

Today, we pay tribute the scholarly achievements of Pádraig Yeates, and honour his exceptional commitment to the research and writing of Irish social and labour history. It is my great honour and privilege to be able to elaborate on why Pádraig is deserving of the Dlitte degree. In doing so, I am also happy to add the voices of other historians who have read his work closely, including one who asserted “One can only salute in awe the depth of his digging on such a vast range of topics. The range of references cited in his footnotes is sufficient to keep a generation of research students digging”. Pádraig has left few stones unturned to offer readers vivid, textured, accessible and fascinating history. His work has also provided a constant reminder that in considering the decade of commemoration of the events that led to the creation of this state, the study of ordinary lives must assume a central place.

To write one excellently researched history of Dublin during a tumultuous period is a fine achievement; to write two such books is an exceptional accomplishment; to write three such books is a magnificent, towering, triumph. That Pádraig researched and authored his Dublin trilogy- *A City in Wartime* (2011) *A City in Turmoil* (2012) and *A City in Civil War* (2015)- having already published his 600 page opus *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (2000), gives you an idea of the prodigious output and hard work the NUI applauds today.

Why was Dublin so important during this period, 1913-23? In Pádraig’s own words: Dublin was “the political, cultural and conceptual capital of Ireland from which most of the fresh and original ideas flowed. Traditional currents of thought were temporarily subverted by the uncertainties and possibilities created by the war, and the Easter Rising provided a platform on which novel new ideas could be debated”.

One of the reasons Pádraig is such an original and challenging historian is because he critically questions how we know what we know and why. He interrogates sources with alacrity. *Lockout* was the first attempt to provide a narrative history of the event in its own right, used the popular press as a primary engine for inquiry and questioned academic assumptions about the inherent superiority of primary sources to others. While acknowledging that primary sources are essential in terms of understanding what many of the principal actors were thinking, particularly the ruling elites, he

argues they are often narrowly focussed, reflect the thinking of the particular institution or interest group and can be misinformed.

Newspapers and periodicals on the other hand have the virtue of being in the public domain. *Lockout* was also the first book to critically question James Connolly's role, arguing that while he was a gifted polemicist and writer, he was a poor union organiser and made major strategic blunders. The book was also the first account to deal in detail with the impact of the Lockout on Irish nationalist politics whether constitutional, revolutionary, socialist or feminist.

And what of the three books that followed? They are a reminder that the victims of many of the violent events were ordinary Dubliners and Pádraig does their memory a great service in keeping their sacrifices to the fore and reminding the reader of their divided loyalties. Pádraig's research of contemporary newspapers and private archives has generated books that succeed in offering a multitude of perspectives on the political, military and administrative concerns of an elite involved in governance, but most importantly, the books are filled with the struggles of ordinary people living their lives during extraordinary political and economic upheaval.

They are books that remind us that for all the headline grabbing events, putting bread on the table was still the most important priority for most, while survival in the trenches of the Western Front was imperative for many others; by the end of the First World War, 30,000 Dubliners had served in British Army uniform. Underlining the class divides, Pádraig points out that while big businesses were handsomely compensated in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, many poor families were put through a demeaning bureaucratic nightmare to prove they were destitute; a 2 year old whose leg was amputated after she was shot was eventually offered a derisory £100.

By the end of the first world war, Dublin was dealing with competing political allegiances, identities and demands, whether it was the demobilised British army soldiers looking for work (there were 19 organisations in Dublin alone to assist them), assertive trade unions seeking better wages and a shorter working week, Sinn Féin TDs planning the first Dáil, or pioneering women like Dr Kathleen Lynn, who opened St Ultan's Hospital for infants in a city where the infant mortality rate was 91 per 1000.

Pádraig has also broken new ground in relation to the civil war. As Catriona Crowe has pointed out “The ghosts of the War of Independence and the Civil War are a lot harder to lay to rest than those of 1916, but they are an essential part of the complicated unfolding of actions and experiences that made such ambiguous marks on our new State, our memories and our historiography... Yeates probably knows more about the city’s infrastructure during this period than anyone else: Dublin Corporation, the workhouses and lunatic asylums, the fire service, housing, institutions for women and children, hotels, shops, businesses, the transport system, the docks, the prisons, the police and the armies”.

I have no doubt that Pádraig spends much time brooding and thinking in Portmarnock, but he inhabits no ivory tower. As a journalist, political and trade union activist and historian over decades he has very much occupied the public realm and is passionate in his views. He has watched history unfold- he was in Belfast when internment was introduced in 1971- and was affected by its contours and the paths, sometimes dangerous and damaging, that he took. The English born son of Dublin parents, he was immersed in the cauldron of socialist and republican politics and activism in England and Ireland from the mid 1960s. There has also, in his activism and journalism, been a remarkable consistency about exposing malpractice, abuse of workers, snobbery and corruption, whether through the *Site Action Press* newspaper for building workers in 1969, his editorship of *Irish People* from 1977 or his work in the *Irish Times* from 1983 onwards.

Pádraig continues to play an indispensable role in the decade of commemorations we currently inhabit. He keeps asking the questions: what are we commemorating, why and how? He was very prominent in commemorating the centenary of the Dublin Lockout in 2013 and here, in his own words, is why: “I was involved, as were a lot of other people, not just because it had been largely forgotten about, but because of the values it encapsulated – social solidarity, the right to equality of treatment no matter who or what you are, the right to freedom of association, the right to representation, the right to be in a trade union, the right to decent pay and conditions, the right to a roof over your head”.

Pádraig also relates history and divided loyalties to his own family's experiences, and let us this evening remember his parents who would be proud today: Consider, again, his own words: "I must say I have difficulty dealing with these conflicting legacies myself. Several members of my own family served in the British armed forces, including my grandfather and father. I know that my father, who served in the British army in the Second World War, had no time for the British establishment. I suspect that his time in the army were the best years of his life, but he loathed the values of its officer class and despised the barrack room culture that appealed to the basest human instincts and prejudices...In early 1943 he was awarded the George Medal for saving the lives of other soldiers in North Africa and, like other servicemen granted a major gallantry award, he received it from King George VI at war's end. When the king shook his hand and said "Congratulations Paddy" he replied "Thanks Kingy", for which my mother never forgave him. However crass his reply, it was his way of saying he was not fighting for king and country, to save the British empire or to keep his betters in the manner to which they felt entitled. He never wore a poppy, never joined the British Legion or attended a Remembrance Day commemoration. Like tens of thousands of other Second World War veterans he became a convinced socialist as a result of his wartime service and began fighting for a better world".

That too, is what Pádraig has done in his promotion of history and education. He has also been a great champion of rescuing archival records and I will instance here the Dublin Metropolitan Police registers and the ICTU annual reports; he has worked in conjunction with the National Archives and UCD to make these records available to everyone interested in developing a fuller understanding of modern Irish history.

Pádraig is a deeply worthy recipient of this Dlitt. Anyone with an interest in our social and labour history owes him deep gratitude and respect.

**Diarmaid Ferriter**

**UCD**

12 June 2018