

Republican SÍNN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration
Bodenstown, County Kildare



2001

Armed peace merely the postponement of conflict

REPUBLICANS made their annual pilgrimage to Bodenstown Cemetery outside Sallins in Co Kildare on June 10 last to commemorate the founder of Irish Republicanism, Theobald Wolfe Tone, at the beautiful memorial erected on his grave.

The crowd of several hundred people, led by a lone piper, marched from Sallins village in warm sunshine. A Republican colour party and members of Cumann na mBan and Na Fianna Éireann led the way for the two-mile parade to the old graveyard.

At the graveside Cathaoirleach, Cathleen Knowles McGuirk, called on Veteran Kerry Republican Maiteas Ó Dubhdha to lay the wreath. Peig Galligan of the National Graves Association, who tend Wolfe Tone's grave and other graves and memorials around the country, addressed the crowd and made a very inspiring speech. After the dipping of the flags and the sounding of the Last Post and Reveille by a Fianna bugler, former Donegal councillor and Treasurer of Republican Sinn Féin Joe O'Neill delivered a most fitting and succinct oration. The text of his address is printed here in full:

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“A Chathaoirligh is a cháirde,

Céad míle fáilte róibh ag uaigh Wolfe Tone.

It is with great pride and honour that I stand on this hallowed ground that enshrines the entire spirit of the Republican Movement and has done so for generations since its foundation over 200 years ago.

We assemble again to renew our pledge and commitment to the Republican Movement at the grave of our founding father Theobald Wolfe Tone, and in so doing I would ask you to reflect for a few moments on how Wolfe Tone saw the problem and the solution to the problem.

For generations there has been an attempt to portray the struggle for Irish national independence as a religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant. I want at the outset, for once and forever to nail this lie. Tone and his generation as Presbyterians, Protestants and Catholics, saw the problem as English interference in our country and saw the solution in breaking the connection with England.

Tone, therefore, having clearly seen the problem and its solution, sought not to divide the Irish people but rather to unite the Irish people and, if I may say so, with a great deal of success. However the English during that era of conflict and in every era have also with a great deal of success been able to change the perception of the conflict from one of a struggle for national independence to one of a religious conflict.

We have seen every time, during the campaigns of the Young Irelanders, the Fenians, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Republican Army, the very same attempt by the English to confuse the real problem by fostering religious differences. Republicans must never deviate from the goal that Tone saw, Break the English connection for all the Irish people, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. It is worth reminding ourselves at this time of some of those whom the English recruited in order to portray this religious issue. The introduction and formation of the Yeomen and the Militia and in the early 1900s the Ulster Volunteer Force and in later days the UDA with the Red Hand Commandos and the LVF. They are all organisations established, financed and controlled by the English war machine in their battle against Irish Republicanism.

We must not forget either the British foundation and financing on the one hand of Maynooth College, and on the other hand of the Orange Order. Both were established in the same year, 1795, to counter Tone's ideas. All of these were ways to divide the Irish people.

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We have seen in recent months the latest attempt by the English to introduce a religious aspect into the British-Irish conflict. The appointment of a Glasgow Celtic-supporting Catholic Secretary of State to the British-occupied part of our country, John Reid, did not go unnoticed by Republicans. But we say today, is he REALLY any different from his predecessors because he is a Catholic. The answer is NO and the message from Republicans is the same: "Get out of our country and we will resolve our own problems without interference". With this in mind the Republican Movement must continue to develop policies for the whole of Ireland and for all the people of Ireland. The ÉIRE NUA proposals for a new four-province Federal Ireland provides room for all sections to exercise power and decision-making.

The English Establishment over the last decade has introduced yet another new dimension into the British-Irish conflict, in the form of Big Brother from the United States and especially in the person of Bill Clinton, in order to push through an internal settlement in the Six Occupied Counties in the north-eastern part of our country.

The billions of so-called aid coming from both Washington and Brussels in the form of a so-called peace fund is nothing short of a bribe to those who work the British system in the Occupied Zone. Unfortunately there are many willing to accept the crumbs from the master's table; some of those still describe themselves as Republicans. I say shame on you. This fund of so-called aid is in stark contrast proportionally to that which is sent to the underprivileged countries which both the USA and many other European countries, especially England, have ravaged down through the centuries.

The recent Clinton visit to our country showed quite clearly the one-sided nature of such aid. His visit to Enniskillen and Omagh highlighted the discriminatory nature of his actions. What about the victims of Bloody Sunday in Derry, the victims of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and the hundreds of other victims of British violence in our country.

Are the victims all on one side? Sorry Mr Clinton; we see through your policies. We see the granting of free passage in to your country to those who eat the crumbs and sup-the-soup, but no free passage to anyone opposed to an internal British settlement. Mr Clinton, we say shame on you.

If the USA and the European Union together with the British and their cronies are obsessed with excluding anyone opposed to the internal settlement, we need look no further than the news media in our own country.

The media's use of a Section 31-type censorship to exclude the Republican message is being used more than ever before over the past 12 months. A very small fraction indeed of statements issued by the Movement have been carried by any of the daily papers and when carried are censored to suit the Establishment. Are the media

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afraid of the alternative message, are they afraid of the truth or do they realise that we are the only political movement telling the world the truth and the only political movement that has the policies for a true and lasting peace in our county.

The irony of all this is that the people who are enforcing Section 31 are the very same ones who would condemn media censorship in other countries. How hypocritical can one get? We call for the abolition of this censorship and the right of the Republican message to be heard.

I want to alert the Irish people and the media to the fact that on May 31 last a Dublin man was sentenced to four years imprisonment by the Special Non-jury Court simply on the "opinion" of a 26-County police Chief Superintendent. This marks a return to the regime of the early 1970s when several hundred persons were imprisoned in this manner.

First the jury was abolished. Then the evidence was found not necessary. A simple accusation was sufficient. The Non-Jury Court has become something of a sentencing tribunal. This procedure amounts to internment without trial.

We have seen over the last number of years many enemies of Irish Republicanism attempting to re-write the history of the struggle for National Independence against our British enemy. We have seen and heard attempts to justify the re-establishing of a foreign assembly in the British-occupied area, and more distasteful we have heard the names of dead Volunteers desecrated by some of those attempting to justify this evil Stormont Assembly.

I cannot say nor can anyone else say how our fallen comrades would have reacted to what is going on now, but I can say with certainty that the cause they died for was a united and independent Ireland, not the re-establishment of a foreign-controlled parliament.

We have also during this time of anniversaries for the 1981 hunger strikers heard it said that they would fully support the Stormont Agreement if they were alive today. How can anyone say this as the reality is that no one knows but as I have said earlier we all know what they died for.

As we pay tribute to our fallen comrades in that great chapter in the history of Irish Republicanism let us not forget that there is a new struggle taking place for the same rights as the hunger strikers died for and that is political status.

There are a number of political prisoners, most notably Tommy Crossan, being denied today the rights fought and died for in 1981. The right to be regarded as a Prisoner of War is paramount. Wolfe Tone himself demanded it when he protested against being shackled in irons while a prisoner of the British forces. He was however, unlike

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the H-Block martyrs two centuries later, allowed to wear his own clothes in the form of his uniform as a soldier of the French Republic.

It is somewhat ironic that today we hear very little from those who campaigned for political status in 1981 and are now members of the British Establishment. Are they unaware that there are still Irish Republican prisoners? Where are your voices Gerry, Martin, Pat and Bairbre?

As we remember our history let us look back at the attitude which Republicans down through the centuries took to the voluntary surrender of arms. Never in our history did Republicans ever hand in their weapons or allow any outside body inspect their dumps. Not in Tone's time, Fine Gael's time, Fianna Fáil's time, Clann na Poblachta's time nor in the more recent times of the Officials. The action and contemplation of such by erstwhile comrades is indeed a sickening thought.

A chásairde, the only peace worth having in our country is a just and lasting peace. Peace for a few years, peace even for a generation – an armed peace – is worthless. It is merely the postponement of conflict.

The only peace which will last is peace based on justice. And the minimum requirement for justice in Ireland is British disengagement for all time. That is the sure basis for a permanent peace here. Let us, standing at Wolfe Tone's graveside, rededicate ourselves then to his noble aims.

Our short-term objective must be the restoration of political prisoner status – that for which our hunger strikers suffered and died. Our prisoners and our whole struggle down the centuries must not be criminalised by the English ruling class.

It must be politicised as it rightly deserves to be. Such endurance and such suffering has won through in the past. Let us ensure that it does so again in the near future.

Above all, let not the English Establishment malign our freedom-struggle by giving power and privilege to one section over another, thereby dividing our people along religious lines.

The world must see our efforts as the struggle of an oppressed people against a vicious and outdated colonialism, which is what British imperialism is.

Basing our struggle on Tones teachings, let us strive to implement his programme and bring it to fruition – in our time."