

Republican SÍNN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtaráin

105Ú Ard-Fheis 2009

Incoming Presidential Address from Des Dalton



A Chathaoirligh, A theachtaí

I stand before you humbled by the great honour which you my fellow Irish Republicans have bestowed on me. I am conscious also of the grave responsibility which has also been placed on me.

One has only to look to the names of those who have occupied this office to realise that the office to which you the delegates of Sinn Féin have elected me is a sacred trust and one which is not to be taken up lightly.

Those names ring down the ages to us today, Seán Ó Ceallaigh (Sceilg), Brian O'Higgins, Fr Michael O'Flanagan Cathal Ó Murchadha, Margaret Buckley, Padraig McLogan, Tomás Ó Dubhghaill. They are names and people bound together by a

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common thread of unwavering loyalty, commitment and an overriding sense of duty to the All-Ireland Republic. One also bound by that same thread and imbued with the same qualities of loyalty, commitment and duty is Ruairí Ó Brádaigh.

Ruairí Ó Brádaigh is a pillar of this movement. His contribution to Irish Republicanism is immense and singular. Over the course of almost 60 years of involvement in the Republican Movement he has never shirked responsibility or leadership when it has been thrust on him.

Serving as Chief of Staff of the Irish Republican Army, elected a Teachta Dala (serving the people of Longford/Westmeath) and as President of Sinn Féin.

In the past forty years this movement has faced two critical junctures when the fate of revolutionary Irish Republicanism lay in the balance. On both occasions – in 1969/70 and 1986 – Ruairí Ó Brádaigh along with his close friend and comrade Dáithí Ó Conaill provided the leadership which stemmed the tide of reformism which threatened to engulf our movement.

Both men tower over any history of Irish Republicanism in the latter half of the 20th Century. EIRE NUA – which was the fruit of their labour – was the first time that a serious effort was made to reach out to all sections of the Irish nation. It lays the basis as it still does today for an All-Ireland Republic. A Republic which would unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter in a common allegiance to the historic Irish nation. Making a reality of the dream of Tone, Emmet and Davis.

Today Ruairí Ó Brádaigh's gifts of leadership, intellect and eloquence are a prized asset of Sinn Féin and the Republican Movement. In the introduction to his scholarly biography of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Professor Robert W. White writes: " Ó Brádaigh's life is a window for understanding his generation of Irish Republicans and how they received the values of a previous generation and are transmitting those values to the next generation." Ruairí Ó Brádaigh is not last Irish Republican, or one of the last but rather by his life's work has ensured that the spirit and values of revolutionary Irish Republicanism live on into the 21st Century.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the other person who allowed his name to go forward for nomination as Uachtaráin of Sinn Féin. Like Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Des Long is a person who has for the past 50 years played a central role in the Republican Movement. Also like Ruairí Ó Brádaigh on the two occasions this Movement was in danger of being hijacked by a reformist leadership Des Long did not shirk his responsibility to safeguard the ideals of our Movement.

As Irish Republicans we are rightly proud of our history of unbroken resistance to British rule in Ireland. We are inheritors of a revolutionary tradition which stretches back through 218 years of Irish history. We are members of the oldest revolutionary

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movement in the world. We have every right to be proud! A true continuity of struggle.

But it is not enough to know all of this. As inheritors of such a tradition, it brings with duties and responsibilities. Our duty is to bring about the realisation of the ideals which inspired all those who have gone before us. Ideals and a sense of duty which have inspired succeeding generations of Republicans to sacrifice their very all.

The responsibility falls on each succeeding generation to take up and carry forward the torch of Irish freedom. It is not enough to say we are right but we must show it by our actions, our work and our commitment.

Speaking at Bodenstown in 1989 Dáithí Ó Conaill defined the role a cohesive Republican Movement can play: "The Movement then fulfilled its true role; it was the catalyst for the progressive forces of this country and abroad who desired the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, socialist Republic."

Today we must live up to this role – the Republican Movement must become the catalyst for all the progressive forces in Ireland; political, social and economic.

Today more than ever clear thinking, leadership and a programme of action are required, providing a focal point of resistance to that section of the Irish people who will never accept British rule in Ireland.

The attacks on British Crown forces this year tell us that the iron law of Irish history has not changed. While there is a British presence in Ireland it will be met with resistance.

We in Sinn Féin are the only political organisation capable of providing the leadership and direction which is demanded by the conditions of today. Our platform is one of solid and unequivocal Irish Republicanism. Other groups and organisations outside of the Republican Movement may claim to hold this ground but Republican Sinn Féin is the only political organisation to uphold the right of Irish people –acting as a unit –to national independence.

Sinn Féin is the only political organisation which rejects both partitionist states in Ireland and their respective assemblies. Sinn Féin is the only political organisation with policies capable of delivering a New Ireland for all of the Irish people. EIRE NUA and SAOL NUA.

Yesterday we passed a motion directing that a review of our organisation is carried out in the coming year to ensure Sinn Féin is capable of taking on the challenges which face us and seizing the opportunities which lie ahead.

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As President I intend to drive this process forward. But the task of building and developing our movement is not one for the leadership alone. On the contrary it is the duty and responsibility of each and every member of Sinn Féin to play their part to the full in carrying out this essential work.

Over the coming year as was discussed in the seminar yesterday morning, we must look at how our organisation functions on the ground, we must look at how we carry out our work from cumainn level up to the Ard Chomhairle.

We must ask basic questions of ourselves, as an organisation and as members. How effective are we in building and promoting Sinn Féin not only at national level but in our own cities, our towns, villages and communities? Do people in the area in which I live know that we exist? That we have a functioning cumann? Do we utilise to the full all the forms of media available to us such as the internet, local media etc? Are we reluctant to face the public?

Sinn Féin's strength has always been that we are of the people, that we have involved ourselves in the struggles of ordinary working people. Yesterday we passed a motion which calls on our members to "join and fully participate in the community, voluntary and trade union organisations in their local area, advancing wherever appropriate the principles of SAOL NUA."

Our constitution sets this out as one of the means by which we achieve our objects: "Through local Sinn Féin members establishing themselves in their local community

in local issues, thereby gaining the confidence of those involved in local affairs." It is only by doing this, going out among the Irish people can we become relevant and can we make Irish Republicanism relevant to the mass of the people.

Membership of Sinn Féin is an honour, we are part of something which is greater than each and every one of us. But it is not enough to take pride in who we are and what we represent, we must also bring to our task, hard work, commitment, discipline, and a sense of purpose and even more hard work. The very qualities which have ensured the unbroken continuity of Republicanism for over 200 years.

This is what is required if we are serious about our goal of "organising the Irish people into a united and disciplined movement for the restoration of the Republic".

Today Ruairí gave his usual excellent and comprehensive review and analysis of the past 12 months and the challenges which face us in the coming year. In the Six Counties we see the institutions of British rule being bedded down. The DUP have stated clearly that they along with a new British Tory government intend to return to Unionist majority rule in Stormont.

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In the recent debate on the transfer of British policing powers to Stormont they have loaded yet further preconditions, setting further hurdles that the Provos will have to jump to be given the privilege of administering British rule in Ireland. This includes the imposition of sectarian and triumphalist Orange marches on the nationalist people of the Six Counties.

Following the attacks on British Crown forces the Provisionals experienced what the journalist Ed Maloney described as their "Four Courts" moment. In other words reality caught up with them. Posturing and weasel words could no longer hide the fact that they had now thrown in their lot with the British government – lining up against that section of the Irish people who refuse to accept British occupation of their country.

Irish history is a cycle of armed resistance followed by coercion and attempts constitutionally to square the circle of British occupation and Irish democracy. It is a circle which can never be squared because British rule denies the exercise of true All-Ireland democracy. That is the right of the people of Ireland acting as a unit to national self-determination.

The only way to break the cycle of Irish history is to end British rule in Ireland once and for all. A public declaration of intent by the British government to withdraw from Ireland would create the dynamic for all of the Irish people to build a New Ireland. Our proposals EIRE NUA provide the blueprint to make this a reality.

The agenda of normalising British rule in Ireland goes on and Republican Sinn Féin must remain at the forefront in resisting all attempts to normalise what is the illegal partition and occupation of our country. Any attempt to bring the Queen of England to any part of Ireland will be met with opposition led by Republican Sinn Féin.

James Connolly famously declared that "Ireland without her people means nothing to me". Whilst ending British rule in Ireland is our core objective we also recognise that merely opposing British military occupation of our nation is not enough. We must oppose imperialism in all its forms.

For that reason Republicans are to be found in the Trade Union movement defending and fighting for proper pay and conditions for all workers, opposing the use of Irish airports or airspace by US warplanes, waging a war of conquest on the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. Opposing the creation of an undemocratic and militarised EU superstate – as we have done in the two referenda on Lisbon and each referenda since original decision to join the then EEC.

The Czech Republic's ratification of the Lisbon Treaty on November 3, paving the way for its adoption as EU law does not mark the end of history. The principles of

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upon which the campaign against the Lisbon Treaty was fought are timeless and will hold true as long as the human race exists.

The fight for real political and economic democracy both within and between states must go on. The struggle against imperialism in Ireland is part of the wider international struggle for human progress, freedom and democracy.

Almost 100 years after the First World War, is yet another generation of Irish people to be sacrificed on foreign battlefields in the interests of European capitalism and imperialism? Connolly defined participation in that war as "to slaughter our comrades abroad at the dictate of our enemies at home". To those who wished to fight he urged: " If ever you shoulder a rifle, let it be for Ireland". Like so much of what Connolly had to say, both statements hold true today as they did almost a century ago.

The struggle for a free Ireland also involves standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Rosspost and Erris in opposing the theft of our natural resources by global capitalism, with the active collusion of the Dublin administration. We applaud the actions of Maura Harrington and her community in defending the rights of all of the Irish people to the ownership of our natural resources.

The struggle for a free Ireland also means joining battle on the side of the working people of Ireland against the political and financial elite who are intent to use the current economic collapse to roll back the hard fought for rights of working men and women. It is a war which is being fought on a global scale -the same forces attacking workers in Ireland murder trade unionists and political activists in Columbia, use child labour to maximise profits in India and the Far East. Globalisation is the new imperialism of the 21st Century.

Its goal is the control of resources and markets, the maximisation of profits by the wealthy northern hemisphere, whatever the cost in terms of people or the environment.

Its logic is to build a world where the most vulnerable are exploited and used to set one section of the working class against the other.

Our struggle against British imperialism is part of the international struggle against the same enemy. This is evidenced by the greetings read to us yesterday from solidarity groups and national liberation movements. Irish Republicans have for long forged solidarity links abroad.

In the Basque Country, links were established from the early 1970s, Catalonia, Corsica amongst others. Of course relations were also established with our sister Celtic countries in Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, the goal of a league of free and independent Celtic nations is one which Irish Republicans would aspire to.

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Our solidarity with the people of Palestine in the long fight for national freedom remains strong and we salute the bravery of the people of Palestine and particularly Gaza who are interned by the Israeli state, deprived of essential medicines and even clean drinking water.

The work of developing such contacts remains vital and the work of our International Relations Bureau is to be commended. This work must be maintained and indeed stepped up. Just as imperialism is a global enemy an international network of solidarity is essential in opposing it.

So entering our second century the tasks and forces facing us are daunting. Building a strong vibrant revolutionary political organisation to meet those challenges is the task which must be taken up by the incoming leadership and by each and every member.

A strong disciplined and united Republican Movement is the only vehicle which can deliver on the historic goal of a free Ireland. It must and can only be a unity based on the principles of Irish Republicanism. In 1983 when Ruairí Ó Brádaigh stood down as Uachtaráin he warned "During my 14 years as head of Sinn Féin there were no splits or splinters – long may it remain so, as it will provided we stick to basic principles." They are words which we would do well to heed.

We have much to be proud of – a noble tradition has been handed to us. We can only honour that tradition by endeavouring to fan the flame of Irish nationality. Ensuring it is not extinguished but rather in the words of Terence MacSwiney it can become a living flame 'scorching up hypocrisy, deceit, meanness, and lighting all brave hearts to high hope and achievement'.

Onwards to the Republic

An Poblacht Abú