

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration
Bodenstown, County Kildare

RESTORE IRISH DEMOCRACY

Oration delivered by Pat Ward, 1987

"We uphold the right of all Irish people to use force for the restoration of Irish democracy which was outlawed by a British Act of Parliament. This is the policy of Republican Sinn Féin and we make no apologies for holding such views. History has told us that Loughgall and Bloody Sunday are the only expectations one can reasonably have from a British administration regardless of their political hue."



This was the clear message at Bodenstown on Sunday, June 14 last, from Pat Ward, the former hunger-striker from Donegal, who was the Republican Sinn Féin main speaker. In a powerful speech to the crowd of over 1,000 people from all over Ireland, he struck the key-note in the statement quoted above i.e. that a country cannot call itself democratic which has been partitioned against its own people's wishes by a colonial power. Instead we have a continuing denial of democracy which can only end with the withdrawal of British power from Ireland and the restoration of decision-making powers to the Irish people, as a unit.

The text of Pat Ward's wide-ranging and important speech is carried here. It was appropriate that this essential restatement of true democracy in Ireland was heard at the graveside of the father of Irish Republicanism, Theobald Wolfe Tone, at Bodenstown, Co, Kildare. The commemoration began at Sallins Field in fine weather where the Clonbony Pipe Band from Clare followed behind a twelve-strong colour party carrying the National and Provincial flags. The marchers, drawn up under 30 banners, were watched by a large crowd of local people along the route and at the cemetery. The proceedings were chaired by Liam Cotter, of Kerry, and after he welcomed those present, the lowering of flags took place. Tony Ruane laid a wreath on behalf of Republican Sinn Féin. Seamus Mac Ciarnain of the National Graves Association in his address spoke of plans for a fitting memorial to the 1981 hunger-strikers on the tenth anniversary in 1991 and made an appeal for financial support.

Pat Ward then gave the oration to rapt attention from the crowd, marked by enthusiastic applause for his most important points. Many people afterwards commented with approval on his dispassionate analysis of British policy and the recent defections from principled Republicanism.

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Following Amhran na bhFiann the crowd marched back to Sallins and dispersed. All agreed it had been a day to remember."

"Bodenstown is the annual pilgrimage to the grave of Wolfe Tone, the shrine of revolutionary Republicanism, to the place where the founding father of Republican idealism is buried. Pdraig Pearse has described this place as the holiest spot in Ireland. In addition he advised all Irish men and women to imitate Tone.

Tone has given us two principles from which we take our stand: (1) to unite the whole people of Ireland, regardless of religious convictions and (2) to break the connection with England, that never failing source of all political evil. Tone was well aware of the sectarian political system which Britain had inculcated and nurtured in Irish society for the immoral and evil purposes of empire. A people divided are easy victims to greedy neighbours.

1798 the Foundation

Tone stated his principles – the unity of all the people of Ireland but recognised that the prime cause of disunity was and still is the British presence, that malignant imperialism which still blights our life and our country. From these sets of principles Tone and his comrades saw only one possible conclusion – uncompromising armed revolution, known to history as the 1798 Rebellion.

"This was no mere rebellion, it did not seek reform, privilege or concession. It was no SDLP effort, no FitzGerald begging-bowl, no Haughey demands –It was revolution – total uncompromising change, something radically new, the rebirth of an ancient nation. History tells us that 1798 was a failure. It was no failure, it laid down the foundation on which the Republican idea stands, a foundation which the British Empire at its most powerful and brutal could not overthrow and will not.

Republicans have lessons to learn from the 1798 period and courses of action to be avoided in the 1980s. Tone had the choice of two avenues, the avenue he took led him to revolution, the dock and finally to his death.

The other avenue, the one he avoided, could have led him into the Irish Parliament in College Green. History tells us that this was called the 'Patriotic Parliament'. the parliament of Grattan and Parsons, a parliament labouring for Catholic Emancipation, a parliament ashamed of and loathing the Penal laws. but a parliament which was impotent and unable to be free – in fact a puppet parliament.

Tone looked on this assembly with cold contempt and scorn, believing it would lead the people nowhere but deeper into the imperial web. Tone was right, the disastrous Act of Union left Ireland and her people vulnerable and defenceless. With a little imagination we can see a striking resemblance between the College Green assembly of the 1790s and Leinster House of the 1980s. Both assemblies are puppets

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and impotent. Tone looked with scorn and contempt on the College Green assembly, just as we in Republican Sinn Féin look with scorn and contempt on Leinster House. The Act of Union which stripped Ireland of every vestige of independent decision-making has its modern counterpart in the equally disastrous Single European Act.

Ireland joined the EEC believing it to be a free trade area. As it now transpires it is fast becoming the new European Empire – an empire comprising mainly of 18th and 19th century empires, empires which exploited and plundered the four corners of the globe. Ireland as an ex-colonial country would have more in common with Third World countries than we have with neo-colonial empires of today. Once again we look back into our history for comparison.

“Prior to the Act of Union the Brits promised Ireland a Free Trade area within the British Empire, lifting all restrictions and revoking all laws which put Irish business at a disadvantage. Free Trade with so large a population, in so strong an empire, would benefit Irish agriculture and industry. This rhetoric is similar in style and content to the arguments used by those who advocated the virtues of the Treaty of Rome and now the Single European Act. But let us not be fooled once again, the only offshoot of this piece of legislation for Ireland will be a diminishing of sovereignty and the eventual abandonment of neutrality under pressure from NATO.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement or Hillsborough Accord is an attempt (1) to hoodwink a risen people into the acceptance of a false sense of normality and (2) to whitewash over Britain's unjust and undemocratic occupation of Ireland in the eyes of the international community.

“For the past 17 years since the present phase of the War of Independence began Britain's atrocities in Ireland have been a constant embarrassment to her foreign policy makers and to her diplomatic community. Britain could no longer speak freely at international fora on Human Rights, on the rights of nations to self-determination. If she did, as has often happened in the past 17 years, other nations and other peoples would say; ‘But what of Ireland's right to self-determination-what of your denial of their rights and national aspirations? People do not die on hunger strike in our prisons, we do not use plastic bullets to kill a civilian population, what we do happens in our own country, what you do happens in another country – IRELAND. Clean up your own act before condemning us.’

Britain needed to save face and found willing accomplices in the SDLP and the Free State collaborators and through their acquiescence Britain could once again stand unashamed in International fora, having been legitimised by the act of collaboration of the SDLP and the Free State assembly in Leinster House. This agreement has in fact

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turned back the clock of Irish history over 70 years by recognising Britain's right to rule in Ireland and thereby copper-fastening partition.

What of the present Haughey governments part in this charade? On the introduction of the Accord, Mr. Haughey, then in opposition, rejected it out of hand. Mr. Haughey said when in government he would renegotiate it but with one dinner and one word of flattery in Washington he has done a complete U-turn, It is well worth noting that Charlie of the 7 Days was then one week in government.

"Also speaking at Bodenstown when in opposition, this holiest of places, Mr. Haughey stated that before rectifying the Extradition Act he would demand a prima facie case be established but here again he has backed down and now says he is awaiting the outcome of the Birmingham Six appeal. If the appeal is successful he will no doubt claim it as a personal triumph and cite it as proof positive of the success of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We must not and will not be fooled.

Salute the Men of Loughgall

"What benefits has the Anglo/Irish Agreement brought to the Nationalist people of occupied Ireland? Has it in any way eased the harshness of Thatcherite colonial policy on the working class people? Has it created any employment for working class people through its suggested social policy? No-it has not. Its only creation has been prestigious posts for Castle Catholics in the SDLP. Has it ended the degrading and inhuman practice of strip searching? Has it ended the Shoot-to-Kill policy of the RUC and British army? The obvious answer to this is No.

"We have sadly seen how they evacuated Loughgall RUC Barracks and how they sat in wait for two days before mercilessly executing eight young Irish freedom fighters. Loughgall was no mere exchange of shots during the heat of guerilla warfare. It was a cold calculated war crime on the part of the RUC. Following the explosion in the barracks the Volunteers were arrested and while lying on the ground were riddled with bullets in what could only be described as ritualistic killing.

We salute these young freedom fighters who made the supreme sacrifice for the restoration of Irish democracy. We uphold the right of all Irish people to use force for the restoration of Irish democracy which was outlawed by a British Act of Parliament. This is the policy of Republican Sinn Féin and we make no apologies for holding such views. History has told us that Loughgall and Bloody Sunday are the only expectations one can reasonably have from a British administration regardless of their political hue.

During the recent British election campaign the SDLP were loud in their praises of what they called the changing face of the RUC. They now see them as an impartial, non-sectarian force. This assumption is also held by the Free State regime but we

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have seen their real unchanging face at the funerals of Larry Marley and Finbar McKenna in recent months.

"Occupied Ireland has over the last eight years suffered the excesses of Thatcherite monetarist policies. These same uncaring policies are now in operation south of the Border. Each week we witness massive and brutal cuts in the health and social services. We hear of mass redundancies and widespread emigration. All of these cutbacks and closures are at a time when the government is spending up to 12% of GNP on Border security. In other words using taxpayers money to maintain British rule in Ireland.

The Rising of 1916 and the War of Independence which followed justified the belief in basic Republicanism. In 1918 Sinn Fein first tested the electorate on an abstentionist platform. Having gained a clear and decisive mandate for the principles of Republicanism based on the teaching of Tone and incorporating the 1916 Proclamation they rejected British parliamentary institutions and set up an all-Ireland parliament, what we know as the First Dáil Éireann. This was the difference between Republicans and the Irish Parliamentary Party.

1922 saw the acceptance of the British Treaty of Surrender and the establishment of two British parliaments in Ireland – Leinster House and Stormont. This resulted in the negation of Irish democracy which was outlawed by a British act of parliament. Whenever Republicans abandon the teachings of Tone and seek a parliamentary role they accept a British parliamentary institution and are by implication accepting partition. This they did in 1927, in 1932, 1948, 1970 and 1986.

"The Constitution of Republican Sinn Féin is very explicit. Our allegiance is to the principles of Tone, the 1916 Proclamation and the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil Óireann. Our Constitution states clearly that the sovereignty and unity of Ireland are non-judicable and inalienable. We believe that taking seats in either a colonial or neo-colonial parliament would mean accepting the right of Britain to rule in Ireland. We believe that to take seats in Leinster House would mean accepting the apparatus of the Free State, her army, Special Courts, internment camps and all the other trappings of collaboration and repression.

"It is natural and indeed expected that Republicans feel a bitterness and a sense of betrayal because of the events of last November. Many have stood back in sorrow and disbelief, unable to believe that it could happen again. Some have drifted away in disgust, many believe, with some Justification, that the Republican Movement was hijacked by political opportunists during the H-Block Hunger Strike, people who saw in our tragedy and grief a convenient platform, an ideal bandwagon, which could convey them and their fellow travellers to the parliamentary woolsack.

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The job which lies ahead is no easy one. It was done many times before in the history of Republicanism. To grasp from the cinders of destruction the acorn of Republican principles and plant anew. Our job is to convince people that it is possible. Despite defeat, the great exodus of 1925, the confused counsels of the 1930s, the Republican Movement of the 1930s was to regroup, train and strike in the heart of the enemy territory.

Barnes and McCormack mounted the scaffold. McNeela and Darcy died on hunger Strike. Amongst the great men of the late 1930s were Sean Russell, Paddy McGrath and George Plant. All three had seen service against the Black ' and Tans in the War of Independence and against the Free State in the so-called Civil War. Two of them. Russell and McGrath had soldiered with Pearse and Connolly in Easter Week. To them the subordinate Free State in the South and the puppet colony in the North were England's alternative to a sovereign Irish Republic. They would have none of them and they succeeded in communicating the ideals of Tone, Pearse and Connolly to a new generation. Within and without the jails the unrelenting battle against foreign rule continued. South, O'Hanlon and McManus answered the call of armed action against the invader, thus testifying to the self-replenishing quality of the spirit which animated the legion of the rearguard.

"How right Pearse was when he said: 'The seed sown by the young man of one generation ripens and grows to fruit in the hearts of the young men of the next generation'. History has a way of repeating itself especially Irish history. Our task is to go forth from this holy place and rebuild the Republican Movement"