

An Address to the People of Ireland

From

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

February, 2003

Eighty-one years after the partition of Ireland in 1922, and almost five years after the Stormont Agreement of 1998, Republican Sinn Féin, on the basis of a resolution passed at our annual Ard-Fheis held in October, 2002, wishes to address the Irish People on the current national position.

We wish to address the people of Ulster in particular and to make a special appeal to people of the Unionist persuasion.

As Republicans in the tradition of Theobald Wolfe Tone, we seek the welfare of all Irish people, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. We are conscious that men and women of all persuasions have, over the centuries, made their contribution to achieving the freedom and welfare of all the Irish people. We think that the lines penned by another Protestant Republican, Thomas Davis (1814-1845) are worthy of recall at this time:

*What matter that at different shrines
We pray unto one God –
What matter that at different times
Your fathers won this sod –
In fortune and in name we're bound
By stronger links than steel;
And neither can be safe nor sound
But in the other's weal.*

It is our opinion that the continuing instability results from an ill-advised partition of our country, a continuance of English rule and the failure of the Stormont Agreement of April 10, 1998. This Agreement was destined to fail because of its inherent contradictions, as it promised a secure place in the United Kingdom to one group and an advance towards a free and united Ireland to another:

A stage appears to have been reached where the London government's will to govern the Six-County area may possibly already be broken and where the Dublin government is scared of taking it under its wing.

Much has changed since 1969 which bewilders and dismays the Unionists, as they perceive the sovereign authority of Westminster to be weakening and the influence of Leinster House to be increasing; joint authority, whether or not it is acknowledged as such, may be ahead of us.

The nightmare of the Nationalist community still endures: watchtowers, patrols and checkpoints still operate, prisoners are denied political status and sectarian attacks and killings continue.

Now, the Unionist community also experiences a sense of apprehension and insecurity, as the certainties of the past give way to uncertainty, confusion and bewilderment. There is likely to be continuing conflict as uncertainty about the future worries everybody in the Six Counties.

The setting up of the new Stormont assembly has not brought real autonomy, as the London government and, to a lesser extent, the Dublin government, are increasingly telling everybody what they may and may not do.

The partition of Ireland in 1921-22 was a mistake, in that it drew an artificial boundary, creating a Protestant state in the Six Counties and a Catholic state in the 26 Counties, thus stifling the potential of all. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Republican Sinn Féin holds dearly to the teaching of Theobald Wolfe Tone that an independent Ireland where Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter could work in partnership under the common name of Irishman and Irishwoman is the desirable end.

The Unionist people have been placed in a trying situation as the Nationalist population and vote continues inexorably to increase. This demographic trend hangs like the sword of Damocles over them and the humiliation long endured by the Nationalists could well be experienced by the Unionists before too long. This can be averted by anticipating the likely result of the present trend and choosing a third way, neither London rule nor Dublin rule, but a new democracy in a new Ireland.

Republican Sinn Féin and its leaders were prepared in 1981-82-83 and again in 1986 to take a principled stand to preserve the Republican position which would “cherish all the children of the nation equally” and stood by an inclusive Ireland and structures of government which would give real power to all the people in a new Ireland. We have always been conscientious and straightforward in our dealings. We do not think in terms of a gain for us being a loss for others but seek only the welfare of all the Irish people.

We believe that neither London nor Dublin can guarantee the future welfare of the people of Ulster. Only the people of Ulster themselves can do that – and they can best achieve it by taking their rightful place, as equals, in the historic Irish nation, where their rights would be guaranteed by a new constitution and they would have access to real power.

As trust founders on all sides, we ask everybody to consider again our ÉIRE NUA programme for a four-province federal Ireland, with optimum devolution of powers down to community level. Even now, Unionists can still have a working majority in a nine-county Ulster, subject to the checks and balances of the new structures.

We do not regard incorporation of the Six Counties into the 26-County state as desirable and nothing resembling a takeover, open or covert should be attempted. We have consistently sought the creation of a New Ireland, fashioned by the representatives of all the Irish people in a constituent assembly which would draft a 32-County Constitution.

Opportunity beckons and this generation of Irish men and women should seize the moment in unity and fraternity. England has little or nothing to offer at this stage, as many have come to realize. The time has come for them to bow out and for the Irish people of all persuasions to plan their future together and set about national reconstruction.

We are prepared to meet with all individuals and groups in order to discuss our ideas and policies with them. Copies of ÉIRE NUA – A New Democracy and Towards a Peaceful Ireland are available from our offices and may be viewed on our website at rsf.ie.

With respect

We remain

Ard Chomhairle – National Executive

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