

40 Years of Éire Nua *by Seán Ó Brádaigh*

The French Revolution in the late 18th century challenged the divine right of monarchs and introduced the concept of the sovereignty of the people, expressed through a Republican form of government. This idea of democracy has been accepted and developed in many countries since that time.

It took decades for France herself to accept that the Rights of Man she proclaimed extended to black people in her colonies and women did not get the vote in France until 1945. Our own 1916 Proclamation had already guaranteed votes for women on an equal basis with men.

Whether by revolution or evolution, change comes slowly, as ordinary people, some of them visionary, struggle to achieve liberty and equality through fraternity, most times against powerful and selfish interests. Democracy involves not just rights but also duties and responsibilities. Without taxation there can be no public services, for instance.

Democracy works best at the local level, where people can identify with their own local community. On the larger scale, people of the same nation have a sense of a common national identity and can accept laws which might seem restrictive but which are necessary for the common good.

In Ireland we were colonised and have maintained a stout resistance and sought to establish our national rights over many centuries. This struggle is not yet over. There is still foreign rule in six of our 32 counties, and England must be persuaded to withdraw and let the people of all Ireland rule themselves.

The freedom struggle is complicated by the alienation, deliberately fostered by English divide and conquer tactics, of a powerful and substantial number of people from the idea of a 32-County Irish Republic. They are mostly Protestants.

The aggressive and even brutal tactics of the British army on the streets of the North and the introduction of internment in August 1971 changed the nature of what was a campaign for civil rights into a renewal of the freedom struggle – an outright war against English rule.

Shortly after that, the Republican Movement launched its Dáil Uladh initiative. It sought not merely a British withdrawal from Ireland, but a united province of Ulster within a free and united Ireland. A nine-county parliament would still have a Unionist majority, of about 5% and would have

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

considerable power, more than the Stormont six-county state ever had. A conference was held in Monaghan and attracted much interest and set up Comhairle Uladh to promote this novel idea.

The other three provinces joined in and soon the comprehensive object of a four-province federal Ireland was developed and given the simple title of ÉIRE NUA. In a federal system power and even sovereignty are shared between the national state and its semi-autonomous provinces.

A number of supportive and idealistic people outside of Sinn Féin contributed to the Éire Nua project and helped to promote it. Federal states as big as the US, Canada and Germany and as small as Switzerland were studied carefully. Sinn Féin activists were provided with literature which explained how such federal systems were successful in some of the best-run countries in the world which have different languages, cultures and religions.

This was not an easy task, nor is it now, as all the powerful interests who have a stake in the old system, the political and other elites, always resist change. The following is a good example of this phenomenon.

When British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, quietly suggested in 1974 that he would consider a withdrawal from the Six Counties a grand coalition of the Unionists, SDLP, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour asked him to drop the idea, which he did. This is recorded by Garret FitzGerald in his memoirs and by Merlyn Rees, MP, in a letter to The Guardian, 19th July, 1983.

He wrote: "The option of withdrawal was seriously considered in Cabinet sub-committee between 1974-76. As Secretary of State I was firmly against such a policy and was supported by the elected Irish government in Dublin, the SDLP," The sub-committee was chaired by the Prime Minister.

The core value of Éire Nua is power to the people and that places it in opposition to the over-centralised modern states, even some nominally federal states

As we have seen in recent times, many states now play a subservient role to the interests of the faceless people of big business and international capital. And governments run scared before powerful media corporations. Such states and their governments thus betray the interests of their own citizens.

The European Union came into being, and Irish people voted in a series of referenda to weaken national defences and thus enable transnational capital to have a free rein. We now live with the consequences of this and we need to proclaim the sovereignty of the people again.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

The partition of Ireland in 1922 created not one, but two unnatural entities, not just a “Protestant parliament for a Protestant people” in the Six Counties, but also a Catholic state in the 26 Counties. The partition of Ireland in 1922 created not one, but two unnatural entities, not just a “Protestant parliament for a Protestant people” in the Six Counties, but also a Catholic state in the 26 Counties.

The Unionist majority in the North behaved very badly in their gerrymandering of electoral boundaries and in discrimination against the minority. The, mostly hidden, hand of the Orange Order was behind serious civil rights abuses. Westminster consistently refused to intervene and the whole thing blew up in all our faces in 1969. This would not have happened in a 32-County pluralist Ireland which guaranteed equal rights and equal opportunities to all her citizens.

The same unnatural partition affected the 26 Counties also. A 32-County state with its balance of different religions could hardly have brought about the controversy over the appointment of a Protestant librarian in Co Mayo in 1931; the banning of Edna O’Brien’s short novels; the hounding from office of Dr Noel Browne, Minister for Health in 1951; the scandals of the Magdalene Laundries and the Industrial Schools, for examples.

Republicans have never advocated the achievement of a united Ireland by adding the Six Counties to the 26, under either the 1922 or the 1937 Constitution. We have never proposed or recommended a 32-County Free State. We have never accepted either state but seek to restore the All-Ireland Republic which was overthrown in 1922.

If the Unionists perceived their possible fate as incorporation into an extended 26-County state, as advocated by some Northern nationalists, then they were probably right to decline the invitation. Their attitude in this respect is at least understandable, but their treatment of the minority was shameful and unworthy of the descendants of the first Irish Republicans of the 1790s period. Republicans of today have not succeeded, alas, in making plain what their objective is, a totally New Ireland with power to the provinces, regions and districts.

One Unionist, David Adams, writing in the Irish Times on 3rd December 2009, criticised the failure of nationalist or republican Ireland to propose a blueprint for a united Ireland. He wrote:

“Clarity is what the people of Northern Ireland (sic) need.

“Those who believe that, if it comes to it, the six Northern counties could simply be tacked on to the Republic (sic), and Unionists would fit neatly in with a 32-County version of how things are in the

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

South at present, are kidding themselves. That would be a recipe for perpetual instability across the island.”

He criticised the Provos (Adams and McGuinness) for having no more than a half-baked notion of how to get a united Ireland, and then declared:

“In fairness to Sinn Féin (sic), none of the southern-based political parties has been forthcoming with anything like a detailed post-unity plan either.

“The Éire Nua document, authored by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Dáithí Ó Conaill in the 1970s, remains the only serious bid by any strand of nationalism or republicanism to address the issue at all.”

Indeed, the Éire Nua proposal is the only one in which Unionists have ever expressed an interest.

When the Adams-McGuinness faction declared Éire Nua to be merely “a sop to Unionists” and got the 1981 Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin to drop it as a policy, and a subsequent Ard-Fheis to delete all reference to a federal Ireland from the Sinn Féin constitution, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Dáithí Ó Conaill stood down from the the leadership. They were not going to renege on something they had created and in which they believed passionately.

Following the breaching of the Sinn Féin constitution by Adams-McGuinness in 1986 the newly reorganised Sinn Féin Poblachtach redrafted and republished Éire Nua. It has remained a core policy since and has been supplemented by the SAOL NUA Social and Economic Programme.

The men and women of the First Dáil Éireann (1919) and the Second Dáil Éireann (1921) were leaders of a brilliant and exceptional generation of Irish Republicans. They set up an administration with government departments, local government, a police service and courts of law and fought a war of independence. The pace must have been hectic.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that Republicans formulated a proposal that would clearly outline structures of government that would guarantee the rights of Unionists, who were afraid of being swallowed up in an all-Ireland state, and that would give them access to real power. And this real power would be accessible to every community in all four provinces.

Some research needs to be done now to discover if the Unionists would still have a majority in a nine-county Dáil Uladh, given the population changes since 1971. Irrespective of how the figures would come out, however, they deserve nothing less than their full rights and access to real power.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Their place in an Irish Republic was bought dearly in their own blood in the Rising of 1798 and we need them and they need us.

Might not the Irish banks be in better shape now if there had been some God-fearing Presbyterians in the upper echelons of management? And more women too? A blend of the better characteristics of the different strands of Christianity could be a refreshing, progressive and formidable force for good. A combination of the Protestant Ethic and the Catholic Ethic.

There is also another major element emerging. The Scots, Welsh, Cornish and even English nationalities or nationalisms are asserting themselves once more. The ties which bind the "Union" are fraying, a certain momentum is building up and we all need to be planning for a better future. What better basis on which to build than a free, united, federal Ireland of over six million people?

Éire Nua includes a Draft Charter of Rights and the right of Petition or Initiative. This right of Initiative is much used in Switzerland. It is a constitutional modus operandi whereby a referendum can be resorted to on an issue of importance if a sufficient number of signatures are collected. This can be done at local, provincial or national level. Issues like Shell to Sea or the M3 motorway near Tara come to mind. This is direct participative democracy at work, as distinct from representative democracy.

For all this to work smoothly and satisfactorily we need a good system of education which encourages young citizens to think things through and develop their critical faculty, rather than learning material by heart in order to gain points.

Ireland, as a nation, has many other resources too. She has some of the finest land and fisheries in Europe. She could feed Europe with organic food.

She has an ancient history and culture and a potentially high productive capacity.

In retrospect, the only problem with Éire Nua was that it was produced by the "wrong" people, those who have been labelled disturbers, subversives, dissidents and terrorists – all undesirables in the eyes of the Establishments. Yet, it has been admired and praised by many scholars and academics. It needs some new maps, particularly in light of the results of the 2011 local elections in the Six Counties. It also needs to be promoted vigorously.

The old order is being questioned more and more, people are receptive to new ideas and the circumstances are opportune again.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

There is also a Plan B, as there should always be, because Sinn Féin Poblachtach says in a footnote to the Programme:

“The above proposals are not definitive; they can and inevitably will be modified. Sinn Féin Poblachtach would in fact welcome constructive criticism of these proposals.”

This then is the Éire Nua programme. But how do we get it put on the agenda for creating a New Ireland, fashioned by the people of Ireland themselves? This can best be done by convening a Consultative Assembly, representative of all shades of opinion in all 32 Counties. Sinn Féin Poblachtach would bring Éire Nua to this Consultative Assembly as its proposal, in the hope that it, or some version of it, would prove acceptable.

Such a Consultative Assembly will never be convened without the build-up of a public demand for it. Bringing this about calls for a mighty campaign among the Irish people. This is an admirable and worthy task. The alternative is a continuation of the running sore of the two artificial states with all the consequences we know all too well, civil strife, unemployment and emigration.

Sinn Féin Poblachtach is shouting STOP and is presenting a viable, feasible alternative, ÉIRE NUA – A New Democracy.

Seán Ó Brádaigh