

Republican SÍNN FÉIN Poblachtach

112Ú Ard Fheis

Aitheasc an Uachtarán



A Chathaoirligh, a Theachtaí is a chairde go léir. Fearaim céad míle fáilte romhaibh ar fad ag an Árd-Fheis seo.

You are all most welcome to the 112th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin. We gather in national conference once more to review what has been an historic year, decide policy and formulate our plans for the coming year.

This past year marked the Centenary of the 1916 Rising and an opportunity for us all as Irish Republicans to reaffirm our faith as well as to engage with the message of 1916 for the Ireland of the 21st Century. For Irish Republicans 1916 is not merely an historical event to be marked. It is unfinished business. Ireland remains partitioned and the north-eastern corner of our nation remain under British occupation. Its ultimate goals have yet to be achieved and we can only truly honour it by working for those ideals.

The revolutionary generation of 1913 to 1923 are an example of what people can achieve when they come together in pursuit of a common goal and ideal. For the Ireland of today people should draw on that inspiration in facing the social and economic war that has been waged on them by both partition states. As Irish Republicans, we draw inspiration from the past as we look to the future. By articulating authentic Irish Republicanism, by working on the ground throughout the 32 Counties and abroad we are keeping alive the ideals and ideas that inspired the men and women of 1916. We put forward with confidence our alternative to the failed and discredited partitionist system, a system that was imposed on the Irish people by threat of immediate and terrible war in 1921.

Irish Republicans viewed this year's centenary of 1916 as something to be embraced. It was heartening to see so many young people interested in learning more about their history. Thousands of Irish people travelled from all over the world to be here to celebrate and remember the Rising. The political establishment moved to sanitise 1916. The "Wall of Shame" unveiled in Glasnevin Cemetery on April 3 carries the names of British soldiers and police who were killed during the rising. What self-respecting nation commemorates those who died in the pay and service of its enemy. Would the French erect monuments to the German occupation forces or the Vichy French who collaborated with them? The answer of course is no and nor are they expected to, why is Ireland expected to behave any differently to any other nation? Here a man who engaged in a legitimate protest was denied his right to protest by a foreign diplomat and despite this was charged and given a suspended sentence. We salute Brian Murphy, a grandson of 1916 Veteran, faithful member of the Second Dáil and President of Sinn Féin Cathal Ó Murchadha.

Instead they attempt to reduce 1916 to an historical curiosity, replacing serious engagement with the ideas and philosophy of 1916 with historical pageantry. Dressing in costume is meant to replace a deeper understanding of the thinking and ideology that lies behind the proclamation. Earlier this year Dublin City Council erected a banner on the Bank of Ireland in College Green containing images of constitutional nationalist leaders including John Redmond who vehemently opposed the rising. This is just a very blatant example of the political elite's attempt to rewrite Irish history by writing out those who are inconvenient to their

narrative. They are saying yes if you insist we will mark the centenary but we will do it on our terms and we will decide for you the people who are worthy of being remembered.

With the renewed interest in 1916 have come renewed attacks on the reputation of Pádraig Mac Piarais. He is presented in some quarters as a caricature, his more extreme critics accuse him of promoting a “cult of death”. Even some who would regard themselves as radical or on the left have fallen into this trap. This is nothing new, Pearse has long been a target of such attacks. Some have attempted to elevate Connolly while denigrating Pearse. But invariably once Pearse has been undermined they then turn on Connolly also. Both Pearse and Connolly are indelibly linked in both historical and ideological terms, their vision and philosophy of the New Ireland as set out in the 1916 Proclamation, show they are two sides of the same coin. Those who attack Pearse of course never engage with his writings because to do so would expose the lack of substance and depth to their arguments.

Pearse and Connolly do not lend themselves to repackaging by the political establishment. Their writings display an analysis and argument that contains both strength and sophistication that defies the best efforts of the Leinster House and Stormont political elites to sanitise them. They were unambiguous in their determination to break the chains of British imperialism and spoke and wrote in the clearest and most direct fashion about the type of Ireland that should emerge from the revolution they were setting in train. We honour both Pearse and Connolly proudly for who they were and what they represent.

On February 20, we launched our programme of events for the centenary at a Seminar entitled Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week. Commemorations took place all over Ireland and abroad as usual over the Easter weekend. On Easter Monday despite the concerted efforts of the 26-County Special Branch to intimidate and force us off the streets Republican Sinn Féin took their rightful place outside the GPO where a crowd of thousands were given an unequivocal message of traditional Irish Republicanism. The national 1916 Centenary commemoration took place on Saturday, April 23. This event attracted a crowd of 2,000 according to The Irish Times. The historian

Eunan O'Halpin wrote that the Republican Sinn Féin "speakers drew on a very traditional republican lexicon, using terms such as 'Free State', '26 counties' and 'six counties'". O'Halpin said RSF: "Speakers reiterated the purist republican view that the only legitimate Irish parliament was the all-island, First Dáil which first met in January 1919, from which RSF and the Continuity IRA claim descent."

In comparison, he cast the Provo event in a more negative light: On Sunday, Sinn Féin's (sic) listeners had to make do with brief snatches from Thomas Davis's milk-and-water 19th century nationalist ballad A Nation Once Again. Where were the once-familiar The Boys of the Old Brigade, Take it Down From the Mast, Seán South, or Old Mountbatten Had a Boat, all songs used to rally the republican faithful which I often heard on Dublin streets when the Provos were in their pomp? If Adams is right, and 'they haven't gone away, you know', they seem nevertheless to have lost their voices."

Over the following weeks four provincial commemorations as well as events in England, Scotland, the United States and Europe were held. In Ulster, a massive RUC/PSNI operation was mounted in the aftermath of the opening of the Republican Garden of Remembrance in Kilwilkie estate in Lurgan. This operation exposed the reality of British occupation in Ireland in 2016. It also gave the lie to those who say that the Six-County State is a normal democratic society. Arbitrary arrest and internment continue to be used against Irish republicans for simply commemorating our patriot dead.

A ten-year-old boy was among those questioned in the operation. The ten-year-old is believed to be the youngest ever in the history of the conflict to be cautioned in regard to a parade.

The father of the two brothers and an older brother were among those arrested, while their mother was cautioned before being allowed to travel home.

We saw it as imperative that we gave the lead in commemorating the sacrifice of the men and women of 1916. As the only political organisation still committed to the undiluted gospel of revolutionary Irish Republicanism and the re-establishment of the All-Ireland Republic of Easter Week it is our duty to ensure that the message of 1916 is carried forward and acted upon.

The forces of reaction and revisionism are attempting to rob us of our history, of its meaning and relevance to make our people compliant and subservient to the present-day forces of political and economic imperialism. Instead we must reaffirm ownership of that history.

In the years to come other significant centenaries of that revolutionary decade will be marked. Next year we will be proudly commemorating the centenary of the first Irish Republican to give his life on hunger strike, Tomás Aghas as well as the historic by-elections which paved the way for the First Dáil.

Some of these centenaries will be uncomfortable to say the least for the political elites in both parts of partitioned Ireland. This is because they challenge the foundation myth of the 26-County state. The denial of the 1918 General Election – the last occasion the Irish people acting as a unit expressed their democratic will – the suppression of the by the British First Dáil and subsequently the All-Ireland Republic in the counter-revolution of 1922-23, exposes the undemocratic origins of the two partition states.

These two states were imposed by the British Government's threat of "immediate and terrible war" not the democratically expressed will of the Irish people. Writing in the Sunday Business Post on March 28 Tom McGurk wrote powerfully about history and narrative that the 26-County political class would prefer not to talk about. Firstly, McGurk addressed the issue of partition: "...any concept of the nation was truly forgotten by Dublin as Northern nationalists were simply abandoned. Left to the total control of their political enemies in a six-county gerrymandered statelet, their lot under the Stormont parliament was to be much worse than ever was under Dublin Castle. So much for cherishing all the children of the nation equally."

He then turned his attention to the legacy of the counter-revolution: "The bitterness was to last generations, largely because of the methods with which the republicans were defeated. In particular, the new Free State army – militarily equipped by the British, and within its ranks many World War One British soldiers and men who had never fought in the War of Independence – were often to outdo even the Black and Tans in their savagery. The Free State government executed 77 republicans (many without trial), and

thousands more were jailed for years. Even after the Civil War ended, the determination to destroy any vestige of republicanism continued as the thousands of republicans on the losing side were made persona non-grata. They were forbidden to have any state jobs and consequently huge numbers were driven into exile in Britain and the US. [...] Even many of the 1916 widows and families were treated with disdain. Whatever the tricolour flew over at the end of it all, it was certainly neither a republic or a nation."

The Decade of Centenaries is an opportunity to address a legacy the effects of which the Irish people still live with one hundred years later. It is time to disturb the comfortable and address ghosts of our history whom have never been laid to rest.

Writing in his column in the Sunday Independent on January 3 Gene Kerrigan made an analogy between the present political and economic forces and those that prevailed 100 years ago: "In any circumstance in which a country is ruled by outside forces there will be a political entity that will prosper by mediating between the rulers and the subjects. That was the role Redmond and the Parliamentary Party played. Make concessions to us, which will boost our popularity among the masses, or you risk building support for more radical forces. As it was back then, so it is now. The outside rulers who exert authority over this country are not the tribunes of any empire. They are: a) the technocrats of the European Central Bank; b) the bankers, who tell the State how they want to be regulated and who take it for granted that the State will pick up the bill when they screw up the financial system. And c) the anonymous executives of massive corporations, so powerful they negotiate their tax payments and strategic employment plans directly with the State. We don't have a photo of prime minister Asquith tickling John Redmond's neck, like he was rewarding a dependable pet. But we do have such a picture of a French politician tickling Enda Kenny's neck, while our Taoiseach (sic) giggled happily."

The 26-County election has come and gone and has left in its wake the usual Leinster House political horse-trading which has resulted in a hybrid Fine Gael/Independent coalition. While words like transformation and radical change are bandied about, when the hyperbole is stripped away very little has changed. How little has changed was shown by the very

marked reluctance by any of the parties or independents to contemplate forming a new 26-County administration because each know that whatever the composition of the next administration the policies would essentially remain the same because economic policy is not decided in Leinster House but by the EU, IMF and the ECB.

That was definitively established over the past five years. The two big centre right parties of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have nothing to separate them in terms of policy. As the historian Diarmaid Ferriter pointed out on RTÉ Radio 1's election coverage there are very few of those elected who can truly be described as politically radical either politically or economically. Many of the so-called independents come from the political gene pool of either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael while the Provisionals only principle is to replace Fianna Fáil as the leaders of the opposition. As Vincent Browne pointed out in his column in The Irish Times on February 24: "Nothing of consequence will change in Irish society with this election. Over one million people will continue to live in deprivation; nearly one in five of everyone in employment will continue to be paid pittances; thousands of poorer people will die prematurely (this was estimated a decade ago to be around 5,000 annually); us – rich people – will crash the queues for preferential healthcare, others will be left on trollies and waiting lists; schools will make no significant difference to the life chances of children and young adults; only the few will exert any influence on public policy; our democracy will remain hollow."

Browne is damning in his assessment of the even mildly radical, let alone revolutionary intentions of the Provos: "Hundreds of thousands will vote for Sinn Féin thinking this will make a significant difference to the distribution of income, wealth, power, influence, cultural capital, social capital – they will be disappointed. It is not that Sinn Féin is a threat

to the established order, it is that Sinn Féin wants to become part of the established order."

Browne quotes from the radical vision of Ireland set out in the Éire Nua programme of the late 1970s and contrasts it with limited vision of the Provos today and finds little to differentiate them from the other Leinster House establishment parties: "...one wonders why they [the Provos] don't just merge with Fine Gael, along with the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil, Renua

and Shane Ross?"

On the what is described as the 'left' of 26-County politics is a mish mash of parties and individuals, some may be well intentioned and sincere while others are more interested in gaining political hegemony and control over the progressive forces that have arisen around the anti-austerity movement on issues such as water charges etc than any vision of a New Ireland.

Le déanaí foilsíodh an Polasaí Oideachais Gaeltachta agus roinnt moltaí maithe ann ach, mar a dúramar anuraidh, níl aon mholtáí ann maidir le dúshlán ceart agus, le haitheantas dá réir, a bheith ag baint le curaclar Gaeilge na hArdteiste. Níl tagairt dá laghad ann do chúrsaí trí Ghaeilge ar an tríú leibhéal, mar shampla ní féidir le duine óg staidéar a dhéanamh ar ábhair ar nós Ceimic nó Cúntasaíocht. Tá an chuma ar an scéal freisin go bhfuil an stát ó dheas ag iarraidh ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta féin, gan aon tacaíocht ón stát, a gcuid pleannanna teanga féin a réiteach.

Recently the Dublin Department of Education finally published the Gaeltacht Education Policy with some worthwhile initiatives but, as was feared here last year, the policy has not come up with a challenging Leaving Cert Irish language curriculum, with associated recognition for native speakers and Gaelscoil students, to arrest the alarming decline in standards. As we all know the Leaving Cert drives standards all through the system. Neither is there any reference to the development of Third Level courses through Irish in such subjects as Chemistry and Accountancy. It seems, in this and in it's Gaeltacht language planning initiatives, that the Dublin Government and the state apparatus is handing all responsibility for the Irish language over to the Gaeltacht people themselves with minuscule resources and with no accountability on the state itself. There is nothing in any of these initiatives to show that the Dublin establishment intends anything but a continuation of the downgrading and marginalisation of Irish, in other words, death by a thousand cuts.

Meanwhile Irish Republican prisoners continue to suffer at the hands of the British state in Maghaberry. Since the Provos surrendered the right to political status for Republican POWs that had been secured following the deaths of the ten hunger strikers in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh in 1981. The recent call

by Ulster Unionist Stormont member Doug Beattie to end the separation of Republican prisoners shows how the unionist establishment continually fail to draw on the lessons of history. Irish history is littered with the failed attempts of the British Government to criminalise Ireland's historic struggle for national independence. This attempt will be no more successful than any of those in the past. We salute the Republican prisoners in Maghaberry.

I would also like to take this opportunity to salute the three Republican Sinn Féin activists arrested and charged before the non-jury Special Criminal Court in September. All three, have been given bail conditions which deny them the right to engage in their normal political activities including attending the Ard-Fheis. This is a blatant attempt to silence these political activists who have played leading roles in issues such as the anti-water charges campaign. We extend our solidarity to Jonathan Hawthorn – a member of the outgoing Ard Chomhairle – Dónall Ó Ceallaigh and Jimmy Geraghty.

As Irish Republicans we have always recognised the EU for what it is. It is a club of former imperial powers whose purpose is the consolidation of their power. It is imperialism in a modern form. Republicans have consistently argued against Ireland's participation in this project. In Ireland we have experienced both forms of imperialism and still do. In the Six Counties British military occupation represents the old imperialism while in the 26 Counties we have seen the social and economic ravages of the new imperialism of the EU.

The result of the British referendum towards Brexit was of course welcomed by Irish Republicans. On two levels, firstly it exposed the inherent fissures that exist within the so-called United Kingdom. From our point of view it will hopefully hasten its demise. We welcome the likelihood of a referendum on Scottish Independence. Secondly it strikes a blow against the EU project and gives encouragement to other progressive forces throughout Europe.

Unfortunately, the British right were allowed to frame the debate, there are of course very progressive arguments to be advanced against the EU but they were lost in a cacophony of right wing voices clamouring for position within the British Tory party etc. We are proud of our record of consistently

opposing the construction of a militarised and undemocratic superstate in every referenda held in the 26 Counties since 1972. This is the only position Irish Republicans can hold if we are serious about creating an independent Ireland based on the principles of the 1916 Proclamation. Talk of a United Ireland is meaningless; we have had unity under British Rule and indeed under the EU both parts of Ireland were largely under the same EU law. The sovereignty and independence of the Irish people is the goal of Irish Republicanism. There is no point in removing the shackles of British imperialism only to replace them with political and economic imperialism of the EU.

Ireland is part of Europe and has been for thousands of years. As Irish Republicans, we draw on a political philosophy whose roots are within the European Enlightenment of the 18th century. This European culture of music, literature and philosophy predates and transcends the EU.

Far from looking inward we as Irish Republicans are looking outward and into the future. We have a vision of the type of Ireland we wish to create. We believe Éire Nua provides the framework within which such a new Ireland can be constructed by all sections of the Irish people.

We are entering a period of radical change which presents opportunities for those committed to fighting for real political and economic democracy not only within nations but between nations. A community of free nations as envisaged by James Connolly. Within such a community of free nations an All-Ireland Federal Democratic Socialist Republic could take its rightful place.

As we celebrate the centenary of the 1916 Rising it is time to reject the failed politics of Leinster House and begin in earnest the task of making the All-Ireland Republic of 1916 a reality. The 1916 Proclamation sets out unambiguously the principles upon which such an Ireland should be founded. Éire Nua provides the programme to transform that Republic from an abstract ideal to a tangible reality for all sections of the Irish people, north, south, east and west. Writing in his column in the Sunday Independent on March 6 Gene Kerrigan does see signs of hope that a younger generation are not falling for the jaded politics of the Leinster

House politics class: "Perhaps reflecting on the 1916 centenary has something to do with it. Perhaps more of us know that others of our kind once had higher hopes." In this centenary year, we must strive for an Ireland where the old and the sick are not forced to rely on the kindness of strangers to survive, where a terminally-ill man or a heavily-pregnant woman are forced to walk the streets by day because they are denied the basic right of a roof over their head, where the social fabric of the nation is shredded in both partition states to protect the interests of the bankers and their cronies. Pearse, Connolly, Clarke, Mac Diarmada and their comrades did not view Ireland and her people as a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder, they saw the Irish Nation as something sacred in which they invested their lives. We can only truly honour them by seeking an Ireland that truly reflects the 1916 Proclamation."

In marking the Centenaries of momentous and defining events in our revolutionary history let us come into communion with the spirit of that heroic generation. The revolutionary generation of a century ago were men and women of vision. They showed us by their example what can be achieved by ordinary people when they unite together based on principle and idealism.

By drawing on the lessons of our history let us set about the task of building a New Ireland that reflects the high ideals of the 1916 Proclamation.

**Victory to the All-Ireland Republic
An Phoblacht Abú**