

The civil war in Dublin and the women's peace initiative – 2 descriptions.

1. 'Maud Gonne MacBride headed up a delegation of women, The Women's Peace Committee. Charlotte Despard, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and a number of pro-Treaty women such as Agnes O'Farrelly and Rosamond Jacob went to broker a peace. They sent a proposal to both sides – a cessation of hostilities to be agreed by the Dáil – but Collins, Cosgrave and Griffith rejected their proposal. Maud Gonne MacBride insisted on seeing her old friend Arthur Griffith, but he refused to help, saying that he was now p of the government and that they had to keep law and order'.

Sinead McCoole, *No ordinary women: Irish female activists in the revolutionary years 1900-1923* (Dublin, 2003), p. 91.

2. Rosamond Jacob diaries (NLI MS 32,582 (41), 22 April – 7 Aug. 1922).

8 May 1922 – Miss Bennett, Hanna [Sheehy-Skeffington] and Mrs Kingston¹ to tea ... and a joint committee meeting after about the civil war menace, but the truce was on by then so we did nothing'.

28 June 1922 'Ferocious firing all the latter part of the night, close by apparently and I found by buying a paper before breakfast that it was the F.S. army attacking the Four Courts. I went down on the quays to look, and stood for a while with a crowd at the corner of Parliament St listening to the big guns and watching the dome of the four Courts in a senseless sort of way. There were F.S. soldiers there to keep the people from going further. It did seem an extraordinary thing that army could be got so easily to attack the republicans. The art school was closed. I spent most of the afternoon wandering round High St, Bridge St, etc. From a diseased spirit of curiosity, and Helen and I went to Miss Scarlett's to tea and met tremendous rifle fire at the corner of Harcourt St but saw nothing ...'.

Thursday 29 June 1922 – 'Plenty of firing, big guns and all. The republicans had the pub at the corner of Aungier St, and there was firing there on and off for the next two days. They used to fire at lorries, and the FS troops took Jacobs. And some other place near, and fired at them until they finally left the place on Sunday evening

I was busy at the At Home at Mrs Despard's'.

30 June 1922 – 'I went to Suffolk St to ask if there was anything I could do. D. Macardle was there. She told me there was a Red Cross place over in Gloucester St, so I went there, where the republicans were in the hotels with the windows full of sandbags, and found a Trade Union place called Tara hall, full of girls making bandages. They showed me how, and I worked there till dinner time. Two wounded civilians were brought in to be attended to in the next room; one was a man who seemed to think he was pretty bad and required a lot of shirts. There was a lot of firing in the streets and a tremendous explosion once that broke the glass in one window. Some of the girls were the C. Na mB. type that loved the whole thing in a horrible way.

After dinner I knocked against Mme. McB. [Maud Gonne McBride] in the street and found she was trying to get some women together to go to both sides' leaders and talk sense to them – so I brought her to the IIL committee at 122A and she raked us all (except Mrs Richardson) over to the Mansion House to see what the Lord Mayor was doing. He said the Four Courts surrender had altered things and there was no knowing more till the next day nor wouldn't be much

¹ Lucy Olive Kingston (1892-1969).

fighting till the next day, and we had better come back in the morning. So we went home and Madame started to search the hospitals for Sean. She was only just home from Paris (where she had gone on a mission for the provisional government) that morning’.

1 July 1922 – ‘We met at the Mansion Hs. in the morning – Mme McB., Miss Bennett, Mrs S.S., Agnes Farrelly, Miss Scarlett, Mrs Comerford, Miss O’Connor (Labour), J.W., Mrs Despard, Edith Webb, Mrs Johnson, Mrs Connery and I forget who else. The mayor and the archbishop were going to the republican leaders then, to represent their share in the general damage and cruelty and see what conditions they wd agree to a truce.

Then, the more or less F.S. women, Mrs D., M. McBride, Agnes O’F., Edith Webb, and L. Bennett as a neutral, went to interview the government, and came back reporting as follows – They spoke of the sufferings of the people and need for peace and got the usual sort of answers from Griffith, Collins and Cosgrave. Cosgrave seemed anxious for the Dail to meet and said it cd be summoned for Tuesday but Griffith nudged him to make him shut up. Miss B. and Mme. McB. asked wd they let the R.s evacuate without giving up arms – Griffith said no, they must give up their arms. Mme McBride said that they certainly would not do, and that it wd be better to let them go with their arms than to shell the city. They were firm on this (tho Collins said he didn’t know why the R.s didn’t go home with their arms now, as there seemed nothing to stop them) and Griffith said the lives of all the ministers were in the greatest danger.

The deputation (W.W. and A.F. anyhow) seemed rather favourably impressed by the 3. The mayor and the archbishop went to the government later, and were told much the same, only they seemed more resolute against calling the Dail then. It didn’t seem much use sending a deputation to the R.s, but Miss Bennett said it wd be very unfair not to – shd at least show them there were some R. women who wanted peace, and not put all the burden of guilt on the government – so Mrs. S.S., Mrs Connery, Mrs Johnson, Miss Bennett and I went. We were taken in a motor ambulance to the back of the Hammam hotel, and let into a kind of back, outhouse place full of men and petrol tins and bicycles and step ladders and boxes and general impedimenta. Doctors and nurses and soldier and messengers went in and out all the time. The men were mostly not in uniform, they all had big revolvers in leather cases and military belts. Some looked dead tired, and all of course were untidy and unshaved, but all seemed in good humour. Most were young, but not all. After waiting a while, Oscar Traynor, then commanding in Dublin, was fetched to us, and Hanna and Miss B. tackled him. He was in a sort of semi-military dark suit, with a revolver in a belt, and the Sacred Heart badge in his button-hole. He is quite young, tall and slim, with the same type of long refined thoughtful refined face as De Valera, though much better looking. He represented their position as purely defensive, said they were not the aggressors. “we’re digging ourselves in here, and if they attack us we’ll defend ourselves”. He said they wd be willing to evacuate but not to surrender arms of course, and I think he said they had made the offer to the other side (whom he spoke of as “these people”). Asked wd they suspend hostilities if the Dail met early this week, he said that was for O’Connor and Mellowes to say, but probably they wd if the other side wd observe the truce. Informed of what Collins had said (that they were fools not to melt away with their arms now) he said they could put no faith in what anything Collins said. His attitude of utter disbelief in the faith of “these people” was depressing, being so exactly what the other side would say about them. Mrs J. and I took no share in the talk. I went for the interest of the thing and had nothing to say of my own; and he looked so tired and worn that I didn’t want to lengthen the conversation anyhow. His eyes looked dead sleepy, he could hardly keep them open. He was very nice in his manner – quiet and civil and friendly. He spoke as if they meant to do nothing aggressive, and

not as if the affair was any sort of fun to him. We were all favourably struck with him, and impressed with his talk just as the other deputation were with Collins, Griffith and Cosgrave’.

2 July 1922 - ‘Powerful firing nearby in the night. We sent a resolution to the govt. demanding that they shd call the Dail, and Mme McB. had a row with them over the prisoners, not being allowed to see Sean in Mountjoy, or even send him in a clean shirt’. RJ then went with Hanna S.S. to ‘Gloucester St, thro Beresford Place and Gardiner St to Tara hall, where there were 7 wounded. H. talked to her friends and I sewed bandages for a bit ... Hot fighting down York St in the evening, and the R’s finally evacuated the Swan and quit’.

Mon. 3 July 1922 – RJ went to look at Four Courts ‘big holes blown in it and the 2 wings practically destroyed. We got a silly answer from Griffith to our resolution. Mme M’B. and Hanna went up to Mtjoy in the afternoon and were refused admittance, but the prisoners were all hanging out the window of D wing in full view’.

4 July 1922 – RJ went to Mountjoy with Mrs Connery and later she went to tea with the Kingstons – ‘They had had bullets in the back gardens and against the house that day, but as soon as they had heard nothing for half an hour, we went out and had tea in the back garden. They are all for the government, or Lucy is disgusted with the whole country, and abuses it venomously, and S.K. doesn’t think the prisoners should resist or demand any sort of treatment’.

5 July 1922 – ‘It was this evening the Gresham and Hammam were evacuated and Cathal Brugha got himself shot. I do like a man who cannot surrender. [Inserted: ‘clouds of smoke up O’C. St, and a red glow in the sky later on, but not half the awful smell of burning that the 4 Courts made’].

9 July 1922 – ‘M.C. [M. Cranwill or Meg Connery] and I went up to the Mater to see Cathal Brugha lying in state. The priests at Marlborough St refused to have him there, or to hear confessions from any republican soldiers’.

12 July 1922 – Went to peace meeting at the Round Room – ‘great crowds of women, but none of them apparently keen on peace. Miss Bennett presided, Mme M’Bride and Miss O’Connor and Mrs Despard spoke well, Edith West fairly well only not suited to an internationally ignorant Dublin audience – and Lucy perfectly awful ... Miss O’Connor and I went out to try and quieten a couple of shouting F.S. women in the hall, who had, God knows how, got the idea that all the platform were republican. Mrs D. was very good, about the folly and uselessness of war ... Some fool in the hall wanted to put the cause of peace under the protection of the queen of heaven, and made them all start singing a hymn to her, which Miss Bennett received awfully well, but the end was a confused scene of uproar all the same ...’.

Sun 16 July 1922 – Peace meeting in O’Connell St ‘quite big, people came running when they saw us in the waggonette. Mrs D presided, Mme Gonne [sic] and Miss O’Connor dealt with the first resolution, and I had to propose the 2nd (about the Dail) which Mrs Johnson seconded extremely well. She was interrupted by Mrs Dudley Edwards², who objects to T. Johnson, and had to explain, very powerfully, that she wasn’t him, and wasn’t responsible for his views’.

17 July 1922 – RJ goes to Belgrave Rd to visit Hanna S-S. ‘she and Mrs Connery didn’t feel “anointed” to help with the peace meetings ... All the same, H. was a great blessing to me all this time, a kind of support and exhilaration to my mind, though less pacifist than I am’.

² Bridget Teresa McInerney (1871-1956); partner of Walter Edwards (1862-1946) and mother of historian Robert ‘Robin’ Dudley Edwards (1909-1988).