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Seán MacBride, A Life: From IRA Revolutionary to International Statesman

Elizabeth Keane

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An exceptional man, an extraordinary career – a life of Seán MacBride, Ireland's most distinguished statesman

Seán MacBride (1904–1988) was at different times the Chief of Staff of the IRA, a top criminal lawyer, leader of Clann na Poblachta, Irish Foreign Minister, UN Commissioner, and a founding member of Amnesty International. He is the only person to have won both the Nobel Peace Prize (1974) and the Lenin Peace Prize (1977).

Seán MacBride, A Life, by accomplished historian Elizabeth Keane, is the first complete biography of this multifaceted, complex and internationally renowned Irish politician. From revolutionary terrorist to conservative constitutional politician to liberal elder statesman and international humanitarian, *Seán MacBride* uncovers the political and personal story of one of twentieth-century Ireland's most controversial figures.

Seán MacBride begins with MacBride's birth in Paris in 1904. With icons of the nationalist movement in Ireland for parents, MacBride's future as a politician was fated: his father John MacBride was a Boer War hero executed for his role in the Easter Rising of 1916; his mother Maud Gonne was an outspoken revolutionary and the lost love and muse of Ireland's most famous poet W.B. Yeats.

Seán MacBride then looks at MacBride's membership of the IRA, which he joined as teenager. He fought in both the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. *Seán MacBride* charts his rapid rise through the ranks, looking at how he became the Director of Intelligence and later Chief of Staff of the IRA before relinquishing his position and becoming a top criminal barrister.

MacBride entered Dáil Éireann for the first time in 1947 as the leader of Clann na Poblachta, and formed the first coalition government in Irish history in 1948. Appointed Minister for External Affairs (Foreign Minister), *Seán MacBride* considers MacBride's tenure in office, which included overseeing the acceptance of the European Convention on Human Rights, the rejection of NATO and Ireland's exit from the Commonwealth. His refusal to support fellow Clann na Poblachta TD Noël Browne's Mother-and-Child Scheme in the face of the opposition of the Catholic bishops led to the collapse of the coalition.

MacBride lost his seat in the 1957 election, retired officially from Irish party politics and entered the third phase of his life: international statesman and human rights activist. *Seán MacBride* looks at the pivotal role MacBride played in European and international politics and human rights over the course of his later years, including founding Amnesty International, opposing apartheid in South Africa and agitating against nuclear armament.

Few Irish politicians have had such an impact domestically and internationally. From MacBride's violent IRA beginnings to his later advocacy of peace in politics, *Seán MacBride, A Life* captures the twists and turns of a fascinating career. A figure of national and international importance, one of the most distinguished

Irish people of the twentieth century, he has found a biographer of authority and assurance in Elizabeth Keane, whose survey of his life and times is astute, insightful and convincing.

Praise for Elizabeth Keane:

‘A singular voice in Irish history’
The Sunday Business Post

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