4 August 1918, about 1,500 illegal hurling matches were held. On 15 August 1918 hundreds of illegal public meetings were held and there were many arrests. Throughout this period there were many prison conflicts involving Republicans. The number of Irish Volunteers had risen to about 100,000. In the Volunteer journal 'An t-Óglach' edited by Piaras Béaslaí, Volunteer Ernest

Blythe wrote, from jail in England, that "anyone, civilian or soldier, who assists [in conscription] should be killed ... as opportunity, arises".

A state of war before the War!

When Dáil Éireann met in January 1919 no less than 36 of its elected Members were in jail. In its Message to the Free Nations of the World in January 1919, it declared that “...the existing state of war between Ireland and England can never be ended until Ireland is definitely evacuated by the armed forces of England.” (21/1/1919) and that this justified the Irish Volunteers in “treating the armed forces of the enemy – whether soldiers or policemen – exactly as a National army would treat the members of an invading army”.

This is illustrative of the situation before Soloheadbeg – a state of war existed. Soloheadbeg began nothing! Ms. Carroll ignores this background but goes on to milk the Soloheadbeg ambush for all its worth and says: “Crucially, the Volunteers were an autonomous military force and not under the direction of Dáil Éireann. Local initiatives prevailed and they often took their lead from the Volunteer journal 'An t-Óglach'. In this unusual arrangement lay the future seeds of disconnect over the terms of the Treaty, the Civil War that followed and the culture of violence to achieve political ends which Ireland for many years. The genie was out of the bottle.” (p.29).

It is plain wrong to suggest that the IRA/Volunteers were autonomous. On 20th August 1919, the Dáil adopted an Oath of Allegiance to be subscribed to by all members of the Dáil and by all Volunteers:

“I, A.B., do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I do not and shall not yield a voluntary support to any pretended Government, authority or power within Ireland hostile and inimical thereto, and I do further swear (or affirm) that to the best of my knowledge and ability I will support and defend the Irish Republic and the Government of the Irish Republic, which is Dáil Éireann, against all enemies, foreign and domestic ...”

(The Irish Republic, Dorothy Macardle p.281).

And the IRA Executive later dissolved itself to make the position absolutely clear. The war in which Moylan played a distinguished part was a war waged under democratic authority against a British state whose only authority for governing Ireland lay in its ability to use violence for political ends. So all her hypothesising about the source of future conflict falls down.

But why does Ms. Carroll make such assertions contrary to well known facts?

Britain becomes almost invisible

There is already a clear thread in her account of events. Britain is outside the conflict with a sort of benign interest. Conflict is explained as internally self-generated in Ireland. They are naturally rebels, after all. So political violence, civil wars etc., are natural to them. This is the unvarnished prejudice that lies behind her bland and misleading statements.

In 1912 John Redmond and Patrick Pearse shared a platform in agreement on support for a Home Rule Bill that they expected to be enacted by parliamentary means in ‘the mother of Parliaments.’ The plain fact is that the genie of violent

conflict in modern Ireland was let out of the bottle later in 1912 when the British Tories supported the Ulster Unionists in destroying the agreed policy of their own government by armed force. They were the first to import arms, first to raise an illegal army, the UVF, the first to set up a Provisional government, arrange the first and only successful army mutiny at the Curragh in 1913 and the first to ‘dally’ with the Germans. They succeeded and that set up ‘the culture of violence to achieve political ends’ and no mistake.

That was all within living memory, was current policies, in 1919 because the people and the party that did all this were then in power. They were no more inclined to concede anything to this independence nonsense in 1919 than they were in 1912.

They had of course let an even bigger genie out of the bottle in launching the First World War that killed at least 10 million people and whose consequences led to the bloodiest century in human history and we are still living with its consequence throughout the world.

And of course anyone who knew anything about Irish history knew that the country was held in check by a British military presence since the Williamite wars of the late 17th century and that was used when necessary without compunction.

Soloheadbeg was very *beag* indeed in the context of all this. It hardly merits a blip on the radar of ‘the culture of violence to achieve political ends’ that was familiar in Ireland. But Ms. Carroll has a very different perspective!

Did Moylan and the Republicans cause the Civil war?

The most serious suggestion/allegation that Ms. Carroll makes over and over again is that Moylan and his colleagues were responsible for the ‘civil war.’ In the Introduction she introduces this allegation in a summary of his life: “many believed that he and others like him – Liam Lynch, Ernie O’Malley and Frank Aiken to name a few – started the civil war when it should never have been fought and continued the war when all hope of victory was gone.” (p.14) She clearly insinuates that she aggress with the ‘many’ who accused him and the others.

Moylan never accepted there was even a civil war at all and he was right. There was a dispute over the Treaty but that in itself did not make it a civil war because all sides agreed on the form of government they wanted – a Republic – which means the conflict could not be a civil war. It was about the Treaty proposals and nothing else. Would they help or hinder a Republic and how to react to the threats from Whitehall to implement it and all sides agreed there were real threats of “immediate and terrible war” if it was not implemented holus bolus. Ms. Carroll says a number of times that nobody wanted a civil war. “Everyone shared Moylan’s determination to avoid war.” (p.183) Quite correct but if that was the case why did it happen? This is what Ms. Carroll does not, or cannot explain. Her inability to explain this conundrum is only possible if you ignore the elephant in the parlour who certainly did not mind having a war.

She, like many others nowadays seem to forget the other player, the main player - Britain. That is the elephant in the parlour in so much that is written about this issue. This was the player that caused the escalation to ‘civil war’ quite

specifically by ordering and manipulating the disagreements over the Treaty to a military level with the order to bombard the Four Courts.

And it did so because it wanted the Treaty implemented in an undiluted fashion to create a subservient Dominion status state. Churchill, never, ever, recognised Ireland's right to independence and he made this clear after WWII.

The Stepping Stone argument

But though she keeps suggesting Moylan did not want civil war and did everything to avoid it she also suggests that perhaps in his heart of hearts he was sorry about what he did and that he had got it wrong. And when evidence can't be found she speculates freely.

When dealing with the late 30s she speculates: "The oath of Allegiance was disposed of and a new Irish Constitution came into force in December 1937. One suspects that Moylan must have wondered if Collins had been right after all; that the Treaty was a stepping stone to real independence and therefore the Civil war had been fought for nothing. If this thought troubled him in the small hours he never shared it. He never spoke in detail of the Civil war and expressed no regrets for fighting the war." (p. 227)

Moylan and De Valera never rejected the stepping stone argument in principle at any stage. It is a question of what steps and what stones are we talking about to step on?

The stepping stone argument is a much used and a seductive notion but it relies on what is not said about it. Let's fill out the metaphor. Stepping stones are (were?) a crude and simple method of crossing a river or stream. I wonder how many of our new historians and commentators who bandy around the metaphor has ever had to negotiate a real one? From personal experience and to mix the metaphors they are not a walk in the park at the best of times. In a situation of full flood and a hurricane blowing they are very tricky indeed to negotiate. Such was the analogous political situation in 1921/22. Add to that, if there is someone trying to prevent you crossing the steps in such conditions it becomes very, very tricky indeed. One false move and you are done for.

If the people preventing you from advancing on the steps also happen to be Winston Churchill and Lloyd George (for it is them), the most powerful politicians in the world just then, you have a real problem indeed. One would get the impression sometimes from our modern historians that it was De Valera and Moylan who were standing in the way rather than behind him trying to help Collins find his footing.

Churchill and Lloyd George were well used to these situations. They got Collins to miss his footing right at the beginning by having him agree to their final ultimatum of signing the Treaty without consulting the Dáil as was agreed and as was practiced by him up till then. That meant he had provoked distrust among his supporters before he took a single step. He got off on the wrong foot in putting a case for the Treaty.

He followed his IRB instincts and thought that he could persuade and contrive to hold all ends together. No doubt his very success hitherto created a certain hubris.

Nothing was beyond him. But the situation had moved beyond the reach of any conspiratorial or manipulating approach as used in the past (and successful these approaches had been before) but there was now a popular democratic polity in operation that had swept the country after the 1918 Election and was spearheaded and personified by the IRA. And he failed to convince *them*.

Nevertheless, he was offered many stepping stones by the Republicans to help him on – a relationship like Cuba had with the USA, External Association (Document Number 2), an agreed New Constitution, an agreed Election Pact, etc. Anything to avoid an escalation of the conflict among themselves. But Churchill and Whitehall would have none of them. Collins was ordered over to London to toe the line, reject the agreed Constitution, drop the agreed Electoral Pact and bombard the Four Courts. There was to be no crossing over at all and any stones were kicked into the river. He was not even allowed a pebble to step on. The Treaty was the destination - nowhere else! In these circumstances how could Moylan and De Valera be accused of starting the civil war?

In other words, De Valera and Moylan far from denying the stepping stone approach had tried to lay down more stones to step on. But Collins was not allowed step on them. (Only two politicians kept their footing in negotiations with Whitehall in that period, De Valera and Ataturk.)

Ms. Carroll has a euphemistic way of describing these things. She describes the breaking of the Electoral Pact as follows: “The De Valera–Collins pact fell apart...” (p.185). This reminds me of the schoolboy explanation for the broken window – ‘It broke, Sir!’ The pact was quite clearly broken by Churchill and Lloyd George and there was no spontaneous falling apart.

She describes the rejection of the agreed Constitution as follows: “The architects of the Treaty were under pressure from the British Cabinet to frame a Constitution acceptable to both Britain and the anti-treaty faction. It was an impossible task.” (p184.) Why was it impossible? It was because the British would not have anything that altered a jot of the Treaty even though the new Constitution was agreed between the Treatyites and the ‘anti-Treaty faction’. So it was also a rejection of the Treatyites’ own Constitution as well, not just the ‘faction’s.’ But as the man said, it’s the way you tell it.

All this is described by Ms. Carroll as ‘a slide’ to civil war. Another euphemism. There was no sliding on either side. One side, the Republicans, tried everything to stop a war and the other was determined to implement the subservience clauses of the Treaty unchanged come what may and it was they who escalated the conflict by initiating military conflict. The British had no qualms about a war especially as others would do the fighting for them. They were past masters at ensuring these arrangements.

Whose Treaty was it?

Let’s look again at the statement on page 185, quoted above which goes: “*The architects of the Treaty were under pressure from the British cabinet to frame a constitution acceptable to both Britain and the anti-Treaty faction*”. Who were the

"architects of the Treaty"? Lloyd George, Churchill, Birkenhead. Collins and Griffiths were its recipients. Did Lloyd George etc. want Collins to "...*frame a constitution acceptable to... the anti-Treaty faction*"?

What *"the anti-Treaty faction"* wanted was a democratically established Republic. The Treaty faction wanted that too. But the Treaty faction was terrified into making a deal which demolished the Republic immediately, with a view, they said, to restoring it later.

Having overawed the Treaty faction and getting them to sign up for Government under the Crown, did Lloyd George and Churchill want those who were not overawed by them, or intimidated by their threats, to be presented with a constitution under the Treaty that was acceptable to them? Or was their purpose to get the Treaty faction to make war on the anti-Treaty faction?

Collins tried to modify, or 'interpret' the Treaty, when drafting a Constitution under it, in a way that would be acceptable to those who stood by the Republic. Whitehall vetoed every modification. Finally it ordered Collins to make war on the Anti-Treatyites, or else the British Army would do so: and then because the Treaty would be off.

What Government did the Republicans conflict with?

Ms. Carroll can't resist pointing the finger at Republicans for causing the Civil war. She says: "*As soon as the army developed a political agenda that brought it into conflict with the government civil war was inevitable.*" (p.175).

She is dealing with the situation that developed after the Treaty was accepted by a majority drawn from the Dáil, but meeting as The Parliament of Southern Ireland, under the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which the Dáil had rejected.

The Dáil had never been recognised by Britain and the Treaty did not recognise it, and the first task of the Treatyites was to abolish it.

When representatives from the Dáil met as The Parliament of Southern Ireland it was under British authority as *"the Provisional Government"*. As there was already an established Irish Government based on the Dáil, what need was there for a *"Provisional Government"*? It was needed for the purpose of demonstrating that legitimate political power in Ireland could only exist on British authority.

Republicans then found themselves without the Government and the Republic that had been established by one General Election and consolidated by another – and for which they had fought and sworn to serve.

The only force left intact from that overwhelmingly elected Government in 1918 and 1921 was its Army – the IRA. As it no longer had its legal and elected government to continue to serve and supply it with political guidance it had to develop its own political positions. The Republicans and the IRA did not and could not clash with the Dáil as that had been abolished. This is the type of thing that's forgotten these days.

Ms. Carroll does not specify which Government she is talking about when she says that the IRA found itself in conflict with it. There were a number to choose from. After the self-abolition of the Dáil there was not a legitimately elected

Government in the country! There were however a number of others without any legitimate authority.

To summarise the situation on government in Ireland in late 1921 there were:

- (i) the Dáil, now abolished;
- there were the two governments set up by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, (ii) Stormont and the (iii) Government of Southern Ireland which had no legitimacy whatever in Irish law;
- those that won the vote on the Treaty created another government, the (iv) Provisional Government;
- and there was the planned (v) Free State government which was not yet set up or elected;
- and there was of course the (vi) British Government which considered itself still in charge and that it was simply delegating some local affairs to a subordinate body and had the troops available to enforce that.

So there were five governments claiming authority in the country and another to be created but only one had any electoral and legal legitimacy based on Irish law. And Ms. Carroll claims that those faithful to that one and only legitimate, electorally based government were the cause of all the trouble! Her reasoning defies all logic and common sense. I have a feeling there could be a rotating movement observed in Kiskeam graveyard if it was read there.

Was Moylan ever “troubled in the small hours”?

As quoted above Ms. Carroll wonders if Moylan was ever troubled in the small hours about his role in the civil war. I doubt it. By the late 30s Moylan and his colleagues felt quite happy with themselves. They had got rid of all the Treaty obligations, got the Ports back, got rid of the annuities, got rid of the Oath, got rid of the Attorney General, got an agreed Constitution, had established the country's independent stance in the League of Nations, had overcome the Fascist threat, had established a Presidency, had restored the Dáil to its proper role, had an independent economic policy, etc, etc.

These achievements had not been easy and it was achieved by them holding firm to what they believed as the elephant in the parlour, Britain, got weaker in the 20s and 30s and was no longer as powerful a force as it was earlier. The most serious setback for the Empire was its defeat by Ataturk which earned him the accolade in Republican Ireland of “‘Attaboy, Ataturk!” The Empire was disorientated after that.

However, the strange thing was that as Britain got weaker the Free State had got *more* committed to the Treaty obligations and forgot all about the stepping stones and ‘the freedom to achieve freedom’. They got to like their chains. They developed an earlier version of the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ when hostages form a bond with their captors. The Collins vision was forgotten. They made a virtue of their subservience. Far from being “the least objectionable way forward” (p.174) as Ms.

Carroll described the Treaty to justify its acceptance it had now become the only way forward for the Treatyites. They opposed every move forward on the stepping stones and got more and more involved with the running of the Empire.

The Treatyites had talked the talk about these stepping stones and the freedom to achieve freedom but it was just that – talk. Moylan and the Republicans walked the walk and crossed over the river to independence. That is why the Treatyite party and its successors have never since won an election on its own. As the people gained in self-confidence that party declined. Put simply, the ‘many’ respected those who had stood their ground.

That is why I believe Moylan was not a troubled man. The Free Staters proved him right in the end!

Shame-faced Free Staters

If anyone lost sleep over the acceptance of the Treaty and the ‘civil war’ I suggest it was the Treatyites. They tried to put an acceptable gloss on what they were doing in enforcing the Treaty but initially in their hearts they actually hated it as much as the Republicans and when they spoke honestly they made that clear. It was they, not Moylan who might have had concerns “*in the small hours.*”

In September 1922 they discussed the Treaty in the Free State Parliament free of the presence of the Republicans and this is what one of their leading members, Dr Patrick McCartan a well known and forthright political activist for over 50 years had to say:

“Dr. McCartan (Pro-Treaty) I am not very enthusiastic about the Free State. It is a sham and does not give liberty or freedom to this country. We are not free and the fight will have to go on in the future for a Republic and for a united Ireland....I hope it will be on a much larger scale and that it will succeed” (27/9/1922, Vol.1, No.13, Col.886)

and

“Dr. McCartan (Pro-Treaty) Those who voted for the Treaty were traitors to the Republic. We are the rebels, and they (the Irregulars) are the patriots. I voted for the Treaty and I submit I swallowed the oath, and every one of you voted for the Treaty swallowed your oaths for the Republic” (28/9/1922, Vol.1, No. 14, Col. 935).

McCartan spoke what they all really believed. He was not contradicted and others merely echoed him in less trenchant ways. They were ashamed of what they had done. The Treaty was based, as Liam Mellows put it, not on the will of the people but on the fear of the people and when the people were no longer afraid they voted out the Treatyites, voted in the party that they had defeated militarily in the civil war with a mercenary army and they have never been elected on their own again. That speaks volumes about the ‘many’ that Ms. Carroll hypothesises about supporting the Treaty. The ‘many’ really looked on their support for the Treaty as an aberration that was best forgotten.

Moylan and industrial schools

At the end of her introduction Ms. Carroll summarises what seems like what she considers a Moylan legacy and says: “Moylan was also a Dáil Deputy and a government Minister at a time when there was entrenched violence and abuse within the industrial schools system. This system destroyed many lives and looking back we wonder why that political generation and many agencies failed to root it out.”(p.14)

All states have dark, violent and repressive aspects, even the most liberal and democratic. These are never pleasant things to behold and certainly not to experience. But public opinion tolerates them and public opinion sometimes allows their amendment when society feels it can allow such changes. But the state will always maintain its right to oppression and suppression to serve its and society’s needs and society will agree. The forms change rather than such things become redundant.

In my school days the bamboo cane and a heavy leather strap were liberally used. That was accepted by all as normal and particularly by our parents whose only reservation was likely to be that we had not got a sufficient amount of both! It would now be almost unimaginable to schoolchildren and would certainly qualify as child abuse.

Seán Moylan was the Minister for Education for part of my schooldays. It never did and never would occur to me or my peers to hold him in some way responsible for our sore hands and bottoms. Moylan was renowned for his decency and humanity which was recognised by his bitterest enemies at the height of the war – and which helped save his life.

It would be a cheap and gratuitous insult to such a humane man to associate him in any way with some particular responsibility for that and other accepted but unpleasant norms of his time. Yet this biographer does just that. I think that is simply disgraceful.

Now read on.....

Ms. Carroll refers a lot to Moylan’s Witness Statement to the Bureau of Military History as her main source for the crucial period of his involvement in the War of Independence. We have published it in full with more material by him – speeches, poetry, and letters to Joe McGarrity and with commentaries on his life and achievements by a number of people including Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Éamon Ó Cuív.

As she does not see fit to refer to this publication anywhere in her book a reader might get the impression that to read the whole Statement he/she would need to go to the Bureau of Military History or the National Library in Dublin to access it.

We have also published a collection of other Witness Statements by members in his Brigade area, relevant publications on the period by Dr. Brian Murphy OSB, Eoin Neeson, Batt O’Connor TD, Kevin Girvin, Brendan Clifford, Manus O’Riordan, Niall Meehan, Owen Sheridan, Alan Ellis and many others together with a number of publications on Peter Hart’s work. None of these are noted either by Ms. Carroll though readers might find them helpful. See list below.

Annex

Professor Peter Hart

It is clear Ms. Carroll has been influenced by the new parameters that have been set by Professor Peter Hart and others in analysing the events and politics of the War of Independence and the conflict over the Treaty. Professor Hart is acknowledged in her introduction as a guide and two of his books are given in her bibliography. So, as he was an influence it is useful to take a very brief look at his views, as they, in various guises, now dominate Irish history writing in academia and the media.

Professor Peter Hart's view of the War of Independence – the Black and Tan view

He outlined what he thinks of the War of Independence in the Irish Times and therefore was not satisfied with just putting his views in his books. He wanted the world to know what he thinks:

“... the Dail had no legal standing and was never recognised by any foreign government. Nor did the IRA, as a guerrilla force acting without uniforms and depending on their civilian status for secrecy, meet the requirements of international law. The British government was therefore within its rights to give courts-martial the power to order executions.” (Irish Times, 23 June 1998).

And furthermore *“Nor were members of the IRA protected by the Hague Convention, the basis for the law of war on land. The British government and its forces were not at war in this sense. To be recognised as belligerent soldiers, the guerillas would have had to be fighting for a responsible established state, wear a recognisable uniform or emblem, carry their arms openly, and not disguise themselves as civilians. None of these conditions applied. It is of course true that international law favours established states, but if any group can claim belligerent status when using political violence, then so can the INLA or the UVF. The Oklahoma bombers would also conceivably have a right to POW status.”* (Irish Times, 22 July 1998).

This is, quite specifically, the Auxiliary and Black and Tan view of the War. The War was a wanton criminal act by criminals or worse. It categorically denies the legitimacy of our War for Independence. The court martials and executions were therefore legitimate. How could someone like this be a guide of any sort to a biographer of Seán Moylan or anybody else who fought for our freedom? His books and writings are permeated with this view.

To make such a case he has to play fast and loose with facts and has become notorious for his way of writing history. He has blatantly abused sources and Dr. Brian Murphy OSB of Glenstal Abbey and a graduate of Oxford, Cambridge and TCD has spent 12 years exposing his abuse of sources in great detail.

Doctoring sources

One example among many will suffice which Dr Murphy highlighted in a review of his infamous book published in 1998, *The IRA and its enemies*. Hart had sought to explain the execution of spies who happened to be Protestants in West Cork as sectarian and quoted from the official British *Record of the Rebellion in Ireland* as follows: “*the truth was that, as British intelligence officers recognised “in the south the Protestants and those who supported the Government rarely gave much information because, except by chance, they had not got it to give.”*” (Hart, pp. 305, 306). However Hart does not give the next two sentences from the same official Record which reads: “*an exception to this rule was in the Bandon area where there were many Protestant farmers who gave information. Although the Intelligence Officer of the area was exceptionally experienced and although the troops were most active it proved almost impossible to protect those brave men, many of whom were murdered while almost all the remainder suffered grave material loss.*”

In other words he conveniently ignores the evidence from this British source that refutes his argument and makes it clear that the executions there were for military and political reasons. This is just a typical example of his methodology.

Interviewing the dead

Meda Ryan is an acknowledged expert and author on the War in West Cork and has done a lifetime of documentary and personal research on the subject. In her very detailed rebuttal of Professor Hart’s theses about the War of Independence in West Cork and particularly about the Kilmichael Ambush she establishes conclusively in meticulous detail in her book ‘*Tom Barry – IRA Freedom Fighter*’ that Hart must have interviewed some dead veterans as it was a physical impossibility to have carried out the interviews he claimed to have done taking account of when the participants had died.

He helps his case by keeping his interviewees conveniently anonymous in his book and despite numerous requests has never specified who he spoke to and when. No reputable historian needs to keep long dead sources anonymous except for ulterior motives. Why in the world would a veteran of Kilmichael want to be anonymous? Professor Hart is a charlatan.

Falsifying the False Surrender

Another example of his approach. He tried to claim that there was no false surrender at Kilmichael and that it was later invented by Tom Barry to justify the killing of surrendered soldiers.

There was no controversy or doubt about the false surrender for about 80 years until Hart came along for the very good reason that all concerned accepted that it happened. And the first people to do so were the British! Before Barry ever put pen to paper about the issue Lloyd George’s special, and very perceptive, advisor, Lionel Curtis, confirmed it at the time in June 1921, in 'Round Table'. General F.P. Crozier confirmed it in his book ‘*Ireland Forever*’ (1932). As General Crozier was O/C of the defeated Auxiliaries if anyone was in a position to know surely he was. So did all

sides of the Republican division over the Treaty - Beaslai, O'Malley and McCann. So did participants Stephen O'Neill in *The Kerryman* in the 1930s and Jack Hennessey in the *BMH*. Other participants also confirmed it when they took the trouble to write or talk about it.

But all this was ignored by Hart in the pursuit of his agenda to discredit the War of Independence and all connected with it by any and every means possible.

Moylan as a sectarian!

Hart maintains the same outrageous approach to Moylan. The index to his book under Moylan has as its first sub heading under his name 'an anti-protestant declaration.' This is how he introduces his readers to Moylan. This turns out to be Moylan's well known speech on the Treaty where there is no mention whatever of Protestants. Moylan warned that Loyalists in North Cork would be wiped out if the war was renewed by Britain. Moylan does not mention Protestants as he knew that Loyalist did not equal Protestant and there were plenty Catholic Loyalists ('Castle Catholics') and plenty Protestant Republicans. Much has been written and said about that speech but it had never occurred to anybody until Hart came along that that Moylan was talking in religious terms.

The other so-called 'anti-Protestant declaration' by Moylan is a speech he made in Kanturk in early April 1922 where he again does not mention Protestants at all but says that Unionists would be the main enemy in a new war by Britain. Moylan was a plain straightforward speaker and if he meant something other than Loyalist or Unionist he would have said so, but he was not such a fool as not to know the difference between these political positions and being a Protestant.

Hart puts all this in the context of the Dunmanway massacre and they had no bearing whatever on each other. This technique of abusing the context in which things are said is another standard ploy of Hart's. All very convincing to the naive and uninitiated.

Ms Carroll knows very well that these are slanders on Moylan and distances herself from them. She chides the Professor as if he did not understand what he was saying. She explains that there is a 'flaw in the argument advanced by Hart to equate loyalist with Protestant' (p.179) as if the Professor was not aware of this distinction. As if he was interested in the argument rather than doing what he clearly sets out to do which is to blacken Moylan's name in any way he could. She naively seems to see a need to enlighten the professor as if the Professor was a fool. The actual facts are immaterial to what the Professor is doing - to denigrate Moylan and everyone else concerned by writing lies about them. That is his life's work. Ms. Carroll should study his methodology a little deeper.

It's pity she is not as clear sighted as her grandfather. Professor Hart should not be given the time of day by any biographer of Seán Moylan.

Moylan, of course, did not have a sectarian bone in his body and as one of those excommunicated by the Catholic Church he was not prone to give it any undue respect or attention.

The Dunmanway killings of April 1922

Professor Hart under the guidance of his mentor, Professor David Fitzpatrick in TCD created a number of concepts that have been bandied about for the last decade or so. They are like nests that other academic cuckoos have been laying their own eggs in for some time since. And so does Ms. Carroll.

One of these is of course that the War of Independence was a criminal and/or sectarian escapade and a great ‘proof’ of this is the killing of 13 Protestants in Dunmanway across three days in late April 1922. This was a one off and totally exceptional event but it is enough for Hart to feel satisfied that his thesis was proved. Of course, for him the IRA did it and did it for purely sectarian reasons.

Ms. Carroll follows him in saying that they were killed “by elements of the IRA”. No evidence for this is given or is available. It is a theory. Several other theories have been put forward as well – land grabbing, personal revenge, blood-lust, anti-Treatyism, alcohol, sheer evil or whatever you’re having yourself.

Ms. Carroll also follows Hart in saying that the massacre was ‘ignited’ by the retaliatory killing of the Hornbrooks at Ballygroman for their killing of an IRA commander, Michael O’Neill. Again there is no evidence to connect the two events except that they happened one after the other.

The Ballygroman killings were an indisputable and acknowledged IRA execution for the killing of one of their commanders. There is no dispute or mystery about it.

She says that of the 13 Protestants shot all but two were spies and that is the most likely reason they were killed.

However, there is also a problem with this theory. The killings were contrary to all IRA practice in dealing with spies. Spies were arrested/captured, interrogated, debriefed and if convicted - executed. Doorstep shootings of them by masked men was not the practice. Also, local IRA intelligence was not likely to mistake non-spies and shoot them also in this random fashion. As John Borgonovo has detailed in his works the IRA took enormous trouble to get the right people.

Ms. Carroll, or Hart, might also tell us which IRA is meant. West Cork republicans were split three ways in April 1922, Treaty, Anti-Treaty and Neutral, but the split had not become a rupture and all three had considerable information about each other. If one of them had done it the others would have known and it would have come out when the differences were manipulated into ‘civil war’ by Churchill three months later and the leading Treatyites ceased to be Republican. And it might have come out in the ‘second round’ of that conflict in the Blueshirt/Fianna Fáil divisions in the 30s. Nothing was spared in those conflicts. Yet the mystery remained as to who had done it. That all three might have been in collusion to kill 13 Protestants and then all condemned it, immediately rushed to protect other Protestants, did no more killings - and then all kept strictly silent about it - is implausible in the extreme as a deduction from circumstances. It needs some actual evidence even to make it thinkable as speculation.

How is the complete lack of information about the Dunmanway killings to be accounted for if they were not the work of a tight conspiracy? And most probably an

external conspiracy with the means of access because internal conspiracies are leaky. An IRA killing by any element remains at best an implausible theory.

There has always been another theory – that the killings were a provocation by British elements to present the South as degenerating into a sectarian war. Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, recently retired Chief of the Imperial Staff - who denounced the Treaty as consigning Southern Ireland to disorder, who was organising the B Specials, and who was engaged in setting up a new authoritarian British Party - had both motive and the means. A sectarian war in the South would prove his case that Ireland could not govern itself and that the British had to return. He was powerful, and was a long-standing and accomplished conspirator, having taken part in the high-level conspiracy that prepared for the Great War on Germany behind the back of Parliament and most of the cabinet. And of course he played a leading role in that other very successful conspiracy, the Curragh Mutiny.

The British secret service in Cork had been reorganised shortly before the Dunmanway killings and, if they were a British operation, they were the work of the secret services, not the Army. See the recent book *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945* by Paul McMahon for details of this reorganisation.

On April 26, 1922, the day before the killings began, three British intelligence officers of this new service (Lieutenants Hendy, Drove and Henderson) which Ms. Carroll refers to in another context, were captured down the road in nearby Macroom, tried and executed. Was this a coincidence? Were they the only ones active in the area? And what were they up to?

Wilson was assassinated a couple of months later in London by a group controlled by Michael Collins's head man in London and longstanding IRB colleague, the Dunmanway Protestant, Sam Maguire who was a neighbour and friend of some of those Protestants killed.

Was this another coincidence or was it revenge? We don't know but Wilson's assassination at that time made no obvious political sense to anyone.

Of course, this case is also circumstantial. But at least it has the merit of not flying in the face of circumstances, as Ms. Carroll's definite statement, "*Thirteen Protestant civilians were killed by elements of the IRA*" does.

The era of the War of Independence in West Cork has been discussed and written about ad nauseum - by participants on both sides, by historians and commentators of all sorts, friendly and hostile. Peter Hart, as we know, has even interviewed participants in the afterlife so there is very, very little that should be unknowable in this area. Every participant and activist is well known. Yet nobody can pinpoint who carried out these killings. Much lesser events have not been left in such a state of limbo for so long. The killers of the Protestants remain a mystery after 90 years! RTE did not add to our knowledge in its recent programme. The silence remains because nobody in the locality, Protestant or Catholic, has any information about the identity - general or particular - of the culprits.

There were Protestants killed in Ireland at the time and that is taken by Professor Hart as entitling him to make of it whatever suits his purpose, regardless of

evidence, and even of sense. It is "*obvious*" to him. But we should recall Sherlock Holmes's advice for investigators, i.e., that "*there is nothing that can be as misleading as an obvious fact*".

The subliminal messages

The influence of the Hart approach permeates the book. Hart sought to change the terms of reference and ways of thinking and writing about the war of Independence. As it was in his view essentially a criminal and illegal venture he invented new ways of looking at events. A favourite was to explain the violence as a matter of 'tit-for-tat' and he makes great play with this concept. It is designed to equate the attacks of the aggressors with the defensive stance of those attacked. It thereby tends to obscure the essential nature of the conflict and where responsibility for it lay, i.e. with Britain - and Britain alone.

Ms. Carroll follows suit: "And so to the autumn of 1920 and a series of tit-for-tat attacks. (p.66). This is pathetic as history but it has a clear purpose to belittle the Volunteers struggle and themselves to that of Tans and the Auxiliaries.

Another of Hart's tactics was to praise all possible signs of bravery or courage displayed by the Crown Forces while downplaying and ignoring any such virtues in the Volunteers' side. And again Ms. Carroll follows suit and is quick to praise the bravery of the Crown forces and their supporters but is very reticent and 'objective' indeed when it comes to the multitude of examples of such virtues on the Republican side. For example, Ms. Leader is admired for her helping wounded soldiers at Clonbanin "at considerable personal risk." (p.103).

This admiration for personal risk and bravery even extends to the events that led to the massacre at Clonmult where she says "the brigade officer, showing considerable bravery climbed onto the roof and set fire to the building." (p.94). The resulting surrender of the Volunteers was followed by 12 of those unarmed and surrendered men (who had destroyed their weapons) being systematically shot dead in cold blood. None of the Crown forces had been killed. Ms. Carroll quotes the 6th Division Record account and then says "Twelve rebels were shot dead" (p.94). That's what happens to rebels, after all. There is a clear subliminal message here à la Hart. What happened at Clonmult was an example of the brutal savagery of the Crown Forces and Ms. Carroll see fit to praise "the considerable bravery" of one of its member in facilitating the savagery. (See *The Battle of Clonmult* by Tom O'Neill, 2006). Those killed in cold blood after surrendering were, like Moylan, volunteer, law-abiding soldiers of the legitimate government of their country and not rebels by any meaning of the word. Calling them rebels is black propaganda,

The two RIC men at Soloheadbeg are praised: "Their courageous resistance (which) was typical of RIC men in the coming conflict." (p.29). The two RIC men would not surrender when asked and hand over the gelignite and this led to their deaths. As Ms. Carroll considers that this event started the war of Independence and let "the genie (of violence) out of the bottle" was it not foolhardy of them to act as they did and not surrender their gelignite when asked and thereby prevent the war?

SOME RELEVANT AHS PUBLICATIONS

- * **Sean Moylan: in his own words. His memoir of the Irish War of Independence.**
- * **The ‘Boys’ of the Millstreet Battalion area** *by veterans of the War*
- * **Seán O’Hegarty, O/C 1st Cork Brigade IRA** *by Kevin Girvin*
- * **Fianna Fáil and the decline of the Free State** *by Brendan Clifford*
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- * **Why Millstreet’s history needs to be written** *by Jack Lane*

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A full biography of Seán Moylan was long overdue and anyone interested in Moylan and his inside story of the War of Independence would welcome any additional information on his life and actions. This biography provides some interesting and useful new information. As the biographer, Aideen Carroll, being a granddaughter of Moylan, had access to family records it also includes very interesting family documents and photographs that have not hitherto been published. However, this review argues that there are aspects of the biography that do not do justice to Moylan and presents a less than accurate and fair account of some of his political positions.

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