

Constance Markievicz

IN THE CAUSE OF IRELAND

Agitator on the path to Revolution

Constance Markievicz was arrested in July 1911 at a protest against the visit of King George V (a man with whom she had danced in her debutante days). She was alleged to have kicked one constable twice in the chest and kicked another in the left leg while throwing gravel in his face. She was found guilty but she got off with a caution. Sir Josslyn, her brother, learned of her arrest by reading of it in the *Sligo Champion* (a weekly newspaper).

Companies or Sluatha of Fianna were set up in both urban and rural settings. The urban groups slowly became involved in political events called on to be messengers, look outs and trackers (following people) in other words all the skills needed for a clandestine war or guerrilla war. As the members aged the wider political environment became more fractious. The introduction of the third Home Rule Bill on the 11th of April 1912 provided a catalyst. The Unionist population viewed with suspicion any attempt to introduce home rule viewing it as little better than 'Rome Rule'. Their opinion was that in a country overwhelmingly Catholic their views would be discounted by the arithmetic of their situation. They decided that they needed to be able to defend their interests by physical means and the Ulster Volunteers were set up to do so in January 1913. To arm this volunteer force guns were landed on the night of the 24th-25th April 1914 at Larne. The nationalists viewing these preparations appeared to believe that they needed to do the same. They set up a Volunteer force in November 1913, the Irish Volunteers and now they had to arm them.

While the arming of the Ulster Volunteers appeared to have been a well organised secret many in nationalist circles were convinced it has been assisted by conservative elements in Britain. The difficulties that they had in accessing arms to buy and transport hardened that conviction. In Antwerp Sir Roger Casement purchased 1,500 Mausers and 45,000 rounds of ammunition. The landing of weapons on Sunday the 26th July 1914, in Howth by Erskine Childers from the 'Asgard', was the real start of active duty for the boys of the Fianna. They were in charge of bringing the ammunition into the city to be distributed. The boys were informed that they were to bring their trek cart, which was drawn by themselves, to collect minerals. However, they were given the ammunition to load in their cart and after a series of escapes managed to bury it in a garden to be recovered later. On the following Monday Constance's cottage got a delivery of arms. It remains unclear whether this small delivery was to partially arm the Fianna or for hiding. But this delivery was seen by walkers and Liam Mellows (a former Fianna Member) arranged for them to be hidden elsewhere that day. In 1914 the Fianna Handbook was published which gave an outline on practical skills necessary for the members



Constance Markievicz in military attire
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Constance Markievicz outside Liberty Hall
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Daily Mirror Monday May 1st 1916

and inspirational stories from Irish history and legend. Constance's presence can be felt in both the production style, the content and the cover.

In tandem with her work with the Fianna Constance developed an interest in the wider social issues of Dublin. Dublin had a death rate at the time equal to that of Calcutta and inspired by a speech given by Jim Larkin she began to get involved in the labour movement. The working classes lived in almost unimaginable squalor in tenements, badly housed, poorly paid, malnourished and as a result of overcrowding prey to all kinds of infectious diseases especially tuberculosis.

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