

## SYLVIA PANKHURST MEMORIAL LECTURE

RUTH TAILLON, 13 August 2016

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me today. I consider it a real honour to be here presenting the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture. Sylvia did have her own direct links with Ireland and the women of 1916. She was friends with Esther Roper and Eva Gore Booth and through them Constance Markievicz. In April 1916 – just a few weeks before the Rising – the Workers Suffrage Federation organised a demonstration at Trafalgar Square against conscription and the DORA that drew 20,000 people. Speakers included Eva Gore Booth and Sylvia. Sylvia had been a supporter of the cause of Ireland since at least 1913, when she shared a platform at the Albert Hall in London with James Connolly and Charlotte Despard in support of locked out Dublin workers. This event incidentally, contributed significantly to the rift with her sister and the WSPU.

After the Rising the WSF defended the Rising – while most British socialists either denounced the Rising or were silent. Sylvia mourned for Connolly and explained that the “rebellion struck deeper than mere nationalism”. She declared herself a supporter of Irish nationalism but understood that even after national self-government was achieved, the social problems shared by Britain would continue.

“I knew the Easter Monday rebellion was the first blow in an intensified struggle which would end in Irish self-government .... Yet Connolly was needed so seriously for the after building; him at the least, it seemed, fate should have spared.”

So what I would like to do here is to focus perhaps less on what women did during the Rising – although we can certainly talk about that – and focus more on some of those women who were most consciously socialists and feminists and their road to the Rising. Markievicz referred to the “three great movements” – labour, nationalism and the women’s movement – that had converged to bring about the revolutionary upheaval that manifested in the Rising and its aftermath. There was of course, considerable cross-fertilisation of ideas and indeed a number of individuals that I’m going to talk about were actively involved at different times in more than one of these movements. And of course, within each there

were different strands of opinion and approach that created both tensions and synergies. The nationalist, suffrage and labour struggles were inextricably intertwined. And while they were very much influenced by what was going on in Britain and internationally, they were rooted in a deep-seated awareness of the dispossession of the Irish nation.

So before we get to the Rising, I think it is worth looking at some of what had gone before; and also noting the involvement of key individuals whose personal contributions helped to shape those movements and also to provide important linkages between them. I want to look in particular at Inghinidhe na Éireann and the Irish Citizens Army as the two organisations where feminists and feminism and socialists and socialism coincided most directly.

The women who were members of those organisations were not all Marxist theoreticians nor did they espouse a fully-formed feminist consciousness ahead of their time. Certainly, they were subject to the same social pressures and constraints experienced by other women of their class and time.

### **Constraints**

I think it is important that we don't apply to them standards or judgements about socialist or feminist purity of thought, word and action. I'm sure many in this room, particularly those of a certain vintage, will be aware of the compromises we have ourselves made and, likewise, may have been harshly judged by others for not being sufficiently 'right-on' or militant. But we don't often think or consider the context and constraints that influenced the personal and political lives of our heroines.

**Helena Molony** recounted how, when the British King and Queen were visiting Dublin in 1911, they armed the young men with rocks. She said – I don't believe with any irony – that it didn't even occur to them that women would throw rocks. It was only when the boys and men didn't do much and she found she still had some rocks in her handbag, that she threw a stone in frustration through the window of a shop that had a pro-British display. She was arrested and when she refused to pay the fine she was sentenced to one month in prison

and became the first female political prisoner since members of the Ladies Land League were arrested in the 1880s. She served only 14 days because her fine was paid (unbeknownst to her) by Anna Parnell, who wanted Helena to complete the work of editing the history of the Ladies Land League, titled *The Tale of the Great Sham*. In her witness statement to the Bureau of Military History, Helena recounted that distributing anti-recruitment and anti-fraternisation leaflets in Dublin was considered dangerous work for the Inghinidhe,

“many of our friends disapproved, as it was not thought "becoming". At that time the military "suffragette" movement had not been heard of and women and girls were still living in a semi-sheltered Victorianism. The hurly-burly of politics, particularly the kind which led to the risk of being involved in street rows, was certainly not thought "becoming".”

**Constance Markievicz** was only allowed to move to London to study art in 1893 at the age of 25 – when she had reached the age at which her father could not have prevented it (although presumably still in control of her finances). Five years later, age 30, the family agreed to allow her to continue her studies in Paris. It was there she met her husband; they married in 1900 and her daughter Maeve was born in 1901. It was not until 1908 that Constance – then 40 years old – joined Inghinidhe and became involved also with Sinn Fein and the Irish Citizen Army. With her marriage pretty much on the rocks, she made the decision that her daughter should live with her family at Lissadell, where she could be safe and secure. Ultimately, this meant that she became estranged from Maeve. This caused her much anguish throughout her life.

**Maud Gonne's** father was a captain in the British Army. When she was in her early 20s, her father died and she soon after began a relationship with right-wing French nationalist politician Lucien Millevoeye. In 1889, by which time she was 33, Maud gave birth to a son, who died two and a half years later. Her daughter Iseult was born in 1894. Although she brought her daughter up, she never publicly acknowledged that she was Iseult's mother. During the 1890s Gonne travelled extensively campaigning for the nationalist cause, forming an organization called the "Irish League" (L'Association Irlandaise) in 1896. In 1899 her relationship with Millevoeye ended. Maud converted to Catholicism and in 1903 married the

Irish soldier and Republican, John MacBride. Marriage to MacBride made it easier for her to be in Ireland with Iseult. This was important, because with the loss of Millevoeye's protection, Maude was increasingly isolated in France. Lady Gregory, who herself had had an affair – for which she felt quite guilty – was sympathetic. She wrote to a mutual friend,

“It shows how hard it is for any of us to escape from our surroundings. What did it matter to her what Paris people thought? ... and yet there is an imperceptible influence closing round one all the time – a net to catch one's feet.”

With him she had her third child, Sean MacBride, but the marriage did not last. The divorce created some scandal – MacBride was a heavy drinker and violent. The charges against him included assault on Maude's half-sister, Eileen and adulterous relations with a young girl. Legal difficulties meant that she was granted a separation rather than divorce. Because she feared that she would lose custody of Sean if she brought him to Ireland, Maud spent the intervening years travelling between France and Ireland. She spoke to Sean only in French, to make it more difficult for John MacBride to establish a relationship with him. When MacBride was executed for his involvement in the Rising Maud was able to return to live in Ireland as the widow of a hero.

**Winifred Carney** – who once said that “revolutionaries shouldn't have families” – worried about her mother when she was arrested and in prison. Winnie married George McBride, a Protestant, in 1928 when she was 41 years old, to the disapproval of both families. Perhaps because of the marriage bar, she left her job at the ITGWU – although this may also have been because of her failing health. Whatever the family problems related to the marriage might have been, her mother lived with them until her death and Winnie nursed her mother through many years of ill health. After her mother's death in 1933, Winnie was able to re-engage with political work although she herself would live only until 1943. Her brother agreed to Winnie's burial in a plot at Milltown cemetery in Belfast, with the provisos that there would be no headstone and that George should not be buried there.

Despite the fact that **Alice Milligan's** political views and activities created significant problems with her family, being the unmarried daughter meant that in later life she would be obliged to become the family carer: for her aging parents and her sister Charlotte, who

died weeks before the Easter Rising of 1916; she also was called upon to assist in bringing up the children of some of her siblings in Ireland and in Britain. Her activism was severely circumscribed by her dependence upon “relatives better off than myself & bitterly opposed to my political views and activities. I am in fact and have been for some time practically interned.” In 1917, she was living in Dublin and alongside her work on behalf of Republican prisoners, was also caring for her alcoholic brother William, who had been demobilised from the British Army. In 1921, the IRA threatened William with assassination, and gave him 24 hours’ notice to leave. So Alice had to bundle him off to Bath, and later they moved back to a village near Omagh in the relative safety of the new Northern Ireland state. Alice helped him set up a home for his family and remained a full-time carer for her brother, who died in 1937, his son who died of a stroke in 1935 and William’s wife, who died in 1941. All were staunch unionists. Her family refused to allow Irish papers in the house. She described herself as “sort of an interned prisoner for 19 years” and commented that because of her association with Roger Casement, it was necessary to travel for 40 miles to post a letter, because otherwise it wouldn’t get through.

**Sylvia Pankhurst** was an exceptional leader. She possessed an analytical capacity and both a feminist and anti-imperialist consciousness that defined her activism and her writing. Nevertheless, neither were the Irish women (some of whom travelled from their homes in Scotland and England) who were “out” in the Rising just subservient cooks and bottle washers and binders-up of wounds. Many of them had years of activism behind them as trade unionists, feminists and from their involvement in rural land agitation. Some had benefited from new opportunities for formal education and used their education to assist many others involved in classes organised by the trade unions, the Gaelic League and the Celtic Literary Societies.

In the 1870s and 1880s and 1890s women were beginning to make progress in access to higher education. 1886, in the realm of parliamentary politics, saw the introduction of the Home Rule Bill, the Gaelic League was organising and women such as Alice Milligan and Anna Johnston were key organisers. The Ladies Land League was formed in 1881 and within a year had 5,000 members. The **Parnell sisters**, of course, were the prominent figures – but

**Jenny Wyse-Power** and **Maud Gonne** were also very involved in supporting those who were being evicted as a result of the land wars. Gonne had been much in the public eye for some years previously, owing to her work for evicted tenants, with the more active spirits of the Land League, and with the Amnesty movement, and in 1898, with **Alice Milligan** and **Anna Johnston**, in commemoration of the Rebellion of 1798. It was in response to the exclusion of women from all nationalist political organisations after the forced dissolution of the Ladies Land League in 1882 that Maud Gonne took the initiative to form Inghinidhe na Éireann – Daughters of Ireland – in 1900.

**Jenny Wyse-Power**, one of the founders of Inghinidhe and a vice-president, had joined the Ladies Land League in 1881. She was a feminist, politician and businesswoman. She was an active member of the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association. She was elected the first President of Cumann na mBan in 1914, and the signing of the Proclamation took place at her home. Her daughter Nancy was mobilised during the Rising.

### **Inghinidhe na Éireann**

Inghinidhe na Éireann was an organisation for women who wanted to be involved in the struggle for Irish political and cultural independence, but who were excluded – after the dissolution of the Ladies Land League in 1882 -- not only from political parties and the National League (which succeeded the Land League), but from other nationalist organisations such as the Celtic Literary Society. The aims of Inghinidhe were the independence of Ireland, support of Irish industry, literature, history, music and art. They ran classes for children, and put on plays to raise money to pay for classes for children from poor families. Inghinidhe gave Irish women an opportunity to develop talents as speakers, teachers, organisers, journalists and leaders. It played a major role in developing an Irish theatre that drew on Irish actors and directors, and which later formed the core of the Abbey Theatre company.

Distinctly feminist, Inghinidhe would later merge with Cumann na mBan – although retaining its distinct identity as a separate branch. Its members would be immersed in the re-emerging physical force movement for Irish independence. At the same time, it was deeply part of the Irish Cultural Revival movement; a movement that involved in the arts,

poetry, prose in the English language, the promotion of the Irish language and people who promoted self-help and Irish manufacturing – as well as the arts and crafts movement. What its members had in common was an approach that looked to Ireland’s past – real or imagined – to find a history, values and aesthetic that was distinctly Irish and from which a sense of Irish identity could be constructed. Inghinidhe looked to ancient Ireland to develop a narrative of an heroic Irish past, whose women warriors and leaders legitimised their own determination to be fully involved in public life as citizens, scholars and soldiers.

Of course, the perspective of the individual Celtic revivalist was shaped by many influences, not least of which were class and gender interests. The poet William Butler Yeats, by contrast, looked to turn back the clock to an idyllic mythological Ireland that reinforced and validated his own socially conservative and romantic notions of an Ireland populated by faeries and beautiful, ethereal maidens who didn’t become shrill harridans insisting on women’s rights and equality. **Alice Milligan**, who looked to some of the same sources for inspiration and support for her progressive, egalitarian politics, challenged Yeats, whose poetry was full of mysticism, for avoiding politics. In 1893 she wrote that “Irish literature cannot be developed in any hedged-in peaceful place, whilst a conflict is raging around.” She urged him to eschew “phantom host of ghost and fairy” and to “stray no more on the haunted shore.”

Although she considered herself a friend of Yeats, this was not the only time they disagreed. When Alice was Organising Secretary for the 1798 commemoration committee, he wrote asking her to postpone the Belfast ’98 celebrations until 1899 – because he was planning the first productions of the Irish Literary Theatre in Belfast and was concerned that the events would clash. The ’98 celebrations were not postponed.

**Alice Milligan** was a very well-respected poet and writer, who played an important role in the Celtic Revival. Her biographer, Catherine Morris wrote that, “Milligan’s vision for a communitarian, decentred national theatre movement was critical in creating the cultural conditions that would give the beleaguered Irish language new social contexts of meaning.”

Alice Milligan, as a key figure in the Celtic Revival was instrumental in shaping a modern Irish identity that looked to ancient, ‘Irish Ireland’ for its iconography. But perhaps more than

most of her contemporaries, she was a very conscious proponent and committed practitioner – as both artist and activist – of an egalitarian, participatory approach that defined everything she did. Alice believed very strongly in the importance of ordinary people, and the responsibility of people to act on their own behalf and on behalf of their country and by becoming educated in Irish history and literature.

She used newspapers to distribute scripts of plays to community theatre groups. And of course she kept up a vast correspondence as a Gaelic League organiser and on behalf of the many other cultural, literary, educational and feminist organisations she helped to organise. These included the Derry branch of the Irish Industries Association, the Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society, the Centenary commemoration of 1798 and the Women's Centenary Union. Her play, *The Last Feast of the Fianna*, with music by her sister **Charlotte**, staged in February 1900, was according to W. J. Feeney “the first completely Celtic Twilight play in setting character and theme ... For Alice Milligan there remains the honour of being the first playwright to dramatise Celtic legend for an Irish audience.” As a northern Protestant, Alice made a conscious decision to focus her political organising in the North.

While Alice was certainly an unrepentant Fenian, equally certainly she was also a committed feminist. Alice commented that constitutional politics depended on the undemocratic exclusion of women who “were not called upon to have any opinion whatsoever” about the destiny of their country. She exposed the gender discrimination she often encountered (even from committees that she had been elected to serve on). On more than one occasion she would arrive at a cultural meeting to be told that the meeting was not open to women.

By 1894, Milligan had launched three branches of the Irish Women's Association in Portadown, Moneyreagh and Belfast. The Irish Women's Association welcomed women from all religious and social backgrounds. They came together to give talks, hold reading clubs, and educate themselves further in areas of Irish cultural history. They also produced and performed their own literature and music.

It is the duty of every woman to take an interest in the country in which she lived, to know something of its history, past and present, and, if in the conditions under which she and her sisters are placed are likely to lead to a fair

development, she should be prepared with the experience she has gained through many years to extend her help and sympathy outside her own home.

So, no pulling up the ladder after yourselves, sisters.

Alice Milligan is perhaps best known for her work as an organiser for the Gaelic League. Again, like her interest in Celtic history and mythology, Alice made it clear that she was not working for the preservation of the Irish language in isolation, but for the preservation of a distinct Irish nationality.

“We are not working merely for the preservation of a language, but for the existence of a distinct nationality. The Irish boy who takes up his Irish grammar and reading book will learn one thing even should he not become a scholar, namely, ‘I am not an Englishman’.”

Until the early 1890s, Irish history and literature and to some extent the Irish language, were mainly in the hands of academics. Alice (writing in 1899) was critical of Trinity College teaching Irish for the

benefit either of antiquarians or of Episcopalian ministers trying to make Irish the medium of missions to Irish Catholics.

When Alice Milligan began to learn Irish only 900 people were registered as Irish language speakers in Belfast; within ten years this figure had risen to almost 4000. Alice and her colleagues also promoted community Irish drama festivals, they raised significant funds to help establish Gaelic League branches and set up teacher training colleges. Alice Milligan was a close friend of Roger Casement and along with Alice Stopford Green and others, worked tirelessly to try to prevent his execution in 1916. As I mentioned, this caused her much difficulty within her family and the wider Protestant community.

**Anna Johnston** was one of the first vice-president of Inghinidhe. Both Anna Johnson and Alice Milligan were elected to the 1798 central executive and Alice later became Secretary of the Ulster Executive. Both Alice and Anna opposed the politicians who they considered were on the committee to use it for their own ends. The Women’s Centenary Committee

was organised in the context of faction fighting among those, who perhaps could have been expected to share the egalitarian principles of the United Irishmen.

Alice explained the need for women to organise separately in the *Shan Van Vocht*,

The women of Ireland who are not called upon to have any opinion whatever to who has the right to speak for Ireland in the British Parliament could at least form a union ....

Anna and Alice were appointed in 1895 as joint editors of the McCracken Literary Society's journal, the *Northern Patriot*. By 1896 they had launched their own paper, the *Shan Van Vocht*. *Shan Van Vocht* was a phonetic version of the Irish for "poor old woman", from an old 1798 song as a symbol of Ireland. The paper carried a wide range of history, mythology, poetry, stories, reviews and polemic. It discussed the Irish language, the GAA, teaching of Irish history, Irish antiquities, the Irish abroad and the Irish countryside but avoided party politics and was "vital in giving a voice to the Irish culture in the north; it was essential also in establishing the broader Revival as a coherent movement."

The *Shan Van Vocht* was all about giving space to the marginalised voices of women, of people who expressed new opinions, of those who were not represented in the official narratives of the state. They circulated historical archives that had been long out of print and published stories from Ireland's (oral) past in newly commissioned fiction, poetry and song. They also broke new ground with an oral history initiative that gathered stories from Irish speakers.

Despite both Milligan's and Carbery's determination that women should have a voice and be active in the national movement, however Brighid Mhic Sheáin commented that many of the poems by women published in the paper were,

barely distinguishable from similar lyrics by male poets of the Celtic Revival – they assume a male voice and speak from the viewpoint of a male lover, and, as in Yeats' early poems, the desired woman is a symbol of a lost or unattainable ideal, or an allegorical figure of Ireland.

Brighid Mhic Sheáin, comments that,

One must read publications like Shan Van Vocht in the context of their time and with some understanding of the spirit of that time. The literary style was emotional, romantic, often sentimental and can sound oddly to the modern ear; it should be remembered that it is typical of its time. It might be salutary to consider how the materialism and apathy of our own age and attitudes would appear to many of the personalities in the Ireland of Alice Milligan's time.

Mhic Sheáin also points out that the paper was published in the context of considerable repression of publications. Many political newspapers were raided and closed down by police and their editors arrested.

Similar criticisms have been made from the distance of decades, about Inghinidhe's newspaper, *Bean na hÉireann*, (the Woman of Ireland) -- describing it as more nationalist than feminist and complaining that it did not challenge traditional ideas about women's issues. One critic complained that the stronger feminist ideas promoted by **Hanna Sheehy Skeffington** were not widely embraced. However, Sheehy Skeffington was in fact a contributor to the paper.

**Helena Molony**, who was only 17 or 18 when she joined Inghinidhe and with absolutely no previous experience, set up and edited *Bean na hÉireann*. Published between 1908 and 1911, *Bean na hÉireann* stood for the '*freedom for Our Nation and the complete removal of all disabilities to our sex*'. It would describe itself in a later issue as '*the first and only Nationalist Woman's paper*'. Helena explained that, "*We wanted it to be a women's paper, advocating militancy, separatism and feminism.*"

Helena described the paper as

"an odd kind of woman's paper ... **a mixture of guns and chiffon**. The National position, and International politics was front page news. But we also had fashion notes ... Gardening Notes, written by Countess Markievicz, and a Children's Corner, with a serial fairy story, anti-recruiting articles ... and good original poems ... **It was a funny hotch-potch of blood and thunder, high thinking, and home-made bread.**" "

In her statement to the Bureau of Military History, Helena provided an interesting example which she said showed that “There was nothing insular about Inghíníde’s political outlook.”

For instance, about this time a young Indian revolutionary, Madar Lal Dhingra, was captured and hanged for complicity in the assassination of a prominent Indian police official. From the dock, when sentenced, he declared, "I am proud to lay down my life for my country". We got printed immediately, and fly-posted through the City, posters stating "Ireland honours Madar Lal Dhingra, who was proud to lay down his life for his country". We reproduced this poster in "Bean na hEireann", and it resulted in the loss of some advertisements and subscriptions.

Helena was an Abbey Theatre actress and many plays produced there were written by members of Inghinidhe. Helena would later recall how James Connolly had asked her to help to organise ‘the girls’ working at Liberty Hall into a unit of the ICA while she was still working at the Abbey at night.

James Connolly, she recalled, “had performed a superhuman task in reforming and building up the broken ranks of the Irish Transport Union, and the handful of girl strikers which was all that was left of the Irish Women Workers Union” formed in 1913, by James Larkin, out of a strike in Jacobs biscuit factory.

The 1913 Strike was a complete rout. Ninety per cent, of the workers of Dublin were swamped in debt, sad many had not a bed to lie on. The only thing left that was not smashed beyond repair was the workers' spirit, and lucky they were to have a man of Connolly's stature to lead them. The ideal of National as well as Social freedom, which he held up to them, gave them a spiritual uplift from the material disaster and defeat they had just suffered.

All the sympathy of the Irish Ireland movement was with the strikers but not all of us were in sympathy with James Larkin, or his outlook, which was that of a British Socialist.

Helena was very proud of the fact that at Connolly’s request she became the registered proprietor of the “Workers Republic” newspaper printed in Liberty Hall.

In September 1913, two of the female workers in Jacob's Biscuit Factory were dismissed from their jobs for refusing to remove their union badges, **Rosie Hackett**, along with over 300 female workers in Jacob's, refused to remove their badges in sympathy with their colleagues. They were also fired.

During the Lockout, Rosie helped run the soup kitchen in Liberty Hall. Failing to get her job back after the Lockout ended, she found work as a clerk in the IWWU shop set up to help those women who could not regain employment. A little shirt-making factory and small co-operative store was established in Liberty Hall to give employment to 8-10 girls, none of whom could get employment as an outcome of their strike activities. Eventually they all fought in the Rebellion. Rosie was one of those who helped to print the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, read by Pádraig Pearse at the GPO on Easter Monday.

During much of the Rising, Jacob's had been surrounded by hostile crowds for several days. On Thursday of Easter Week, with much of the city on fire, and Jacob's was cut off from the other insurgents, sympathetic Jacob's workers surrounded the factory and prevented it from being attacked by the British soldiers.

After the Rising, Rosie was active in reorganising the IWWU, the ICA and briefly joined Cumann na mBan. We now have a bridge in Dublin named after her.

It would be quite impossible to write a history of Irish theatre without reference to the women of Inghinidhe. **Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh**, who as a member of Cumann na mBan commanded the women at Jacob's Biscuit Factory during the Rising joined the Gaelic League in 1898 and later Inghidhe. She grew up in the Liberties and it was her father who was the printer who printed the Proclamation. Maire joined Inghinidhe in 1900 and started acting with the Inghinidhe na hÉireann drama group. In 1902 she joined the Irish National Dramatic Company, went on to help form the Irish National Theatre Society and later the Abbey Theatre. Her book *The Splendid Years*, recalls the years of the national revival and the Easter Rising. Inghinidhe also helped to forge the acting skills of several other young women, although they went on to quite illustrious acting careers on stage and film, which took them away from political activism.

## **Irish Citizen Army**

The Irish Citizen Army was formed as a labour defence force during the 1913 Dublin Lockout. Its members were mainly trade unionists and women members had equal rights and duties with the men – at least in principle. No formal distinction was made between male and female members, and ICA women carried arms. **Helena Molony, Constance Markievicz, Kathleen Lynn and Madeleine ffrench Mullen** – all members of Inghinidhe -- were all ICA officers.

It has become generally accepted that the members of the ICA were more politically aware, or socially progressive – especially on issues of women’s equality – than were their comrades in the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan. It is certainly true that Molony, Markievicz, Lynn and ffrench Mullen were all involved in campaigns for women’s rights and the trade union movement before and after they joined the ICA. Indeed, they had been leading members of Inghinidhe. The ICA also involved other women who like their sisters in Inghinidhe, were involved in dramatic societies, Irish language classes and suffrage societies. But the majority of female members were in what was called the “Ambulance Corps” and which many of their male comrades called “the Women’s Section”. On the other hand, although Cumann na mBan branches were attached to particular sections of the Irish Volunteers, subordinate to the command of male Volunteer officers, Cumann na mBan retained its own command structure and the right to take independent action. A few women, including Constance Markievicz, held membership in both Cumann na Ban and the ICA.

**Madeleine ffrench-Mullen** wrote a children’s column in Bean na hEireann and was active in Inghinidhe’s campaign to provide school dinners for children. The women provided regular ‘proper dinners’ for schools on a voluntary basis, but the other side of this action was agitation to legalise payment for these meals by local bodies, such as the Dublin Corporation. Their lunch service was to give practical demonstration of how this could be done. The ethos of the project was sympathetic to the dignity of the children and their families;

All idea of pauperism was kept out of the scheme, as every child who could pay paid their penny to the teachers (and sometimes it was only a halfpenny) but no one was allowed to know who paid and who did not. Those teachers took a great interest in their pupils and knew their family circumstances, insisted on payment where it was possible, and relaxed where necessary, but payments were not made publicly.

During the Lock Out of 1913 she was one of the staff of the soup kitchen in Liberty Hall. She joined the ranks of Cumann na mBan and later the Irish Citizen Army. She met Dr Kathleen Lynn at a lecture on first aid and their lifelong friendship began.

**Kathleen Lynn** was the daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman., She studied medicine at Cecilia Street (the Catholic University Medical School, now UCD) and graduated in 1899. She was refused a position in the Adelaide Hospital because of her gender, but did gain appointments at the Rotunda, Sir Patrick Dun's and the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear hospitals. In 1904, she established a private GP practice from her home in Rathmines, Dublin. In 1909 she was made a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, described as a 'rare distinction'. From 1903, she was a member of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association.

In 1913, at the request of Countess Markievicz, she treated Helena Molony who stayed with Lynn in her Rathmines home following an illness. Through her friendship with Molony and Markievicz, Lynn became an active participant in the labour and nationalist movements. Along with Molony and Markievicz, she supported the workers during the Dublin Lockout in 1913, and became a friend and supporter of James Connolly.

Lynn joined the Irish Citizen Army and taught first-aid to them, as well as to Cumann na mBan. In the week leading up to the Rising, she used her car to run guns into Dublin, storing some at her own house.

Her diaries, now housed in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI) Heritage Centre, Dublin, are now available online. With her partner, Madeleine French Mullen, Kathleen Lynn went on to found St Ultan's Hospital, a pioneering hospital for infants. Lynn is regarded as one of the most dedicated pioneers of children's health and welfare in Ireland.

**Hanna Sheehy Skeffington** queried **Constance Markievicz's** feminism, but Constance and her sister **Eva** were the founding members of the Sligo Women's Suffrage Society in 1896. In 1908, Constance was a speaker at a rally in Trafalgar Square in support of the rights of women to work in bars – then under threat by political attempts to restrict the hours women could work. She said,

“There is a league for the abolition of barmaids, and it is an infamous league. They cannot abolish women, take away her occupation and let her starve, .... We are told that the bar is a bad place for women, but the Thames Embankment at night is far worse.”

During the same campaign she helped to organise the campaign in Manchester.

**Helena Molony** recalled that Markievicz came to the National Movement through Inghinidhe and Bean na hEireann. Helena later recounted,

She had been for some years interested in the Irish literary movement, through George Russell and his circle, and she was deeply interested in the Agricultural Organisation and the work of Russell and sir Horace Plunkett in that direction, She had discovered that Ireland was her country, and wished to work for it. ... Arthur Griffith ... advised her to join the Gaelic League. She did so, but she felt the need of something more active, more revolutionary.

Having found her place in the revolution, Constance put herself and her resources at the services of the workers and national struggles.

She wrote a training manual for the Fianna, an organisation for boys (although the Belfast branch – home of Connolly's daughters and Winifred Carney -- included girls. Markievicz and Molony with Bulmer Hobson, were responsible for setting up the Fianna in 1908. Her home became a hub for the brewing insurgency and it was a storage space for guns and other military equipment. In 1916, Markievicz was appointed by the Military Council to be James Connolly's 'ghost'. That is, as his deputy, she had to be fully informed of the plans for the Rising so that she could take over his work if he was captured or otherwise put out of action.

**Winifred Carney** is best remembered today for her participation in the Irish Citizen Army, in particular her role as James Connolly's secretary and her involvement in the Easter Rising of 1916. Her years of political and trade union activism after 1916 are rarely acknowledged although she was a trade union and socialist activist until the mid-1930s. Likewise, her life as an independent woman and activist before she became involved with Connolly is also little known. She has been stereotyped as the tweedy, somewhat prudish spinster, the loyal secretary with her typewriter in one hand and pistol in the other.

By the time Winnie Carney met James Connolly in 1912, she was already an experienced political activist, committed to the cause of women's suffrage, socialism, the Gaelic cultural and language revival and Irish independence. Winnie was interested in literature, art, music. She sang and played piano. She was a woman who had managed to get herself an education – despite the fact that her own mother had been a lone parent raising six children on the income from a confectionary shop on the Falls Road. Winnie worked for a time as a teacher, but she attended secretarial college and qualified as one of first “lady secretaries/shorthand typists”.

In 1911 women working in Belfast's linen mills were organised into the Irish Textile Workers Union and went on strike. At the age of 24, Winnie gave up her relatively comfortable position as a solicitor's clerk in Dungannon to become Secretary of the Textile Workers Union. At 5 shillings per week she was earning 1/3 of wage of one of her mill worker members. In reality it was often an unpaid post. This was when Winnie first met James Connolly.

During the great Dublin Lock-out in 1913 Winnie worked very hard to raise funds for workers facing hardship and they also helped to support and accommodate locked out workers who came to Belfast. Girls of sixteen and seventeen years of age were being arrested and imprisoned in Dublin so Connolly was bringing them to Belfast to find work.

Winnie was one of the 10 founding members of Cumann na mBan, established in 1914 as a women's auxiliary organisation to the Irish Volunteers. Winnie helped to set up the number one branch, Belfast Cumann na mBan. She was later branch President. Winnie was

acknowledged as a crack shot. Her skills were instrumental in a winning shooting competition with men in Belfast Volunteers.

So -- by the time Winnie Carney met Connolly in 1912, she was already an experienced suffragist, socialist, and Irish language activist. By 1916, as the Easter Rising was being prepared, at the age of 29 she held the rank of Adjutant in the Irish Citizen Army. It has been said that she was the only person from whom Connolly had no secrets. When Liam Mellows escaped from detention in England and was smuggled back to Ireland to lead the Rising in the West of Ireland, it was Winnie who accompanied him.

### **The Proclamation**

The women who came out in Easter week were not just 'supporting' the men in pursuit of generalised national ideals which only included them by default. They were also asserting their claim to be part of the shaping of the nation and a share in determining the shape of the new Republic. And it was not just because James Connolly – or Padraig Pearse or Thomas MacDonagh – supported women's equality that the Proclamation included universal suffrage and equality for all Irish citizens. The Proclamation reflected the very real influence and involvement of women in the suffrage, national and labour movements. It is something to be honoured that the Proclamation was the first founding national document in modern history that enshrined universal suffrage and equality between men and women.

### **Conclusion**

So, I've given just a sample of some of the women who were involved in the 1916 Rising and its aftermath; and a just a skate over their backgrounds and political and cultural activities. There were, we know, almost 300 women mobilised in Easter Week and most of those who would define themselves as socialist were in the ICA. Of course there were several varieties of suffragists and feminists – not just those who had links to Inghinidhe – involved as members of Cumann na mBan or otherwise. What I've tried to illustrate by highlighting some of those who were better known – primarily more affluent or educated women who left a paper trail – is that these women, like Winnie Carney, had activist pasts and social and political ideas, before the Rising. And while some may have modified their viewpoints in

different ways, they continued to have minds of their own and many continued their political and military involvements after 1916.

The nationalist revival of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought together women like Jenny Wyse Power and a new generation of young women. These women in turn fought for their place in the revived nationalist movement, participated in the emerging labour movement and won votes for women. They fought in the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War. They served terms in prison and the Oireachtas. After the Civil War of course, the most socially and politically progressive sections of Irish society were fragmented and demoralised. Those who were not in prison often found themselves without employment or forced into exile. Ireland became even more conservative and inward-looking. The 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill and de Valera's 1937 Constitution cemented the exclusion of women from employment and public life.

But many of the women of 1916 continued the fight for equality and human rights on both sides of partitioned Ireland. Their legacy has passed down through the generations – as women continued to organise, and we can trace a line of activists through the 1920s, 30s and 40s – to the 'second wave' of Irish feminism in the 1960s and 70s – right down to the young women who are campaigning for social justice and equality today.