

Nationalism And Unionism: Conflict In Ireland, 1885-1921

Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland

Guy Beiner

Ireland is deeply troubled by evocative memories of its past, not least of 1916, which inhabits a mythic time and space reverberating with resonances that range far beyond the events of that year.¹ On 21 October 2005, the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, prime minister of the Republic of Ireland, declared that he was reinstating annual military parades in commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising, starting with the upcoming ninetieth anniversary.² Although a major military parade had been the centrepiece of triumphalist jubilee celebrations in 1966, just four years later annual state parades were canceled.³ Following the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, commemoration of the insurrection was tainted with allegations that it inspired republican paramilitary violence. Given this background of prolonged commemorative embarrassment, Ahern's announcement instantly provoked a heated public debate.⁴

First, there was controversy over the political appropriation of national memory.

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¹ See Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, "Responding to the Rising," in *Revising the Rising*, ed. Máirín Ní Dhoonchadh and Theo Dorgan (Derry, 1991), 50–70.

² *Irish Times*, 22 October 2005.

³ *Irish Times*, 11 April 1966; see also *Cuimhneachán, 1916–1966: Commemoration; a Record of Ireland's Commemoration of the 1916 Rising* (Dublin, 1966), 24–27; Roisin Higgins, Carole Holohan, and Catherine O'Donnell, "1966 and All That: The 50th Anniversary Commemorations," *History Ireland* 14, no. 2 (2006): 31–36.

⁴ See *Irish Times*, 25 October 2005, 26 October 2005, 27 October 2005, 28 October 2005, 29 October 2005, 31 October 2005, 4 November 2005, and 15 November 2005. Further controversy was kindled by a speech on 1916 made by President Mary McAleese on 27 January 2006; see *Irish Times*, 28 January 2006.

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