



THE CUBA
P R E S S

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New book uncovers controversial Irish–New Zealand story from World War II

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On the eve of St Patrick's Day, Michael D. Higgins, Uachtarán na hÉireann President of Ireland, has endorsed a new book written by Horowhenua journalist Peter Burke about the controversial treatment of Irish immigrants to New Zealand during World War II.

Burke reveals that as Ireland was neutral during the war, Irishmen in this country refused to betray their homeland and fight for New Zealand and, by default, Britain. This refusal was also based on the atrocities they had seen committed by British forces in Ireland during the War of Independence 1919–1921, known as the Troubles.

True to Ireland: Éire's 'conscientious objectors' in New Zealand in World War II, published by The Cuba Press in Wellington, documents the struggles the Irishmen faced here with officials and politicians and an unsympathetic public. It also describes how 155 of them faced deportation back to Ireland, and focuses in particular on six men, including Peter Burke's own father, who went before the No.4 Armed Forces Appeal Board as a test case and were dubbed the 'Sons of Éire'.

Peter Burke says he had been vaguely aware for much of his life that his father would not fight for the British and New Zealand in WWII, but it was not until he was going through his late mother's papers in early 2009 that he discovered an affidavit with his father's name on it, and what appeared to be a transcript of his father speaking at some sort of trial. Research revealed that his father appeared before the appeal board on Wednesday 30 July 1940 with the five other Irishmen. 'I was fired up to discover more about this case and about the father I didn't really know,' says Burke. 'It took ten years.'

President Michael D. Higgins praises Peter Burke for uncovering a fascinating piece of Irish–New Zealand history. 'This volume, meticulously and lovingly researched and chronicled by Peter Burke, tells the story of six men – including his father, Matt Burke – who lived through those years and later emigrated to New Zealand in search of a better life.'

'It is a tale of extraordinary moral courage,' Higgins says, 'demonstrated by Matt Burke and his comrades in following their principles during the Second World War. The very public stance that those Irishmen took was not popular, nor was it easy. Yet it was deeply admirable, and, as this wonderful book shows, understandable in light of the lives and ideals of those six Irishmen.'