

Where we Stand

(Lecture delivered by Des Dalton, Ard Chomhairle, in Dundalk, Co. Louth, February 20, 2000)

Who is Republican Sinn Féin and what does it stand for? Firstly, Republican Sinn Féin was founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith as a radical alternative to the then dominant Home Rule party, advocating abstentionism from the English Parliament in Westminster, proposing instead to establish a native Irish Parliament. However it was following the 1916 Rising, at the 1917 Ard-Fheis that Sinn Féin adopted a totally Separatist and Republican constitution.

Republican Sinn Féin's roots in Irish history run much deeper and reach further back than either 1905 or 1917, they stretch right back to 1791 and the foundation of the Society of United Irishmen. Indeed we are the inheritors of a proud and noble tradition with deep roots in Ireland's history. A tradition that can quite easily be traced from the United Irishmen to the Young Irelanders in the 1840s, to the Fenians through to the 1916 Rising and



so right up to the present day. Truly, in the words of Roger Casement: "We stand in goodly company and a right noble succession".

As to what we stand for, the answer is simple, we are the only political organisation still committed to the All-Ireland Republic, proclaimed in 1916, endorsed by the people of Ireland in the 1918 General Election, the last true All-Ireland vote, and ratified by the First Dáil in 1919. In doing so we are the only truly Republican political organisation in Ireland. Our objectives are a free, independent and united Ireland. Republicanism in Ireland has always in the words of Theobald Wolfe Tone been about: "The Right of Man in Ireland. The greatest happiness of the greatest number in this island".

Republicanism has always been Internationalist in the best sense of that word, very much part of the wider democratic tradition, taking what is best from that tradition, this is reflected in the thinking and writings of Irish Republicans from Wolfe Tone, to James Fintan Lalor to James Connolly and Liam Mellows. "Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky," declared Lalor; "The Reconquest of Ireland," was Connolly's stated aim; The Proclamation of the All-Ireland Republic proudly declared: "The ownership of Ireland for the people of Ireland".

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

This proud tradition and thinking is reflected in Republican Sinn Féin's political and economic policies. Both the Six and 26 County States are the result of the undemocratic 1921 Treaty of Surrender. Consequently we seek to build a New Ireland North and South following a complete British withdrawal from Ireland. One of the failures of National Liberation Movements the world over has been the lack of a comprehensive blueprint for their respective countries in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the forces of occupation. This was the motivation behind the formulation of the ÉIRE NUA programme in 1972 by its chief architect Dáithí Ó Conaill.

In a post-British withdrawal situation ÉIRE NUA provides for the Federation of Ireland giving each province its own Parliament. ÉIRE NUA is about the maximum decentralisation of power, from national to provincial to regional, right down to local or community level. Giving people a real say in the decisions which effect their lives, empowering people in a meaningful way, not simply moving civil servants from one part of the county to the other, which in the present 26-County State passes for decentralisation.

Aware that economic democracy and political democracy are two sides of the one coin Republican Sinn Féin have also formulated a programme which would provide for economic democracy. SAOL NUA is about people-centred economics, judging economic progress by factors such as quality of life, life expectancy, literacy and employment. SAOL NUA is about giving communities control over their economic lives, encouraging native industry, bringing banking and key industries under public or democratic control. Community banking such as Credit Unions would be extended, servicing the needs of local people. We want to move away from 'Celtic Tiger' economics which have left so many of our people behind creating what is in effect a sub-culture of unemployment, poverty, drug-abuse and crime. We want to give all our people a stake in the country.

What is clear from all of this is that we in Republican Sinn Féin possess a credible and reasoned alternative to the present partitionist set-up which has failed all our people.

The National Movement which we want to build is that which is spelt out by Connolly: "Capable of formulating a distinct and definite answer to the problems of the present and a political and economic creed capable of adjustment to the wants of the future." Let us bend ourselves to that task.