



Mary MacSwiney

Máire Nic Shuibhne

1872-1942 | Cork Borough



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of Ireland

Extracts from Mary MacSwiney's speeches during the Treaty Debates

14 December 1921

There was a lot of talk when the Treaty was brought back, but if we present to the world to-morrow a united front then the country will follow us. I think those who put before themselves a measure of expediency should ask themselves is it worth while sacrificing expediency. If they declared war on us to-morrow we are not a bit worse off than we were six months ago. For God's sake and the sake of the dead let us keep together. We who stand for principle cannot give in to you who stand for expediency, and expediency can always give way to principle. Therefore, if there is to be a split, it is because you who stand for expediency have accepted something which we who stand for principle cannot give way. If there is a split the evils of that split will be on your shoulders not ours. It is for you to come up to our standards; not we to come down to yours. Therefore I would ask the signatories to submit to the decision of Dáil Éireann. We may have a united front then and the people will come after.

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-14/3/#spk_257

Extracts from Mary MacSwiney's speeches during the Treaty Debates (continued)

21 December 1921

Though I have been a teacher all my life, and longed and prayed for the day when the Irish Government would take over the education of this country, I tell them here and now I would never teach in a school under their control—that I would still take a school and teach that the adoption of that Treaty, if it should be adopted by this Dáil and by the people of the country, is the greatest act of treachery in history. That I shall teach to every child that I have control of, and I shall teach the Republican doctrine in any school I teach in, and if I have only two pupils instead of 200, it does not matter; I shall keep their souls clean at any rate. I shall be a rebel to their Government, and I shall be a rebel to their education, for it will be false, utterly false education. What will you teach the children in these schools? (“Irish.”) Irish! Yes, but not Irish alone. To teach through the medium of Irish you must teach the history of their country. And the greatest trouble of education in this country is that we were never allowed to teach until recent years Irish history at all, and then it was not Irish history, but the history of England in Ireland. You must teach history, you must teach the names of the great ones of the past, you must teach the history of Grattan’s Parliament and the people that gave it away. Then you will come to the history of Dáil Eireann, the history of the Parliament set up in 1919 by the will of the people, the history of a movement that made our country great throughout the world, the history of a movement that brought on us the admiration of the world, the history of those who commanded the admiration of the world for qualities of soldiers and statesmen that six years before no one would have believed them capable of. You will have to teach them that the eyes of the world were turned on our country wondering and uplifted because in this day of materialism a little nation, a gallant little people, fought against a mighty foe and refused to acknowledge itself conquered.

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-21/2/#spk_98

The Irish Republican Government was established in January, 1919, and it has functioned since under such conditions that no country ever worked under before. That Republican Government is not now going to be fooled and destroyed by the Wizard of Wales. We beat him before and we shall beat him again, and I pray with all my heart and soul that a majority of the Members of this assembly will throw out that Treaty and that the minority will stand shoulder to shoulder with us in the fight to regain the position we held on the 4th of this month. I pray that once more; I pray that we will stand together, and the country will stand behind us. I have no doubt of that. I know the women of Ireland, and I know what they will say to the men that want to surrender, and therefore I beg of you to take the decision to throw out that Treaty. Register your votes against it, and do not commit the one unforgivable crime that has ever been committed by the representatives of the people of Ireland (applause).

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-21/2/#spk_121

Extracts from Mary MacSwiney's speeches during the Treaty Debates (continued)

7 January 1922

I, for one, will have neither hand, act, nor part in helping the Irish Free State to carry this nation of ours, this glorious nation that has been betrayed here to-night, into the British Empire—either with or without your hands up. I maintain here now that this is the grossest act of betrayal that Ireland ever endured. I know some of you have done it from good motives; soldiers have done it to get a gun, God help them! Others, because they thought it best in some other way. I do not want to say a word that would prevent them from coming back to their Mother Republic; but I register my protest, and not one bit of help that we can give will we give them. The speech we have heard sounded very beautiful—as the late Minister of Finance can do it; he has played up to the gallery in this thing, but I tell you it may sound very beautiful but it will not do. Ireland stands on her Republican Government and that Republican Government cannot touch the pitch of the Free State without being fouled; and here and now I call on all true Republicans; we all want to protect the public safety; it is our side that will do its best to protect the public safety. We want no such terrible troubles in the country as faction fights; we can never descend to the faction fights of former days; we have established a Government, and we will have to protect it. Therefore, let there be no misunderstanding, no soft talk, no ráiméis at this last moment of the betrayal of our country; no soft talk about union; you cannot unite a spiritual Irish Republic and a betrayal worse than Castlereagh's, because it was done for the Irish nation. You may talk about the will of the Irish people, as Arthur Griffith did; you know it is not the will of the Irish people; it is the fear of the Irish people, as the Lord Mayor of Cork says; and to-morrow or another day when they come to their senses, they will talk of those who betrayed them to-day as they talk of Castlereagh. Make no doubt about it. This is a betrayal, a gross betrayal; and the fact is that it is only a small majority, and that majority is not united; half of them look for a gun and the other half are looking for the fleshpots of the Empire. I tell you here there can be no union between the representatives of the Irish Republic and the so-called Free State.

www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1922-01-07/2/#spk_241

Mary MacSwiney

Junior Cycle



Find the answers to these questions in the extracts from Mary MacSwiney's speeches.

1. What does Mary MacSwiney want the people who signed the Treaty to do? Why?

2. In her speech of 21 December 1921 what does MacSwiney call the Treaty?

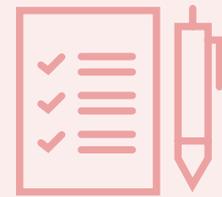
3. In the same speech name one thing she would teach in her classes?

4. What do you think she means by this phrase 'that Republican Government cannot touch the pitch of the Free State without being fouled'?

5. If you could pick three words to describe these three speeches what would they be?

Mary MacSwiney

Transition Year



Prepare a short report on Mary MacSwiney.

Include the following information:

- ▶ Dáil membership, constituencies represented, Ministries (if appropriate).
- ▶ Background information.
- ▶ Any other contributions made in the Dáil.
This can be linked to the Treaty debates or on another issue.

SOURCES

Oireachtas member profile

www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/member/Mary-MacSwiney.D.1921-08-16/

- ▶ To find Mary MacSwiney's contributions in the Dáil, visit her member profile page and click **See all contributions from this Member.**

Dáil100 website

www.dail100.ie/en/people/

Dictionary of Irish Biography

www.dib.ie/biography/macswiney-mary-a5295

Mary MacSwiney

Senior Cycle



Question 1

Mary MacSwiney spoke for over three hours on 21 December 1921. From your understanding of the history of the MacSwiney family, why did she speak for so long? What phrases does she use to illustrate her thoughts on the Treaty either in support or against it?

Question 2

In her speech of 21 December 1921 Mary MacSwiney said,

‘I would take a plebiscite of the women of Ireland gladly, and I know what the answer would be’.

Write an account of her involvement in various women’s movements from 1911 to 1934.

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