

# **LIAM LYNCH NATIONAL COMMEMORATION**

REPUBLICAN PLOT

Kilcrumper Old Graveyard

**Jim O'Callaghan TD**

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

**SUNDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER 2025**



Cuimhneachán Náisiúnta

**Liam Uí Loinsigh**

**General**

**LIAM LYNCH**

**NATIONAL  
COMMEMORATION  
FERMOY**

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2025**

-----

*Guest Speaker:*

**DEPUTY JIM O CALLAGHAN**

**MINISTER FOR JUSTICE**

**Commemoration: Republican Plot  
Kilcrumper Old Graveyard at 12 noon  
Mass at St Patricks Church Fermoy at 10.30 am**

Parade from Kilcrumper Cross (by Cottage): 11.45 am

Wreaths to be laid on graves of General Liam Lynch & Commandant Mick Fitzgerald

Contact us : [trevorflaherty1@gmail.com](mailto:trevorflaherty1@gmail.com)

# **GENERAL LIAM LYNCH NATIONAL COMMEMORATION FERMOY 14 SEPTEMBER 2025 JIM O'CALLAGHAN**

A dhaoine uaisle, a chairde Fáil, ar dtús ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le coiste Liam Ó Loingsigh as cuireadh a thabhairt dom labhairt ag an gcomóradh seo. Is mór an onóir dom a bheith anseo inniu chun cuimhneamh ar an nGinearál Ó Loingsigh. Mar is eol daoibh, fuair Liam Ó Loingsigh bás i naoi deag fiche trí ach tá a pholaitíocht agus a fhís le feiceáil le cead bliain anuas agus tá siad le feiceáil inniu sa chruinniú seo agus i bpáirtí Fhianna Fáil.

I want to thank the Liam Lynch committee for inviting me to be here today to commemorate General Liam Lynch. It is important that we gather each year to remember his life and death. Although General Lynch died before Fianna Fáil was founded, the politics and vision of Liam Lynch are evident in this gathering this afternoon and his vision of Ireland is ingrained in Fianna Fáil.

Can I start by saying it was with great sadness that I learned yesterday of the death of the Fianna Fáil party leader on Cork County Council, Councillor Patrick Gerard Murphy. Councillor Murphy served the people of West Cork diligently and professionally since 2008. He displayed great courage and resilience throughout his personal and political life. He was an example of a person who fought to overcome adversity and serve his local community. I want to remember him on this important day when members of Fianna Fáil gather to commemorate another lost leader, General Lynch. I want to extend my condolences to his family and all his friends and colleagues. Ar dheis dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Two weeks ago we gathered to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Éamon de Valera. Today we gather to remember General Liam Lynch. They had much in common aside from their well-known views on the 1921 Anglo Irish Treaty.

Both were tall, thin, bespectacled and had a priestly demeanour. In fact, the Free State forces that captured Liam Lynch on the slopes of the Knockmealdown Mountains believed they had caught de Valera. Ernie O'Malley provides a very detailed description of General Liam Lynch which unintentionally highlights similarities with de Valera.



*“Liam Lynch had a high domed forehead. When he smiled I could see a row of large teeth; his face tightened quickly on his smile. He was quiet, but forceful and commanding. He tapped the table impatiently with his pencil at side issues and quickly worked through a long agenda. His eyes had large pupils which grew blacker and larger when he stammered in anger. He had a clear, well organised mind. He made frequent notes in a loose-leaf notebook as we talked.”<sup>1</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> O'Malley, Ernie. *On Another Man's Wound*. Mercier History (2002), page 209

<sup>2</sup> Kissane, Bill. *Explaining Irish Democracy*, UCD Press, (2002), page 105.

<sup>3</sup> McCullough, David. *De Valera Rise*, Gill, (2017), pages 55-56.

Other similarities were that both were members of the Gaelic League. Lynch joined the Gaelic League in Mitchelstown, County Cork after he moved there in 1910. De Valera joined in 1908. The Gaelic League was a remarkable organisation. In 1899 only 1,825 children in National Schools were being taught Irish. By 1911 that had risen to 180,000.<sup>2</sup>

Both found love in the Gaelic League. Lynch met Bridie Keyes during Gaelic League Irish Language classes in Fermoy in 1917. They met for the last time in Easter 1923 at a safe house in Graigavalla. They intended to marry but this never occurred. In contrast, Éamon de Valera met his future wife Sinéad Ní Fhlannagáin in the Leinster College where she taught him Irish.<sup>3</sup> They married and went on to have a long and happy family life with many children.

Both joined the Irish Volunteers, and both of them had a defining imprint placed on them by the 1916 Rising. De Valera's role in the Rising is well known. Liam Lynch, like most members of the Volunteers outside of Dublin, was inactive during the Rising but on 2 May 1916 he witnessed the treatment of the four Kent brothers: Thomas, Richard, David and William who were all members of the Cork Brigade of the Volunteers. On that day the RIC arrived at their property at Bawnard House in Castlelyons not far from here.

After a gun battle that lasted several hours and that resulted in the fatal shooting of RIC Constable William Rowe, the Kent brothers, including Richard who had been shot, were escorted through the streets of Fermoy by the RIC, led by a vehicle into which the Kents' mother was placed. As was noted by Liam Lynch's biographer:

*"Bearing witness to the Kents' arrest and seeing them paraded through Fermoy in such a manner seemed to incense Lynch deeply. His anger was surely cemented further by the knowledge that the youngest, Richard, died of his wounds, and Thomas was executed on 9 May."*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Shannon, Gerard. Liam Lynch, To Declare a Republic, Merrion Press (2023), page 21.

<sup>5</sup> O'Donoghue, Florence, No Other Law: The Story of Liam Lynch and the Irish Republican Army, 1916-1923 Dublin. Irish Press Limited (1953), pages 8-9.

Florence O'Donoghue commented on the impact this humiliating sight had upon Lynch:

*“That night he made a resolution and vow. He would, God helping him, atone, as far as the dedicated life of one man could atone, for the sacrifices of the martyred dead”.*<sup>5</sup>

The subsequent execution of Thomas Kent a week later entrenched those initial views.

Most importantly, Liam Lynch and Éamon de Valera shared an absolute devotion to their cause - the establishment of the Irish Republic. Nineteen twenty one was a pivotal year for both men.

On 26 April 1921 the first Southern Division of the IRA was formed. It brought 8 brigades from Cork, Kerry, Waterford and West Limerick together. Liam Lynch was elected to Divisional Commandant. After the truce was called in July the Dáil met on 14 September 1921 to ratify the plenipotentiaries nominated to engage with the British government. Although de Valera was a politician and Liam Lynch was a soldier they both shared the clear view that Ireland had formally declared its independence and recognised itself as a sovereign State and Republic. As Liam Lynch said in a letter to his brother Tom who was concerned about political developments:

*“[He] may rest assured that our government as well as the army is out for the Republic.”*<sup>6</sup>

Lynch's opposition to the Treaty is well recorded. What deserves more attention is the fact that his Southern Division of the IRA accounted for 33,550 volunteers. At the IRA Army Convention on 26 and 27 March 1921 the Army reaffirmed its allegiance to the Irish Republic and elected Lynch as Chief of Staff.

Liam Lynch did not seek civil war and retained good relations with those on the pro-Treaty side prior to the beginning of hostilities with the bombardment of the Four Courts by the Pro Treaty IRA.

<sup>5</sup> Liam Lynch to Tom Lynch, 26 September 1921, NLI, MS 36, 251-20.

<sup>7</sup> O'Donoghue, Florence, *No Other Law: The Story of Liam Lynch and the Irish Republican Army, 1916-1923* Dublin. Irish Press Limited (1953), page 258.

<sup>8</sup> Andrews, Todd. *Dublin Made Me*. Dublin Lilliput Press (2001), page 286.





That bombardment with 18-pounder guns supplied by General MacCready's departing British Army Garrison united what was then divided groups within the anti-Treaty Army. As was noted by Florrie O'Donoghue:

<sup>9</sup> Minutes of IRA Executive Meeting, 23-26 March 1923, UCDA, de Valera Papers.

<sup>10</sup> Shannon Gerard, Liam Lynch, To Declare a Republic, Merrion Press (2023), page 56.

<sup>11</sup> Shannon Gerard, Liam Lynch, To Declare a Republic, Merrion Press (2023), page 71.

<sup>12</sup> Andrews Todd, Dublin Made Me. Lilliput Press. (2001), page 305.

*“Nothing was more certain to solidify Republican opposition than this crude bludgeoning”.*

With the commencement of the Civil War Lynch’s influence grew whilst de Valera’s faded. Notwithstanding the military superiority of the Free State Forces, Lynch remained optimistic. When Todd Andrews told him in February 1923 that the military situation was going very badly, Lynch dismissed this narrative of pessimism. This must have had a real impact on Andrews as he subsequently joined as Lynch’s adjutant in the following weeks.<sup>8</sup>

Even the reintroduction of de Valera’s proposed document number 2 as a means of ending hostilities did not dissuade Lynch from pursuing the goal of a Republic. After Ballyseedy he sought, along with Sean Moylan, heavy artillery and other weaponry. As the fortunes of the anti-Treaty forces declined and the peace efforts of Tom Barry and others increased, Lynch remained steadfast in his pursuit of the Republic.

There was a crucial meeting of the IRA Executive held on 23-26 March 1923. It was attended by Lynch, de Valera, Frank Aiken, Austin Stack, Sean Dowling, Humphrey Murphy, Sean MacSwiney, Tom Derrig, Sean Hyde, Tom Crofts, Bill Quirke and Tom Barry.<sup>9</sup> The meeting was inconclusive as to the future direction of the anti-Treaty side. However, what was clear was that support for continuing hostilities was fading. By this stage, as is noted by Gerard Shannon, the relationship between de Valera and Lynch was a troubled one.<sup>10</sup>

It was shortly after this meeting that Lynch was killed in action in the Knockmealdown Mountains. Irrespective of their previous difficulties, DeValera was clearly upset when he learned of Lynch’s death, referring to him as *“Your Chief—the “Lionheart” whose exalted soul and tenacious will, backed by his royal allies the Hills, more than any other baffled the Forces of an empire and brought them to terms”.*

In speaking to Countess Markievicz he lamented *“Poor Liam! It is so awful to see these men who loved Ireland so deeply...killed off one by one. Ireland has far too few of such and cannot spare them.”*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Shannon Gerard, Liam Lynch, To Declare a Republic, Merrion Press (2023), page 287.



Todd Andrews recognised that Lynch's death meant an end of the Civil War as "only his iron will had kept it going in the last few months."<sup>12</sup>

I do not propose at this event to relitigate the Treaty debate. What I do want to do, however, is to emphasise the reasons why Liam Lynch and others on the anti-Treaty side opposed the Treaty. People had witnessed the sacrifice of the leaders of 1916 who were executed for their declared Irish Republic. Tomás Mac Curtain and Terence MacSwiney died because of their commitment to that Irish Republic. The IRA had succeeded in fighting the British to the negotiating table because of its success in a War of Independence that sought an Irish Republic.

Having declared a Republic, having seen colleagues die for a Republic and having fought for a Republic it was more than understandable that Liam Lynch and others opposed an arrangement that gave only dominion status to Ireland with a Governor General representing the continued presence of the British King to whom the new State would be required to remain loyal. It would have been a serious violation of the Republican cause to expect Liam Lynch and others to approve of representatives of that Republic taking an oath of allegiance to the British King.

Much of the analysis of the Treaty is framed by what transpired subsequently in the 1920s and 30s, particularly after the enactment of Bunreacht na hÉireann in 1937. But political decisions are not made with the benefit of foresight. Also, it is wrong to frame the Treaty within the politics of compromise. The power imbalance between the negotiating teams and the history of British oppression in Ireland should frame our appraisal of the Treaty. The signatories may have believed it was the best they could get, but the Treaty terms were accepted under extraordinary duress and imposed by an oppressive opponent that refused to acknowledge the existence, let alone legitimacy, of the Irish Republic.

Liam Lynch's commitment to the Irish Republic meant he would not cease his military opposition towards the Free State and its forces.

<sup>14</sup> O'Hegarty P.S., *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, Talbot Press Limited (1924), pages 102-105.

As an example of a person who was purely devoted to the Republican cause there is no better example. Had he not led the Republican forces it is likely that the fighting in the Civil War would have ended sooner. However, his commitment to the Republican cause had a significant influence on future political developments and indeed the policies adopted by Éamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil after it was founded nearly 100 years ago. As was noted by Gerard Shannon at the end of his biography of Liam Lynch:

*“Liam Lynch still represents the purest ideal of Irish Republicanism and one of the greatest of that generation, a heroic example to inspire into the future. Alongside his considerable contribution to the achievement of Irish independence, this remains the most enduring legacy of the short life of this important and influential Irish revolutionary.”*<sup>15</sup>

The reason we are gathered here today to remember Liam Lynch is because we share his view of an Irish Republic. After Éamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil came to power in 1932 they set about dismantling the Treaty’s terms and putting in place the architecture for the Republic that exists today. That is a constitutional arrangement that is markedly different from the Dominion Status, presided over by the Crown, that was planned for Ireland under the Treaty and which remains the case today in jurisdictions such as Canada and Australia.

Dominion status for Ireland, however, because of our proximity to Britain would have resulted in Ireland remaining a province of the United Kingdom and a country that would not have achieved the character, success and independence that we associate with our Republic.

Many of the Republican purists who were on the Republican side during the Civil War are now looked upon with a sense of bemusement and intolerance. This arises because the dismantling of the Treaty by de Valera is now viewed as a manoeuvre that was permissible and an achievement that was expected. Nonetheless, there was nothing inevitable about that dismantling of the Treaty. It was achieved through the political brilliance of de Valera who used the terms of the Treaty to undermine itself. The fears of Republicans such as Liam Lynch deserve to be acknowledged and respected.

Without them the Treaty's terms would have persisted and continued indefinitely. Ireland's pathway to a Republic was not inevitable. Without de Valera's dismantling of the Treaty Ireland would have remained a British dominion and never have become an independent Republic.

Consequently, it is right that we assemble to remember and honour anti-Treaty Republicans such as Liam Lynch. In the early years of the Free State many such Republicans, particularly the female TDs who voted against the Treaty, were subjected to unfair criticism by propagandists whose views became entrenched as the official narrative. P.S. O'Hegarty condemned them stating:

*"It is women who were largely responsible for the bitterness and the ferocity of the Civil War... To them the truce was nothing but a trick played upon the British, and to them peace was a loveless thing, and no life so good as the life of war. They became practically unsexed, their mothers' milk blackened to make gun power, their minds working on nothing save hate and blood."*<sup>14</sup>

This vicious conclusion ignored that these women had been at the centre of the Irish Republican cause from the beginning of the struggle for independence. It also ignored that many of them lost fathers, husbands and children during this time.

Many of these women including Countess Markievicz, Kathleen Clarke and Margaret Pearse went on to join Fianna Fáil, the new republican movement founded in 1926 to pursue through political action those republican ideals shared by Liam Lynch. Gerard Shannon recognises the role that Lynch played in the development of Fianna Fáil's political tradition:

*"Whatever Lynch's own personal disinterest in political activism, whatever his poor relations with de Valera, the memory of Lynch would remain an important component of Fianna Fáil's political tradition, which views its own beginnings as the Republican opposition to the Free State during the Civil War."*<sup>15</sup>



As Taoiseach Micheál Martin said at this event a number of years ago:

*“Fianna Fáil is proud to have been founded by Republicans of the generation which secured independence.”*



The Taoiseach was also correct when he reminded those present that Liam Lynch:

*“rejected the Treaty like many many others for reasons which were motivated by the highest ideals.”*

The success of those ideals lives on in the Fianna Fáil party today. The ideals of creating a Republic which seeks to advance the social and economic welfare of our people; to ensure equal opportunities for all Irish citizens, and to serve the interests of the entire population, not just the privileged few, have been the bedrock of the party’s enduring popularity and success.

On any objective standard, the delivery of those objectives has been impressive. Ireland has witnessed one of the most remarkable transformations in living standards of any Western country over the past century.

We have one of the best educated populations in the world. We enjoy full employment. We are one of the most peaceful countries in the world. Fianna Fáil was at the forefront of creating that peace. There is much to be proud of in how this small nation has advanced and maintained its economic and democratic life despite the most difficult of challenges. It did so without any natural resources save for the industry of its people. Our independent Republic, fought for by people like Liam Lynch, has been a success. Northern Ireland provides a clear comparator of how we would have progressed as a Dominion.

There are of course, those who seek to dismiss this progress as something which was inevitable, which would have occurred naturally without any political influence. That is, I think, a witless interpretation of our history. We do not need to look far to see how excitable and imprudent political actions can undermine the progress of a country.

That is, of course, not to say we do not have our own significant challenges in this Republic. We do. None more so than the delivery of housing and infrastructure. The challenges the State faces today in the delivery of housing and infrastructure are being compounded by the utilisation of our laws in certain circumstances to delay, obfuscate and undermine the efficient delivery of vital projects which would benefit our communities and the common good as a whole.

In particular, the utilisation of judicial reviews to prevent the delivery of vital accommodation, transport or environmental projects because of technical breaches of statutory rules or procedure is abhorrent to the common good. In any republic, laws are there to serve the common good and the people who put them in place through their democratically elected representatives.

They should not be viewed as a game that can be won or lost depending on absolute compliance with our ever-growing statutory architecture or rules of procedure. I think it is obvious that, at this time of a housing emergency and infrastructural deficit, our increasingly impactful and expansive judicial review process must be curtailed.

As such, I have asked my Department to bring forward proposals to rebalance the judicial review procedure to ensure that the common good and public interest are at the centre of any judicial review process, in particular when examining vital infrastructure and housing projects.

Fianna Fáil, the Taoiseach and its Ministers believe in homeownership to advance the social and economic welfare of our people. We have to bring new thinking to ensure that objective becomes a reality. The laws of our Republic must serve our people, not act as barriers to their progress. That is what those who believe in the Republican tradition stand for. That is what General Liam Lynch stood for. We will honour his sacrifice in pursuing those ideals.





[www.jimocallaghan.com](http://www.jimocallaghan.com)