

Mary Ellen O'Doherty Appreciation:

Written by Hugo -

The widow of Harry O'Doherty (1899-1989), decorated for his role in 'A Company', of the Derry Brigade, Irish Volunteers, Mrs O'Doherty is believed to have been the last of a generation linking Derry to the War for Independence (1916-23).

In the 1960s she and family members worked closely with the Campaign for Social Justice in N. Ireland, established by Dr. Conn McCloskey and his wife Patricia of Dungannon. It was actively supported at Westminster by several MPs including Stanley Orme, Paul Rose and Gerry Fitt. This group was the forerunner of the Civil Rights Association. One of Mary's younger sons, Fionnbarra, was a co-founder of NICRA when it was established in Belfast in early 1967. Draped in the national flag, her coffin had been carried from her former home in Crawford Square to the doors of St. Eugene's Cathedral by her nine surviving sons and daughters, extended family, neighbours, men and women from local community groups and former republican prisoners.

Among four daughters carrying her remains was Mrs. Mary Kathleen O'Doherty- King, who for several years has been an independent senator in the Trinidad and Tobago parliament. Mrs O'Doherty's casket was carried into the Cathedral by her sons to the music of the Mountains of Pomeroy and during her last Mass a number of Gaelic laments were played and sung.

Requiem Mass

Her Requiem Mass was celebrated on Monday morning, June 18, by Fr. Gerard Mongan who said Mrs. O'Doherty had made an immense contribution to the evolution of society as well as rearing her nine surviving children. "Mary Ellen instilled in her family a great love for education for she believed passionately that education was the key to progress. And, in celebrating her long life today, we are all conscious of her family's deeply-felt loss. First and foremost Mary was a devoted wife to Harry, who died in 1989. Both she and her husband represented local working class views and their home became a focal point for a wider community.

In the mid-1960s, Harry and Mary attended the annual TUC Conference, held on the Isle of Man to update Labour and TU leaders on the burgeoning civil rights struggle in the North. Harry, a master in his family's trade, trained scores of apprentices, before deciding to retire from Doherty Meats, after 65 years, at the age of 79. He was a founding member of the Butchers and Allied Workers Union, which eventually merged into the T&GWU. For many years he served on the Northern Committee of the ICTU, alongside a former Mayor of Derry, the late Nationalist

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Party councillor, James Hegarty. ??Mary and her late husband remained in contact with many across Ireland and beyond. They particularly cherished close bonds with Tan War veterans and their families. Among their ever-welcome visitors where Dr. Nora O'Brien and her brother Roddy, the daughter and son of the 1916 leader and martyr, James Connolly. Their links to Irish American communities and the Left in Britain led to the opening of several influential doors which significantly assisted the civil rights cause, and, in particular, its pivotal advocates.

"Like others of her generation she attended every one of the Civil Rights marches that took place between 1968 and '72", Fr. Mongan told the large attendance at her Requiem Mass. ??She and family members were among marchers during the initial Coalisland to Dungannon demonstration, Duke Street on Oct. 5th, and later, 'The Burntollet Ambush'

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