

Republican SÍNN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtaráin – 2013



Presidential Address by Des Dalton at Republican Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis, Sunday, November 3, 2013

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 109th Ard Fheis of Sinn Féin. Once more we gather in national conference at a time of great challenges for Irish Republicanism. This weekend allows us to take stock of where we are and to access how best to advance along the road ahead. The past year saw the passing of people who were pillars of the Republican Movement for the past half century or more. These were people who guided our movement through turbulent waters at a time when the very existence of the historic Irish Republican tradition was at stake. However it is because of the life's work of such people that we are gathered here this weekend to plan for the future of Irish Republicanism rather than to lament its passing. This weekend saw us unveil yet a further stage in our series of 1916 Manifestos, plan ahead for next year's 26-County Local Elections and prepare to step up our preparations for the centenary of the 1916 Rising in less than three years time. We have much work to do in which all have their own part to play.

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In the occupied part of Ireland the Six-County State displays all the characteristics one would expect of an abnormal. Undemocratic and sectarian statelet. The use of internment without trial and internment by remand tell us that nothing has changed in the daily reality of British Rule in Ireland. The beginning of the year saw the annual Bloody Sunday march – organised by the relatives of the victims of Bloody Sunday – held in Derry. Once again ordinary Irish people as well as international political activists came out in their thousands despite the threats of the Stormont Political establishment and their lackeys. Speaking at the event the veteran Civil rights campaigner Bernadette McAliskey said “We came on the streets to end internment without trial yet here we are 41 years later in a new administration, a new dispensation, new power structures, and new civic collaborators and we still have internment without trial with people in prison on the whim and diktat of the Northern Ireland Secretary of State —the Overlord of this place; And whatever minions of small people who think they have power here... the fact that they cannot have Martin Corey released means they have no power! “She quoted the judge in the High Court in the bail application of Marian Price: “But in the High Court, on a judicial review, the judge said that David Ford’s behaviour and his judgment on not allowing Marian Price out – and not even considering it – for a few hours to sit by the coffin of her sister was unlawful, unreasonable and irrational. That’s what the judge said about the Minister of Justice of this small, misbegotten, corrupt, little, pretending state.” The continued internment without trial of Martin Corey is a resounding reproof to any who claim that the Six-County State is a normal functioning democracy. In Martin’s case he has been held for the equivalent of a seven – year sentence on the basis of ‘secret evidence ‘that remains unsighted by either him, his legal team or the judiciary. We welcome the long overdue release of Marian Price and call for the release of all those currently held under a regime of internment by remand on spurious ‘holding charges’. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome home Michael Campbell. I know it was a relief to us all to see him returned to his family having endured the inhuman conditions of a Lithuanian prison. Failte Abhaile a Micéal.

On December 3 Belfast City Council voted to end the daily flying of the Union Jack flag over Belfast City Hall. Instead a coalition comprising of the Provisionals, the SDLP and the Alliance voted to fly the Union Jack on 17 designated days. This unleashed an orgy of loyalist rioting and protests across the Six Counties but particularly focused on East Belfast. In contrast to the heavy handed treatment meted out by the RUC/PSNI to Republicans and nationalists who have engaged in peaceful protests, the loyalists riots have met with only token opposition from the

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RUC/PSNI. Indeed Republicans attending the annual Bloody Sunday commemorative march in Derry on January 27 witnessed the RUC/PSNI helping loyalists to erect loyalists flags in the city. Republicans who have been jailed for simply participating in a peaceful protest march highlighting the ongoing internment of Martin Corey. On top of this comes the call from the Provisionals for a 'Border Poll' on Irish unity. It is important that all of this is viewed in context so as to properly understand what is going on here. With the securing of British rule the big constitutional questions have been removed from the political agenda and in their place instead we find tribal and sectarian games of one-upmanship led by the two sectarian power blocs at Stormont, the Provos and the DUP.

Sinn Féin warned in 1998 that one of the consequences of the Stormont Agreement would be the institutionalisation of sectarianism. In his Irish News column on December 15 Patrick Murphy described Stormont as: "...a sectarian carve-up of limited autonomy... It is designed to cater for, rather than counter, sectarian differences." The Provisionals are quite happy to proclaim the vote in Belfast City Council as a victory, however that poses the question; over whom? British rule is firmly entrenched, administered and policed by the Provos and their camp-followers, internment without trial and the attempted criminalisation of Republican prisoners goes on, political policing and repression is the daily experience of nationalist communities across the Six Counties. Little wonder then the Provos would attempt to reduce the issue of Irish freedom to a question of flags and symbols. By doing so they hope to distract from their abandonment of even a basic nationalist, let alone a Republican, position. In 2009 Vincent Browne in his nightly TV3 programme put it clearly. He said in effect that the nationalist view had been rejected and the unionist position had been accepted. The nationalist standpoint was that the people of Ireland as a whole should determine the future of Ireland. He continued: "The Unionist position was that the majority in the Six Counties should decide the future. We have all become unionists." Having abandoned Republicanism the Provos have embraced sectarianism as the means to consolidate their power base. As Patrick Murphy points out: "With few modern writers, philosophers or even poets saying much about the Irish nation, nationalism in the north has degenerated into what we might call quantitative sectarianism. It uses a sectarian inch tape to quantify the frequency of flag-flying, the number of Catholics in the census results and the volume of music from Orange bands. Unionism is delighted to hold the other end of the British-made tape." It is working-class Protestants now who are the enemy, not the British government or establishment. Provo leaders queue up to shake hands with the Queen of England while stoking the flames of sectarian conflict. The nationalist community within the

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Six Counties rightly did not allow themselves to be sucked into this nakedly sectarian circus, despite blatant attempts to provoke a response with attacks on nationalists areas.

Sinn Féin also rightly refused to rise to the bait of Unionist stooge Willie Frazer when a loyalist protest at Leinster House was mooted. Instead leadership is required in keeping the focus on the core issue, which is partition and British rule in Ireland. The Provo's sectarian alter-ego in the DUP likewise is playing the sectarian card in order to bolster and increase their power. It is the Alliance Party and its Parliamentary representative in East Belfast Naomi Long who was the focus of much of the loyalist protests and this is not unconnected to the fact that it was Naomi Long who took DUP leader Peter Robinson's seat at the last Westminster elections in 2010. The Provos call for a "Border Poll" is more of the smoke and mirrors designed to give their supporters the illusion of actually doing something to end partition while masking the reality that they have been absorbed wholesale into the machinery of British rule. By rejecting the very notion of an historic Irish nation and swallowing in whole the British definition of Ireland's histories fight for national independence as a sectarian squabble between to religious tribes, the Provos have undermined any effective argument for Irish unity, reducing their case to one of pure economics. In the late 1940s having lost power after 16 years Fianna Fáil latched onto the issue of partition using the Anti-Partition League as a vehicle to consolidate their base and rebuild support. The waving of the green flag and the platitudes about the 'fourth green field' were their electoral stock-in-trade. Now the Provos are playing a similar game. As Patrick Murphy puts it: "...the proposed border poll is clever electioneering for more important polls north and south."

Another campaign under the title "One Ireland – One Vote" is in clear contradiction of the unequivocal statement contained within the 1916 Proclamation: "We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people." The constitution of Sinn Féin is equally clear in declaring: "That the sovereignty and unity of the Republic are inalienable and non-judicable". In other words this is not a right that is negotiable or one that can be given away. In the words of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, speaking at the 1986 Ard Fheis: "They are absolutes". No one generation has the right to abrogate Ireland's historic nationhood. And nor can such a right be claimed. The exercise of national sovereignty by all the people of Ireland is sacrosanct and one that Republicans

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have consistently defended and acted on, such as the 1918 General Election, which established the First All-Ireland Dáil. The right to exercise national self-determination should not be confused with holding a referendum to determine if such a right exists in the first place. You cannot put to a ballot something that is fundamental to our very definition as a nation.

For true Republicans the attempts by the Provos to besmirch Republicanism with sectarianism is as reprehensible as those who would try to link it with criminality.

Sinn Fein is the only political organisation standing on a unequivocal Republican platform, advocating through ÉIRE NUA a programme that appeals to all sections of the Irish people, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. Clear vision, a focus on the real issues; political, social and economic, coupled with resolute Republican leadership is what is called for. On October 8 the new Director General of the British Intelligence service MI5 Andrew Parker warned he would crack down hard on those intent on resisting British occupation, calling them the "ragged remnants of a bygone age". It appears the British establishment are like the Bourbon monarchy, in that they: "saw nothing, remembered nothing, and forgot nothing." Our message to Mr Parker and his political masters is a simple one. It is to pledge our eternal hostility to British rule in any part of our nation. Like Pearse we believe that: " As long as Ireland is unfree the only honourable attitude for Irishmen and Irish women is an attitude of revolt." Writing in the Belfast Telegraph on July 2 the journalist Ed Curran recorded a conversation that took place between Nelson Mandela and a group of Irish newspaper editors at a lunch held in the home of Tony O'Reilly in 2000 . Mandela was questioned as to whether or not the Provisionals should decommissioning their arms. Mandela's response was unequivocal: "...my position is that you don't hand over your weapons until you get what you want." Needless to say this was a response that was not welcomed nor reported on. Mandela's attitude contrasts sharply with those who had already at that point in time abandoned the ideological basis for continuing the fight for a free Ireland. Again we are back to Pearse: "Ireland unarmed will attain just as much as it is convenient for England to give her; Ireland armed will attain ultimately just as much freedom as she wants." Continuity of purpose and intent link two true revolutionary thinkers and activists

Within Maghaberry prison Republican POWs continue to defy all attempts to criminalise them. The statement by the Continuity IRA POWs in Maghaberry prison on November 25 last, announcing the end of their 'dirty protest' marked the end of what the prisoners described as: "our current phase of protest". By ending their

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protest the POWs have now placed a serious onus on the Six-County Justice Minister David Ford and the Six-County Prison Service to speedily implement in full the August 2010 Agreement. The ending of strip-searching and the establishment of free association for all POWs are cornerstones of that agreement. There is also a responsibility on political activists outside the jail to continue, and indeed step up their protests and lobbying in support of the POW's demand for political status. The POW Department of Sinn Féin have already reiterated their determination to do so. The IRA prisoners have shown true leadership over the past three years both in the lead up to the negotiation of the August 2010 Agreement and its aftermath. Despite the repeated assertions by David Ford in recent weeks it was the IRA POWs who championed that agreement when the Six-County Justice Department and Prison Service were dragging their heels on its full implementation. In doing so the POWs were referred to in some quarters disparagingly as: "the conforming prisoners". The IRA POWs showed commendable restraint in the face such prevarication and smears. When it became obvious that the Six-County Prison Service had no intention of implementing the Agreement they led the way again by embarking on a full 'dirty' protest. All Irish Republicans are rightly proud of their courage and fortitude in the face of an inhuman and barbarous prison regime. They have nothing to prove to anybody either inside outside the prison walls.

The damning evidence given during the appeal by 'Craigavon 2' by the former governor of Maghaberry prison, Steve Rodford on October 15, as well as that given by the former Six-County Prisoner Ombudsman Pauline McCabe, exposes the lengths that the British State were willing to go to convict Brendan McConville and John Paul Woooton. As pointed out by Justice Watch Ireland, what happened to the Craigavon 2 could happen to anyone. But the evidence given by Steve Rodford and Pauline McCabe also shone a light on the atmosphere of outright hostility and hate that Republican POWs experience at the hands of a prison regime that is, as Rodford put it: "...out of control".

For Irish Republicans our struggle is both political and economic, anything less would be to ignore the reality of imperialism and consequently to dilute our revolutionary programme. As with James Connolly we believe that it is not enough to merely remove the physical presence of imperialism in the form of British military occupation without creating a New Ireland based on real political and economic democracy; an All-Ireland Federal Democratic Socialist Republic. Ninety-one years after the death of Liam Mellows his teaching has never been more relevant: "If the Irish people do not control Irish industries, transport, money and soil of the country, then foreign or domestic capitalists will. And whoever control the wealth of a

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country and processes by which wealth is attained control also its government." Writing in the foreword to a briefing paper issued by the charity Oxfam in September the Nobel Laureate in economics and former Chief Economist of the World Bank Joseph Stiglitz warned of the consequences of the policy of austerity being pursued by the EU: "The wave of economic austerity that has swept Europe in the wake of the Great Recession is at risk of doing serious and permanent damage to the continent's long cherished social model. As economists, including myself, have long predicted, austerity has only crippled Europe's growth, with improvements in fiscal positions that are always disappointing. Worse, it is contributing to inequality that will make economic weakness longer lived, and needlessly contributes to the suffering of the jobless and poor for many years." The recent 26-County Budget was but another example of this war of economic imperialism that is being waged against working people, the unemployed, the young, the old and the sick.. Once again the Leinster House political elite have targeted the most vulnerable members of society in order to protect the interests of the wealthy. The singling out of the elderly and the young unemployed exposes the harsh reality of the neo-liberal economics that drives the economic and social policy of the 26-County Administration. Cutting access to a full medical card to thousands of people over seventy as well as the renewed targeting of the young unemployed, leaving many with no other option but to emigrate is reminiscent of the 'Poor Law' mentality of the 1840s when starvation or the coffin ship were the only options that were provided. The ability to care for the old and provide for the young define a society that would claim to be civilised. The barbarians have indeed breached the gates. The effects of this economic onslaught are felt in both urban and rural Ireland. The enforced emigration of our youth is robbing rural communities of the very lifeblood they need to survive. This is pointed out by Seamus Boland, Chief Executive of the NGO Irish Rural Link: "The threat of emigration of young people away from rural communities, puts in jeopardy the very future of those areas." Likewise the cutting of the telephone subsidy cuts another vital lifeline as Irish Rural Link explain: "The phone has become a lifeline for many. As well as providing the security of communications, it also acts as a means of fighting off extreme loneliness often experienced by people living alone." The steady erosion of rural Ireland is evidenced by the closure of rural post offices, the rolling back of public transport or access to broadband. The hostility to rural Ireland is also to be seen when we witness turf cutters being photographed from helicopters and surrounded by Gardaí as they go about their normal work. While the bankers and financiers whose sharp practice lead to the economic collapse walk free of prosecution, those who seek to protect and maintain a way of life which has endured over centuries and many generations are criminalised. We

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salute the turf cutters and all those who are prepared to defend their communities against the bureaucrats of Brussels and their lackeys in Leinster House. We once again salute the bravery of the Shell-to Sea activists in their tireless fight in defence of the Irish people's right to the ownership of our natural resources. The spirit of Michael Davitt is truly alive and well.

The Leinster House political class are collaborating against the interests of their own people in order to prop up the economic agenda of the EU power elites. This budget is just the latest salvo in a war of economic imperialism being waged against ordinary people, workers, the unemployed, the rural and urban poor, the young and the old across Europe. The budget as an exercise is largely a media event, as the major decisions are already made by the political and economic masters in Brussels and the European Central Bank. This is the new face of imperialism and people must awake to the reality that they are now locked in a struggle for the very survival of the concept of a social contract. Oxfam warn that if the current policies continue to be pursued then an additional 15 to 20 million people face the prospect of living in poverty across Europe by 2025 bringing the total to over 130 million. Oxfam points out that the model being adopted in Europe resembles that pursued by the IMF and the World Bank in Latin America, South-East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s. As Oxfam says: " These policies were a failure; a medicine that sought to cure the disease by killing the patient." The measures proposed by Oxfam echo much that we advocate in Éire Nua and our social and economic policies. They call for greater participation in the democratic process by all stakeholders. The improvement of workplace democracy and shared ownership. An economy that invests in people aimed at creating sustainable economic growth and employment. Investment in public services and the prioritisation of health and education as the cornerstones of a functioning society. According to the OECD almost 1 in 5 (18%) of Irish adults aged 16–65 are at or below Level 1 on the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies). The 26 Counties are placed 17th out of 24 participating countries on the literacy test. 19th out of the 24 participating countries on the numeracy test, significantly below the PIAAC study average. In the Six Counties the figures are equally bleak. According to The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network the unemployment rate is 8.4% in the Six Counties is higher than the rate of 7.9% within the so-called UK. The Six Counties now has the highest rate for unemployment within the British state . 21% of children in the Six Counties are living in poverty. 44% of households in the Six Counties experience fuel poverty. Many have to make the decision whether to eat or have heat. Six-County food bills are predicted to be joint highest within the British State along with London. This

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despite the fact that Six-County income is 36.6% being lower than that of London. 21% of pensioners in the Six Counties are living in poverty compared to an average of 16% within Britain. Those who cynically protest so loudly about austerity in the 26 Counties whilst administering a similar cocktail of neo liberal economics from Stormont should be recognised for the political charlatans that they are. The 1916 Proclamation sets out clearly the principles upon which the All-Ireland Republic should rest. It takes no great examination to see that both the Six and 26-County states fall far short of the definition of freedom and democracy set by the men and women of 1916.

It is clearer now than ever the need for a new economic model for all of Ireland. We believe that the model of economic democracy as set out in *Saol Nua* provides at the very least a starting point towards building a New Ireland worthy of the high idealism of the 1916 Proclamation and the All-Ireland Republic it proclaimed.

This year marked the centenary of the beginning of the 1913 Lockout when the workers of Dublin heroically took on the combined efforts of the employers and the British State to not only break an effective trade union movement. But 1913 was also about what the power relations would be in a independent or semi-independent Ireland. As the historian Brian Hanley points out, 1913 was a struggle about "...class and power: with Home Rule on the horizon at last, about which class would dominate self-governing Ireland". In this respect it carries a serious message about who controls the levers of economic and political power in the Ireland of today. It was a moment in Irish history which would prove to be a signpost to what an organised and politicised Irish working class could achieve and heralded the collective drive of the Irish people for political as well as social and economic freedom in the following decade. It was a crucial moment when the political resolve of the trade union movement, both its leadership and members was tested in the white heat of battle and was not found wanting. Sadly the same cannot be said of the current leadership of the trade union movement in Ireland. They have failed in their duty and fallen far short of the high standards of decisive and visionary leadership set by Connolly and Larkin. In contrast they have embarked on a campaign of containing the righteous anger of Irish working people seeking to dissipate it in meaningless marches with no effective strategy of economic resistance even being discussed let alone formulated and implemented. The weasel words of conciliation have no place in the mouths of those who are in earnest about creating a New Ireland and a better world, instead they must speak with it with a language that will fire the soul and embolden the spirit of the people to resist. James Connolly described Liberty Hall as the: "unconquered citadel of the

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Irish working class", it is now time for the entire trade union movement to prove itself worthy of the proud legacy bequeathed to it by its unconquered and unconquerable forbearers. James Connolly's words are as relevant today as when first penned in 1916: "The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be disjoined. Ireland seeks freedom. Labour seeks that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon her soil."

The Irish people it seems are merely fodder to be sacrificed on the high alter of EU finance capitalism. But not only are our people plundered financially but also culturally. It seems that the denizens of Leinster House, Stormont, Westminster and Brussels are intent on robbing us of our identity as a separate people and nation. Writing in the Sunday Business Post earlier this year, Tom McGurk wrote that because the Irish people have been taught, over the past forty years or more, that it is wrong to take pride in our history of resistance, our distinct culture and identity, it means that today they are being denied the very tools of a strong sense of national identity required to stand up to the EU Troika in contrast to people's across Europe who have heroically defended themselves and their societies from the grip of the financial and banking elites. A clear pattern is there to be seen, stretching back over the past decade there has been a steady erosion of our political and cultural identity . Politically and economically it is easy to see where imperialism is at work but a more subtle war of cultural imperialism is also at work. The co-option of Irish sporting and cultural bodies into furthering this campaign is a clever ploy. The inclusion by the GAA of a recruitment advertisement for the RUC/PSNI in the match programme for the Minor and Senior All-Ireland Football Finals on September 22 is but the latest example. Speaking at a function in Queen's University Belfast on October 17 Peter Robinson indicated that the naming of GAA Clubs or grounds after Irish patriots is next on their hit list. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann were forced to subvert their own constitution in order to hold the annual Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Derry this year in order to promote the absurd idea that Derry was a so-called "UK City of Culture". This is a form of cultural imperialism that seeks to use Irish culture as a weapon against the very concept of an independent 32-County Irish Nation. Sinn Féin held two successful protests in Derry's Guildhall Square showing that the embers of nationality have not been extinguished. In Belfast Lord Mayor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir allowed Belfast City Hall to be illuminated in red on October 24 in order to promote the Poppy Appeal, commemorating past imperialist wars including the Black and Tan war in Ireland

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and the Paratroopers who carried out Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972. With Thomas Davis we believe: "This country of ours is no sand bank, thrown up by some recent caprice of earth. It is an ancient land, honoured in the archives of civilisation." The Irish nation can never be bound or defined by the artificial borders of the two partition states. The philosopher Dr Mathew O'Donnell writes that nations rather than states, which are simply units of political organisation, bring people together: "For people are not brought together by a state; the state is the subsequent organisation of people who already posses some kind of unity...It is with the nation that one's loyalty lies. There is no disowning it, no alternative to it. There should be a feeling for the nation, for it is one's own people. This is the origin for the effective element in patriotism." Dr O'Donnell warns of the dangers of substituting state for nation: " An unduly emotional attachment to the state – the organising coercing element – will surely lead to totalitarianism, expansionism, militarism. And an unduly detached critical attitude to the nation could lead to an exaggerated cosmopolitanism, rootlessness, and in the long run, a general impoverishment of the spirit through the loss of the sense of belonging. If humanity is reduced to pure individuality it is a poor and stunted thing."

The founder of Conradh na Gaeilge Dubhghlas de Híde spoke of the need to reverse the process of anglicising Ireland: "When we speak of 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising the Irish Nation', we mean it, not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English."

He went to set out why we as a people needed to reconnect with our own distinct cultural identity if we were to prosper: "I would earnestly appeal to every one, whether Unionist or Nationalist, who wishes to see the Irish nation produce its best — surely whatever our politics are we all wish that — to set his face against this constant running to England for our books, literature, music, games, fashions, and ideas. I appeal to every one whatever his politics — for this is no political matter — to do his best to help the Irish race to develop in future upon Irish lines, even at the risk of encouraging national aspirations, because upon Irish lines alone can the Irish race once more become what it was of yore — one of the most original, artistic, literary, and charming peoples of Europe."

Bliain na Gaeilge is ea Dhá Mhíle is a Trí Déag. Comóradh aon chéad is fiche bliain ó bunaíodh Conradh na Gaeilge in Ocht Déag Nócha Trí. Tréaslaimid le Conradh na Gaeilge as an éacht a bhaint amach.

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Trí Bliana tar éis don Straitéis Fiche Bliain don Ghaeilge a bheith fógraite ag Rialtas Bhaile Átha Cliath is cúis imní i gcónaí an ciúnas iomlán faoi. Idir an dá linn leanann an ghéarchéim sna Gaeltachtaí, mar shampla b'éigean d'Eagras na Scoileanna Gaeltachta (ESG) éirí as feidhmiú ar fad mar gur cuireadh deireadh scun scan lena mhaoiniú. Stoptar Gaelscoileanna nua á mbunú agus tá baol ann fós go bhfuil polaitíocht Fhoras na Gaeilge ag tachtadh na n-eagras deonacha.

Conradh na Gaeilge, the Gaelic League celebrates 120 years this year and has a special programme of events to put the Irish Language in the centre, where it belongs, in the Centenary Celebrations of the Irish Revolution and the Easter Rising.

Three years on from publication, silence surrounds the 26-County Administration's 20 year Strategy for the Irish Language. This silence is now approaching shameful levels as the language continues to struggle for survival especially in its heartland, the Gaeltacht. In the last few weeks the Organisation of Gaeltacht Schools (ESG) had to disband due to a unilateral withdrawal of funding by the 26-County Administration.

The move away from allowing parents and communities themselves to set up Gaelscoileanna, and indeed other Patronage schools, to the present situation where the State decides the areas where the schools are established and by whom, is a matter of grave concern. In the last five years hardly any new Gaelscoileanna have been allowed commence. In spite of all this hostility on behalf of the state towards Irish we note, for instance, the continuing good work of the Irish Language Commissioner in shining a light on the negativity and hypocrisy of the 26-County Administration towards Irish and of COGG in supporting Irish medium schools.

Today we see a concerted effort to re-anglicise Ireland, to undo all that was achieved by previous generations and to sweep away the last vestiges of distinct nationality from the consciousness of the Irish people. As the centenary of the 1916 Rising draws near we have the opportunity to fan the embers of that national consciousness, to awaken within the Irish people an awareness of their possibilities as a people. We need to reconnect with high ideals which have in the past inspired us to greater things and a vision of a New and better Ireland. As we approach the centenary of the 1916 Rising a battle has commenced for the hearts and minds of the Irish people.

The legacy as well as the essential message of 1916 is at stake for this and future

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generations. The resources of both partitionist states are being employed in order to sanitise our history to the point that it has been robbed of any meaning. Equivalence is being made between the forces of occupation and the independence movement that no self-respecting nation would contemplate. The 1916 Rising for Irish Republicans is not only an important moment in our history but a beacon to light our way forward. It is an event that not only continues to occupy a central place in our history but also remains relevant due to the simple fact that it remains unfinished business.

The announcement by 26-County Foreign Affairs Minister Eamon Gilmore on September 7 last that representatives of the British Government and the British Royal family would be invited to events to mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising in 2016 is but the latest indication of a drive to rob the centenary of the rising of its significance and in the process further bed down the continued British occupation and partition of Ireland. Our history is being stolen from us because those within the British and 26-County political establishments recognise the power of memory and history in forging identity and self-confidence in a people. The Czech writer Milan Kundera wrote: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting". That is the struggle we are engaged in today. The Irish people must take control of their own history, culture and identity. It is time to stand up to those who would attempt to parody our history to the point that it is process divested of any relevance or meaning. Do not let them rob you of your heroes or of pride in our centuries long struggle against oppression. If we are to draw any lessons from the Ireland of a century ago it is that our destiny lies in our own hands. History and identity are inextricably linked and are not the preserve of a political or academic elite, they belong to the men and women of Ireland.

Irish Republicans view our struggle not just in the context of one of national liberation from British occupation but we also view it as part of the international fight against imperialism in all its forms. Reflecting this we held a very successful Anti-Imperialist Forum in the Conway Mill in Belfast from June 13 to 15. International delegates, academics joined with grass roots activists and members of Sinn Féin in a lively weekend of debate and discussion. Topics such as Republican History: The Challenge of Finding the Truth; Experiences From the Worldwide Anti-Imperialist Struggle; The Anti-Imperialist Struggle & Initiatives in Ireland and Irish Republicanism in the 21st Century ensured that a broad range of issues, both at a national as well as an international level were explored. The forum was organised as a counter to the G8 Summit, held in Co Fermanagh. As an event it represented in microcosm the interconnectedness of our struggle and the possibilities of international

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solidarity. Culminating with the annual Wolfe Tone commemoration in Bodenstown on June 16 it was truly a weekend suffused with the spirit of anti-imperialism.

We extend our greetings and solidarity to all of our international comrades who struggle for national liberation and the political and economic emancipation of humanity.

Irish Republicanism is faced, as it has always been, by many enemies. Most obviously it is faced by the open hostility of the British and 26-County States but we are now faced by a more insidious foe. There are a variety of groups and individuals who have hijacked the flag of Irish Republicanism in order to engage in nefarious activities all of which besmirch our noble and historic cause. In our own case a grouping has, since 2010, attempted to steal our identity and good name. We would urge people to be alert to the existence of such gangs and to draw a clear distinction between them and the legitimate Republican Movement. Sadly as we have experienced, elements within the media have been all too willing to collaborate in sowing further the seeds of confusion by making the deliberate decision not to make such a clear distinction. Gangs such as this fit the criteria of the infamous 'pseudo gang' concept, first devised by General Frank Kitson of the British Army. They first made their appearance in British occupied Kenya in the 1950s. Since then their effectiveness has been honed and perfected by the British in various theatres of operation, from the Six Counties to Iraq. The South African apartheid regime used such gangs in an attempt to discredit the ANC. These state-sponsored gangs work to an agenda designed to both discredit the true revolutionary movement in the eyes of the people and at the same time sow seeds of doubt and division in the ranks of the legitimate movement. Frank Kitson has indeed bequeathed a dark legacy to the world and in Ireland it seems there are those who are all too willing to implement his strategy. Vigilance and care are called for as seldom before. We must never lose sight of the high idealism of 1916 because it will always speak to us of a New and better Ireland and with it the possibility of revolutionary social, political and economic change. and should note well the words of Brian Ó hUiginn: "Keep close to them on the road they walked without flinching, the road whose signposts, as Liam Mellows said, are unmistakable, the road of truth and honour and earnestness and courage, the road of no wavering, of no compromise with wrong, of no surrender – the only road that leads to the freedom and happiness of the indivisible Republic of Ireland."

On June 5 we lost a man whose contribution to Irish Republicanism was unique. It was a life marked by unselfish devotion to the cause of Irish freedom. It was a life

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set apart by his sense of duty, honour and the intellectual rigour that he brought to the Republican Movement. In his biography of Ruairí, Professor Robert W. White of Indiana University, described Ruairí Ó Brádaigh's life as: "...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." In his introduction to the same book, the journalist Ed Maloney described Ruairí as the "last, or one of the last Irish Republicans". Whilst the tribute was well intentioned the case is quite different. It is because of the life's work of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh that he is not the last Republican but has rather ensured the continuity of Irish Republicanism, passing on the torch to succeeding generations. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh was a towering figure of Irish Republicanism in the latter half of the 20th Century. He came to embody the very essence of the Republican tradition, setting the very highest standards of commitment, duty, honour and loyalty to the cause of Irish freedom. Ruairí was a man of immense capability both as a politician and as a soldier. He holds the unique distinction of serving as President of Sinn Féin, Chief of Staff of the Irish Republican Army and from 1957 to 1961 as a TD, representing Longford/Westmeath.

At critical junctures in the history of the Republican Movement, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, along with his close friend and comrade the late Dáithí Ó Conaill, manned the gap against the forces of reformism who sought to convert a revolutionary movement of national liberation into a mere constitutional political party, first in 1969/70 and once again in 1986. For Ruairí the essential principles of Irish freedom were clear and marked the political course to be followed. He dismissed any cult of the personality warning always of the inherent dangers of following merely the man or woman over the cause of Irish national independence. For Ruairí Ó Brádaigh there could be no temporising on the issue of British Rule in Ireland. Drawing on the lessons of Irish history he recognised that it constituted the root cause of conflict and injustice for the Irish people. In opposing the 1998 Stormont Agreement he rightly viewed it as a flawed document serving only to copper-fasten British Rule while also institutionalising sectarianism, thereby further deepening the sectarian divide. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh's analysis has since been borne out by a number of independent studies which have shown an increase in sectarianism in the Six Counties in the years since 1998. The economically and politically oppressed and partitioned Ireland of today is far removed from the vision of a New Ireland, which inspired Irish Republicans such as Ruairí Ó Brádaigh. The shameful actions of the 26-County State at the funeral of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh showed the real face of Free Statism. The actions of the 26-County police evoked memories of the funeral of Frank Stagg and if anything were a testament to power of a revolutionary idea

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over the seeming might of a corrupt and failed state. In life they feared Ó Brádaigh and the cause which he served and articulated with great skill, conviction and courage and in death they showed that the power of the ideals and ideas he espoused lived on with the same potency as before.

We will be holding a Ruairí Ó Brádaigh Summer School in Roscommon on June 6,7 and 8 next year to mark a very rich life filled with activism and ideas. It will be a weekend of discussion based on the ideas and themes that inspired Ruairí thorough out his life such as the Irish language, our cultural and political identity as a nation, Irish history, and Éire Nua.

On October 2 we lost another great Republican with the passing of our Honorary life Vice President Joe O'Neill. Joe was a stalwart of Irish Republicanism throughout his adult life and remained an active Republican right up to recent weeks. Joe O'Neill was born into a strong Republican family. His father Frank from Pomeroy, Co Tyrone was active in 1916 with the East Tyrone IRB. They had mobilised outside Coalisland when the order from Headquarters came to demobilise. The order was brought to them by Nora Connolly, daughter of James Connolly, who travelled to Carrickmore on the GNR railway. Joe's mother Agnes from Dungannon was also steeped in Republicanism and was very active. She was also very active in the GAA, founding the first camogie team in Dungannon.

From the 1950s onwards Joe O'Neill served the cause of Republicanism in a variety of capacities at both local as well as national level. On both occasions when a reformist clique attempted to hijack the Republican Movement, in 1969/70 and again in 1986, Joe O'Neill was steadfast in his fidelity to the All-Ireland Republic of 1916. Taking his place in the leadership of Sinn Féin he was elected to the Ard Chomhairle in 1971, where he was to remain up to his death. He was proud to serve alongside close friends and comrades including Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Dáithí Ó Conaill and Pat Ward. He served as National Treasurer of Sinn Féin for many years up to 2009 when he became a Life Vice-President.

The Éire Nua programme for a free and federal Ireland was championed by Joe as the key to bringing about a just and lasting settlement for all of the Irish people. For him it represented the best opportunity of fulfilling Theobald Wolfe Tone's aim of uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter as Irish men and Irish women.

It was due to the untiring work and sacrifice of Joe O'Neill that the memory of the hunger strikers of 1981 was suitably honoured each year in Bundoran despite

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numerous attempts by the 26-County State to disrupt it. As a member of the Bundoran Hunger Strike Committee Joe and the committee erected the beautiful Garden of Remembrance as a most fitting and lasting tribute to the hunger strikers.

Joe gave unstinting service to his community for almost thirty years as a local public representative. He was co-opted on to the Ballyshannon Town Commissioners in 1963. He was later elected to Bundoran Town Council where he was to serve for over 25 years. Joe embraced all aspects of Irish culture, including its music and history. He had an enduring love of Gaelic games. Joe was a lifelong member of the GAA.

For Joe O'Neill there was no shortcut to a free Ireland. He believed that as long as Ireland was partitioned and occupied by the British State there could be no lasting peace. He was a man of high principle with a burning sense of justice. It was this sense of justice that informed his political activities at both a national as well as a local level. He leaves a gap in the ranks of Republicanism that will be hard to fill. However like his friend and comrade Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, it is due to the lifetime dedication of such people that there is a new generation there to take up the torch of revolutionary Irish Republicanism.

I would like to conclude by reiterating points that were made at Bodenstown, which I believe bear repetition and reaffirmation. We must look first to ourselves if we are serious about building a credible and effective opposition to the political and economic enslavement of the Irish people. There are those who believe that there is a short cut to this by creating a false unity, a so-called unity based on ignoring fundamental principle. To do so is to build on sand and any movement built on such a foundation contains within it the seeds of its own fragmentation and division. We must instead concentrate our energies and focus our attention on building the Republican Movement into what Dáithí Ó Conaill described as its historic role: "It was the catalyst for the progressive forces of this country and abroad who desired the establishment of a sovereign democratic socialist Republic." We must have confidence in ourselves and our own Movement and not relying on other groups or organisations who may on the surface provide a certain glamour and gloss but who lack the necessary ideological depth and commitment to the task of achieving our ultimate goal, the complete ending of British occupation and the re-establishment of the All-Ireland Republic of Easter Week. It is our duty to take up the torch of freedom and carry it forward; each person has a key role to play and must be willing to play it if we are serious about completing our noble task.

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We have set out what the task is, we are grounded in the principles of Irish Republicanism and so we must set about our work with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Duty, commitment and comradeship should be our watchwords as we once more go forward holding aloft the proud standard of the All-Ireland Republic of Easter Week. Be proud of your place in the ranks of the “soldiers of the legion of the rearguard”.

An Phoblacht Abú