

Cathal MacSwiney Brugha

My father Ruairí Brugha was a man who thought a lot, but didn't talk a lot. In that he was like his father, Cathal Brugha, whose centenary of his death is on July 7th. That said, we grew up in a home where discussions between my father and mother, the daughter of Terence MacSwiney, were always about current affairs: Europe, 'the North' (of Ireland, obviously), what was good for society, which he called 'the country'. They were rarely about politics, as in differences between political parties, or politicians, and *never* about the Civil War. All political discussions ended with my father uttering the phrase 'that was not right', meaning that something was wrong because it did not protect the good of society. My early experiences were disparate. In the Gaeltacht I felt at home. In Cork there was the strong spirit of the legacy of Terence MacSwiney. In Dublin city people remembered Cathal Brugha of the song 'Foggy Dew'. During the Northern Troubles my father, and I, were a disappointment to some. I was told that, if I was twice the man I was, I wouldn't be half the man my grandfather was, meaning that I should have been taking up a gun in the Six Counties. And, where we lived and I went to school, I was informed, with great certainty, that Cathal Brugha hated Michael Collins. My father told me to 'just ignore them'.

I learned about Terence MacSwiney from his writings, especially in the book 'Principles of Freedom'. Getting to know Cathal Brugha was difficult. He was mentioned in many books, but always quoting the false allegation that he hated Michael Collins. My understanding emerged over time. He named my dad Ruairí, the after Irish Independence leader, Roger Casement, and who I now see as Europe's Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi.

Casement's early career was working for the British Empire, helping to bring civilization to societies in Africa, India and America. He discovered that Britain, had actually been doing the opposite: savaging civilizations throughout the world, including in Ireland. He revealed that the British Empire had been for years planning to start the Great War with Germany, in a book, 'The Crime Against Europe', Casement became an enemy England needed to destroy, physically, his reputation, his influence, his vision, and legacy, in a cloud of shame.

Born in 1874, Cathal Brugha was well aware of the effects of the Empire in Ireland: in the Nineteenth Century alone forcing two million Irishmen into the English army and navy, while also reducing the Irish population by 50% for reasons of "economic efficiency", and claiming the potato blight was sent by God, to assist with England's 'economic policy' for Ireland. Apart from history, he was also interested in sport, where he was very competitive, and successful. His life changed when, at the age of 25, he was invited to a meeting of the Gaelic League, where he discovered something that joined his two interests. The dreadful state of affairs in Ireland had been caused over hundreds of years, of losing in a 'governance game' with an imperial monster.

Should our governance be driven by civilization or colonialization, by society or by dictators. Ireland, for long the 'Land of Saints and Scholars', had been driven backwards. Greeting one another with a prayer was replaced by a handshake, originally the proof one was not holding a sword. The Irish legal system, the Brehon Law, which is based on making judgements between people, was replaced by the property-based English Common Law.

Cathal Brugha became engrossed in this 'game' and in four years he became as fluent in the Irish language as a native speaker, and developed a deep understanding of Irish history, and how Britain had used divide-and-rule to conquer Ireland, and spread corruption.

His understanding of Christianity came from the Parable of the Good Samaritan. He saw the Irish people as having been beaten, robbed, abused, and killed for centuries, and that he should help. He saw this as a long-term game, and would see a century as short in the long history of Ireland.

In this 'game' he was very much a team-player, did not like to stand out, he disliked politics.

Although an optimist, he was also a pragmatist. Replacing British rule by Irish had to be done by the people. When the Dáil passed the Treaty, and ended the Irish Republic, he saw the difficulties for Munster, which had already been liberated from British rule, and the temptation to resist. This explains his last comment at the end of the Treaty Debate on 7th January 1922: "So far as I am concerned I will see, at any rate, that discipline is kept in the army." Pragmatism, also, kept him from joining the Treaty

discussions in London. As Minister for Defence he had successfully remained incognito for the War of Independence, and did not want to be exposed.

He was an idealist, and always believed it was possible to unite all strands of society: Catholic / Protestant, Nationalist / Unionist, North / South, Irish / British.

And he was an opportunist. If the 1916 leaders were arrested before the Rising, he had accepted the instruction to lead the Rising in their absence. If the British Government passed a bill to bring in conscription in Ireland in 1918, Cathal Brugha was ready in London with a team to assassinate the British cabinet. When the British Government started the Civil War, and he realised that he had failed to prevent it, he thought that his death could become an opportunity that might wake both sides up to the senselessness of what they were doing.

This Centenary provides a timely opportunity to reveal how deception was used to cause our Civil War. The British officer ordered to fire the first shots against the Four Courts had been told that there were renegade Black and Tans there. The officer in charge of the unit that killed Cathal Brugha in O'Connell Street, had been recruited in Liverpool in 1922, and actually believed he was fighting for Irish independence. Alfred Cope, the main negotiator of the Treaty on behalf of David Lloyd George, was so disgusted with the duplicity of Churchill's involvement in the Treaty that he refused to write a memoir on the grounds that 'it is not possible for this history to be truthful'. A false theology had been adopted by the Catholic Church institution, that members should respect oaths and obey religious superiors. Churchill succeeded in including an Oath to the King in the Treaty. And good Catholics on the Pro-Treaty side were deceived into thinking that they had to attack anti-Treaty-ites, or be in breach of the Treaty, and that they were oath-bound to accept a return of direct British rule. The consequence of this was needless pain, hurt, division in Irish communities that has continued since between families.

This can be resolved now, with the help of the Glenree Reconciliation Centre. The first reconciliation event will take place between descendants of Five Fallen Leaders who died on the following dates: Cathal Brugha July 7, Harry Boland, Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins August 1, 12 and 22, and Erskine Childers November 24.

It will be the first time that descendants of these five will relate to one another as a group, in public, about all that has been said about them, and was done to them.

For myself, listening all my life to the false claim that Brugha hated Collins encouraged me to listen to all the stories, about who shot Michael Collins, who shot Harry Boland, about Collins going South to meet up with 'the three Toms': Tom Malone, Tom Barry, Tom Hales.

Only now, as we come to the Centenary of the Civil War, have I been able to piece much of the evidence together. Our War of Independence and Civil War was not a 'Cat-and-Mouse' story about the Irish trying to achieve independence. It was a 'Cat-and-Mouse-and-Rat' story.

The Centenary is the time to claim the truth, and relieve the pain that is in the families and communities, whose relations were involved and suffered, and whose descendants still carry the blame. Revealing the truth during the Centenary of the Civil War will show that all those who worked for Irish Independence did not deserve the burden of shame that was put on them then, and their descendants should not carry it on to the next generation.