



# CNI

## **FAITH FOCUS - Cynical to cloak modern agenda in spirit of 1916**

**A curious aspect of the centenary commemoration around the 1916 Easter Rising is the confidence with which many people claim to know the minds of the leaders, Michael Kelly writes.**

Take Leo Varadkar (acting-Minister for Health, at least for the time being). Mr Varadkar recently claimed that same-sex marriage blended the “warm realism” of the leaders of 1916 with what he described as the “cold realism” of 1937, presumably a reference to the fact that Bunreacht na hÉireann – adopted by the Irish people in 1937 – contained no reference to gay marriage.

Joan Burton – acting-Tánaiste – claimed that same-sex marriage is “consistent with the values of the [1916] Proclamation”.

For his part, the acting-Taoiseach Enda Kenny, in a suitably emotional voice, claimed that last

year's vote in support of same-sex marriage showed that Ireland was becoming the "fair, compassionate and tolerant nation" the men and women of 1916 fought to create.

It's an odd attempt by the politicians of 2016 – living on borrowed pride – to co-opt the visionaries that struck for Irish freedom in 1916 to give the impression that the revolutionaries would approve of the modern political agenda.

### **Same-sex marriage**

Would the men and women of 1916 have been enthusiastic supporters of same-sex marriage? Well, the basic answer is that we simply don't know. In the absence of historical evidence, there is no way of knowing for sure. But, we can certainly extrapolate.

What do we know of the men and women of 1916? Well, one of the key things we know that they were – for the most part – a group of religiously-devout Catholics.

As the recent book *The Church and the Rising* points out, many people recalled how the praying of the rosary was the backdrop to the Rising. Evidently, many of the leaders of the Rising were men and women who were socially conservative, certainly by the standards of today.

It's cynical in the extreme for politicians to claim the mantle of 1916 to push a radical social agenda today.

It's notable that no such attempt was made in 1966 – the 50th anniversary of the Rising – by contemporary politicians to claim the blessing of the executed leaders for their policy agenda. Presumably, since many of those involved in the Rising were still alive, opportunistic politicians would've been found out.

There's a similar approach taken to Catholic schools by some politicians. Aodhán Ó Ríordáin – who failed to retain his seat at the general election and is now campaigning to win a place in the Seanad he campaigned to abolish – is strident in his views on Catholic education.

### **Intolerance**

Mr Ó Ríordáin has claimed that “religious ethos has no place in the educational system of a modern republic”. When challenged about the intolerance of such a view, he simply responded “this is a republic” as if announcing the description of the form of government in Ireland amounts to a profound statement. Italy is a republic, the US is a republic, France is a republic, Iran is a republic and North Korea is a

republic. All of these countries have radically different approaches. So the simple fact that Ireland is also a republic says nothing about the system of education we ought to have.

It's hard to know how, in conscience, Mr Ó Ríordáin taught for so many years in a Catholic school and even put himself forward to be appointed principal, a role which put him to the fore of promoting an ethos to which he is so clearly publicly opposed.

If politicians believe in a particular cause, they should articulate it with honesty and clarity. Claiming the legacy of the 'dead generations' or tired formulaic pieties might sound warm and fuzzy, but it's ultimately idiotic.

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*The Church and the Rising is available from The Irish Catholic priced €12.99/£9.99 by calling 01.687.4095 or emailing [geraldine@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:geraldine@irishcatholic.ie). It can also be purchased online at [www.irishcatholic.ie](http://www.irishcatholic.ie)*

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