

## **We have never accepted slavery, defeat or conquest.**

John Joe McCusker (Fermanagh) Ard Chomhairle, Republican Sinn Fein speaking at the Ruáiri Brádaigh Autumn School in Roscommon in 2017.

Each year, perhaps on several occasions Irish Republicans are requested to review and reassess Ireland's bedraggled journey from the time of Brian Boru to the present day. I use the word bedraggled because for the past eight hundred and fifty years our people have never known true freedom, have been subjected to harsh penal laws, transportation, evictions and starvation. Despite this we have never accepted slavery, defeat or conquest.

The English fully recognised following the 1798 Rebellion that they could only frustrate the efforts of Irishmen and Irishwomen to claim their place among the free nations of the world. Despite the Repeal act of 1782 and the Act of Renunciation in 1783 which put the Irish Parliament beyond the power of England; the English brought influence to bear on the members to the Irish Parliament of the dangers of allowing Catholics into the legislature.

Although at this time the Irish Parliament was only Landed Protestant gentry, there was an affinity across the landed gentry Protestant and Catholic and there was a fear that this would lead to equality which would see Catholics in the Irish Legislative Parliament. Indeed this was highly probable as the Irish Parliament had in fact given a vote to the Catholic Gentry and property holders in 1793. The natural progression of this would need to be averted and so England made her move to undermine what was described as Henry Grattan's Parliament.

The English did not initially have the numbers in the Irish Parliament and so they did what they do best, coerce. Some members to the Parliament were blackmailed some were purchased and a policy of gerrymander was conceived whereby new boroughs were carved out and loyal members elected on slender numbers. These were to become known as 'Rotten Boroughs' as they had no evidence of necessity; except to deliver a favourable vote. Henry Grattan the leader in the Parliament pleaded the case for the retention of the Irish Parliament, despite this, the majority of members voted the Irish Parliament out of existence.

Having secured the Act of Union in 1800 the Act became effective January 1801. The English now involved themselves in the second stage of the strategy. It was envisaged by the English that Catholic Emancipation would eventually be arrived at. In 1829 Catholic Emancipation was secured by Daniel O'Connell. The vote however was again attached to land ownership and at this stage peasant farmers were only tenants and had no vote.

It was also the English desire to purchase the affections of the Catholic Church and the Catholic landed gentry and thereby retaining a semblance of democracy. To the greatest extent they were successful in this.

All rights had to be agitated and fought for. The 'Great Hunger' of 1847, which could so easily have been avoided, had a national government been in control, was to devastate the country while the ships full of corn and cattle sailed from our shores the people of Ireland starved.

The Young Ireland movement offered some resistance, but this was easily dealt with and was 'run of the mill' colonial management for the British military and their Irish constabulary.

Between 1847 and 1852 our country lost three million of our people to death and emigration as a consequence of the English Government's management.

## Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

The Irish Fenian movement was founded and commenced a campaign in England in 1867. This was known as the dynamite campaign.

Always throughout our history we have resisted the strangulation of our small Nation by this foreign power.

1916 – The Easter Rising – and throughout each decade since; political agitation and campaigns of guerrilla fighting and bombing have been used to force the English from our land.

The execution of our Irish Leaders, this leading into the War for the Independence of our country.

The establishment by England of a ‘Free State’ Parliament controlling 26 counties and the northern state comprising 6 counties remaining under English control.

The 1956-62 border campaign with the death of many volunteers and this inspiring the young men of the six occupied counties to again assert the right of the Nation to National Independence.

The people of Ireland on the streets of Derry on Bloody Sunday marching for ‘One Man One Vote’, one hundred and forty years following ‘Catholic Emancipation’. They were answered with English bullets. Fourteen of our people died in consequence. ‘Croppy lie down’.

The death of combatants and the slaughter of the innocent continued for many years culminating in the Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981 and the death of Ten Brave Men

The move towards politics, the split in the Republican Movement the abandonment of the Republican Constitution and the recognition of the English established parliaments in Dublin and Belfast. Sporadic resistance continuing from the Republican Movement and elements of the provo movement which have moved steadily away from the constitutional approach chosen by the Provos.

So to the latest fall-out at Stormont and the intrigue surrounding England’s ‘Brexiteer’ from the European Union. Politics galore and another European battle fought on Irish soil.

European politicians can come to our country visiting and shake their fists at England, they may fool the people of Ireland but they will not fool the people in the Republican Movement. What border exists between Britain and Europe shall exist between the six counties and the 26 counties unless there is constitutional change. European Capitalism and British Capitalism, I suspect, shall take the workers of Europe and Britain for every last cent on the currency markets. Time to prop up the status quo. Bonanza time at the stock exchange.

Still the essence of the Irish struggle remains and still England holds firm. They have the bullets, they have every ounce and they still have our country.

Now to what some will say were, perhaps, missed opportunities in Irish history. The Renunciation Act 1783.

## Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

The Irish Appeals Act 1783 (23 Geo 3 c28) commonly known as the Renunciation Act. was an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain. By it the British Parliament renounced all right to legislate for Ireland, and declared that no appeal from the decision of any court in Ireland could be heard in any court in Great Britain.

### Grattan's Parliament:

Could this have emerged and developed into an Irish Parliament for all the Irish people. (One is prompted to ask the question was 'Irish Parliamentary Independence put it place in order to 'democratically' remove it). (democratically by English standards). Whatever about this, the pace of change was seen as slow, although twenty years in politics is a relatively short period. Impatient perhaps, but the parliament was not the parliament of a republic and the men of 1798 had a sound core of Protestant, Presbyterian and Catholic men at arms and seized on the opportunity to rise in rebellion to secure the republic. (The leadership of the rebellion were perhaps alive to the divisions been carefully fostered by an alien people). With the rebellion defeated, (as stated earlier) the English turned their attention to the Irish Parliament also referred to as 'Grattan's Parliament'.

Although peopled by a Protestant landed gentry, England perceived there existed an affinity with the Catholic landed gentry of Ireland and this was seen dangerous to the intent of the English.

The 1798 Rebellion was further evidence of a coming together of all Irishmen.

Grattan's Parliament would have to be undermined and so to work again for the English. Irish Parliamentarians were bribed, coerced and the establishment of new 'Rotten Boroughs' whereby new and loyal members were returned to the parliament. Thus, the Irish Parliament voted the Parliament out of existence and the Act of Union was secured in 1800. The Act became effective in January 1801. (Like slavery, all legal and above board).

### Home Rule:

Could Ireland have secured a Home Rule Government as envisaged by John Redmond? Could this have evolved naturally towards an Independent Ireland? The answer lies in the fact that England had partition in their minds from , at least, as far back as 1912 and the Buckingham Conference.

England was at all times holding fast to any ground and any power as long as they could stand up an intoxicated democracy.

The English Government would always change the goalposts long before any democratic process could effect change. These two examples of great forward planning by HM Government needs to be heeded by Irish Nationalist and Republicans.

**Could the failing power sharing at Stormont, coupled with Brexit, move to the next phase and become yet another gross injustice on the Irish people?**

I was asked to speak regarding the workings of a Consultative Assembly and how it might work. The simple answer to that is that those assembled talk about how to effectively run the country in the absence of foreign interference. The major difficulty is how do we present ourselves to the Unionist and largely Protestant communities especially in the six counties in order to bring about such consultations. Perhaps we should recognise some facts and fears about our neighbours.

## Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

We must look at the other side of the conflict and view all from a 'Protestant Unionist' perspective.

They accept, for the most part, that they are the descendants of planters their right in this country was contested in many fractious and bloody occasions following their arrival. Their right to be in Ireland which they secured has for many hundreds of years not been an issue. They along with the alliance forces of the Holy Roman Empire and King William of Orange commanded the field at Derry, Aughrim and the Boyne. These events are as sacred to them as Clontarf, 1798 or 1916 are to Irish Nationalists. These battles are hailed as events where they fought for the freedom of religion.

In opposition to the efforts of the United Irishmen the Orange Order was brought into existence in 1795.

The 1798 rebellion where Protestant, Catholic and Presbyterian fought side by side to expel England from our shores also had incidents which were none too restrained and where many innocent lives were lost and viewed as sectarian.

The Land Wars seen many attacks on Landlords and their agents, where the agent was a Protestant man, such incidents could and would be viewed as sectarian by the Protestant community.

During the war for the Independence of our country there were cases where Protestant people were set upon because they were viewed as informers. Many Catholic informers were shot. Given the nature of the conflict, at the time, you could not expect Protestants not to be informers. Many such incidents involving Catholic and Protestant were grudge killings. Again, any adjudication especially by the Protestant community would find this, the killing of a Protestant man as blatantly sectarian.

There were people who were disappeared in the 1920s and their bodies have never been recovered.

So we Irish, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenters do not have a monopoly of Angels.

All in all I suppose there has been enough killing for Irishmen to establish at least a respect for the sharp end of the others' sword.

Regarding the defence of Ireland during the Second World War the British government was concerning itself with securing north-south cooperation and if possible having the Free State abandon neutrality. The Unionists had a great fear that de Valera would trade Irish neutrality for post war Irish Unity.

Craig was subjected to a mounting campaign of cajolement, persuasion and political pressure, such as he had not experienced since the treaty negotiations almost twenty years earlier. His response was consistently inflexible and dilatory, reflecting his priority, the preservation of the union.

Basil Brooke (Lord Brookeborough) in support of his Prime Minister James Craig who had replied to a telegram from MacKenzie King (Canadian Prime Minister) which urged Irish north-south co-operation in defence matters, ... stated that prime minister Craig's 'reply was

## Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

..... Effective namely that we are part of the United Kingdom at war, whereas the Free State are neutral... and that the matter of defence was one for the United Kingdom government.

Notwithstanding this, as the crisis escalated, Sir Basil was concerned that his loyalty to crown and empire might come into conflict with his life-long commitment to the union. On June 5, he recorded that he was 'still anxious about the position with regard to Éire (and) ....convinced that heavy pressure will be put on us to join up. The argument being that de Valera will allow the British army to come into the south and the fleet to use southern harbours and in return he (De Valera) insists on Ulster coming in.' (Uniting Ireland) Brooke concluded that it would be a 'very hard nut to crack'.

Craig allayed his fears, explaining the further efforts by the British government do induce him to discuss defence matters with Éire, writing, 'so long as they keep on that line (i.e. defence) and do not discuss the constitutional position. I think we have a good case for staying out. But', he added, 'I always fear that we may be asked to sacrifice ourselves if Eire offers to cancel her neutrality and allow British troops into the 'country'.

One Sunday in June 1940, John Brooke son of Sir Basil, recalls his father considering such a prospect. The latter spoke of the pressures being exerted on the Northern Ireland government and stated that 'if 'we were faced with the choice of losing our civilisation or accepting the unification of Ireland he would find it a very difficult decision. He regarded western civilisation as of greater worth than anything else, being absolutely convinced of the menace of Nazi Germany'. **His son concluded: 'It was my opinion that day in those circumstances he would have to do his best to secure Irish Unity.**

This broad impression is supported by a conversation which Brooke had with Frank MacDermott, a southern senator and occasional visitor to Colebrooke, who was seeking to act as an intermediary between the northern and southern 'governments'. He called with Sir Basil, on June 25, 1940, 'to discuss a conference on defence'. The latter (Sir Basil), records: 'I told him that the south had to give some proof of its pro-British, pro-Ulster tendencies.....namely declare war before any discussions could take place'. McDermott adds that Sir Basil 'admitted privately that if the south were to join the war on Britain's side in return for post-war unification, Craig's cabinet would be split **with his own vote favouring a new relationship with the south.**

On June 23, Pat Herdman, son of a northern Unionist senator and acquaintance of Brooke's called at Colebrooke to say that Sean McEntee was 'anxious to discuss the defence of Ireland' with him. In reply, Sir Basil again stated that 'we cannot discuss anything until they declare war' and added that he 'could not act behind prime minister Craig's back and would have to inform him of anything he told me'. Herdman presented these terms to De Valera and then raised the question of Ireland's defence and whether 'Eire' would be prepared to enter the war in order to end partition. To his amazement, the Taoiseach once more opposed any compromising of neutrality, stating that to do so would 'split the south from top to bottom.

Herdman returned north and reported back to Brooke, who recorded his impression that De Valera was 'afraid of his fifth column... the IRA. Brooke immediately told Craig of 'all these conversations'. Brooke highlighted the strength of the position they were now in with the British government.

To what extent disingenuous soundings existed on either side of the border it is difficult to gauge. It was mooted or intimated that the foot-dragging in the south was that De Valera was ever watchful of the 5<sup>th</sup> column in their midst, namely the IRA. It could be construed that this offering was a political sixpence each way by de Valera on the outcome of the war. This offering however did provide Craig with political cover which he aptly exploited. Craig wrote, 'my friend, ...an absolutely reliable source' has met with De Valera and suggested to him that 'if he would declare himself willing to come in with Britain, I would be glad to meet him anywhere at any time over mutual civil defence. provided no constitutional questions were touched upon'. Craig's letter continued,

'Mr de Valera's answer was 'quite impossible', as he could not 'abrogate his position of neutrality on account of the strength of his fifth column'. Craig thus repeating the phrase used earlier by Brooke.

Certainly, Brooke had shown during this 'moment of crisis in the death struggle' a greater willingness to compromise and to act in the 'national interest, than his leader or his cabinet colleagues. **Just as he had suggested in early 1916 that he would prefer home rule to civil war in Ireland, so now he had indicated that in the final analysis the defeat of the Axis powers must take priority over the preservation of the union.**

Ian Paisley in defence of his democratic principles stated in 1981 to Pádraig Ó'Malley an American based academic that he would accept a United Ireland if 51% of the people of the north voted for it.

These utterances from such senior people in the Protestant community demonstrates that the Irish problem can be solved. Indeed, it may well be that the common sense of Irish unity and the slow melting of sectarian bitterness, assisted by better education and a better understanding could well be coming into play.

When Gerry Adams was seeking to have Ruairí Ó Brádaigh removed as President of Sinn Féin he used the opposition within the movement to a Federal Solution for the Irish difficulty of partition as a means to undermine Ó Brádaigh. Ó Brádaigh responded: "Without federalism I am not interested in any leadership position". He informed Adams, that when he met with Unionists and Loyalists he told them that he believed so strongly in the policy that he would resign as president if Sinn Féin dropped it. He said, "If you want a new song, you get a new singer".

The people of Ireland Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter have all a right to live here, to prosper and respect our differences.

The Monarch of England as ecclesiastic head of Protestantism is entitled to a residence in Ireland the status of such a residence may be ecclesiastical and/or ambassadorial.

The English Government does not have a right to rule us and must get out and stop interfering in our affairs. The English Government must stop the management of sectarian division in Ireland.

No Nation or Union should be accepted onto the theatre of modern world politics where they define and maintain their borders by religious affiliation.

## Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Each time we look at history we are looking to make assumptions on how the lessons of the past can serve us in the present day. **Perhaps history cannot help us at all.** Some aspects perhaps more than others.

How do we get people to talk to each other especially when they are fundamentally opposed. The answer is never to easy arrived at.

1. Respect for the opposing side.
2. Start discussions from a base where neither side has an historical advantage going into negotiations.
3. That the outcome of the talks does not produce one winner.
4. That the outcome of the talks does not produce one loser.
5. That the outcome of the talks produces two winners.

There would certainly be two winners were we to have a Protestant Messiah turn the Protestant people towards managing the affairs of their own country as no more than equals in this joint venture. This self-empowerment would I feel create a better place for the next generation of Irish people. The people of the six counties would no longer sit waiting on the pronouncements of English politicians, no longer waiting on a budget which is defined in terms of; 'what is the least you can do with', but rather how much is needed to create success.

Its either this great effort to take control of our own destiny or languish for more years to come looking at the grey wet hills of Ulster. The dark unlit oblique and obsolete housing in every town.

The place is just literally closing down for want of energised management and this management is not going to come from an English politician wanting to send jobs to Ulster, which is after all Ireland, when he can keep these jobs in Stockport or Burnley.

The founding fathers of Irish Republicanism were progressive Protestants: Wolfe Tone Dublin Church of Ireland, Henry Joy McCracken and his sister Anne, Belfast Presbyterians. Our struggle for a new independent Ireland must not be seen in terms of Protestant, Catholic or Presbyterian but in terms of Irishmen and Irishwomen in a New Ireland.

The economic state in the six counties is critically flawed and shall remain so until a National government representative of all the people presents our trading Nation as a single unit to the world.

We in this movement propose to the people of Ireland, north and south, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter a federal solution, whereby Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaught shall have their own regional parliaments.

Our constitution declares only for equality and it remains for the Irish people to work hard in harmony with our neighbours at securing this and a bright future for all the people.