

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Theobald Wolfe Tone Commemoration
Bodenstown, County Kildare

2007

“Republicans here for the long haul”

ON Sunday, June 10 Republicans gathered in Sallins, Co Kildare for the annual Wolfe Tone commemoration to the grave of Wolfe Tone at Bodenstown. As usual Republicans were subjected to harassment and intimidation by a large number of 26-County political police, the Special Branch. Everyone had their name and address taken and in one case, a young member of Na Fianna Éireann, who gave his name in Irish, was arrested for not giving it in English. He was handcuffed and held in a police car for a short time before being released. An 84-year-old Veteran Republican member of Cumann na mBan was also verbally harassed by the same Special Branch man but gave better than she got.

The parade, led by a long piper, the National Colour Party carrying the Tricolour, the Starry Plough and the flags of the Four Provinces, and by contingents from Cumann na mBan and Na Fianna Éireann, marched in brilliant sunshine along the mile-and-a-half road to the cemetery. Chief Marshall was Seosamh Ó Maoileoin, Co Iar Mhí.

Proceedings in the cemetery were chaired by Tomás Ó Curraoin, Co na Gaillimhe who welcomed all those in attendance before calling on Brookeborough raid Veteran, Seán Scott from Galway, to lay the wreath on behalf of the Republican Movement.

He then handed the microphone to the Chief Marshall who brought the parade to attention for the Dipping of the Flags. Following this Tomás called on Peig Galligan of the National Graves Association to say a few words. The National Graves Association are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the monument and grave at Bodenstown.

Peig spoke about the contribution of women to the Republican cause throughout the years before calling on those present to support the NGA in their work in maintaining the graves of our patriot dead.

Tomás Ó Curraoin then called on Cathleen Knowles McGuirk, Leas-Uachtaráin, Sinn Féin Poblachtach to deliver the main oration. Tomás Ó Curraoin brought proceedings at the monument to a conclusion by delivering a spirited message to the many Special Branch policemen present and to the Dublin and London Administration that true Republicans would continue the struggle for Irish freedom until it was achieved.

The parade then formed up and marched back to Sallins where Amhráin na bhFiann was played and the parade dismissed. Below is the full text of Cathleen Knowles McGuirk's oration:

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A comrádaithe agus a chairde go léir, táim an-bhródúlach a bheith anseo inniu ag uaigh Thiobóid Wolfe Tone, athair an Phoblachtachais in Éirinn.

We are assembled here in Bodenstown churchyard to commemorate Theobald Wolfe Tone, the greatest of the Republican leaders of the eighteenth century, and the most visionary Irishman of his time or any other time. Historians consider him to have been the first true Republican and this view of him is surely incontestable. I believe that today I am addressing Republicans whose dedication to a free and democratic Ireland has left them uncorrupted, people who have no price so therefore cannot be bought.

In the past we have had Republicans, both men and women, who possessed unshakeable ideological principles and because of that they survived all the suffering that was meted out to them. They lived to fight another day. I believe that there are among us in the Republican Movement men and women of the same calibre. This annual commemoration is the most important event in the Republican calendar, not least for its continuity of the Irish Republican thinking since Tone first espoused his philosophy of separatism.

Tone, a Protestant, was born in Dublin in 1763 into a large family of which only five survived. His father Peter, a coachbuilder, had inherited property so Tone's early life was one of financial ease. He was educated privately. In his early twenties he met a young girl named Matilda Witherington. Tone was essentially rebellious by nature so, risking his father's disapproval, they eloped and married. Matilda Tone stood by her husband, through exile in America and France, through long periods of absence and finally through capture and death. She deserves to be remembered by history. Although Tone's ambition was to be a soldier his father had other ideas for him. He was an outstanding student at Trinity College and graduated with a law degree in 1787. He was also an accomplished debater and won three medals from the College Historical Society. These accomplishments were to stand him in good stead in later years when he was in France to negotiate an invasion of Ireland with the French Directorate.

Tone's Republicanism developed over a period in the 1790s. He hoped for a political career and began writing pamphlets as each one was published we can see how he had become more radical as his thinking developed. The 18th Century Enlightenment Movement, with its focus in Paris, had begun to affect Irish thinking. Social improvement, freedom of conscience and religious tolerance was advocated. Much of the Irish radicalisation of the 1780s and 1790s derived from this influence and from the publication of Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, which Tone said was regarded as the Koran of Belfast among Presbyterians.

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Catholics and Presbyterians, or Dissenters as they were called suffered under the Penal Laws, which had created a Protestant ascendancy. Tone's analysis of the basis of government in Ireland led him to conclude: "...that Ireland would never be either free, prosperous or happy until she was independent and that independence was unattainable whilst the connection with England existed". This conclusion prompted Tone to write an astounding pamphlet in 1791 entitled An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland which evoked the sympathy of the Northern Dissenters for the Catholic cause by pointing out similarities between their respective grievances.

Wolfe Tone's radical nature and his serious questioning of the benefit if Ireland's relationship with Britain brought him into contact with likeminded radicals, among them Thomas Russell, a Cork man and a soldier, recently returned from India. A strong bond of friendship was forged between the two men and through him Tone met Henry Joy McCracken, Samuel Neilson and others in Belfast.

He was appointed secretary of a reform body, the Central Catholic Committee, in 1792 where he resolved to become a 'red-hot Catholic'. The constant topic of conversation was the French Revolution from which Tone was to inspiration. He had become interested in the democratic principles behind both the French and American revolutions. With Russell, McCracken and Neilson, Tone set up the Society of United Irishmen under the banner of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' with the objective of breaking the connection with England. In 1794, fearing that the Society would undermine the privileged position of the Protestants, the government proscribed it, thus forcing them into becoming an underground revolutionary movement. The seriousness of 'the Oath', which continued to be administered secretly was acknowledged when in 1795 at a special event on Cave Hill, the leading figures of the United Irishmen made a solemn vow "never to desist in our efforts until we have subverted the authority of England over our country and asserted her independence."

Tone's egalitarian ideas in an Ireland wracked by distinction of class and religion and his articulation of Irish nationality led to his acknowledgment as one of the greatest political thinkers of his time. In the same year, 1795, to counter the growing strength of the United Irishmen, the English government promoted the establishment of the Orange Order, a sectarian and exclusively Protestant secret society with the objective of maintaining the Protestant ascendancy. It was then, as it has been ever since, their policy of 'divide and conquer'. While Tone, as a member of the United Irishmen, avoided the charge of treason, he was forced to leave for America. He now saw that nothing short of a social and political revolution, as had been accomplished in France, would suffice if Ireland were to break the connection with England. He was soon to put his daring plan into action.

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While England and France were at war, Tone saw his chance to assert Ireland's independence by seeking help from France for an invasion of Ireland. In time he sailed for France where he met with the revolutionary leaders. Impressed by his courage and sacrifice they were eventually convinced that there was widespread support for a rising. They dispatched 14,500 troops on 43 vessels, commanded by General Hoche to Ireland in 1796. Tone accompanied a French fleet to Bantry Bay believing that such a large force could more easily overthrow British Rule, but bad weather foiled the proposed invasion.

In the year of Rebellion in 1798 the French were persuaded once more by Tone to help him. This time the expedition consisted of nine ships and 300 men. The English knew they were coming and that the much sought after Wolfe Tone would be among them.

His brother Matthew had landed with General Humbert but was arrested, taken to Dublin, tried and hanged. In Lough Swilly, the French came up against a hugely superior English fleet and were defeated despite the fact the Wolfe Tone and his comrades in arms fought bravely until the end. He was taken ashore with the other prisoners.

In chains he was taken to Dublin where he was tried and found guilty of treason. Still wearing the uniform of a French Colonel he was decided a soldier's execution and died before the execution could take place.

The 'jury is still out' on who was responsible for his death. Wolfe Tone's long held ideal of 'breaking the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils', and 'to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter', were denied him.

The Rebellion had failed but the English knew they had had a lucky escape. Wolfe Tone did not die in vain but passed on a legacy and a torch of freedom to his successors. This, a chairde agus a comradaithe, is the political philosophy that we too have inherited and it is a heavy mantle that we wear but wear it we will until the day when Emmet's epitaph can be written.

Wolfe Tone believed in the cause of Irish freedom and he also served that cause courageously. We come here every year to give our allegiance to the Republican ideal of which Tone was the founding father but it must be a persistent allegiance. Despite Wolfe Tone's sacrifice and Robert Emmet's, and the Young Irelanders, the Fenians, the Volunteers of 1916 up to 1923 and beyond, we are today living in a two-state Ireland, a colonial Six Counties, and a neocolonial 26 Counties because of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act which partitioned the country.

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Partition was, and remains, the greatest evil that the British ever inflicted on Ireland. It has been the cause of conflict since 1921 and remains the stumbling block in any attempt to secure the restoration of the All-Ireland Republic.

It is still the cause of conflict! Britain's continuing strategy of returning the failed entity that is referred to as the "north" to normality has shown that they lied (no surprise) when they said back in the early 1990s that the British had no economic, strategic or selfish interest in Ireland.

How then can they justify their continued occupation of the Six Counties? Britain's interests in Ireland, selfish or otherwise, shall always be served until the connection is broken.

How can anyone begin to understand the thinking in 1986 when Adams and company left the Republican Movement to enter Leinster House? How could they have been so blind as to think they could do any better than former Republicans who thought that they could fight for a free Ireland by entering the very Assembly set up by Britain for the purpose of maintaining their power in Ireland. At a time when the national struggle was at the height of its power Adams and McGuinness were plotting behind the scenes to manoeuvre Republicans into accepting Leinster House. What foolish notions took possession of them? Was it because they were never Republicans in the first place? This is the conclusion we must draw since all they have come out with at the end is 'civil rights' under British rule.

They have since abandoned the national struggle and accepted a partitionist assembly, they have decommissioned their volunteers, and buried their weaponry under concrete, all under the watchful eyes of two international supervisors who then reported to General John de Chastelain, whose parents were spies for MI5 during WWII. This was not just shameful it was base. And it was planned and brought about when the Republican struggle was at its zenith.

Yet despite this, most of the post-Provo elements blindly followed Adams and McGuinness in whatever unprincipled U-turns they made.

The media in their rush to support the Belfast Agreement actually referred to these U-turns as "pragmatic shifts". But not all spectators of the Stormont hype see it that way. "Peace has been bought in Northern Ireland by perjury, fraud, corruption, cheating and lying" said Bernadette McAliskey in a recent report. And Éamonn McCann had this to say: "In endorsing the principle of consent (which means the Unionist veto) Provisional Sinn Féin has ditched the ideal that lay at the heart of its own tradition and that provided the justification in political morality for the campaign, indeed the existence of the IRA".

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When the Provisional leadership agreed to accept the RUC under a new name of PSNI did they seriously think that those men in RUC uniform who murdered Catholics on the streets of Derry, who are proven collaborators with the British-backed death squads of the UVF, could now be sweet and loving and neighbourly village 'bobbies'?

It was this atrocious decision of the Adams leadership that finally lifted the veil from the eyes of at least a section of their followers who resigned immediately. And do they really believe Tony Blair when he said that there would be no inter-relationship between the police and MI5? Do they not know of the long history of British intelligence in Ireland and do they think that they are about to end their operations now? No, Brigadier Kitson and his catechism of psy-ops are alive and well in Ireland. True Republicans will never accept either a British presence or any involvement one way or the other in the Six Occupied Counties. Never!

Because of our political stance further overtures have been made to the Republican Leadership from British agents in various guises, including the Provisionals, to try to get us to change our minds so that we will agree to a continuance of British rule in Ireland. The Leadership has stated that it will not yield to any such agents and that this message should be understood by all our members and supporters. Attempts also to associate the Republican Movement with drugs, criminality and recent murders in Belfast are nothing less than an attempt to besmirch the organisation. The Leadership has categorically denied any involvement.

Allow me to quote a short passage from an oration given here in Bodenstown by Frank McCarry from the Glens of Antrim, almost twenty years ago: "It is on the basis of the armed resistance to the British armed occupation of Ireland that we lay claim to Irish nationhood and Irish nationality. The day that the armed struggle dies, never again to be rekindled, than that day the Irish nation dies and our claim to Irish sovereignty dies with it."

Not one of England's Treaties with Ireland or any Agreement or any Declaration was ever about her leaving us in peace but rather they have been about perpetuating her power in the Six Counties and always at the expense of Irish democracy. It is the ideal of the Republican Movement that Ireland will see self-government by a national parliament, representative of all the people of the nation. Republican Sinn Féin is the only political organisation with a stated policy for a New Ireland – ÉIRE NUA.

It sets out a programme for strong provincial and local government in a federation of the four provinces designed to ensure that every citizen can participate in genuinely democratic self-government. The adoption of this policy would also ensure

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that the fears of Unionists may have of being sucked into a society in the 26 Counties, governed by self-serving and corrupt politicians were put to rest.

Today in Maghaberry prison a struggle for prisoner of war status for the prisoners continues. Prisoners have engaged in 24 and 48-hour fasts to attempt to obtain this and for better conditions because of the deprivations they suffer. That phase of the prison protest, we are happy to say, has been suspended for the time being. We send solidarity greetings and our congratulations to them on their principled stand. To the prisoners in Portlaoise we also send solidarity greetings with the hope that conditions are more favourable with them.

In this year of 2007 we commemorate the 50th anniversaries of the deaths of Seán Sabhat, Fearghal O'Hanlon and the Edentubber Martyrs and the 20th anniversary of the Loughgall Martyrs who belonged to the IRAs East Tyrone Brigade, one of the most active over the course of the last 30 years. Their deaths are an incalculable loss to the Republican Movement. Do they owe their deaths at the hands of the SAS to a tout or British spy? We may learn the truth some day. But we know that they served the cause with determination and gave their lives for that cause.

Finally I must mention the Republican Sinn Féin candidates who stood for election in the Six County Westminster elections with their hands tied behind their backs because of the outrageous censorship by the media on both sides of the Border. In each of the occupied Six Counties we had a candidate.

They deserve our congratulations for putting themselves before the electorate despite the muddying of the waters by the Provisionals who have long since moved away from the ideals of Theobald Wolfe Tone. They should therefore now stay away from this holy spot lest they desecrate his grave with their hypocrisy. We Republicans are here for the long haul – we haven't gone away you know!

An Phoblacht Abu!