



ROLE: Chinese leader Xi Jinping is effectively president for life

ON THIS DAY

MARCH 15 1921

Six More Hanged

ALL efforts for reprieve having proved in vain, the six Dublin prisoners were executed in Mountjoy Gaol yesterday morning. They were marched to the gallows in pairs at intervals of one hour, the first two being executed at six o'clock, two others at seven and the remaining two at eight o'clock. Their names, already familiar to the people of Ireland: Thomas Whelan, Patrick Moran, Thomas Bryan, Patrick Doyle, Frank Flood and Bernard Ryan.

Scenes of the utmost solemnity were witnessed outside the prison while the grim tragedy was being enacted within its walls. It was a bitterly cold and dreary morning but this did not deter people from coming out. Many of these were young boys and girls, a great number early workers who, but for the impending sacrifices, would have been going to their workshops but, above all, were the very poor-women especially- who came from their humble homes to pray for the happy repose of the six victims of the gallows.

Kneeling on the damp ground, with close to a thousand people fervently reciting the Rosary which was given out by a lady attacked to Cumann na mBan, many bore lighted candles. Here the heroic mother of Thomas Whelan, clad in her Western garb, took her place to join in the chorus of prayer for her dying boy. The scene at this juncture was so touching that even the soldiers in an armoured car stationed some yards away leant over in silent awe and wonder and seemed to forget, for the moment, the grim occupation in which they were participants.

It was known in which particular wing the doomed men had been incarcerated and lights were seen in two cell windows. A crowd collected and handkerchiefs were waved while soldiers stood by in obvious amazement. A figure was seen to come repeatedly to one of the windows and he seemed to be endeavouring to communicate with those outside. After some time the lights went out and as it was then close to seven o'clock, the awful truth was forced upon the crowd that two more were being taken to the execution chamber.

THE SIX IRA prisoners had been sentenced to death by court-martial for their alleged part in the Bloody Sunday killings by Collins's 'Squad'. Patrick Moran - convinced he could prove his innocence - had declined to take part in a successful escape attempt. Joe Devlin met Lloyd George to appeal for the young men's lives but failed to save them. To Moran's sister, Devlin wrote: 'I was shocked at your brother's execution and...what I regard as a cruel crime of infamy.'

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Century may be defined by China's rise in significance

THE world has never been smaller than it is today, thanks to the internet and social media, yet old habits persist. When news breaks, good or bad, it remains the case that we are conditioned to pay closer attention to happenings in foreign places of which we are tied through language, culture, history and proximity.

Our manifold ties with the United States has meant political and societal developments in that country resonate and strike a chord across Irish and British societies in a way that is wildly disproportionate to America's status as but one of 195 recognised independent sovereign nations in today's world.

People of all ages in Ireland will have been aware of Donald Trump and would have been able to voice opinions on his presidency over the past four years. Very few would know of the Chinese president Xi Jinping in spite of the fact that there are four times as many Chinese people on the planet as Americans.

The recent spat prompted by Sinn Féin MP Chris Hazzard's laudatory tweet praising the Chinese ruler for his country's achievement in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty highlighted how little we discuss foreign affairs outside of the English-speaking world of which we are most familiar and comfortable.

In the past week, violent political protests in Senegal claimed at least eight lives, explosions at a munitions depot in Equatorial Guinea killed more than 100 people whilst war raged on in Yemen and brave pro-democracy protesters continued to risk their lives in Myanmar defying a brutal military which seized power in a coup last month.

A week will fall to pass without a major atrocity being committed somewhere on the planet against a beleaguered minority community, yet it is rare for such incidents to provoke anything like the response that followed the appalling death of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis last June.

In many ways, that is quite understandable.

The United States remains the most powerful nation on earth. It is the pre-eminent economic powerhouse

Chris DONNELLY



and military superpower in the third decade of this century, and American popular culture continues to shape attitudes, trends, vocabularies and even children's accents across many distant lands.

Yet we are living in a century which seems destined to be defined by the rise in global significance of China, a nation of which one in six human beings call home.

Chris Hazzard had a point when highlighting the remarkable achievement of the Chinese government in delivering socio-economic changes in a society which remains utterly alien to most of us in the West.

The United Nations has confirmed that some 750 million Chinese people have been lifted out of poverty in the past four decades, four-fifths of all the people across the world lifted from extreme poverty in that time.

China only entered the World Trade Organisation in December 2001 and has reshaped its economy with remarkable speed. No longer is it merely the world's factory, it is now a leader in advanced technologies.

China is the pre-eminent trade and development partner for many emerging economies across Latin America, Africa

and Asia. Over the past few weeks, it has been busy donating vaccines to many of these countries, including the Dominican Republic, Serbia and Ethiopia, as well as more than thirty other African countries. China is gaining leverage with the intention of developing allies to support its foreign and domestic policy objectives. In this, it has learned from its main global competitor, the United States.

For years, the Chinese government has been working to improve direct connections from China with Europe, Asia and Africa through new land and shipping routes. Infrastructural projects, unparalleled in scope and speed of construction, continue to be completed across the vast nation.

Yet China remains a deeply troubling society. The government demands absolute loyalty from the state media and social media content is rigidly controlled and monitored, as was apparent in the frantic effort to shut down and censor online expressions of anger following the death of the Wuhan whistleblower doctor, Li Wenliang, a year ago.

The Communist Party has been in power for more than 70 years in China's one-party system. Xi Jinping's decision to push for the abolition of term limits meant he is now seemingly president for life - the law confirming this move three years ago was approved at the National People's Congress by a vote of 2,959 in favour to just 2 against.

All of this before we even mention Tiananmen Square, Hong Kong or the appalling treatment of the Uighur population today, up to a million of whom - according to human rights organisations - have been housed in internment centres for 're-education'.

There are undoubtedly lessons we in the West can learn from China but, for all the faults of our Western societies, these are not conditions within which people accustomed to basic civil liberties would wish to live.

The future may bring political reform to the world's latest superpower, but it is almost certain we will become more familiar with China, its society and policies as its influence continues to grow.

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