

Anglo-Irish Treaty debates: primary source activity

Kate O'Callaghan (1885-1961) was a TD in the second Dáil and opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. She was a former lecturer at Mary Immaculate College of Education in Limerick. In 1914 she married Michael O'Callaghan. He was Mayor of Limerick in 1920 and on 7 March 1921 he was shot dead at home, either by the Black and Tans or the Auxiliary members of the RIC. Kate O'Callaghan was one of six female TDs elected to the second Dáil two months later.

Read the following extract from a speech given by Kate O'Callaghan during the Treaty debates in the Dáil, 20 December 1921 and answer the questions that follow.

The speech has been edited for educational purposes

A Chinn Chomhairle, I rise to support the President's motion for the rejection of these Articles of Agreement, and, lest anybody should afterwards question my right to stand here and criticise and condemn this Treaty, I want it to be understood here and now that I have the clearest right in the world. I paid a big price for that Treaty and for my right to stand here. Since I came up to Dublin for this Session I have been told, with a view to changing my vote, I suppose, that my husband was never a Republican. I challenge any Deputy in this Dáil to deny my husband's devotion to the Republic, a devotion he sealed with his blood.

I have been told, too, that I have a duty to my constituents. They, I am told, would vote for this Treaty, and I ought to consider their wishes. Well, my political views have always been known in Limerick, and the people of Limerick who elected me Deputy of this Dáil two months after my husband's murder, and because of that murder, know that I will stand by my convictions and by my oath to the Irish Republic.

No woman in this Dáil is going to give her vote merely because she is warped by a deep personal loss. The women of An Dáil are women of character, and they will vote for principle, not for expediency [practicality].

This Treaty, which we are told gives us the substance of freedom, to my mind puts Ireland definitely on a Dominion status within the British Empire. Now what have all these hundreds of years of struggle been for? What has it been about?

Now as to this question of the oath. I fail to see how in swearing an oath of allegiance to the Free State I can avoid King George. To my mind in swearing to the Constitution of the Irish Free State I cannot avoid him.

If there is any Deputy here who has not yet made up his mind, I would ask him for God's sake, before he does, to think well and stand for principle and against the Treaty.

Source: oireachtas.ie

1. How does Kate O'Callaghan justify her opposition to the Treaty?
2. Why does O'Callaghan believe she is not going against the wishes of her constituents by voting against the Treaty?
3. In her speech O'Callaghan refers to the female TDs in the Dáil, many of whom were connected to men who had died in either the Easter Rising or the War of Independence. She says: "No woman in this Dáil is going to give her vote merely because she is warped by a deep personal loss." What does this statement reveal to you about attitudes towards women in politics in 1921?
4. Identify two articles of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921 that O'Callaghan takes issue with.