

## NEWS

**MNÁ 2016 WAS LAUNCHED ON NOLLAIG NA MBAN. PARTICIPANT MARY RYAN REPORTS**

# Women refuse to be sidelined in 1916-2016 commemorations

**T**HE launch by Galway County Council of the 1916 Commemoration on New Year's Day once again left women in a cold space. The only reference to women was a brief one to the 'lady' Helena Molony (remember, revolutionaries ain't no ladies) who was a member of Inghinidhe na hÉireann.

This in spite of the fact that there were women who contributed in one way or another to the drawing up of the 1916 Proclamation and the eventual wresting of power from the British regime.

Aside from this, a group of five women who have become increasingly frustrated at the lack of gender balance in the proposed 1916 commemorations and celebrations intend changing that. Lelia Doolan, Hannah Kiely, Kathy Mooney, Áine Ní Shiordáin and Eithne Verling initially tried to address the imbalance by working with the Ireland 2016 structure. Because this failed, Mná 2016 was launched in the Cornstore, Galway on Nollaig na mBan (January 6).

It could not have been more different from the Galway County Council event. It was informal, informative, intercultural, authentic, downright good craic and a credit to our revolutionary foresters.

The all-female event was MCed by Lelia Doolan who introduced three of the others in their different capacities: Áine Ní Shiordáin as singer and harpist, Kathy Mooney who is looking at women's emblems and stories over the last 100 years and plans on having a badge designed and made for 2016, and Hannah Kiely who announced the programme for 2016 and read one of her poems the final stanza which end with these lines: "F\*\*k it all/I want to strip off /And run naked through the city/To dance on top of the cathedral/To shout loudly in respectable rooms/To drink whiskey for breakfast/To start smoking joints at meetings" - and those words encapsulate the determination and gusto which will accompany Mná 2016.

An interjection was made by anti-war activist Margaretta D'Arcy who appealed to the gathering not to ignore the number of wars which affect women, children and men globally. She pointed out that in 2012 Ireland earned €2.3 billion in arms exports which she said turns "the Irish army, with its long and proud tradition as a neutral force, into a gang of mercenaries ... meanwhile the Irish navy is in the Mediterranean dealing



ÁINE NÍ SHIORDÁIN, ÍDE NÍ FHAOLÁIN and Cepta Byrne at the launch of Mná 2016.



DANI GILL, Director Cúirt Festival, Tara O'Connor, Cúirt Manager, Frances Waldron and Anne Weadick, Project Coordinator, Galway Youth Arts Alliance.



GEARÓIDIN Hynes, Gaillimh le Gaellge, Bríd Quinn, LII Griffin and Bríd Ní Chonghaolle, Gaillimh le Gaellge.

with the consequences of such weaponry".

A specific topic and challenge have been designated for each month in 2016.

January saw the launch of Mná 2016 with the challenge of "How to infect people to ..." and it certainly did. The reason for our assembly - the exclusion of 51 percent of the population - had us chomping

at the bit to claim our space and honour our fore-sisters who had done the same, probably in even more challenging circumstances.

February will focus on Lá le Bhríd which celebrates the life of St Brigid, founder of a number of monasteries and whose feast day supplanted the pagan festival of Imbolc which heralded spring.

International Women's Day

on March 8 will have more significance for us this year as it will become a kind of ready reckoner when the question will be asked "How have women fared?"

The remainder of the year might answer that question. April will look at Women in Literature: 100 years of Creativity, May will see an exhibition of brooches

and emblems historically used by women and July will look at women in film during the Galway Film Fleadh. An event will be organised to celebrate Refugee Day on Monday June 20 and October will focus on Nuns, Prisoners and Prostitutes 1915-2015.

National Youth Day and Mental Health Promotion in August will