

Phil Mac Giolla Bhain, who has written the screenplay for a new film about the history of the republican struggle in Ireland, writes an open letter to An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern

# Prove your republicanism, Bertie

Dear Bertie, I tend not to believe what people say, but I certainly believe what they do.

The recent 1916 celebrations in Dublin were, despite some saying it was more to do with the electoral considerations of Fianna Fáil "The Republican Party" (Trade-Mark), a blow to revisionism.

Fair play. The revisionist agenda these past 30 years in the 26 counties offered amnesia not analysis on why there was a war situation on this island.

They demonised the volunteers in Belfast and south Armagh for exactly the same reasons that William Martin Murphy and the Catholic church hierarchy demonised Pearse and demanded the execution of the dying Connolly.

Amnesia could only work for a while. Now that the northern war is over, there are less people willing to indulge in that collective memory loss.

I am currently writing the script for a film on revisionist amnesia.

The story is told through three generations of Dublin men: a grandfather, father and son.

The grandfather is a 1916 veteran, the father a revisionist Labour Party type and the son finds who he really is by talking to his grandfather in his dying days in a nursing home. The owl fella's days tick away as Bobby Sands grows weaker on hunger strike.

He tells his grandson of meeting the wounded Connolly in the GPO as he got there as a terrified dispatch runner. This knowledge changes his grandson. History recovered is a weapon.

With the magic of the movies, the GPO scenes will be shot in two weeks' time in Vienna.

As the scriptwriter I walked into an ambush that Tom Barry would have been proud of.

We were discussing who would play Connolly. We needed someone who was in their 40s, with stocky build and could do a rough Scottish accent.

The heads in the room turned to me. It took about 30 seconds for the pingin to drop.

The small Irish community in Vienna is pitching in and the indoor scenes of the GPO will be full of genuine Dublin accents and one genuine Scottish one. Mel Gibson has not been called.

The short film is being made by people's goodwill. There isn't a penny of your film board's money being sought.

We reckon that a film project that ties in Bobby Sands and James Connolly would not get past the Section 31 that still operates in the arts.

The film - *Rebellion* - will be ready to show in film festivals next year, all being well.



O'Connell Street and Bridge, Dublin are in need of statues depicted the heroes of 1916.

PHOTO: GRAHAM HUGHES/PHOTOCALL IRELAND

**A foreign person visiting our main street would have no knowledge that 1916 happened. This country has many fine sculptors who would tackle the commission with the same relish that Connolly went about organising the defences of the GPO on Easter Monday.**

Like the rising itself, it is resourced by people of goodwill. Most of the main players in the project are grandchildren of 1916; ordinary people doing the right thing for the right reasons, just like the Rising itself.

The former Hapsburg capital has cobbled streets in abundance and buildings with high ceilings, one of which the film lads have unfettered access to.

Most of the props are in place, although we could do with some period piece English artillery, if there are any Fine Gael folk out there who want to help.

In writing the dialogue I was required to study the street map of 1916 Dublin. I noted that, although Sackville Street is now, of course, O'Connell Street, the same Home Rule monuments are still in place.

O'Connell 'The Liberator' is still at the southern end of the country's main thoroughfare.

At the north end the uncrowned King of Ireland himself. Given that Sackville Street is no longer Sackville Street because people chose to ignore Parnell's political heir John Redmond, I thought this hugely ironic.

Nelson's pillar is gone by physical force. Just as the Lancers who gaily clip-clopped down Sackville Street to deal with the rebel johnnies are also gone.

The lads that removed Nelson's pillar had no democratic mandate, it needed done, and it was an affront to independent Ireland. It's gone and no one outside Ballymore Eustace mourns its disintegration.

We do of course have the spike. I prefer to call it the needle in honour of O'Connell Street's lumpen proletariat. The monument symbolising

their preferred drug of choice. It serves to remind me that Connolly's work in rising up the lowest orders in society still remains to be done and their position is a watermark on our level civilisation as a society.

Like me, Bertie, you're a socialist, so you know that Connolly's vision needs further muscle.

The north and south ends of the Ireland's main street are totems to Home Rule.

They have their place in the nation's march, but in the end, Home Rule accepted that someone else could set a limit on the march on the Irish nation and say here and no further.

Sackville Street is now named after a hero of Home Rule because a group of Irishmen and Irishwomen ignored the Home Rulers' strategy. No 1916. No rising and we would still be on Sackville Street spending coins of the realm.

A foreign person visiting our main street would have no knowledge that 1916 happened. This country has many fine sculptors who would tackle the commission with the same relish that Connolly went about organising the defences of the GPO on Easter Monday.

Okay, what do I want?

Bertie, I know you read this paper, you say you are a republican. I know your late mother was. Not because of what she said but because of what she did. Like my grandmother down in Mayo, your ma was in the Cumann na mBan. These words blink to life near a picture taken in 1966.

The scene shows happy, proud, solid people in their later years. The man at the centre of the picture is unmistakably General Tom Barry.

The lady next to him,

medals on her chest, is my grandmother Julia Derrig.

They wouldn't start the 50th anniversary celebrations without her in Westport.

She's gone now and it appears to be left to me in my tribe not to forget. History forgotten is a betrayal.

There are those around you who want us to forget. Michael McDowell, keeping faithful to his family traditions, may well try and stop this before it happens.

In 2016, we should have a full-size statue in bronze at the front of the GPO of Pearse reading the 1916 Proclamation with Connolly at his side.

In the middle of O'Connell Street, there should be a large sculpture on a suitably large plinth of volunteers of Easter week to celebrate the rank-and-file men and women who made the rebellion a reality.

That sculpture must also have women portrayed and immortalised in bronze. We've had the floozie in the jacuzzi. Let us have the reality of proud female republican volunteers, armed and equal with their male comrades.

These volunteers made our freedom possible by taking on the modern equivalent of the Roman army. The insurgents of Easter Week were ordinary people with a pitiful supply of weapons and virtually no military training.

This rebellion succeeded in changing the psychological landscape of this country, changed it utterly and for all time. The sturdy guerrilla campaign that my grandparents took part in would not have been possible without Easter Week.

For reasons best left to a psychotherapist, some of the revisionists would rather that 1916 had not happened.

So, for 2016, we need two sculptures for O'Connell Street. They will say who we are far more cogently than those erected to O'Connell or Parnell, because they, ultimately, failed through being reasonable with England.

The reading of the proclamation sculpture and the second sculpture celebrating the ordinary men and women who were willing to hurl their flesh against the steel of a global superpower to make their republic a reality so that we could enjoy that freedom today.

That, Bertie, is what Julia Derrig of Westport would want for 2016.

I'm sure your own late ma would agree with the woman from Westport who encrypted dispatches for Mick Collins in 1920 and carried concealed revolvers past armed checkpoints in Mayo so that those weapons could be used in the cause of freedom.

Let's be plain on this, man to man.

Killing at close range is disgusting work, but sometimes it is needed. It was needed then. They did those deeds for future generations. They did it for us.

These monuments will say more about you than any owl Bertie Bowl. You might not have that much time to action this, although personally I hope you do.

Like the Rising itself we have a window of opportunity. The other lot are far more likely to bring back Lord Nelson.

Julia Derrig never did rate the mettle of that lot in Castlebar.

Do it Bertie. Do it and the people will respect you. We will believe what you do.

Sincerely,  
Phil Mac Giolla Bhain