



## **Eirí Amach na Cásca (Part 5)**

by Mike McCormack

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The following is abridged from Mr. McCormack's book, "The Road to Rebellion.

Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa had grown up during the Great Hunger which took his father's life, separated him from his family and left him with an undying hatred of the Crown and its politicians; it inspired the course he followed for the rest of his life. He buried himself in nationalist-oriented material in *the Nation* and *the United Irishman* newspapers, and believed all Ireland's problems were due to the control exercised by landlords. Why couldn't his people see this and stand up for their rights as Irishmen in their own country? He was determined to convince them of their right to independence, but when he learned that they were largely unaware of past oppressions, he realized that they had to learn their history before they could be convinced to assert their right to independence. That defined his mission! In 1856, he formed a society to educate his people to their heritage and direct them toward the liberation of Ireland by force of arms. He called it the **Phoenix National and Literary Society**. It became so popular that it inspired, and became the forerunner of, many similar societies that made up the **Gaelic Revival**, for once self-esteem took hold among the Irish there was no stopping it. It was the societies of the Gaelic Revival that excited the Irish to a new sense of pride and a desire for independence through the study of their history.

In May 1858, James Stephens, co-founder of the new 2-month old **Irish Republican Brotherhood**, visited Rossa and was so impressed by his work that he swore him into the IRB and the Phoenix Society merged with the IRB and the Fenian Brotherhood. In 1882, they published the **Gaelic Journal** to carry the nationalist message across the country. There followed a series of societies like the **Gaelic Athletic Association** (1884) to revive Irish sports and cultural competitions, the **Irish Literary Society** (1892) to study patriotic writings, and the **Gaelic League** (1893) to promote the language. Nationalist newspapers like the **United Irishman** appeared in 1898 and by 1900 a woman's society, **Inghinidhe na hEireann** (Daughters of Erin), was actively involved in promoting the nationalist message. In 1900, the movement became political as **Cumann na nGaedheal** (Society of the Irish) was formed as a political party and in 1903 the **National Council** debuted to increase nationalist representation on local councils. In 1905, the **Dungannon Clubs** were formed as reading rooms hosting nationalist lectures.

By 1907, the Gaelic Revival had successfully provided the second leaf of the Shamrock of Insurrection – Inspiration. It was now time for the third leaf and that came when John Devoy contacted Arthur Griffith in Ireland and provided Motivation. He offered to fund a rising, but only by one unified force. Griffith in his newspaper **The United Irishmen** urged the many nationalist groups in Ireland to unify and establish that force. As a result, **Cumann na Gael** merged with the **Dungannon Clubs** and the **National Council** to form the **Sinn Fein League** as a nationalist political party.

In 1908, the AOH in America added the office of National Historian to their hierarchy to educate their members to the historic dimension of Ireland's struggle. From Ireland, Bulmer Hobson wrote, *The AOH and the United Irish League are now whipping up their members and getting them all to join*. Meanwhile, Devoy's compatriot, Tom Clarke, returned to Ireland in December 1907 to rejuvenate the dormant IRB as a military force. Tom Clarke, after 15 years in prison, went to America and worked with fellow Fenian John Devoy on the **Gaelic American** newspaper. The IRB in Ireland had grown inactive after the failed 1867 Rising, but Clarke and Devoy were among those who kept the dream of independence alive. To them, the Gaelic Revival had created many nationalist-oriented groups and now was the time to mobilize them! Among those groups was **Fianna hEireann**, a Boy Scout movement founded in 1909 who went into the Dublin hills to learn marksmanship, drill and train in military skills.



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Their value would become evident years later when senior members joined the soon-to-be-formed Irish Volunteers and used their training to turn volunteer recruits into disciplined soldiers.

Upon his return, Clarke expanded IRB recruitment through young men like Denis McCullough, Bulmer Hobson and Seán MacDiarmada – the trio who had founded the Dungannon Clubs. MacDiarmada was also a member of the AOH and he brought the Hibernian Rifles of the American Alliance into the movement. Recruitment was easy for although the Gaelic Revival brought the Irish to an increased awareness of past glories, the dichotomy with their existing situation fostered increased resentment adding to their frustration. Tenants were still second class citizens and the laboring classes were underpaid and forced to the slums of urban centers like Dublin, Cork and Waterford which were filthy, overcrowded, disease-ridden and teeming with malnourished children much like the Five Points in New York 50 years earlier.

Their only hope was the promise of **Home Rule**, an independent Irish Parliament, held out as a carrot-on-a-stick by the British to keep the Irish from becoming more militant. It promised the Irish more self-government, though still answerable to the Crown; but, it would remove the self-centered, landlord-dominated Westminster Parliament from day-to-day oversight of the Irish economy. However, in January 1913, hundreds of Loyalist Clubs in the north coalesced into the **Ulster Volunteer Force** vowing to fight the imposition of Home Rule for the rights it gave to Catholics. On 11 November, a meeting of the IRB, AOH, GAA, IPP and others agreed to organize a force to defend Home Rule implementation. It would become a main component of the coming rising and it was waiting in the wings.

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