



## COUNTESS MARKIEVICZ—‘THE REBEL COUNTESS’

Countess Markievicz was born on the Fourth of February 1868 in London being christened Constance Georgina Gore-Booth. After her birth she moved back to Ireland with her parents. Her parents Henry and Georgina Gore-Booth were wealthy landowners owning thousands of acres of land in Sligo. She had two brothers and two sisters. Nearly all of her childhood was spent at Lissadell House in Co. Sligo. When Constance was growing up she was taught by a governess and only paid attention to two subjects painting, literature and she excelled in riding horses.

In 1893 Constance parents enrolled her at the Slade School of Art in London under Alphonse Legros and also kept up her art lessons in The Bolton Studios Fulham Road under Anna Nordgren. Where she stayed for some four years to October 1897. Constance left London to finish studying in Paris 1890s and lived at Rue Campagne Premier in Montparnasse where she was accepted into Julian's Art School just off the Rue de Rennes, under Jean Paul Laurens.

In Paris she met Count Casimir Dunin Markievicz and fell in love with him and got engaged at the end of 1899. They were married on September 29th 1900 by the Rev. F. S. Le Fanu, of Saint John's Church, Dublin and from 41 Devonshire Place, at Saint Marylebone's Parish Church London England.



Their honeymoon was spent cycling around Normandy. They settled in Paris until the following year they came home to Ireland, for Constance was going to have a baby girl born on the 13th November 1901 christened Maeve Alys. In spring 1903 the Markievicz's left for Casimir's home country Poland, that would be the last time Constance would ever see the place of her husband's family. October 1903 they came home with Casimir's son Stanislas to settle down in St Mary's Frankfort Avenue, Rathgar a suburb of Dublin.

In the next few years the Markievicz separated and Casimir went home to Poland. March 1908 Constance decided to join the Sinn Fein Meetings to get to know her fellow members and there she met Helena Molony who belonged to Inghinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Ireland) set up by Maud Gonne in 1900. She became a member of Inghinidhe na hEireann and with her friend Helena they decided to set up a newspaper called Bean na hEireann to spread the Irish News. Another friend she met was Bulmer Hobson, Vice- President of Sinn Fein arranged for Constance to become a member of its Drumcondra Branch in November 1908. They established a group for young boys called the Red Branch Knights then changed its name to the Fianna, (a band of elite warriors in ancient Ireland). Constance started to train the boys to shoot with rifles and to fight. In the mean time she looked around for something in the country and found a 12 bedroom house with a garden just outside Dublin which is now called Raheny, and hired a gardener to show the boys how to grow vegetables and fruit. The Raheny project failed and they all moved back to town, where the Fianna were still going strong and still spreading the word.

In 1912 Constance moved into Surrey House, Rathmines where she opened her house to anyone in trouble. She also opened soup kitchens with women friends in two national schools in the city area when the Lock-Out of 1913 stopped the workers from working after they supported the union. In 1915 Constance was honoured by the ITGWU for her services.

She was Second-in-Command in the Irish Citizen Army during the 1916 Rising at St. Stephen's Green. With so many dead and injured, the battle went on for another few days and they surrendered on the Saturday 19th April 1916. The rebels were taken to Kilmainham Jail and Madame Markievicz was taken to solitary confinement away from the others. All of Dublin lay in ruins after the 1916 Rising was over.

In secret the sentencing including the leaders and Constance were court-martialled and sentenced to death.

Court-martial: Constance Georgina Markievicz

- (1) Did an act to wit did take part in an armed rebellion and in the waging of war against His Majesty the King, such act being of such a nature as to be calculated to be prejudicial to the Defence of the Realm and being done with the intention and for the purpose of assisting the enemy.

- (2) Did attempt to cause disaffection among the civilian population of His Majesty.



The finding and sentence was Guilty. Death by being shot. The Court recommend the prisoner to mercy solely and only on account of her sex. Signed by J. G. Maxwell, Convening Officer, and C. J Blackrader, Brig. -General, President, 4th day of May 1916. The Confirming Officer (also General Maxwell) noted on the proper space on the Schedule: 'Confirmed. But I commute the sentence to one of Penal Servitude for life'.

Constance was taken to Mountjoy with some 20 women, girls that were left behind from Kilmainham Jail who were not released. 5 women prisoners were sent to internment in England, first to Lewes and then to Aylesbury. But since Constance was a life-sentence prisoner she was sent to Aylesbury Prison. She was released on Sunday, June 17 by the Home Office, after been there 14 months in Prison. Her sister Eva and Esther Roper came with clothes for her to wear and to help her to get home. Maire Perolz, Helena Molony, and Dr Kathleen Lynn stayed there to welcome her out of prison. She got on the boat in Holyhead, Wales for Dun Laoghaire Co Dublin and arrived on Thursday June 21st 1917 which took five days. Constance had no home but stayed with Dr Kathleen Lynn's place for some days to rest. She was President of Cumann na mBan and affiliated with the Volunteers.

On October 25th 1917 at the Mansion House Dublin, Sinn Fein were holding a convention to revive there organization and to represent Madame Markievicz first appearance as a politician. On the night of May 17th all Sinn Fein leaders were taken in as prisoners, issued by the new Viceroy Lord French and the Chief Secretary, Mr Shortt. Madame Markievicz was one of them named.



She was brought down by train to Euston Station, London and then on to Holloway Prison as an internee. In Sep-

tember 1918 Constance was requested to stand as a candidate for Sinn Fein in the next election. She was standing for St Patrick's in Dublin, a working – class constituency but was still in Prison. The results came in on the 28th December 1918. The Home Rule Party had won six seats, Unionists 26 and Sinn Fein amazing 23. Countess Markievicz was the only woman to be elected in the whole of United Kingdom.

Constance became the first woman to be elected to British Parliament, but could not take her seat because of Sinn Fein policy. She came out of Holloway on the 10th March, 1919 to stay with her sister and to get peace and quite. After leaving prison she visited the House of Commons just to see her name on a coat peg in the members' cloakroom and arrived home to Dublin on the 15th.



An Irish Parliament was set up by Sinn Fein as promised. Dail Eireann met again on April 1st, with Countess Markievicz elected as Minister of Labour 1919-1921 and becoming the first woman to be elected a Cabinet Minister in Europe. After coming out of Holloway she was arrested again for the third time, for using a treasonable speech in which she used Jonathan Swift's famous remark 'Burn everything British but its coal'. She went to Cork Prison for four months coming out in October. After which Sinn Fein and the Dail were prohibited by law. It was declared because of the splitting up of the Old Volunteers now called The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Black and Tans.

This was the back drop that Constance and Ministers had to work with, also being on the run, hiding out in houses belonging to friends and keeping one step in front of the police. Constance started to disguise herself by wearing an ancient bonnet with berries on her head and stooping like an old lady to fool the police, and then people started to call her Charlie's Aunt. She continued to work as Labour Minister, with a ladder attached to her office window to escape from police. One night coming up from Wicklow Mountains she was stopped by the police for not having a tail lamp and was recognised and arrested. She was sent to Mountjoy, where she contacted her sister Eva to say she was well.

In Spring 1920, Lloyd George passed a Government of Ireland Act through Parliament. There it set up Two Parliaments ---- Northern Parliament was to rule Ulster Counties and the Southern Parliament to rule the other 26 Counties. The Act was accepted by the Unionists but not by the rest of the counties. Guerrilla warfare still raged on and it came worse, until July 1921 talks between Lloyd George and de Valera arranged a truce, that would release all the prisoners including Constance and she was free

again. Constance lost her seat when the Peace Treaty was signed. De Valera and his followers who refused to believe the Peace Treaty went and set up a new Republican Party, Cumann na Poblachta.

She now joined the Party and they sent her off to America to raise funds for the cause. The tour in America was a great success. On the return journey by liner she stopped in London to see her daughter Maeve who did not recognise her own mother. The amount of time she was in prison she got very old and frail.

Constance was travelling in America, but at home Ireland was divided over the Peace Treaty. She had lost her seat in the Government. Constance was in the thick of war joining her fellow members on the roofs of O'Connell Street buildings to shoot at Free State snipers. During the war she edited a Republican newspaper *Eire*, from Glasgow. War ended after about a year to June 1922. She won back her seat at the General Election, but did not take her seat in the Dail because of the Oath of Allegiance. Constance campaigned all of her time to just getting all the Republicans out of jail, when they were arrested after the Civil War. She held meetings everywhere, around street corners and was arrested for disturbing the peace.

At Christmas 1923 she was set free and began her political career again in the new year. Constance took charge at the Cumann na mBan meetings, reorganised the Fianna, was affiliated with St. Ultan's Children's Hospital and a member of the Rathmines Urban District Council. She fought for the people that had nothing for housing, health and child care. Casimir on a diplomatic mission in London came over to see Constance in Dublin, left after a few days and went back to Poland. In 1916 after she was arrested Surrey House was turned over by the army and looters came and took what they wanted. She was left with a few things and some money, at which she bought a car. The car was used for my things, bringing coal to people's houses and giving lifts to her friends. Constance was fighting for a seat in de Valera's new Fianna Fail party in June 1926 when she heard that her sister Eva had died and then her mother.

Constance was re-elected again, when Fianna Fail won back 44 seats de Valera and the rest of the elected could not enter the Dail and not in her life time. Before the end of the June she got very sick and was sent into Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital for an operation. Constance was operated for appendicitis but complications set in. She was very sick, Casimir, her stepson Stasko and Maeve her daughter were there around her bedside and many of her friends. On the 14th she lapsed into a coma at midnight and died on the morning of the 15th July 1927 at 1.25am surrounded by family and friends.

She lay in State in the Pillar Room of the Rotunda for two days and nights with a guard of her own Fianna boys observing her. On the day she was to be buried which was Sunday the Grave Diggers' Union were not permitted to work on that day, so the coffin was put into a vault over

night. Countess Markievicz was given a public funeral, a ceremonial with many bands, eight motor-tenders of wreaths.



Photo: Independent Newspapers, Ltd., Dublin.  
MR. DE VALERA, MR. RUTLEDGE AND OTHER DEPUTIES  
CARRYING THE COFFIN

The funeral was attended by her family, Jim Larkin, The Women's Defence League: represented by Madame MacBride, Mrs Despard, Miss MacSwiney and J. J O Kelly.

The Workers Union of Ireland

The Clan na nGaedheal

ITGWU

Sinn Fein Representatives

Citizen Army

She was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in the Republican Plot with the rest of her comrades on the 15th July 1926, at the age of 59 years. The funeral oration was delivered by Eamon de Valera.

The Last Post was sounded by Buglers of Fianna Eireann, followed by a decade of the Rosary in Irish..

Constance is remembered by;

- A Limestone Bust in Stephen's Green,
- A plaque in St. Ultan's Hospital which is now closed.
- A full-length portrait of her painted in 1900 by Szenkowski, which hangs in the Dublin Municipal Gallery.
- Yeat's poem; "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Constance Markievicz.