

## **Narrator**

The bloody aftermath of the 1916 Rising, with the protracted executions of the 15 republican leaders over a period of one week; the hanging of Roger Casement in August 1916; the mass internment of thousands and severe military repression by the British, created in the Ireland of 1919, for the first time since the 1798 Rising, a nation in revolt.

British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, decided to hold a General Election in December 1918. Republicans were determined to take full advantage of the opportunity provided.

On 14 December 1918, for the first time in Irish history, all the people of Ireland were being asked to choose between an Irish Republic as expressed in the Sinn Féin manifesto or to support the policies of the Irish Parliamentary Party; which meant a partitioned Ireland within the British Empire.

Sinn Féin's 1918 Election Manifesto declared:

## **Actor**

*Sinn Féin gives Ireland the opportunity of vindicating her honour and pursuing with renewed confidence the path of national salvation by rallying to the flag of the Irish Republic.*

*Sinn Féin aims at securing the establishment of that Republic:*

*1. By withdrawing the Irish Representation from the British Parliament, and by denying the right and opposing the will of the British Government or any foreign Government to legislate for Ireland.*

*2. By making use of any and every means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland in subjection by military force or otherwise.*

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Against the backdrop of massive intimidation, including the arrest and jailing of over 100 prominent Sinn Féin activists; the confiscation of election material; and the suppression of republican papers, the Irish people overwhelmingly and unequivocally demanded an independent 32-County republic.

Sinn Féin candidates scored a spectacular victory in the December 1918 Westminster elections. The result, announced on 28 December, gave the party 73 out of a total of 105 seats. Of the remainder, the Irish parliamentary party got just 6 seats and the remaining 26 went to unionists.

Sinn Féin candidates had stood on the policy of self-determination for Ireland and declared that they would not be taking seats in the Westminster Parliament. This abstentionist policy has been adopted by Sinn Féin candidates in all elections since 1917.

As the pro-Irish Parliamentary Party newspaper The Freeman's Journal admitted on 30 December 1918:

**Actor**

*“The meaning of the Irish vote is as clear as it is emphatic. More than two-thirds of the electors throughout national Ireland have endorsed the Sinn Féin programme. They invited the people to join to the demand for a Republic as something immediately obtainable and practicable as well as desirable, the declaration that they would accept nothing else and nothing less.”*

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In the New Year, Harry Boland and Alderman Tom Kelly issued invitations from the Sinn Féin Headquarters in 6 Harcourt Street, to all Sinn Féin deputies to attend a private meeting in the Mansion House in Dublin on 7 January. Count Plunkett chaired the meeting of 26 deputies and it was decided to proceed with the plan to institute an independent parliament for Ireland, which would take on the powers of government. It

was agreed to invite all the recently-elected deputies to attend the opening session of Dáil Éireann on 21 January 1919 in the Mansion House.

The invitation to attend Dáil Éireann was sent to all the recently-elected deputies, signed by Count Plunkett who had been re-elected to the Roscommon seat he first won in 1917.

As the Sinn Féin members entered the Mansion House, they were greeted by cheering crowds.

The feeling of republicans on this momentous occasion for the Irish people were described by Máire Comerford, who was among the packed gallery that day:

**Actor**

*'No day that ever dawned in Ireland, has been waited for, worked for, suffered for like that January Tuesday.'*

**Narrator**

At 3.30pm, Count George Plunkett called the inaugural meeting to order and nominated Cathal Brugha to be Ceann Comhairle for Dáil Éireann. Pádraig Ó Máille seconded the proposal. Cathal Brugha rose and spoke in Irish saying:

**Actor**

A chairde, tá obair thábhachtach le déanamh inniu, an obair is tábhachtaí do rinneadh in Éirinn ón lá a tháinig na Gaeil go hÉirinn.

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This call, and much of the proceedings of the First Dáil was done through Irish. Brugha, addressing the deputies, clerks and packed public gallery of visitors and press, said that there may be people present who didn't understand the Irish language as a result of the type of education in Ireland for many years.

He proceeded then to the roll-call, 28 Teachtaí Dála were present, absent were 37 deputies, while 34 were ``faoi ghlas ag Gallaibh" (imprisoned by the foreign enemy). Another three were recorded as being ``ar díbert ag Gallaibh" (deported by the foreign enemy).

The first woman elected to parliament, Constance Markievicz, could not be in attendance, as she too was imprisoned. In her absence she was elected as Minister for Labour in the new government later that year.

One of those in attendance, Frank Gallagher, described the sense of occasion that resonated within the building, as Ireland asserted its freedom to the world:

### **Actor**

*“The roll of Deputies was called. To many names the clerks gave answer ‘Fe ghlás ag Ghallaibh’ – in foreign prisons. So often was that answer given that it became a refrain, a menacing refrain, which ever afterwards rang in the mind as that day was recalled. To other names the answer was simply ‘Absent’. One of these names was Sir Edward Carson. For a moment the audience laughed and then it was realised that Dáil Éireann was the assembly of Ireland, embracing all whom the people chose, and that Unionists had the same right to be there as Republicans, and the laugh died out and was not repeated.”*

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Cathal Brugha stated after the reading of the roll call that it would be noticed that many of those named were absent, though they had received an invitation to attend. In Irish, he said that as Wolfe Tone had stated *“there are those who do not wish to toil for Ireland and that work must be done in their absence and that work would be done”*. He explained that those imprisoned by England had no charges proffered against them by the country *“which professes to the world that it is a friend to small nations”*. *“In prison in England,”* he said, *“is the most courageous women born in any country, Countess Markievicz”*.

Following the adoption of the provisional Constitution for the First Dáil, Cathal Brugha called for the TDs to be upstanding while the Declaration

of Independence was read, firstly in Irish by Brughha himself, then in French by George Gavan Duffy and lastly in English by Eamon Duggan.

**Actor**

*Fáisnéis Neamhspleáchais*

*De bhrí gur dual do mhuintir na hÉireann bheith n-a saor náisiún.*

*Agus de bhrí nár staon muintir na hÉireann riamh le seacht gcéad bliain ó diúltú d'annsmacht Gall agus ó chur ina choinne go minic le neart airm.*

*Agus de bhrí nach bhfuil de bhunús agus nach raibh riamh de bhunús le dlí Shasana sa tír seo ach foiréigean agus calaois, agus nach bhfuil de thaca leis ach sealbh lucht airm in ainneoin toil follasach mhuintir na hÉireann.*

*Agus de bhrí go ndéarna Saor-Arm na hÉireann Saorstát Éireann a fhógairt i mBaile Átha Cliath Seachtain na Cásca 1916 ar son muintir na hÉireann.*

*Agus de bhrí go bhfuil muintir na hÉireann lán-cheaptha ar neamhspleáchas iomlán a bhaint amach agus do chosaint dóibh fhéin d'fhonn leas an phobal a chur chun cinn, an ceart a chur i bhfeidhm, an síothcháin in Éirinn agus cairdeas le náisiúin eile a chur in áirithe dóibh féin agus féineachas náisiúnta a cheapadh go mbeidh toil na ndaoine mar*

*bhunús leis agus cothrom cirt is caoithiúlachtachta dá bharr ag gach duine in Éirinn.*

*Agus de bhrí go ndéar na muintir na hÉireann, agus sinn i mbéal ré nua de stair an domhain, feidhm a bhaint as an Olltoghchán, Mí na Nollag, 1918, chun a dhearbhu gur toil leó bheith dílis do Shaorstát Éireann.*

*Ar an ábharr son déanaimid, na Teachtaí atá tofa ag muintir na hÉireann agus sinn i nDáil Chomhairle i dteannta a chéile, bunú Saorstáit d'áth-dheimhniú in ainm náisiún na hÉireann agus sinn féin do chur faoi gheasa an deimhniú seo a chur I bhfeidhm ar gach slí ar ár gcumas.*

*Órdaím nach bhfuil de chumhacht ag éinne ach amháin ag na Teachtaí tofa ag muintir na hÉireann dlíthe a dhéanamh gur dual do mhuintir na hÉireann géilleadh dóibh, agus nach bhfuil de phárlimint ann go mbeidh an náisiún umhal do ach amháin Dáil Éireann.*

*Dearbhaimid nach bhfuilingeóchaimid go bráth an annsmacht Ghallda ar ár gceart náisiúnta agus éilimid ar Gharastún na Sasanach imeacht ar fad as ár dtír.*

*Éilimid ar gach soar-náisiún ar domhan neamhspleáchas na hÉireann a admháil agus fógraimid gurab éigean ár neamhspleáchas chun síocháin a chur in áirithe don domhan.*



## **Narrator**

Reading the Declaration, Cathal Brugha stated:

## **Actor**

*“Deputies, you understand from what is asserted in this Declaration that we are now done with England. Let the world know it and those who are concerned bear it in mind.”*

*“Pé ní a thiochfaidh as a bhfuil ráite anseo - imirt anama nó bás - tá deire le ré na cainte in Éirinn, agus má's maith is mithid é - tá deire le ráiméas.” (Whatever comes of what is said here today - risk to soul or death - the era of talking is at an end in Ireland - and thankfully - there is an end to the nonsense.) “Caithfear briseadh do dhéanamh ar an gceangal idir an dúiche seo is Sasana. Mura ndéantar sin ní bheidh aon tsíocháin ann.” (The connection between this jurisdiction and England must be broken. If it is not there will be no peace).*

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Piarras Beasláí seconded the adoption of the Declaration, stating

## **Actor**

*“without the brave heroes of 1916, the First Dáil wouldn't be in existence. The spirit, of those brave warriors who acted on their beliefs was with us in this Dáil. We will pursue the independence referred to in*

*the Declaration in every way possible. That means action, and we will not shirk from that action, even though it may mean imprisonment or injury. Dáil Éireann will do everything within its power to bring about freedom and implement the Declaration."*

### **Narrator**

*Cathal Brugha then asked the deputies present to stand and affirm in Irish that:*

### **Narrator & Actors**

*Aontaimíd an Fhaisnéis Neamhspleáchais seo agus cuirimid sinn féin fá gheasaibh ár ndícheall do dhéanamh chun í a chur i bhfeidhm ar gach slí ar ár gcumas.*

*We adopt this Declaration of Independence, and we pledge ourselves to put it into effect by every means in our power.*

### **Narrator**

After the reading of the Declaration came the Message to the Free Nations of the World.

### **Actor**

*To the Nations of the World—Greeting*

*The Nation of Ireland having proclaimed her national independence, calls, through her elected representatives in Parliament assembled in the Irish Capital on January 21st, 1919, upon every free nation to support the Irish Republic by recognising Ireland's national status and her right to its vindication at the Peace Congress.*

*Naturally, the race, the language, the customs and traditions of Ireland are radically distinct from the English. Ireland is one of the most ancient nations in Europe, and she has preserved her national integrity, vigorous and intact, through seven centuries of foreign oppression; she has never relinquished her national rights, and throughout the long era of English usurpation she has in every generation defiantly proclaimed her inalienable right of nationhood down to her last glorious resort to arms in 1916.*

*Internationally, Ireland is the gateway to the Atlantic; Ireland is the last outpost of Europe towards the West; Ireland is the point upon which great trade routes between East and West converge; her independence is demanded by the Freedom of the Seas; her great harbours must be open to all nations, instead of being the monopoly of England. To-day these harbours are empty and idle solely because English policy is determined to retain Ireland as a barren bulwark for English aggrandisement, and the unique geographical position of this island, far from being a benefit*

*and safeguard to Europe and America, is subjected to the purposes of England's policy of world domination.*

*Ireland to-day reasserts her historic nationhood the more confidently before the new world emerging from the war, because she believes in freedom and justice as the fundamental principles of international law; because she believes in a frank co-operation between the peoples for equal rights against the vested privileges of ancient tyrannies; because the permanent peace of Europe can never be secured by perpetuating military dominion for the profit of empire but only by establishing the control of government in every land upon the basis of the free will of a free people, and the existing state of war, between Ireland and England, can never be ended until Ireland is definitely evacuated by the armed forces of England.*

*For these among other reasons, Ireland—resolutely and irrevocably determined at the dawn of the promised era of self-determination and liberty that she will suffer foreign dominion no longer—calls upon every free nation to uphold her national claim to complete independence as an Irish Republic against the arrogant pretensions of England founded in fraud and sustained only by an overwhelming military occupation, and demands to be confronted publicly with England at the Congress of the Nations, that the civilised world having judged between English wrong*

*and Irish right may guarantee to Ireland its permanent support for the maintenance of her national independence.*

## **Narrator**

The last document ratified was the Democratic Programme which carried forward the progressive legacy of James Connolly and which has defined Sinn Féin's policies to the present day.

## **Actor**

### ***Democratic Programme of Dáil Éireann 1919***

*We declare in the words of the Irish Republican Proclamation the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be indefeasible, and in the language of our first President. Pádraig Mac Piarais, we declare that the Nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the Nation, but to all its material possessions, the Nation's soil and all its resources, all the wealth and all the wealth-producing processes within the Nation, and with him we reaffirm that all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare.*

*We declare that we desire our country to be ruled in accordance with the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Justice for all, which alone can secure permanence of Government in the willing adhesion of the people.*

*We affirm the duty of every man and woman to give allegiance and service to the Commonwealth, and declare it is the duty of the Nation to assure that every citizen shall have opportunity to spend his or her strength and faculties in the service of the people. In return for willing service, we, in the name of the Republic, declare the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the Nation's labour.*

*It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens of a Free and Gaelic Ireland.*

*The Irish Republic fully realises the necessity of abolishing the present odious, degrading and foreign Poor Law System, substituting therefor a sympathetic native scheme for the care of the Nation's aged and infirm, who shall not be regarded as a burden, but rather entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration. Likewise it shall be the duty of the Republic*

*to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well-being of the Nation.*

*It shall be our duty to promote the development of the Nation's resources, to increase the productivity of its soil, to exploit its mineral deposits, peat bogs, and fisheries, its waterways and harbours, in the interests and for the benefit of the Irish people.*

*It shall be the duty of the Republic to adopt all measures necessary for the recreation and invigoration of our Industries, and to ensure their being developed on the most beneficial and progressive co-operative and industrial lines. With the adoption of an extensive Irish Consular Service, trade with foreign Nations shall be revived on terms of mutual advantage and goodwill, and while undertaking the organisation of the Nation's trade, import and export, it shall be the duty of the Republic to prevent the shipment from Ireland of food and other necessaries until the wants of the Irish people are fully satisfied and the future provided for.*

*It shall also devolve upon the National Government to seek co-operation of the Governments of other countries in determining a standard of Social and Industrial Legislation with a view to a general and lasting improvement in the conditions under which the working classes live and labour.*

## **Narrator**

When Dáil Éireann had risen from its first sitting, it was greeted outside the Mansion House in Dawson Street by tumultuous cheers from thousands of supporters. The First Dáil had shown that Ireland would no longer accept the rule of Westminster.

And as the crowds cheered the newly-formed government leaving the Mansion House, a small group of IRA men were returning from a quarry in Tipperary, where, almost echoing the words of Cathal Brugha, they had just taken part in the first action of the Tan War.

The socialist republican Liam Mellows who was Teachta Dála for two constituencies in the First Dáil was later to be executed by the Free State during the Civil War. During the Treaty debates he described the Ireland of the First Dáil, the Irish Republic declared independent in 1919:

## **Actor**

*We placed Ireland upon a pedestal for the first time in the history of this country. For the first time we had a government established by the directly declared will of the people. That government rested upon the surest of all foundations and placed Ireland in a position it was never in before since its subjection. Ireland was put forth to the world as a headlight, as a beacon beginning to shine for all time to guide all those*



*who were struggling. The whole world was looking to Ireland for a lead.  
This downtrodden, this miserable country, as some of you called it, was,  
during the last few years, the greatest country in God's earth...ENDS*