

THE LAST DAYS OF REVISIONISM

Revisionism, semantically, can have both a positive and negative meaning. In the first instance, research, and discovery of information can lead to a better understanding of issues, without altering a basic stance in regard to them. In the second, revisionism entails a reinterpretation and perhaps the use of documentation to discredit a traditional perspective. In fact, ‘revisionism’ entered the English language negatively at the turn of the last century as a description of attempts to derevolutionize socialism.

Two of the main negative revisionists of Irish history in the Irish context are journalist-historian Ruth Dudley Edwards and QUB emeritus professor Liam Kennedy; its main political proponent is ex-taoiseach John Bruton.

Edwards, in her last book (*The Seven - The Lives and Legacies of The Founding Fathers of The Irish Republic*, 2016) maintains that the revolution which began 100 years ago had “little popular support” and Kennedy, in his last tome (*Unhappy the Land*, 2016), says that the organisers of the Easter Rising “had no mandate whatsoever from the people of Ireland.” Therefore, it was “anti-democratic”.

However, neither produces any evidence to back up these assertions. I have largely dealt with these in articles in INC NEWS (May 2014, Dec 2014 and April 2016). Much has been specifically made of those who jeered the rebels in Dublin after the surrender in Easter week, thus arguing from a particular crowd to the generality of the Irish nation. The crowd in question is said to consist of some wives and mothers of those serving in the British army and in receipt of payments for same. The truth is that we do not know what the attitude of the general populace was.

Edwards states that the Military Council, which organised the Rising, was “a seven-man secret clique ... within a secret clique (the IRB) within a clique (the 100,000 Irish Volunteers) determined to ignore the electorate’s endorsement of the IPP [Irish Parliamentary Party] and of Home Rule”. For a start, the electorate, given the restricted nature of the franchise, was far from universal and thus not democratic. As for ‘cliques’, it is naïve to suggest that it could be otherwise than to rely on same in the face of imperial repression. Apart from the fact, that one cannot exactly provide for a referendum on a national revolution, a mandate for this essentially derives from foreign occupation, and those who oppose this are entitled to rebel against violation of their rights whatever their numbers. (We have said before that, for example, it is a matter of speculation as to whether or not a majority of the French between 1940 and 1944 endorsed the Resistance to German Nazism.)

Edwards, however, holds that “the British government was the legitimate authority” in Ireland and “helping its enemy was treachery of the highest order” for which there was “no conceivable justification.” Kennedy ridiculously and tendentiously compares those who fought in the Rising to the “group of militants [who] crashed their bodies and their machines into the Twin Towers that dominated the lower Manhattan skyline”!

John Bruton, in his Opinion piece in *The Irish Times* of 8 April 2016, advises us that the Home Rule Bill of 1914 could have led to independence “had it not been derailed by the 1916 Rebellion” and later undermined by the War of Independence from 1919 to 1921. He does not mention that the Home Rule Act was accompanied by its suspension for the duration of the Great War with the promise that this would be lifted once the war was over.

But could Britain be trusted in this regard? Citing the example of Canada, Australia etc, pursuant to the Statute of Westminster 1931, which gave effective independence to the dominions, does not answer the question. The likes of Canada were not at the backdoor of Britain and had not experienced revolutionary contact with Napoleonic France or Wilhelmite Germany which lingered in the mind of the British. Not only was Home Rule a milk and water devolutionary measure rather than independence, but even it could not be relied upon to actually come into being, never mind dominion status later. The paranoia of the British establishment regarding Ireland was articulated as late as 1983 when Secretary of State James Prior warned of Ireland becoming an Atlantic Cuba!

Bruton denounces the manifesto of the national birthright of his country and fails to acknowledge the heroism and bravery of those who fought for it. At best, he has a skewed historical sense of the relation between Britain and Ireland that leads to political wrongheadedness. More recently, one recalls his sickening laudation of Charles Windsor at an official trip to the Irish Republic, and holding him out as an example of what we should all be! It is appalling to think that this man was once Taoiseach.

A footnote of revisionism concerns the alleged proclivities of Patrick Pearse. Edwards tells us that he was "a tormented, repressed paedophile." In her book about Pearse Triumph of Failure (1977), she classified him as a latent homosexual. Now she has upgraded him further into the category of paedophile. Kennedy avers that he was "latently homosexual, and was seemingly sexually attracted to children". In fact, there is no evidence that he was homosexual or a paedophile (not that there is anything wrong in actually being homosexual). Specifically, he cannot be accused of any illicit act. Aesthetically he saw the beauty of males, young people in particular, and celebrated this as an artist and poet. But that does not substantiate the Edwards-Kennedy conclusions about him. In reality, he had had a close friendship with a woman who tragically died an early death and, otherwise, insofar as any mental repression might be considered, this was more likely, in the Ireland of its time, to be repressed heterosexuality. However, one suspects that the purpose of seeking to cast aspersions on Pearse's sexuality is an attempt to sully the whole enterprise of which he was one of the chief organisers.

Doubtless, revisionists were bitterly disappointed by the centenary celebrations of 2016 for the Rising. From 'the lower classes' up to official Ireland, there was a recognition and admiration for those who courageously laid the foundation stone of modern Ireland. This effective rejection of the detractors of the national revolution amounted to the final defeat of revisionism and its interment. Revisionism thus ended its days deficient in scholarship, delusional in politics and lurid in psychological accusation.

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