# Reflecting on 1916: would the Easter Rising leaders recognise modern Ireland?



As Ireland marks the anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising, questions about how the leaders of that pivotal rebellion would view modern Ireland have resurfaced. Paddy Cullivan, a historical entertainer, offers a reflective essay for Easter Sunday in the Irish Mirror, exploring the perspectives that figures like James Connolly and Patrick Pearse might have on contemporary Irish society.

The Easter Rising is widely considered a turning point in Irish history, ultimately leading to Irish independence. Yet, over a century later, commentators like Cullivan are asking whether today's Ireland aligns with the aspirations set out in the 1916 Proclamation, the defining document authored and signed by the rebellion’s leaders.

Cullivan begins by noting the phrase "Was it for this?", commonly used in Ireland to question whether the sacrifices made during the Rising were justified by the country's current state. This phrase, derived from a 1913 W.B. Yeats poem, especially reflects on how the leaders of 1916 might feel about today's Ireland.

He highlights the Proclamation’s opening phrase “Irishmen and Irish women,” which was notably progressive for its time, as women would not gain the vote until 1918. The essay suggests that the emphasis on inclusivity might have pleased the signatories, especially considering the advancements in women's rights and equality that have been made in recent decades. For instance, while Pearse—a noted poet—might have disapproved of attempts to remove the word “Mother” from Ireland’s 1937 constitution, he may have been heartened by its rejection in a 2024 referendum.

However, the essay expresses disappointment over the Proclamation's declaration of the Irish people's right “to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies.” Since Ireland joined the European Union in 1973, the country has been subject to EU policies affecting migration, trade, and climate change, limiting what might be considered ‘unfettered’ control. Nonetheless, Cullivan posits that Michael Collins, known for his fiscal insight, might have approved of former Finance Minister Charlie McCreevy’s 12.5% corporate tax rate policy, which helped shape Ireland’s modern economy.

Cullivan also considers how James Connolly, a socialist figure and signatory of the Proclamation, would view present-day Ireland. Connolly’s vision for “equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens” is contrasted with current social challenges such as homelessness, emigration, and the ongoing crisis in housing affordability for young people. The essay points out that Connolly would likely be critical of the present political focus, which often dwells on “culture and identity wars” rather than pragmatic solutions to the country’s pressing economic and social issues.

Drawing from a 1904 statement by Connolly, Cullivan quotes: “I have long been of opinion that the Socialist movement elsewhere was to a great extent hampered by the presence in its ranks of faddists and cranks, who were in the movement, not for the cause of Socialism, but because they thought they saw in it a means of ventilating their theories on such questions as sex, religion, vaccination, vegetarianism, etc., and I believed that such ideas had or ought to have no place in our programme or in our party.” From this, Cullivan infers that Connolly might advocate for political leaders today to focus on effective governance rather than becoming bogged down in divisive or peripheral debates.

The essay further criticises the current parliamentary environment, referencing “the interminable Dail speaking rights debacle,” and suggests that issues such as Ireland's human rights challenges and diplomatic relations—particularly with the United States—could be taking a backseat to less substantial political disputes.

Cullivan concludes by imagining that if every member of Dáil Éireann, the Irish parliament, recited the Proclamation before beginning their debates, it might refocus attention on the priorities espoused in 1916: the freedom, welfare, and exaltation of Ireland. These goals are contrasted with what the essay describes as an excessive focus on “imported culture wars” and distant conflicts, rather than the unification and prosperity of the Irish nation.

In summing up, the question “Was it for this?” remains pertinent, with Cullivan offering his answer: “No. Must try harder.” This reflection encourages consideration of Ireland’s journey since 1916, and the ongoing work required to fulfil the vision of its founders.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Rising> - This article supports the claim that the Easter Rising was a pivotal rebellion that marked a turning point in Irish history, ultimately leading to Irish independence and the establishment of the Irish Republic in 1916.
* <https://www.ucc.ie/en/theirishrevolution/collections/the-story-of-1916/chapter-3-the-leaders-of-the-1916-rising/> - This source confirms details about Patrick Pearse’s role as a leader of the Rising, his reading of the Proclamation, and his background as a poet and advocate of Irish cultural revival.
* <https://templeupdate.com/100-years-later-irish-remember-the-1916-easter-rising/> - This article discusses the legacy of the 1916 Rising and how it is commemorated in modern Dublin, supporting the notion that the Rising’s leaders are still remembered and that their actions shaped the course of Irish independence.
* <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/easter-rising> - This National Army Museum page supports the fact that on Easter Monday 1916 Irish nationalists launched an armed revolt against British rule, linking the Rising’s military action with its symbolic and political significance.
* <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/irish-constitution-amendment-mother-word-6028056-Mar2023/> - This article corroborates the recent 2024 referendum rejecting the removal of the word 'Mother' from Ireland’s 1937 constitution, an issue the essay suggests Patrick Pearse might have viewed with interest.