

# Constance Markievicz

## I gCÚIS NA hÉIREANN

### Revolutionary



Prison apron worn by Constance Markievicz in Holloway Prison  
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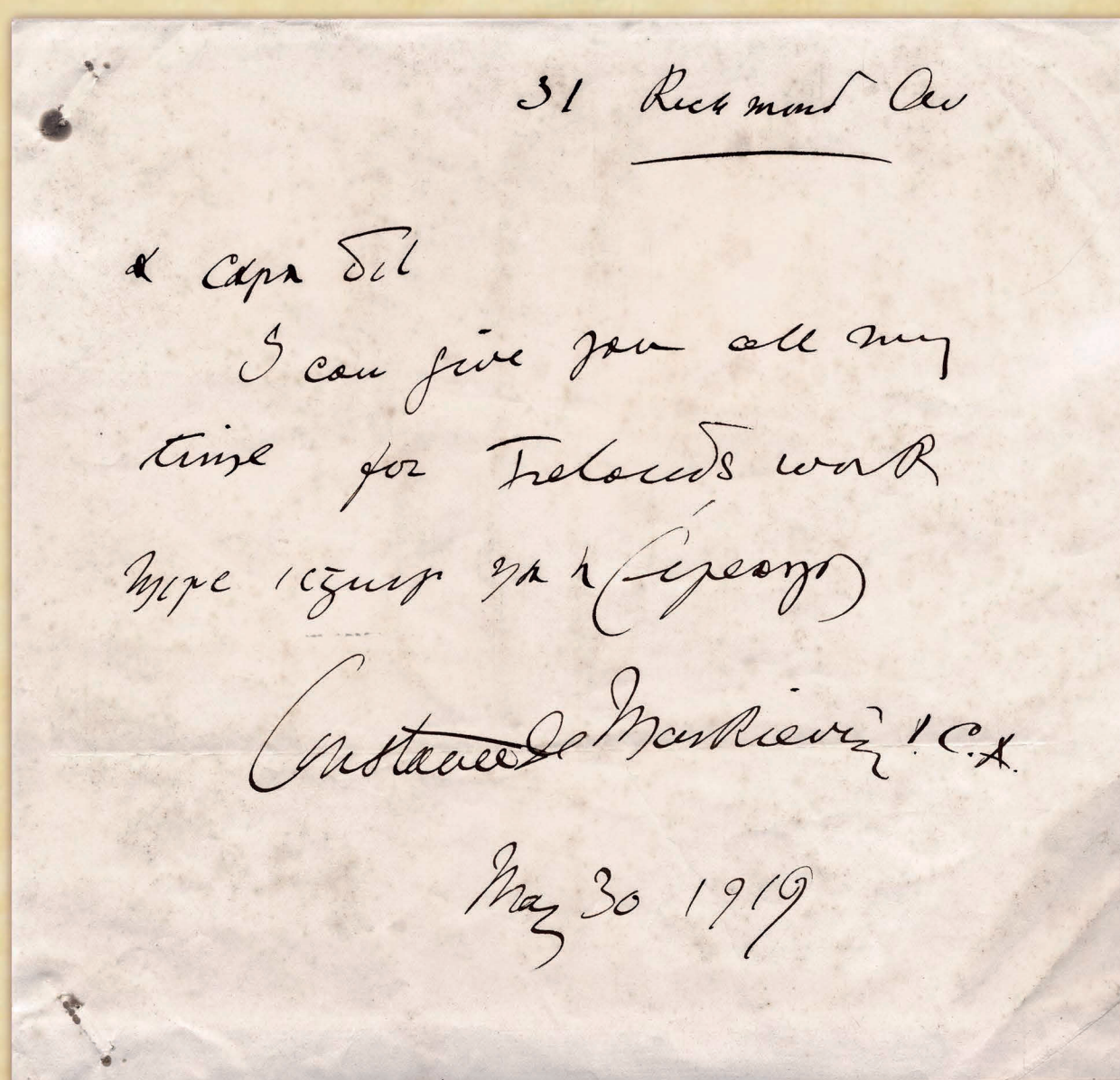
Initials on apron worn by Constance Markievicz in Holloway Prison  
© Sligo County Museum

At first Constance was held separately in Kilmainham prison, later transferred to Mountjoy and finally Aylesbury Prison in England where she was treated as a convict unlike other Irish prisoners with political status. It was in Mountjoy that she recorded her religion as Catholic and the memory of the nightly rosary in the College of Surgeons, led by fellow Sligionian William Partridge, played a part in this. It was from him that she received the rosary that she wore around her wrist. From the beginning she knew that Eva had to agitate for her release on whatever grounds that would work. She lost weight and, it must be presumed, teeth from her physical appearance after her release. After a campaign all 122 prisoners were released including Constance, who met by Eva her sister, was free after 14 months on Sunday June 17<sup>th</sup> 1917. She returned to Dublin where the city turned out to welcome her.

*Sinn Féin* had over the 17 months been having notable electoral success starting with the election of Count Plunkett in February 1917. Then on May 9<sup>th</sup> the election of Joe McGuinness in South Longford, who was elected with the slogan 'put him in to get him out' he, being at the time, in Lewes prison. Kilkenny made Constance an honorary citizen and then in Sligo she received the Freedom of Sligo. In his address the Mayor of Sligo said they were also 'paying a tribute to her family of whom she was the most distinguished member.' When the *Sinn Féin* executive met on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1917 she was elected to the Executive Council and in December was appointed to head its' Department of Labour with Cathal O'Shannon. That autumn she made scores of speeches but two were personal appearances one at the funeral of Sligo man and Citizen Army member William Partridge in Ballaghaderreen. The other was a visit to Athea in Co. Limerick the birth place of Con Colbert who was one of the original members of the *Fianna na hÉireann* executed in 1916.

It was in April 1918 that the British government made its' most misguided decision and introduced a bill to allow conscription in Ireland and united the country in opposition. In response to the opposition they then instigated a roundup of *Sinn Féin* leaders and Constance was arrested on the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> May and imprisoned in Holloway Gaol. She was selected to stand for the constituency of St. Patrick's in Dublin in the November 1918 election and was the first woman in Western Europe to be elected to a national Parliament. Of course she never took her seat in the House of Commons as *Sinn Féin* had an abstentionist policy. She was released from Holloway in or around the 20<sup>th</sup> of February and visited the House of Commons with Eva to see her named peg in the cloakroom.

As a result of their overwhelming victory in the 1918 election *Sinn Féin* decided to establish an Irish Parliament and the first Dáil met on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1919 and as a result Constance was selected to be Minister of Labour. She had now a political mandate being successfully elected for the first official public position she had stood for.



Constance Markievicz's acceptance letter of the post of Minister of Labour in the first Dáil  
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