The 1916 Easter Rising transformed Ireland. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic set the agenda for decades to come and led directly to the establishment of an Chéad Dáil Éireann. The execution of 16 leaders, the internment without trial of hundreds of nationalists and British military rule ensured that the people turned to Sinn Féin. In 1917 republican by-election victories, the death on hunger strike of Thomas Ashe and the adoption of the Republic as the objective of a reorganised Sinn Féin changed the course of Irish history.
The British government attempted to impose Conscription on Ireland in 1918. They were met with a united national campaign, culminating in a General Strike and the signing of the anti-Conscription pledge by hundreds of thousands of people. In the General Election of December 1918 Sinn Féin triumphed, winning 73 of the 105 seats in Ireland.
The First Dáil Éireann assembled in the Mansion House, Dublin, on 21 January 1919. It ratified the establishment of the Irish Republic and adopted a Declaration of Independence and a Democratic Programme committed to justice and equality. The British government suppressed the Dáil and the Irish Republican Army fought for Irish independence against an increasingly brutal British military regime.

1919

The First Dáil 90th Anniversary

The British government suppressed the Dáil and the Irish Republican Army fought for Irish independence against an increasingly brutal British military regime.

First Dáil members pictured in April 1919 after many of them had been released from prison.

Dublin Metropolitan Police outside the Mansion House.

Cathal Brugha who presided at the First Dáil meeting on 21 January 1919.

Press photograph of the Round Room of the Mansion House as the First Dáil met on the afternoon of 21 January 1919.

First Dáil members pictured in April 1919 after many of them had been released from prison.
The Black and Tans and Auxiliaries were introduced in 1920 and terrorised Ireland. The IRA fought in guerrilla war against the British whose military infrastructure and intelligence system was badly damaged. British Prime Minister Lloyd George’s 1920 Government of Ireland Act imposed Partition against the wishes of the people as confirmed by Sinn Féin’s victory in the Second Dáil election in 1921. The Dáil, Sinn Féin and the IRA split on the Treaty of December 1921 which established the 26-County Free State and the Six-County ‘Northern Ireland’ state. Civil War was fought between June 1922 and April 1923, ending in military defeat for Republicans. But the vision of the Republic proclaimed in 1916 and ratified by the First Dáil Éireann lived on.
For nearly half a century between 1923 and 1969 Partitioned Ireland was divided between a sectarian state in the Six Counties dominated by the Unionist Party and the Orange Order and, in the 26 Counties, a state dominated by conservative politics with widespread poverty and social exclusion. In every decade internment without trial was used in the Six Counties against republicans seeking a United Ireland. Despite repression, Republicans battled on, enduring prison hunger strikes and executions in the 1940s and in the 1950s reviving the IRA to commence the Resistance Campaign of 1956-’62, an armed challenge to Britain’s border in Ireland.
The Civil Rights Movement saw the nationalist people in the Six Counties challenge the sectarian Orange state. Unwilling to reform, Unionism staged a backlash, culminating in pogroms against nationalist communities in 1969. Determined to prop up the Orange state, the British Government imposed Internment without trial in 1971, massacred 14 civilians on Bloody Sunday 1972 and enforced military occupation on a scale not seen since the Black and Tans. The IRA was the spearhead of popular resistance, waging a long war of attrition against British rule.
Prison resistance was always a key element in the struggle for the Irish Republic from 1916 onwards. Many First Dáil TDs were political prisoners. Britain tried to break Irish republicans in the prisons and in 1974 and 1976 IRA Volunteers Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg died in English jails on hunger strike. From 1976 the British government attempted to criminalise Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and Armagh Women's Prison. The fight against criminalisation culminated in Hunger Strikes in 1980 and 1981. Ten hunger strikers died and the republican struggle was transformed, much as it was after Easter 1916.

1981

Máiréad Farrell
National march in Dublin in support of the Hunger Strike
Bobby Sands
Trade unionists mobilised in support of the Republican prisoners
1981 saw some the largest ever mobilisations in Ireland
H Block protest outside Leinster House after the election of Kieran Doherty TD
The grieving family of hunger striker Joe McDonnell
The funeral of Bobby Sands MP

REMEMBER THE HUNGER STRIKERS

The growing family of hunger strikers (Joe McDonnell)
Throughout the 1980s the conflict in Ireland continued at great cost in human lives. The undefeated resistance of Republicans was seen in the mass breakout from the H-Blocks of Long Kesh in September 1983. Sinn Féin grew as a major electoral force in the Six Counties in 1982 and 1983 when Gerry Adams was elected MP for West Belfast, becoming President of Sinn Féin in November 1983. The British and Irish Governments signed the Hillsborough Agreement in 1985 to isolate Sinn Féin politically. The Border was reinforced. Censorship was tightened. Discrimination was undiminished. The war and the causes of the war persisted. Then in 1992 Sinn Féin initiated a Peace Process.
Intensive dialogue between Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams and SDLP leader John Hume resulted in the commencement of the Irish Peace Process. In August 1994 the IRA declared an historic cessation of military operations and Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Irish Government of Albert Reynolds pressed for inclusive negotiations involving all parties. This resulted in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Since then Sinn Féin has worked to implement the Agreement, culminating in the formation of a Sinn Féin-DUP Executive in 2007. Inspired by the 1916 Proclamation, the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil and the sacrifices of generations of Irishmen and Irishwomen who have struggled for freedom, Sinn Féin today continues to play a leading role in the Peace Process, to campaign for social justice and equality and to work for a United Ireland.