

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration
Bodenstown, County Kildare



1998

New Stormont must be removed

In glorious sunshine Republicans gathered in Sallins, Co Kildare on June 14 for the Bicentenary Wolfe Tone commemoration. To mark the 200th anniversary of the 1798 Rising a short programme of music and song was presented beside a Liberty Tree before the parade set off for Bodenstown churchyard and the impressive graveside of Theobald Wolfe Tone, the Protestant Father of Irish Republicanism, who died aged 35 in October 1798. Mary Ward, Republican Sinn Féin Vice-President, gave the keynote address:

Is mór ar fad an phribhléid do dhuine ar bith deis a fháil labhairt anseo ag uaigh Wolfe Tone, bunaitheoir an Phoblachtais in Éirinn. Ní gá a rá mar sin gur pribhléid fíor-speisialta domsa a bheith i láthair i mbliain seo '98 nuair atá 200 bliain cothrom an ama nuair a rinneadh an chéad éirí amach ar son phrionsbail an Phoblachtais. Is mór agam í mar phribhléid, mar bhean, mar Éireannach, mar Phoblachtach agus go háirithe mar Leas-Uachtarán ar Shinn Féin Phoblachtach — an t-aon eagrais polaitúil atá gníomhach ar bhonn 32 chontae a raibh feachtas leanúnach acu in aghaidh an dá “Tá” san dá reifreann le déanaí, cé nach dtuigfeá é b’fhéidir ó chlár chúrsaí reatha RTÉ.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration Bodenstown, County Kildare

“We come to the holiest place in Ireland, holier to us even than the place where Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. And though many before him and some since have died in testimony of the truth of Ireland's claim to nationhood, Wolfe Tone was the greatest of all that have made that testimony the greatest of all that have died for Ireland, whether in old times or in new.

“He was the greatest of Irish nationalists, I believe he was the greatest of Irish men. And if I am right in saying this I am right in saying that we stand in the holiest place in Ireland, for it must be that the holiest sod of a nation's soil is the sod where the greatest of her dead lies buried.”

Those were the words spoken by Patrick Pearse in his oration at this very spot in June 1913. We in Sinn Féin Poblachtach in common with Pearse acknowledge the grave of Wolfe Tone as the shrine of revolutionary Republicanism, the place where the founding father of Republican idealism is buried. We come here today not just as an act of faith, we come to restate our programme. Tone has stated it for us when he said:

“To break the connection with England the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country, these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and dissenter these were my means. It is to that definition of Ireland as a Nation and to that programme we declare ourselves anew here today.”

Speaking in New York on the March 2, 1914 Pearse said and I quote “Let us not pledge ourselves unless we mean to pledge, we pledge ourselves to follow in the steps of Tone, never to rest either by day or night until his work be accomplished, deeming it the proudest of all privileges to fight for freedom, to fight not in despondency but in great joy, hoping for the victory in our day, but fighting on whether victory seem near or far, never lowering our ideal, never bartering one jot a tittle of our birthright holding faith to the memory and inspiration of Tone. Only we in Sinn Féin Poblachtach and we alone can stand here today and say yes we have kept our faith.

It is indeed sad to note that in the age of mass media soundbite it is necessary to distinguish which branch of Sinn Féin we belong to by recourse to the fact that we are, always have been, and are proud to proclaim REPUBLICAN Sinn Féin. What clear-thinking foresight had those loyal Republican activists who decided after the decision to recognise Leinster House in 1986 to stress our Republican claim at that stage!

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration Bodenstown, County Kildare

We said at that time what we say still. That Adams and McGuinness and company had already set their minds on becoming some sort of Northern Fianna Fáil party, that would continue to claim to be representative of a 32-county revolutionary aising but in fact is now confined to a declining form of resentful populism that may currently be strong in some urban ghettos but in no way represents the broader Republican family even throughout the six of the nine counties of Ulster that are still ruled by Britain.

For make no mistake about it, those six north-eastern counties of Ulster, which even RTÉ and the Irish News not to mention the wider pro-British media increasingly refer to as “the province” are still ruled by, with, and from Westminster. The latest Blair trick simply confuses people with abuse of language in a manner that hides the reality but distorts terms like “Ulster” etc. in such a way as to remove the perceived international “blame” for the situation from the door of No 10 Downing Street, in a manner that was never possible up to this.

We in Republican Sinn Féin drew attention over the past year or two to this strategy that was aimed in our view at making a re-constructed British rule in Ireland more benign, and because others would be sucked into co-operating in it would be all the more difficult to end. But even those of us who have read the lessons of the past, feared another dishonest “fix-it” pro tem could hardly have suspected that British imperial policy could have been more successful in so short a period.

I am not saying that all is lost or that there were not darker days even in our own lifetime for the Republican cause. The saddest and most amazing thing about this current sell-out however, is not only that it has been so well camouflaged, but is in fact being “sold” by some of our former comrades not just as a stepping stone a la Collins, but in fact a victory.

Even younger Republicans in our midst are well aware that sell-outs are nothing new—not just of ideals and principled positions but in the honest use of language and in open and honest discussion of the issues themselves. This while Gerry Adams says he is on the road to the Republic for which he once fought and encouraged others to sacrifice their all, David Trimble and his Orange Order bullyboys have asserted that the Union is safe, indeed that union of 1800, forced through by bribery and corruption in the aftermath of the Republican challenge to British rule in 1798, was safer than ever. Both men cannot be right. You know that, I know that and Adams knows that! At least in the past when some former comrades, who used to assemble here with us in Bodenstown, changed their tactics or even their aims, they had the honesty to admit that, to suggest like Fianna Fáil in the 1920s that they were going another route towards the same or admit like the Officials did in the 1970s that they had changed their minds altogether and proceeded to adopt a classical pro-

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration Bodenstown, County Kildare

unionist position themselves albeit with some pseudo Socialist trappings that were swept away some years later.

It was left to this generation however for the revisionists and counter-revolutionaries to confuse people further by not only defying the constitution of Sinn Féin as it had been since Griffith's original "political organisation" embraced the Republic declared in arms in 1916, at the historic 1917 Ard Fheis, but by holding on to the title of the organisation itself — in spite of the clear change of direction.

CLEAR DIFFERENCES

But even those who remember the clear differences in ideology which were spelled out by my late husband when he spoke here in 1987, could hardly have imagined some of the Alice in Wonderland brands of Republicanism that have now taken place. And what of suggestions that if you cannot get rid of the RUC you can at least work towards "reforming" them — by offering jobs as RUC informants to some former IRA prisoners, whose release will depend on Gerry and Martin remaining good boys We all know that when Dev got into office in 1932 he released the Republican prisoners then being held by Cosgrave and the others who had abandoned the Republican path ten years earlier. But we also recall that many of those released were offered positions within a few years in the Broy Harriers—and the legacy of these gentlemen with their "specialist inside knowledge" of Republicanism in the 1930s and '40s.

Those who went along with the Leinster House compromise in 1986 must be worried with the recent attempts by Adams and Britain's right to rule in Ireland by suggesting that even elected constitutional MP's stay at home in Ireland and get on with idling up the Dáil in Ireland. The point needs to be made perhaps, that the issue about going to Westminster or recognising any British right to govern any part of Ireland is not really the path, as the Provisionals now De Valera-like protest.

The real issue is what the hell is any Irish representative doing in Westminster in the first place, or in England for that matter. Except of course as a member of a militant Republican delegation that wants to talk to HMG about the one and only real issue in this context. Arrangements for ending British rule in Ireland.

Gerry Adams was released from internment in 1972, at the insistence of some of the founders of Republican Sinn Féin, living and dead, to form part of such a delegation to the British Tory Government of the time, with one main issue only. Negotiations aimed at getting a British declaration of intent to leave Ireland in a phased and orderly manner of course.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration
Bodenstown, County Kildare

DISTINCTION

But a clear distinction was and had to be made at all times by people like the late Daithí Ó Conaill, who knew what Tone was all about, and John Hume who even in 1972 was suggesting, indirectly of course, that once he had gained a Stormont seat at the expense of former Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer, it was time for all the boys to seek political jobs, even in that corrupt distortion of Irish democracy that was Stormont, and which cost all of us including my late husband such a huge price in blood, sweat and tears before it was brought down in March 1972.

In that regard, it may be worth asking Mr Hume, Mr Adams and indeed all those political and establishment figures who have thrown themselves behind the new Stormont agreement on the anniversary of the 1798 Rising, in what way the current, basically dishonest deal is better than Sunningdale, for example?

Austin Currie once a nationalist, then SDLP and now a Fine Gael TD in Dublin is telling everybody that what we have on the table now is considerably less than Sunningdale, negotiated by Liam Cosgrave, Garrett Fitzgerald and Conor Cruise O'Brien in December 1973.

And whatever else one may think about Liam Cosgrave and his government they did NOT sell out Article 2 and Article 3 of the 1937 Constitution at that time, just as Garret Fitzgerald—in spite of his protestations about a life-long campaign to scrap these articles—his government wrote the 1985 agreement specifically so that no change in Article 2 and Article 3 would be required.

But Bertie, it seems, had no problem at all in outbidding the Blueshirts. He had fewer problems it seems with this than he had with appointing Burke to Cabinet!

The late John Joe Rice, Sinn Féin TD for South Kerry, used to recall how Fionán Lynch once advised his Sinn Féin followers at the 1918 General Election that “there will be some who may come back here in later years and preach a doctrine other than the basic Sinn Féin position and they will tell you this is now Sinn Féin policy.”

Given Lynch's role a few years later as a Cumann na nGael TD and as a Free State Army “Chief” in Kerry in the lead-up to the Ballyseedy period, it may be worth noting that Fionán himself was one of the ones who returned and tried to turn Wolfe Tone ideals and methods on their head.

IGNORE REVISIONIST HISTORIANS

Let us therefore ignore the revisionist historians, the spin-doctors, the various media and political attempts to turn Tone and '98 upside down and explain it away in terms of current political necessity. True Republicans, but also honest people who may not

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration Bodenstown, County Kildare

be Republican at all and may even to opposed be our views also know that it is not possible to believe Adams, Trimble, Hume and Ahern at the same time.

Honest people, be they historians, politicians, students or just ordinary folk, all know that to omit the Tone dictat “to break the connection with England” makes an insulting mockery of Tone’s gospel. All those loaded chat shows that continue to feature John A Murphy, Conor Cruise O’Brien and all the same old tired suspects, while ignoring scholars; who have in fact researched, updated and sought to set 1798 in context for this the 200th anniversary are evidence of this.

In that regard can I recommend the excellent job of editorship done by our Cathaoirleach Seán Ó Brádaigh. His Songs of '98 is exactly the type of popular but informative booklet in two languages (le beagáin den bhFraincís tríd freisin) that should have been produced by the Department of Education and distributed through the national school system. That is if we still can refer to our school system as being in any way national.

Can I also mention Patrick C Powers Irish Historical Press publication on the Courts Martial in the various parts of the country in 1798 and 1799. Here the sheer injustice and cruel follow-up of “British justice” is revealed in a fashion which still shocks even in the context of the time. The bigoted racist bias of their lordships and the ruling elite in general is clear. As is the on-going treachery of some Castle Agents — above and beyond the sad pathetic betrayal of many rebels, comrades who sought only to protect their own hides. The irony of all this of course is that even those Irish Republicans who betrayed their own for whatever price usually did not get an opportunity to benefit from the deal. Paddy was Paddy and remained Paddy!

Even the Catholic bishops who backed the Act of Union in the hope that they would then see Catholic Emancipation and parity of esteem, were as disappointed as Cathal Daly, no doubt, will be, when having failed to get the picket on Mass-goers in Co Antrim withdrawn over the past two years dared to join the Head of the Parachute Regiment, Charles, when the Crown Prince opened the Corrymeela building in the predominately Nationalist Ballycastle, without even as much as a whimper of protest about this denial of basic religious liberty.

REPRESSION

In summary, British policy in 1798 was one of repression. Those on top stayed on top and made some begrudging concessions in the aftermath of the French revolution — but only to the extent that was necessary to try and bind a certain segment of the non-establishment population, Presbyterians and later on the growing Catholic middle class—in submission, in a form that would involve Catholic leaders from O’Connell through Maynooth to Redmond, in keeping the rest in their place.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration Bodenstown, County Kildare

For since, through Famine, land wars, Home Rule struggle, even the Treaty negotiations that arose from the rebellion of 1916 and the Declaration of the Republican First Dáil Éireann, British policy always has been in broad terms, to concede a minimum, mainly that which she could no longer pursue in the light of international attention, but at the same time to frustrate the growth and development of Irish trade and commerce, employment and industry, arts and culture, native education and language, even simply democracy and equal social and constitutional rights.

Of course in recent times, the approach has become somewhat more sophisticated. Clearly, a “spin” must be part of the root cause of the problem, because America is worried. Britain, which retains the straight vote for Westminster and ignored the massive institutionalised gerrymandering ways of Stormont for 50 years, must pretend to be on the side of “democracy” now.

Even though her main contribution to “democracy” in this country, as soon as it became clear that she could no longer hold most of the island even by brute force and official terrorism. HMG then drew a line on the map of Ulster that had nothing to do with geography, or with anything else in fact, except a naked sectarian head count.

Not even a cultural event of the magnitude of Blueshirt Bono joining John Hume and David Trimble on stage can hide the legacy of this the original denial of normal democracy in this land. We in Republican Sinn Féin will continue to highlight these basic issues in spite of all the thoughtless hype and ballyhoo!

On the bicentenary of the 1798 Rising we answer those commentators who state that Irish Republicanism has run its 200-year course and is at an end.

In due course the euphoria will pass as the New Stormont fails to deliver and non-sectarian Republicanism will come into its own again as the last hope for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity with the “breaking of the connection with England”. Republican Sinn Féin will work and prepare for that day and be ready once more to give the lead.

The New Stormont will be a barrier administration between the British government and the Irish people. It will be a self-perpetuating power bloc dispensing patronage to its supporters.

As such it will have to be taken out of the way on the road to a free and independent Ireland.

An entirely artificial means has been devised to administer under British rule an artificial area carved out of Ireland. It cannot endure, no more than did the Sunningdale agreement nor the original Stormont. Regardless of the outcome of the

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration Bodenstown, County Kildare

referendums in two geographical fragments in Ireland, Republican Sinn Féin is continuing to campaign for British disengagement from Ireland and for a new four-province federation with maximum devolution to local level as the best guarantee of a permanent peace in Ireland.

Do not make the task more difficult. Do not cement British rule in place. Do not strengthen the New Stormont. Do not vote in the elections to the New Stormont on June 25. Boycott them and weaken British rule in Ireland.

The Republican Movement today is a modern, enlightened and progressive movement as can be seen from our policy documents ÉIRE NUA, SAOL NUA, and Towards a Peaceful Ireland; just as Tone and the United Irishmen were in their day. They were the foremost thinkers of their age as were the leaders of the 1916 Rising when they addressed their Proclamation to “Irishmen and Irishwomen” at a time when women did not even have a vote. Today we are in the world vanguard of liberation struggles and forward thinkers – in keeping with those who have gone before us on this path.

In May 1795 Wolfe Tone visited Belfast for the last time, as he expressed it himself. “I remember particularly two days that we passed on Cave Hill. On the first, Russell, Neilson, Simms, McCracken and one or two more of us on the summit of MacArt's fort, took a solemn obligation which, I think I may say I have, on my part, endeavoured to fulfil — never to desist in our efforts until we have subverted the authority of England over our country, and asserted our independence.

That bedrock link prevails to the present day in this Movement.

Having kept our Republican faith let us who have come here today to this holiest place renew the pledge of Tone.

An Phoblacht Abú!